The Co-operative [season II]

by Sealie

Summary

Danny Williams, Professional Photographer, and his second month (season II) at the Seolh Co-operative.

Notes

Rating: Slash; oodles of h/c
Warnings: please contact me if you require a run down. Alternatively, see the end notes.
Advisory: potty mouth; disability; the bad guy is an ableist shit; some parts not safe for work, and lots of cliff hangers
Disclaimer: writing for fun not for profit.
Comments: British English spelling
Spoilers: none, it’s a AU
Beta: Springwoof, clanger wrangler extraordinaire! ♥, Babe. Applause for Spring woof -- she has gone beyond the bounds of betaing supporting me as I wrote this story.

See the end of the work for more notes
Danny tugged at Steve’s bottom lip with his teeth and then released him. Steve had interlocked his fingers around the small of Danny’s back, holding him in place in the cradle of his thighs.

“Hi,” Steve said goofily, a little Kiss drunk.

“Hi,” Danny responded.

“Hmmm.” Steve watched him indulgently.

“You know….” Danny wrapped his hands around Steve’s neck and leaned back in his embrace.

“What do I know?” Steve tilted his head.

“We’ve got guests. I could stand here all day kissing you, but everyone’s gonna come in the kitchen at some point.”

Steve yanked Danny in close and hooked him down for another kiss. Danny went willingly, because it was a heady, lush feeling to map the man beneath him with lips and hands: warm lips; the fragile skull; soft cheeks, the sharp angle of his jaw under nascent stubble.

“Whoa! Hah! Called it!” Kono said gleefully.

Steve gusted a sigh against Danny’s neck.

Danny sagged back, and Steve let him move away, but not out of arm’s reach.

“Dudes, you’re in the kitchen; you might as well be in LAX. If you want privacy, get a room.” Kono set her hands on her hips. “So, can I run out to the imu and announce to everyone that you guys are now an item?”

“No!” they both said simultaneously, and then stared at each other, abashed.

“Give us some privacy, Kalakaua,” Danny said.

“I really recommend that you go upstairs, then.” Kono pointed heavenward helpfully.

Steve masked his face with a big hand, and said nothing.

“This is new. It’s actually a newborn baby,” Danny said. He slid a checking glance at Steve, who was a little flushed under his splayed fingers. “Let us just figure it out before you go tell the whole family.”

“Yeah, Kono,” Steve said throatily. “It’s between me and Danny at the moment. Please.”

“Yeah, please,” Danny echoed.
Kono canted a hip to the side, and regarded them. “Okay.” She crossed her heart.

“Thank you,” Danny said, a little sarcastically.

“Man, you guys have just made my Christmas.” Kono threw her head back and laughed. “Not telling Chin is going to be hard…. But I’ll look after you guys. I’ll need updates, though. I’ll be checking up on you, Danny.”

She spun on her heel and sauntered out of the kitchen.

“Yep. Bit smothery,” Danny said, and sagged against Steve, who immediately circled an arm around his waist.

“You know, that’s not really a con,” Steve pointed out.

Danny peered down at the top of his head. “Did you find my list, Steven?”

Steve patted the right thigh pocket of his cargoes with his free hand. “You left it on the kitchen table. Of course, I found your list.”

Danny twisted down and grabbed Steve’s thigh -- because now he could -- clamping his hand over the familiar shape of a leather wallet.

“You kept my list,” Danny observed as Steve manhandled him around, so he stood, once again, between his knees.

“Hey, it’s got my name on it. In the pro column,” Steve said smugly.

“You’re an aggravating pro,” Danny curled down for another kiss. Steve matched him, bottom lip a little fuller, a little more moist with every kiss.

With a reluctant huff, Steve pulled back. “Kono’s right -- this is the hub.”

“Yeah, and there’s lots of kids about. “

“I’m not ashamed--” Steve began.

Danny tapped Steve’s nose, finally giving into the impulse to discipline.

“Since when does any responsible adult let little kids see them necking like horny teenagers?” Danny straightened his new tie. “I’d like Grace to not figure out that this is fun until she’s thirty-six. If you want, I’m happy to go out there right now and tell Chin and Mamo and Toast that we’re… you know …. But I need to make it about you and me first. Not the whole ‘ohana.”

“That we’re -- what?” Steve asked, but there was an almost sly smile on his face.

“Figuring us out.” Danny offered Steve his hand. “Come on, there’s a party. And apparently this pig thing tastes awesome.”

“It is pretty good,” Steve said, clearly remembering other lu’aus, judging by his suddenly abstracted expression.

“You going to have some?” Danny asked.

“Yeah, probably.” Steve shrugged.
“So what do you think?” Mamo asked.

Danny held the plate that Mrs. K. had given him in his two hands. The pork and sticky short ribs smelled amazing, there was a scoop of yellow rice, but thing that had caught his attention was the tiny bowl of pale purple sludge.

“I haven’t tried anything yet.” He definitely thought that the sludge had moved. “I need some cutlery.”

On his left, Grace was sitting at a picnic table surrounded by tiny cousins, delving into her plate with fingers.

Mamo offered him a fork. Balancing the plate on one hand, Danny braced himself, because he wasn’t too sure what to make of the sludge. Tentatively, he took his first mouthful of kalua pig. He held it on his tongue, enjoying the savoury bite.

“You like?” Mamo smiled.

To be honest even if he had hated it -- unlikely because he adored roast pork -- Danny would have pretended, just this once, to like it. They had put so much effort into the Christmas lu’au that it simply had to be awesome.

“And?” Mamo asked.

“Yeah,” Danny deliberated. “It’s a clean taste? And smoky, deeper, somehow?” He took another mouthful, addicted.

Mamo patted his shoulder. “Right, I’ll go find Stevie.”

Danny pointed with his fork in the direction of Mamo’s carpentry workshop.

“He went to corral the twins. I think that they had decided to get a look at your boards.” The equipment-filled workshops were very much verboten, and hence totally appealing.

“I knew that I should have just asked you.” Mamo ambled off to find Steve, but also, no doubt, discipline his youngest grandchildren.

Danny juggled his head from side to side in agreement. Steve came out of the workshop, fingers twisted in the left and right ears of the identical twins as he frogmarched them towards their grandfather. It was frankly hilarious and if Danny hadn’t been shovelling sweet, roast kalua pig into his mouth, he would have taken a photograph.

Not touching was suddenly the hardest thing in the world. This was probably going to be the longest Christmas Day that he had ever experienced. If Grace hadn’t been around, he would have probably spent the whole day intertwined with Steve.

Danny stretched his arms before him. He rotated his arms in their sockets, getting the stretch just right, trying not to focus on the dull throb of arousal flowing through his veins.

Early days, he told himself.

“Yoga move?” Steve said, obviously kidding.
“No.” Danny rolled his eyes. “That reminds me. Mamo took me to a yoga -- I guess you call it -- studio, and the guy there said he would give you a free lesson, figure out what works for you.”

“Really,” Steve said suddenly noncommittal.

“I said that it was up to you.” Danny noted the sudden prickliness, but continued. “But you might think of taking him up on the offer. I’ve got his contact details in my room. Mamo liked him. His name was Maka -- no, Makaio.”

“Hmm.”

“You like yoga. Twisting yourself into a pretzel? I don’t get it. The guy might be able to help with the balance thing,” Danny continued doggedly. He would have persisted before they had made out, he wasn’t going to stop now. “I don’t know anything about yoga. Would I like it?”

Inwardly, Danny choked, because -- yoga -- the things that you did for love.

“Really?” Steve looked straight at him.

“I dunno,” Danny said honestly. “So I could try? Would it be a photo opportunity?”

“I think you,” Steve said indulgently, nodding at the Canon hanging from its strap around Danny’s neck, “find a photo opportunity in everything.”

“I guess,” Danny huffed out a laugh, “if I’m photographing you. Jesus.” Appalled at the mushiness, he flushed.

Steve threw back his head and laughed. It was so contagious everyone around him joined in, without knowing what they were laughing at.

“What are you laughing at?” a random Keawe family member, judging from the slightness (Kahikes had a tendency to be large), asked. But then again, Danny was having problems keeping everyone straight. Laka called Mrs. Keawe ‘Grandmother’, but Mamo was her Grandfather.

“Hey?” Steve clicked his fingers under Danny’s nose. “Where you at?”

“Is that Hawaiian dialect? It wasn’t English.”

Steve shrugged. “No, it’s just bad grammar. What are you thinking?”

“Just everything.” Danny waved an arm -- encompassing the Christmas lu’au overtaking the lawns down to the workshops and running into the House. There was still enough food to feed an army set out on three picnic tables by the imu. He guessed that upwards of sixty people were enjoying themselves, albeit a little more quietly, after descending on the variety of dishes. A bevy of elderly ladies, chaired by Mrs. K., were sitting in the shade offered by the old wooden gazebo, enjoying the lull.

Indefatigable dark-haired, brown-haired, red-haired, and tow-haired kids raced back and forth. The sound of their happy screaming warmed Danny’s soul but he kind of wished that it was the twenty sixth of December and that the House was quiet. But there was also a party to delve into and people to meet.

Steve cocked his head to the side. “You’re sort of thinking several things at once aren’t you?”

Danny gazed heavenwards as he thought. “Yes,” he hazarded.
“Okay. I’ll assume there are a couple of things that you don’t want to say out loud.” Steve waggled his eyebrows. “Is there one thing that we can do?”

“Oh?” Danny rocked back on his heels. “How about being introduced to some people? I know a few but…”

“Not everyone.” Steve looked around. “Well, you know Kavika and Blue.”

Danny wavered because he did know Kavika, and knew what the leader of the Kapu thought of him. Saying hello to Kavika was an invitation for vicious snarking, which wasn’t appropriate for a Christmas holiday. There had been no apology from Kavika for erroneously suspecting that Danny had had something to do with the arson attack on Seolh. But Danny actually wanted to speak with Blue; he owed the tattooed Hawaiian an apology for not checking up on him and Paulo after they had been shot. Danny was ashamed to admit it that he had completely forgotten about the Kapu guards in the aftermath of the Hesse brothers’ invasion.

Now that he had thought about it, he strode across to the sitting men.

“Kavika.” He nodded, but the man didn’t like him and Danny didn’t respect Kavika, so he left it at that. “Blue?”

“Hey, Brah.” The bodyguard wasn’t bodyguarding. He was ensconced in a picnic chair far too small for his massive frame, on the edge of the party under a shading tree. He looked like Grace’s favourite pot-bellied teddy bear stuffed in a tiny Barbie doll chair.

“It’s been insane. I should have asked earlier,” Danny said. “But how are you doing?”

“And the other guy?” Steve clicked his fingers interrupting. “Paul Leto? He got shot in the arm?” he addressed his question to Kavika.

Kavika scanned the Christmas crowd and pointed towards the row of picnic tables. The central one bowed with the weight of the now well-gnawed on hog. Paulo was happily munching on an impressive Subway-sized sandwich, which was as big as Grace’s head.

“He looks well,” Danny observed before turning back to Blue. “How are you doing?”

“Maika`i no mahalo.”

“And I’m guessing that means?” Danny spread his hands.

Kavika rolled his eyes, and Steve caught Danny’s elbow, before he could react.


“Good to know. I just wanted to thank you,” Danny said sincerely. Blue and Paulo, and other guy who had died, had also been victims of the Hesse Brothers.

“Have you found the bastards?” Kavika asked Steve.

“There’s an ongoing investigation,” Steve said abruptly, Lieutenant Commander McGarrett rising to the forefront. “Well, if you’ll excuse us, I’m introducing Danny to people.”

Interest piqued by the swift change in Steve’s demeanour, Danny let himself be moved smoothly around. Every now and again, it was drummed through him how big Steve actually was. It was a curious sensation to allow the confident manhandling.
“And what was that about?” Danny asked, as they moved out of earshot.

Steve’s lips were pursed, top lip jutting out.

“I’m gonna keep asking,” Danny said conversationally. There were a few folk around them, involved in their own enjoyment of the festivities. No one was listening.

“You know I can’t talk about it.” Steve relaxed fractionally. “Come on, Danny. I’ll introduce you to Pop McCoy. I saw him heading into the kitchen.”

“Pop McCoy?” Danny echoed. “He sounds like a cartoon character.”

“You’ll love him. He’s a friend of Kahuna Keōua.”

“Is he coming?” Danny stopped dead and stared suspiciously at Steve.

“I’m already here!”

Danny jumped sky high. “Jesus, fuck!”

The toga-decked kahuna laughed, showing all the gaps between his teeth. Danny would have decked the old guy, or more likely told him exactly what he thought of the old git, but jumping and car chases definitely didn’t go together.

“Danny?” Steve asked softly, placing a gentle hand over the blade of his shoulder.

“I’m fine,” Danny said grimly, and he was; just a little jarred. He pushed against sternum and hee’ed out a small breath.

“I’m sorry,” Keōua said seriously, leaning forwards. “What happened?”

“We were in a minor car accident,” Steve said.

“Minor? Minor?” Danny half-shrieked. “We took off. We sailed through the air. Came down like a tonne of bricks, nose in a ditch. All because some psychotic --”

“He exaggerates.” Steve manufactured a smile over a glare.

Oh yeah, Danny remembered, belatedly. The reason for the crash was a secret. Steve continued to glare, demanding silence. Keōua was watching them, a little perplexed at the clearly obvious undercurrents of communication. Steve, Danny knew, operated from a ‘no comment’ stance to hide the truth rather than opting for obfuscation. Really, Danny had no clue how he had worked in Naval Intelligence.

“Steve’s an appalling driver,” Danny hand-waved. “I would have just run over the mutant-squirrel thing.”

“What!” Steve spun on him, affronted. But stymied by an inability to lie, he could only mouth nothing.

“See? No good. Can’t think on his feet.” Danny grinned at Keōua.

Keōua laughed. “You guys make a good couple.”

Steve froze. Cocking his head to the side, Danny pondered on that observation and smiled sublimely because he didn’t care if Keōua was fishing, or was very insightful. He was more interested in
Steve’s reaction.

“Actually, yeah we do.” Steve shifted from foot to foot. “Fire and water.”

“Fire and water?” Danny eyed him.

“Yeah. You’re not the only one who can ascribe epithets. Emperor of Seolh?” Steve rolled his eyes.

Regarding them, Keōua rubbed at his lantern chin. “I’m guessing you’re the Emperor, Steve. So what does that make Danny?”

“Court Jester,” Steve responded instantly.

Danny batted him on principle.

Both Keōua and Steve laughed.

“Well, come on, Danny. If I’m the Emperor. Chin’s the president. Kono’s the -- what did you call it, finder? Paladin knight of the court, bringer of lost souls to Seolh? Toast is, I guess, the Wizard. What does that make you?”

“I don’t if I should say, Mr. Emperor. You must have an idea?” Danny said, narrowing his eyes, and daring Steve.

If Steve said ‘Queen’, Danny was going to tickle him until he yelled ‘uncle’.

Steve’s thumbnail went to his mouth as he contemplated Danny. A hint of a pink tinged his pale cheekbones. He shrugged.

“Go with your gut,” Keōua said.

“Danny’s Danny,” Steve said around his gnawed thumb. Looking straight at Danny, he continued, “The daimyo of feudal Japan had top ranking samurai officials and advisors, the karō.”


“Yeah. Yeah,” Danny mocked, rolling his eyes. This was utterly ridiculous. “Mr. Kahuna, I figure you’re trying some sort of Gandalf-esque leading of the Hobbity questors to the treasure of enlightenment. Fact: I’m Danny and he’s Steve. We’re friends.”

“Yeah,” Steve echoed.

“And that’s an excellent foundation,” Keōua said sagaciously.

Danny really couldn’t hack the wise sage thing that Keōua had going on. What gave him the right to dissect their friendship, their incipient relationship, with that knowing smile on his face?

“Danny?” Steve probed.

Danny manufactured a smile.

“I’m going to go get some more beer,” Keōua said, proving that he was very perceptive, and ambled off towards Mamo.

“You’re glaring, Danny.”
“Hmmm,” Danny said, darkly.

Mamo slouched on a low slung picnic chair, his feet propped up on a portable beer cooler. Keōua pushed Mamo’s feet off the cooler to get to the beer and Mamo grinned straight at them, as Keōua mumbled quietly.

“What were you saying?” Steve said out of the side of his mouth. “Smothery Seolh? What you really mean is interfering. What the Hell--?”

“What?” Danny asked, reacting to the abrupt change of tone by looking around. A long highly-polished black limousine was turning up the winding pebbledash drive. “Who?”

“That’s the State of Hawaii’s plates,” Steve observed intently.

“The governor?”

“She’s still in the hospital, so it will be Samuel Denning. Why’s the assistant governor coming here, especially on Christmas Day?” Steve scanned the skyline, the high walls around Seolh, and the bracketing trees. He stood a little more tense, eyes suddenly agate hard. “Photographers.”

“If they’re climbing a tree,” Danny hazarded, striving to follow Steve’s line of sight. “They’re not photographers. They’re paparazzi.”

Steve glanced sideways at him, assessing.

“Artist.” Danny tapped his own chest. “Not a parasite.”

“Well, I’m glad we’re on the same boat.” Steve strode off on long legs towards the limousine as it pulled to a stop on the drive rather than continuing around to the front of the House and out of view of the lu’au.

Danny jogged to keep up. The chauffeur opened the side door and Danny got his first view of the assistant governor. He was tall and broad and exuded authority. He scaled the grassy bank from the drive up to the lawn in three long strides, making it look all the more effortless in his cut black suit and glossy shoes. Danny was abruptly glad that he had chosen to dress with panache to celebrate Christmas Day. Steve had also changed from his morning casual wear into a white dress shirt and tailored black pants that emphasised his narrow waist.

“Assistant Governor Denning,” Steve greeted the man, extending his hand. “News of Governor Jameson?”

Too drawn and impassive for a surprise visit on Christmas Day, a malaise of ‘I am a bearer of bad news’ hung over the man.

“I am afraid to inform you that Governor Jameson died of her injuries in the early hours of this morning,” Denning said soberly.


“Aw, Babe.” Danny didn’t know Steve’s relationship with the lady, but evidently she had been an old family friend.

Steve shied away from the hand on his back.

you, Mr. Denning?"

“The details of the incident leading to Governor James’s death have been leaked,” Denning began.

“And hence?” Steve glared balefully over Denning’s shoulder at the tree. Danny still couldn’t see anything, but he trusted Steve’s vision.

“By details, what do you mean actually?” Danny probed, because this was all top-secret-hush-hush as far as he knew. What did assistant-not-acting-Governor Denning know?

Danny met Denning’s flat assessing gaze with one of his own.

“That ex-Navy SEAL, Lieutenant Commander Steve McGarrett was incidental in thwarting an attack on the governor.”

“They identified me as a SEAL?” Steve glowered. “Excuse me. I need to make a phone call.” He began to turn but stopped dead. “Did you come straight here? Has there been any attempt made to stop of the details of this story leaking?” Steve looked again to the tree. There was a flash of reflected sunlight from a lens and Danny caught where there paparazzi clung.

Denning stood a little straighter, a little more defensively. “I thought it best to inform you straight away.” His gaze flicked to Steve’s left ear.

“I can use a phone, Governor,” Steve said pithily. “Kavika!” Steve strode off.

Danny put his hand in his pockets, and decided that this man was politician through and through.

“It would probably be best if you don’t watch what happens next,” Danny observed.

“What?” Denning shook his head slightly, in confusion, before he controlled his expression. A suite of cousins and a handful of Kavika’s men were ambling like a herd of buffalo across the lawn.

“I think,” Danny said conversationally, noting that Steve was heading into the House at a brisk clip rather than going with the men, “Steve’s really picky about who takes his photograph.”

~*~

#52#

Danny debated the ethical merits of keeping the very nice D3s Nikon and frankly orgasmic AF-S VR telephoto Nikkor lens that Paul Leto and Al'u had confiscated from the paparazzi. Pragmatically, he decided that he would set them aside for a month, and if the two paparazzi had the balls to return, he would consider returning the equipment. He preferred manual focusing, but he was willing to experiment with autofocus using equipment that was this high quality. He was definitely keeping to thirty two gig memory card, though.

His laptop finally recognised his card reader and the pictures began to pop up in Windows Explorer.

“What did they get?” Steve asked, settling in closely beside him on the picnic bench, hips touching.

Danny angled the screen so it didn’t catch the late afternoon sunlight glare.

“A couple of you shaking the new Governor’s hand.”

“Hmmm.” Steve, of course, took over the mouse. Danny let him cycle through the photos.
“Why are you so bent out of shape? Privacy issues aside-- Hey, they took pictures of our kids!” Danny said indignantly. They so weren’t getting their camera back.

“That aside,” Steve said, continuing to scroll, “SEALs don’t generally go around broadcasting that they’re SEALs. It’s bad enough that the Hesse brothers and Wo Fat know where I live. But there are a lot of people out there who I would prefer not to know that I, Steve McGarrett, was in the SEAL teams, and definitely not in Naval Intelligence. I don’t know what Denning was thinking.”

“I think he’s a politician. He wanted publicity.”

Danny could have possibly ascribed a name to the face that Steve pulled, but for once his vocabulary failed him.

“A photo with the man who didn’t save the Governor?” Steve said, disbelieving.

“A decorated Navy SEAL who gave her kids time to say goodbye. That has to count for something.”

Steve absorbed that implacably. And, Danny -- knowing that his own parents were a hundred thousand million miles away and that pained his soul -- wanted to hug the orphan before him, even if he was thirty five years old.

The party eddied around them. And their little eye was left alone.

“So, should you be in protective custody or something?” Curious, Danny broke the silence. Danny knew what a SEAL was from documentaries and furtive Google searches. Did Steve’s presence at Seolh constitute a risk to those living at Seolh? On the heels of the quite frankly chilling realisation, was the absolute certainty that Steve couldn’t leave Seolh -- it would kill him. The man needed his ‘ohana like Danny needed Grace. Steve would, however, leave if he thought that his presence at Seolh could hurt people.

“No. Protective custody? Definitely not.” Steve drummed his fingernails against the tabletop. “There’s an ongoing risk assessment procedure for all officers and enlisted personnel with access to sensitive information. In the wake of the Hesse brothers’ attack, while I am here, there are specific strategies in place. If I wasn’t here there would still be risk, but…” Steve stopped pensively.

“Go on,” Danny encouraged.

“This is my home. These are my friends and family regardless of whether or not I’m here or in the Naval equivalent of WitSec.” Steve moved fractionally closer into Danny’s warmth. “I can get resources deployed if I am here. If not, it’s down to the Honolulu PD to respond to any problems, or maybe the CIA, depending on the threat assessment.”

Steve leaned his elbows on the table. A millisecond later he gnawed on his thumbnail.

A frankly preposterous game of tag football with no apparent rules other than ‘the bigger you were the more people could pile on’ was rolling about on the grass before them.

“Is Barnabas Simons coming back?” Danny asked.

“He never left.” Steve shook his head, and revised, “Simons did go to the Netherlands. But I currently check in with the JOIC at Pearl Harbour-Hickam on a regular basis. The new security features that are being installed in the New Year will have some discreet panic buttons situated.”

“Grace?” Danny blurted, because she was always in the forefront of his mind.
“It’s precautionary, Danny. It’s about managing risk. Denning was an ass but Admiral Locklear read him the riot act. No stories relating to my status should be released.”

“Are SEALs really that important?”

Steve regarded him levelly — über confident ass that he was -- and suddenly Danny knew that Toast monitored his Internet Explorer history and gleefully updated Steve.

“It’s not just--” Steve snorted, “--the SEALs, Danny. I’ve been an officer in Naval Intelligence much longer. I’m an asset. A very expensive, very highly trained, knowledgeable asset.” He slumped wearily.

“Hey?” Danny rubbed a hand between Steve’s sharp shoulder blades, and this time Steve allowed the comfort. “It’s okay. Denning’s little promotional hoo-hah was nipped in the bud. We just have to worry about Wo Fatty Pants and the psychotic Hesse Brothers.”

“Wo Fatty Pants?”

Danny shrugged. “I kind of like the sound of it.”

A hint of a smile graced Steve’s face.

~*~

“Pleased to meet you.” Danny shook Malia’s father’s hand. He was a diminutive gentleman of Japanese ancestry. Danny kind of wanted to bow because he felt as if he was in the presence of royalty.

“Malia says you’ll be taking photographs for the wedding?” he said with a hint of uncertainty.

“Yes, Mr. Waincroft. Rest assured, I am a professional photographer. Taking photographs of your beautiful daughter will be a pleasure.”

“Arata, please. And she is -- takes after her mother.” He smiled at his daughter and her fiancé, who were getting reacquainted after being apart for the whole hour that it had taken Malia to bring her parents to Seolh.

“Call me, Danny.”

“And this is my wife, Emma.” Without looking, Mr. Waincroft stretched his hand behind him, as Mrs. Waincroft smoothly moved away from saying hello to Mrs. K. and slid comfortably around her slimmer husband.

“Hello,” Danny said, leaning to shake her hand. Malia did indeed favour her mom, sharing the same naturally curly hair and warm skin tones. When he took the family photographs at the wedding he wanted to capture the duality.

“Malia says that you have a little girl?” Mrs. Waincroft interrupted his planning.

“Yeah, Grace. She--”

Grace was running between the posts of the Christmas light strewn gazebo with her new best friend Cally.

“--is just ducking out from behind the trellis and heading to that weird urn thing on the pedestal.” Danny pointed as Grace darted out of sight.
“How old is she?”

“How old is she?”

“Seven and -- that very important -- a half years of old.”

“Oh, she’s going to be tall,” Mrs. Waincroft observed, entwining her fingers with her husband’s.


“And her mother?” Mrs. Waincroft asked politely.

“We’re divorced,” Danny said easily. “She remarried and lives in Waikiki. We share custody.”

“Must be difficult.” Arata still had one eye on his own daughter, even if she was an adult, and an experienced medical professional. “You’ve got her on Christmas Day, luckily.”

“Yeah.” Danny glanced at his watch -- It was six thirty. “And unfortunately, it’s about time to take my Monkey back so she can have some time with her mom. If you’ll excuse me.”

Nodding to Malia’s lovely, disgustedly happily married parents, Danny strode off to corral Grace. He figured she’d need a good half hour to say goodbye to people and grab her loot.

“Monkey!” he hollered. He had stopped chasing after Grace when she turned six and began to run like a gazelle.

She came out from behind a verdant rhododendron brush and galloped over. Her white frilly party dress was grass and mud stained. Hey, Danny figured, Rachel would have some bleach and Tide, and Grace had had a whale of a time. Well trained, Danny braced himself, timing it perfectly as Grace jumped into his arms. Manfully, he hid a wince.

“This is so the best place in the Universe,” she said as Danny walked them back into the area of the sparkly-light lit gazebo. The light was concentrating the lu’au in one spot as the night fell quickly, as it did in the equatorial latitudes.

“Yeah, it’s pretty special. We’re going to have to say good night. Time to get your Christmas presents from your mom and step-Stan,” he said, softening the blow.

“Oh,” Grace began, but the enticement of more presents prevented an all out slump of misery.

“You’re leaving your surfboard here. Do you want to leave your other presents?”

Grace blew out her cheeks as she contemplated.

“Aquagirl and SEAL need to come with me,” she said, meaning the new Barbie with the marine biologist fashion outfit that Steve had bought her. Danny didn’t quite approve of the matching Action Man with the SCUBA kit that had also been part of the present. He hadn’t quite managed to wrap his head around why it disturbed him. But he was fairly sure that Kono would have some, unasked for, insight.

“Hey,” Steve ambled over. He smiled at Grace. “Time to go to your Mom’s?”

“Yeah.” Grace smacked a kiss against Danny’s cheek and then wriggled. Obediently, Danny let her slither down to the grass. “I gotta say goodbye to Uncle Chin, Auntie Malia, Kono, Toast, Mrs. K., the twins, Cally, A’u, Uncle Mamo...”

“Gonna take a while. Better hurry,” Steve said laughingly as she raced across the grass towards Mamo, who bent down to sweep her into a hug.
“I need to go get her suitcase, and Aquagirl and SEAL.” Danny cocked an eyebrow at Steve, who returned the expression with a ‘what did I do?’

The sad thing was that Grace was pretty much packed, largely because she didn’t unpack, just lived out of the suitcase. Her dirty clothes were strewn about their room, and Danny grabbed them and stuffed them in a plastic bag. It took less than a couple of minutes.

Steve was waiting by his truck, tossing his keys up in the air. “Hey,” he said, and lobbed over the keys just a little bit wide, making Danny fumble for them.

“I’m driving?”

Steve shrugged. “Laka brought me a glass of homemade punch to try, turns out that it was spiked with vodka.”

“Who spiked it?”

“That hasn’t been figured out.” Steve laughed. “Koa’s on the case.”

“Maybe he’ll solve this one,” Danny said, a little nastily.

Grace came over, swinging on Malia’s hand, chattering about weddings, and wedding dresses that were always white for some reason, which no one would explain.

“Yes, Danno. Time to see Mommy?” Releasing Malia, she scampered forwards.

“Yep.”

“You Highness.” Steve opened the passenger door of the big Ford truck and bowed extravagantly, arms wind-milling. Grace accepted his right hand with a curtsey and let him help her into the cab.

Shaking his head at their antics, Danny turned to his fellow adult. “Thanks for bringing her over, Malia, otherwise I’d probably be chasing her through the gardens again.”

“You’re welcome.” She smiled. “Back in an hour or so?”

“About two,” Danny estimated, maybe less if the Christmas traffic was light.

“I’ll make sure that we save you some beer.” She ambled back to the glow of lights, relaxed and happy. Chin was a lucky, lucky man.

~*~

Rachel presented her cheek for a chaste Christmas kiss and wished him a Happy Christmas before shutting the door in his face. One step forwards and two steps back, Danny mused, looking at his reflection in the stained glass window in the door. He didn’t really know what to make of the kiss, especially in the face of Steve’s machinations.

He turned to the truck parked at the bottom of the steps and raised his hands high, emphasising his shrug.

Steve, peering through the driver’s window, screwed up his nose, disavowing any understanding.

Danny accepted that. He had been married to Rachel for almost ten years, and he didn’t understand
Clambering into the truck, Danny asked, “What time will the party go on to?”

Regarding him, Steve dropped back down into the passenger seat. He shrugged.

“I guess that the kids will be going home soon, if not by the time we get home. It will just be the adults? Hanging around, probably in the kitchen. All the best parties end up in the kitchen.”

“Isn’t that a song?” Danny leaned towards Steve, and Steve met him halfway.

The kiss was sweet and fleeting in front of his ex-wife’s home.

“I think so yes,” Steve said, moving back a fraction, but still close enough to kiss.

“I’ve wanted to do that all day,” Danny admitted.

“It’s been a long day,” Steve agreed, canting his head to the side to the perfect angle.

Danny sucked on his bottom lip, simply relaxing into the magic of a kiss for a heartbeat, before pulling back.

“We’re on my ex-wife’s doorstep, we should move.”

Steve agreed by moving back and slumping in his seat. He carefully fastened his seatbelt.

~*~

The roads were quiet. Lulled by the mesmerising, regular pattern of street lights as they drove along the highway, Danny relaxed in the driving seat, loosely holding the steering wheel with one hand.

He glanced sideways. Steve was still slouched, long legs twisted into the foot well. Danny half-expected him to be dozing. Reflected lights, as they passed by, turned his eyes molten gold.

There should have been some music playing, something soft, Danny thought. It was strange driving without the radio on, but it was never on in the truck.

“So you want to keep things quiet,” Danny said conversationally.

“Hmm?” Steve turned in his seat, to better see Danny.

“So you want to keep things quiet,” Danny repeated, twisting his head slightly so Steve could see his lips clearly. “Us?”

“Yeah,” Steve said simply. “Don’t you?”

Danny pressed on the gas slightly, and the truck speeded up a fraction. Did he? It wasn’t like one kiss, okay one make out session made them married forever. There were things to figure out, although it simply boiled down to -- did they work?

“Yeah,” Danny agreed. “But easier said than done.”

“Quiet doesn’t mean lying.” Steve sat up a little straighter. “I don’t have anything to hide. We don’t have anything to hide. But I just don’t want Mamo and Auntie Maru, and Koa Keawe and Kavika all speculating.”
“Speculating?” Danny echoed.


“And Kavika and Keawe?”

“Koa Keawe will disapprove on principle. And you’re too blond for Kavika.”

“And a guy?” Danny said baldly.

“Kav’s not a ‘phobe.” Steve huffed. “Well, he’ll probably say something.”

“So you’re not hiding the guy thing, you’re just private.”

“What?” Steve bristled. “Hell, yes, I’m private. I just don’t think that it’s anyone’s business except ours.”

“Hey, don’t snap at me! I’m just trying to figure out where we’re at.”

“Where we’re at?” Steve echoed. “Is that what you said? What the Hell does that mean? And why are we fighting!”

“Hey, I’m not fighting with you!” Danny yelled back at him.

“Really, it seems like you’re fighting to me. I just don’t want everyone in our business.”

“They’re your family. They’re going to be all over this. They’re going to happy for you. They’ve been worried sick about you.”

Steve parsed that sentence, and spat out, “Oh, don’t you start psychoanalysing me.”

Danny flicked on the hazard lights and pulled right over. “I don’t believe that I have to be the adult about this instead of the hot head,” he grumbled.

“You can’t just park on the side of the highway.” Steve looked around disbelievingly.

“The hazards are on.” Danny left the engine running.

“You could get us killed!”

Danny flicked on the cab light and shifted in his seat. “Wanna go on a date?”

Steve was totally derailed. His mouth fell open like a gaping fish.

“You. Me. Date,” Danny enunciated each word carefully, too carefully to be honest.

Steve blinked, slowly, and then he smiled, slow and easy like the rising sun. “Yeah.”

“Tomorrow?” Danny said.

Steve nodded, suddenly enthusiastic. “I’ve got a great idea. I know what will be perfect. The weather forecast says that this high pressure is going to continue for the next few days. I can take you to one of my favourite places on the Island.”

“Wh--?” Danny began, because he was thinking a movie and a candlelit dinner for two. But Steve’s eagerness was infectious; he really was on board with this idea. “Favourite place on the Island?
Okay. So what’s the plan?”

“Can we start driving? The chances of some drunk driver piling into the back of us are pretty high.” Steve jabbed a finger at the keys in the ignition, even if the engine was running.

Danny concurred, even if it was quiet, being stationary on the highway wasn’t a good idea. The longer they stopped, the higher the chance a police vehicle would come by and check up on them. He eased off the shoulder and onto the road.

Inevitably they were going to have to talk. They were both adults, it shouldn’t be that difficult. Danny swallowed a snort. He thought that he was past all the insecurity and anxiety around relationships when he had graduated, married, and had a kid. But this was, proverbially, a whole new kettle of fish. Steve was complex and complicated, and surprisingly prickly. Danny, of course, knew that he was perfect.

“Why are you laughing?” Steve asked.

~*~

#53#

The party had calmed down considerably by the time they turned up Seolh’s drive. It had not been raucous to begin with, but it had been hectic.

The lights were on in the kitchen and the mosquito screen door was pulled shut. Inside, the table was piled high with food, as was one of the picnic tables that had been carried into the room. Clearly, there had been a dedicated ‘operation clean up’ during the couple of hours it had taken them to drive Grace to Rachel’s and back.

Mrs. K., three of her sisters, Mamo and Al’u were intently busy, packing up plates and boxes of food.

“Should we help?” Danny jerked his thumb at the six.

Steve glanced at the operation. He shook his head. “Nah, we’d just be in the way.”

Danny accepted that happily. He had been a cheerfully attentive Dad all day, and cognizant that he would have to drive his Monkey back to Rachel’s; it was now time for a beer.

The gazebo had indeed become the de facto party centre with its Christmas lights and unneeded, in the tropical humidity, patio brazier. The sandalwood scented, gently wafting smoke was probably aimed at keeping the mosquitoes away, Danny guessed.

There was always something about fire that drew people.

The gang had broken out musical instruments in the gazebo. Acoustic guitars by the sound of it. By the pinpricks of lights and brazier vying with the lemon scented candles, Danny could see a double handful of family lolling around in the gazebo.

Chin had a tiny ukulele, and was strumming out a tune with Hyo, the young cop who had been the first responder to the fire alarm when the house had been attacked. Belatedly, Danny saw the family resemblance in their high cheekbones and broad brows.

Hyo was singing a soft disconnected sort of song, dominated by Chin’s acoustics. Danny didn’t recognise it at all -- not even the genre. Evidently, Chin and Hyo were well practised since it was a
complex, interweaving melodic piece.

Mamo’s beer cooler was propped open and filled with longneck bottles and ice. The music was nice, but the beer was awesome. After he had indulged in the first glorious swallow, he offered another bottle to Steve. Evidently debating whether or not to drink, Steve finally, desultorily, accepted the bottle.

Kono shuffled along on the wicker sofa along one hexagonal wall, patting the flowery cushion enticingly. Stepping over extended legs, and weaving around sitters, Danny slumped down next to her. Steve was right on his heels. It made for a tight, cosy heap on the two-seater.

“Dude,” Danny began, but Kono shushed him with a finger to her lips.

Ah, music; everything stopped for the music. Danny shuffled back, wriggling into the perfect comfortable position. Steve responded by slinging an arm over Danny’s shoulders and letting his gianormous hand drape down his bicep.

Ostensibly totally engaged by the performance, Steve smiled, satisfied.

The urge to tickle his unguarded armpit was nigh on irresistible, but Danny refrained.

It was inevitable: it was dark; it was warm; it was comfortable; heady, relaxing scents filled the air; they were surrounded by friends and family, and as far as Danny was aware, Steve hadn’t disappeared off for any me-time throughout the entire day -- between one song and the next, Steve became a warm, sleepy lump and slumped against Danny’s side.

Danny had missed this -- holding someone, a partner being comfortable in his arms. Albeit, Steve was actually sort of holding him, and his head had fallen back in a position that would soon become uncomfortable, but the feeling was there.

Danny was going to give him half an hour, and if the crick in his neck didn’t wake him, Danny was going to assume that Steve was tired enough to be shepherded off to bed.

He glared at Kono on principle because he was not coddling Steve.

“What?” she mouthed. Her smile would, Danny noted, would not be out of place on a Cheshire cat’s face.

“Merry Christmas,” Danny whispered back. It was all her fault any rate.

“You’re welcome.” She crinkled her nose at him. They were barely half a foot apart, so Danny planted a kiss on her temple.

~*~

“Come on, Steve. You’re going to hurt your neck sleeping like that.”

Steve was a heavy weight, moulding into Danny. The weight was solid and lush, and the relaxed form of someone deeply asleep.

“Steve, wake up.” Unsurprisingly, there was no response.

Danny reached over and patted his chest. “That’s an order, solider.”

That garnered a response. Steve cracked open an eye, and glared. “What?”
Shifting out from under Steve’s heavy arm, ignoring Kono’s squeak of protest, Danny wiggled his own arm around Steve’s back.

“Everyone is going home,” Danny said, which was a blatant lie. “Time to say: good night.”

“Oh?” Steve blinked and sat up. “Doesn’t look like it,” he said, showing that he was no fool.

“Good night, Stevie,” Mamo said from his cosy armchair by the brazier.

Steve regarded them all, expression rueful. “Yeah, you’re probably right. This constant sleeping thing isn’t going to go on much longer,” he informed them, as he levered himself to his feet.

“Looking forward to it, Brah,” Chin said.

Danny stood with him as he wavered just a fraction.

“Mele kalikimaka,” Steve said.

The returning sentiment from everyone was harmonious in its choral intensity.

“Come on, Babe,” Danny cajoled. Folk got out of the way of their drowsy shuffling. But Mrs.K. stopped directly in their path.

“Merry Christmas, Steve,” she said softly.

“Merry Christmas, Auntie.” Steve bent over so he could hug her properly, engulfing her in his embrace.

She released him with a kiss to his cheek. “I’m glad that you’re finally home.”

“Yeah,” Steve returned.

“Kiwi.” She rested her hand against his cheek, and Steve turned his head to brush a tiny kiss on her palm. “Right, off to bed now!” she ordered, suddenly brisk and commanding.

“Aw no,” Steve said, automatically regressing to age five.

“Go. Go,” she chivvied.

Steve obeyed, with a final goodbye to everyone.

Danny steered him. Steve was quiet, evidently focused on getting to his goal: bed. Danny had seen him like this more than once, somnolent, bordering on sleepwalking.

The kitchen was sparkly clean and there appeared to be enough food on the tables for two more Christmas lu’aus. The rest of the house was quiet and comforting. Danny kept a hand on the small of Steve’s back, turning him up stairs and along corridors all the way to his eyrie. He didn’t need direction, but Danny couldn’t help himself guiding him all the way up to bed.

“I’m sorry, Danny,” Steve said, out of the blue, as Danny turned the top spiral stair, following him into his lantern house bedroom.

“What are you apologising for?”

“I wish I had more energy. I have to crash.” Silhouetted against the starry backdrop revealed by his extensive windows, Steve moved in and pressed an absent kiss against the corner of Danny’s mouth.
He backed off before Danny could physically respond.

“Hey, you’re recovering. You recovering from some pretty significant injuries. This isn’t TV. Injury, surgery, pneumonia, trauma, it all adds up to your recovery taking time. You’re getting better.” Danny darted in with his own brief kiss. “It’s just been a long, fun, but very, very busy day. We’ll talk about this tomorrow.”

Steve nodded tiredly. “I just want to…”

“Come on, do I have to undress you?” and somehow it didn’t come out lecherous. Yawning, Steve unbuttoned his white shirt. He stood there, blindsided by a massive yawn, shirt half on half off. Tutting, Danny divested him of the shirt and tossed it in the corner. Steve was pliable and sleepy; it wasn’t much different than looking after Grace.

“Trousers next,” Danny instructed.

Steve obeyed, skinning out of his dress trousers by simply unbuttoning them and letting them fall off his almost non-existent hips and stepping out of the puddle of clothing. He kicked off his shoes and his feet were bare.

“Go on, all done. Get in your ostentatiously, overly large bed.” Danny laid his hands on Steve, manoeuvring him around and forcing him backwards until his knees hit the bed, and he sat.

Steve allowed the manhandling. “You’re just jealous.”

“Of your bed? Yeah sure.” Danny pushed a finger against Steve’s sternum, and he yielded to the light pressure, toppling backwards in a controlled flop. “Sleep.”

“Yeah, unfortunately, yeah,” Steve muttered. He plucked his aids out of one ear and then the other.

Danny held his hand out, and automatically Steve dropped them on his outstretched palm. They were warm with Steve’s body heat -- it kind of surprised Danny. He looked at the small plastic buds, and then curled his fingers protectively over them.

Shimmying up the bed, Steve grabbed one of the many pillows by the headboard and tucked it against his ribs, and then curled up on his side. Click -- like a switch -- he was asleep.

“Babe,” Danny said sympathetically.

~*~

Danny trooped down the foyer stairs after making sure that Steve was covered with a light quilt and pulling the drapes. He absently trailed his fingers along the polished, curving banister. He liked looking after people; so sue him. Maybe in the future, if they had a future, when Steve was fully recovered, Steve wouldn’t be so accommodating. Danny was kind of looking forwards to it.

The drilling ring of an old fashioned landline phone caught his attention. Danny followed the annoyingly persistent ring into the co-operative office on the ground floor. Moonlit dark, he had to fumble around the large leather-dressed desk until he found the phone.

“Hey,” he answered, as he fought with the ancient curly cord. “Seolh.”

“Who’s this?” a brash, female voice demanded.

“Who’s that?” Danny returned.
“I asked first.”

Danny accepted that. “Danny Williams.”

There was a moment’s silence.

“Well, Danny Williams,” she drawled, “can you put my brother on?”

“Depends. Who’s your brother?” Danny said, hackles rising.

“Steve McGarrett, of course. I’m Mary McGarrett.”

Danny pulled the receiver away from his ear and looked at it, before answering.

“I guess you’re calling to wish him Merry Christmas or something. Sorry, he can’t come to the phone.”

“What? Put him on!” she said.

“He’s gone to bed. He’s asleep,” Danny explained. “I’m not going to wake him.”

“Bed!” she said stridently. “It’s only ten o’clock.”

Danny considered the phone. As first impressions went, they weren’t making a good one. But Steve had told him that he wished he had a better relationship with his estranged sister. Danny understood that it was unusual for her to make the first overture. Steve chased after her, and chased after her, and chased after her, and she rarely responded.

“Look, I’m sorry,” Danny said. “He hasn’t been well. He’s getting better. But he’s asleep and he’s not going to be any use in a conversation.”

The line was silent.

“You still there?” Danny asked. “Hello? Hello?”

“Put him on. I need to talk to him.”

“I can’t.” Danny pursed his lips tightly, before repeating, “He’s asleep. Give me your number. He’ll call you back in the morning, first thing. Well, I guess that depends on where you are. Are you on the Mainland?”

“Why are you asking?” she said suspiciously.

“So he doesn’t call, I dunno, at three o’clock in the morning, your time.” That was a little weird and overly mistrusting, Danny thought.

“I tried his cell, he didn’t answer.”

“He’s got a new phone. The other broke.” Danny thought that that was somewhat of an understatement, one had broken when Victor Hesse had thrown it against a wall, and his replacement had been given to an ex-CIA operative working for a terrorist. “I guess he lost your number, assuming that he had your actual number.”

“What does that mean?” Mary McGarrett bit like a rattlesnake.

“I know that Steve calls you regularly, but you don’t pick up,” Danny said, just a little vindictively.
“You want to give me your current number?”

“No, I’ll try again, maybe later.” There was a resounding sense of ‘Hell, maybe never’ to her tone.

“You can’t,” Danny said rapidly. Damn it, Steve wanted to talk to his sister. “You have to call his cell. He can’t use this old-fashioned phone.”

“What? What does that mean?”

“Steve was injured in Afghanistan. He’s deaf. He’s got to use a special phone that works with his hearing aids. He can talk to you; he can use his own phone, but he needs your number. Or I’ll give you his number.”

“I can’t cope with this,” she said distantly.

“I will go up to his room,” Danny said reluctantly, knowing that he was losing her, “and try to wake him, but we have to use his cell phone.”

“Wish him Merry Christmas for me.”

The click of the end of the phone call echoed loudly in Danny’s ear.

“Damn.”

~*~

#54#

“So what’s the story behind Mary McGarrett?” Danny asked Chin as the other man stood outside the gazebo smoking a fat cigar. “And you’re smoking?”

Danny had tried to return the call, to get Mary’s phone number, but she had withheld her number. If Toast hadn’t been at his girlfriend’s house, Danny would have put him on the case.

“It’s a Christmas tradition.” Chin looked ruefully at the cigar pinched between index and forefinger. “Once a year. Why are you asking about Mary?”

“She rang the office phone. I picked up.”

Astounded, Chin froze like a manikin. “That’s a turn up for books,” he said, when he had found his normal equanimity. “What did she say?”

“Not a lot. She wanted to talk to Steve. Wouldn’t give her number, didn’t stay on the line long enough for me to give her Steve’s number. She was,” Danny pondered, “high strung.”

“High? Drunk?” Chin asked immediately.

Danny regarded him. “Drugs?”

Chin shrugged. “It’s been known to happen, but a long time ago.”

“So what is the story?” Danny persisted.

“It’s not a story for Christmas Day,” Chin hedged.

“Bull.” He appropriated Chin’s cigar and took a drag. “I’m going to have to tell Steve that he missed
his sister’s call, the first time in forever, when he gets up. I’d like some background.”

“She never really got over the car crash,” Chin said obliquely.

“Car crash? What car crash?” Danny wondered, and recalled, “When her parents were killed?”

Chin nodded.

“Was she was in the car?” Danny leaned forwards.

Chin glanced over his shoulder towards the gazebo, and said quietly, “Both she and Steve were.”

“What?” Danny yelped, and then toned it down so the party in the gazebo wouldn’t overhear. “Steve and his sister were in the car? My God! Were they injured?”

Chin pinched the bridge of his nose. “Steve was knocked out; Mary broke her arm; Doris and John were killed outright. They thought that it might have been a hit because John was investigating the Yakuza. Mary was conscious when the emergency services pried the car apart. She thought Steve was dead. Her parents were dead. My dad attended the scene. She was only eleven.”

“And it messed her up?” Danny summarised.

“Life is an encounter with many moments, but that was a significant one.”

“And she does drugs?”

“Started out on pakalolo. Audrey shipped her off to Tampa at Mary’s emphatic and persistent requests. And then Mary graduated with honours in heroin and E at the University of Florida.”

“Shit.”

“She came home for Audrey’s funeral as high as a kite. Steve got her into rehab. And she disappeared after she’d finished treatment.”

“Yakuza?” Danny suddenly thought. “Okay, I’m a little confused. John McGarrett was investigating the Yakuza? And Wo Fat is part of the Yakuza?”

Chin blinked. “I’ve had a couple of beers -- that’s an interesting segue -- so I might not be following this conversation very well. I don’t know if Wo Fat is Yakuza.”

“Steve asked Commander White, who turns out to be an old family friend, if his dad might have known Wo Fat? White said no. But if Wo Fat’s Yakuza, even if he was a kid at the time, it’s possible.”

“Again you’re assuming Wo Fat is Yakuza,” Chin said patiently.

“He was working with them, I think.” Danny absently took another draw on Chin’s cigar, inhaling the smoke deep into his lungs, revelling, and then exhaling. “Steve identified the thugs with Wo Fat, when the guy shot the governor, as Yakuza.”

“Okay, working with the Yakuza,” Chin revised, and plucked his cigar from Danny’s fingers. “Thank you.”

“Are we on to something?” Danny hazarded.

“We’re going to need some sort of high powered computer to keep track of all these hypotheses and
thoughts,” Chin said.

Danny considered Chin. “If John McGarrett was investigating the Yakuza, why didn’t you say something when Steve was asking if there was any way that Wo Fat might have known his Grandmother or his parents?”

Chin met the question phlegmatically. “Because Wo Fat is a terrorist and probably, based on the photos I’ve seen, Chinese-American?”

“And?”

“Yakuza are from Japan. That’s a different country than China. And Japanese and Chinese are different ethnicities.”

“You do sarcastic really well,” Danny noted.

Chin shrugged. “Some lessons have to be delivered in a sarcastic manner, otherwise they don’t sink in. But I apologise.”

Danny hand waved the apology off, because Chin was right; he was typically a shit at telling ethnic groups apart. “So if you’re Chinese you can’t join the Yakuza?”

“I have no idea, Danny.” Chin stared at him. “I’m not up on the membership requirements for criminal gangs. I’m kind of guessing that they’re pretty exclusive, though. But maybe terrorists work with criminals?”

Danny heaved out a sigh. “It’s really frustrating. I feel like I’m trying to figure this out from the bottom of a really deep, dark well.”

“It’s not your job, Danny,” Chin pointed out.

“Steve knows his dad was investigating the Yakuza before he died?” Danny wondered.

“I believe so. I think that was one of the reasons he joined the Navy.”

“Really? Fuck, I need a beer.”

“Cooler in the gazebo.” Chin jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

“Thanks.” Danny made a half-step towards more beer. “If that was the case, wouldn’t he have joined the police?”

~*~


“Here,” Danny yelled, because he was happily ensconced in the conservatory, simultaneously reading *People of the Islands of Hawaii* on his lap, drinking coffee, and munching on a breakfast bagel.

“Danny?” Steve continued.

“Idiot,” Danny chastised himself, setting his coffee and bagel down, and twisting the large book off onto the sofa. He trotted through the makeshift gym and into the kitchen.

“There you are,” Steve said loudly.
“Hey, Babe,” Danny ventured. Steve looked flushed and a little wild eyed. Once again, he just wore his boxers and the ratty terry-cloth bathrobe. “You okay?”

“Do you have my aids?” Steve said loudly, and with that characteristic monotone drop.

“Oh.” Danny winced.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’. Where are they?”

They were in the pocket of his chinos, which were in the laundry basket in the corner of his room.

“I’ll go get them.” Danny darted off to retrieve them. Geez, what would have happened if he had thrown his clothes in the washer?

Steve was still standing in the centre of the kitchen amidst the array of leftover food when Danny returned.

“Sorry.” Danny handed them over.

“It’s okay.” Steve canted his head to the side and plugged in one and then the other. “The remote?”

“That you didn’t give me.”

“Must be in the pocket of my trousers,” Steve mused. “Which are where?”

Danny had kicked them under Steve’s bed so he wouldn’t trip over them, but decided against volunteering that information.

“Morning,” Danny said with a smile.

“Morning,” Steve returned.

“God, kiss already.” Kono sailed past them, aiming for the fridge.

They both glowered, the moment effectively squashed under Kono’s petite size sevens stomping all over it.

“Oh, ooh, fruit.” She snagged a large bowl of fruit salad and dolloped a portion into a smaller bowl straight from the draining board. “Any one else want?”

Steve nodded.

“I guess we’re eating somewhere else,” Kono noted, looking at the food parcels obscuring the tabletop.

“I set up in the conservatory,” Danny said. “I’ve got the coffee pot through there.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Kono grabbed a couple of mugs.

“Are we making a trip to the food kitchen this morning?” Steve asked, indicating the food that had not been doled out to the family before they had headed to their respective homes.

“Mamo said that he would be by about ten with Kavika and some of the guys,” Kono said.

“Good,” Steve said authoritively. “We kept some back, though, didn’t we?”

“We’re covered.” Kono smiled.
It was a little strange setting up breakfast in the conservatory -- more formal, as a function of the old fashioned flower-print embroidered upholstery on the couch and armchairs. The ruby red drapes with the knotted cords securing them seemed like something out of *Jane Eyre*.

Kono cracked the door to the gardens to let the morning air drift in, heady with the scent of plumeria.

“What are you reading?” She flopped on the couch beside Danny and wrestled the large hardback onto her lap. “Oooh, interesting.”

“Chin got it for me.”

Kono flicked through the first few pages. “Wow, look at these lithographs.”

The picture was a rendition of Captain Cook discovering -- not that they had been lost -- the Islands of Hawaii. A fine line, black ink print showed a tall ship in the background, with uniformed British Officers -- complete with high tricorn hats -- in a row boat in the forefront, being met by native Hawaiians in coracles, wearing grass skirts, beaded necklaces, and feathered headdresses.

“Funny isn’t it,” Danny mused.

“What funny?” Kono asked lifting the book and angling it towards Steve in the armchair so he could see.

“Naked dudes in loincloths and feathered headdresses meeting guys in knickerbockers and what looks like black velvet in Hawaii -- clothes were kind of ridiculous back then,” Danny observed.

“I guess in another hundred years or so, people will look at what we’re wearing and say the same thing,” Kono mused.

“Remember the seventies,” Steve observed, waggling his eyebrows in pretend horror.

“I was kind of small at the time,” Danny said. “One day I might forgive my mom for taking the photo of me in a brown corduroy suit. Man, it was horrendous. Who decided that making four year olds dress up as pageboys was the perfect addition to any family wedding?”

“Oh, you don’t have it, do you?” Kono asked, bright with anticipation.

“No.” Danny snorted. He pointed vaguely in midair. “That’s in an album on the top shelf, fourth one along, green and gold ring binder in my mom and pop’s living room.”

“It would be nice to meet your mom and dad sometime,” Kono said, flicking through the history book. “Maybe they’ll bring the family album?”

“Albums, plural, and no, not even over my dead body. They are saving up; I guess we’ll see them sooner rather than later.”

“That would be cool.” Kono’s smile was mischievous.

“Hmmm.” Danny narrowed his eyes, since it was obvious that Kono was trying to figure out how to get in touch with his mom and pop and get them to bring the family albums on their visit. His mom would be totally on board with the idea. “How come we didn’t get to meet your mom and dad yesterday?” Danny asked.

“Oh, they went to visit my brother, Adam, in LA. He was in a Christmas Show, and got them
“He--” Danny struggled to remember, “--is a dancer?”


“Yeah,” Danny echoed, remembering that Chin being ostracised, and finally, being somewhat accepted back had paved the way for Kono and Adam to find their own careers. But only Chin’s baby brother Hyo had attended the Christmas lu’au. Families were hard work. He couldn’t help glancing at Steve, who was desultorily picking at his bowl of fruit topped with yogurt. This was the opportunity to mention Mary’s phone call.

“What?” Steve looked up, feeling Danny’s gaze.

Well, they were all ‘ohana.

“I picked up the office phone last night, after you had gone to bed,” Danny said. “It was your sister, Mary.”

“What?” Steve demanded.

Danny kind of guessed that he might have spoken too rapidly, but there was also an element of disbelief in the question.

“I guess the fact that you didn’t call her made her look you up?” Danny hazarded.

Steve set his bowl down on the wicker coffee table.

“Mary called,” Steve summarised. “What did she say?”

“Not a lot. Demanded to talk to you. I said that you were asleep…. I explained that she had to call your cell phone because it’s linked to your hearing aids.”

Steve processed that sentence, as implacable as granite.

“And you’ve been injured in Afghanistan. She told me to tell you Merry Christmas and then hung up.”

Unassailable, granite mountain like Everest -- assuming that Everest was made out of granite.

“I didn’t have a chance to give her your new cell number,” Danny finished.

“How,” Steve said, the word deep and resonant, “did she sound?”

That was a tough one, because definitely upset after Danny had dropped the bombshell. Prior to that…

“Kinda high strung,” Danny said. “She was upset when I told her about--” Danny touched his ear and drew his finger down his cheek to his mouth.

Steve heaved out a sigh. He looked to the gardens beyond the conservatory windows.

“It was really quick, Babe. My first thought was that you were asleep, and then you needed to talk to her. But she did not want to call your cell or give me her number. I tried to call her back on the landline but she’s withheld her number.”
Kono tapped Danny’s knee, stopping him dead, and then flicked her fingers in Steve’s direction. The man’s attention was miles away.

“I’ll go,” Kono whispered, corralling her bowl and mug, and creeping away.

Oh yeah, he was the boyfriend now. Okay, that was kind of stupid, he would have done what he was about to do any rate.

“Babe.” Danny stood and moved into Steve’s line of sight, gathering his attention like a laser sight. “It’s not your fault. She called you. She knows that you’re injured, and she knows that you can’t call her. The ball is in her court.”

“Jesus, I can’t believe it.”

“You don’t have her number, do you?” Danny suddenly remembered that Steve had gone through cell phones like toilet paper in the last few weeks.

“Not on my current phone; I haven’t backed it up since the last back up, which was the phone that I gave to Kaye.” Steve pressed his fingertips to his forehead, dimpling the skin. “I’ll have a post-it in my rolodex. But Mary hasn’t answered when I’ve called that number for over a year. The number is probably not even live. Damn, I missed her call. I bet she tried my old phone first.”

“Blame Hesse. Blame the insurgents in Afghanistan. It’s not your fault.”

“No,” Steve sighed. “Fucking Hesse. He could have at least left the SIM card intact. Damn.”

Steve rocketed to his feet. He was a breath away from bolting to one of his hidey-holes.

“Babe.” Danny got in tight, preventing him from escaping. “It’s not your fault.”

“How is it not my fault?” Steve growled, and then blew out a harsh, gusty sigh. “I know it’s not my fault. It’s a confluence of events.”

Danny splurted out a laugh that wasn’t in anyway humorous. “Steve, man, it’s out of your hands. To be honest, I think that she might call. In fact, I think that it is very likely.”

“You think, Danny?” Steve said with a tinge of hopefulness.

“I do. Come here.” Danny hauled him in, one arm around his waist, the other around his shoulders. Steve hooked his chin over Danny’s shoulder and squeezed back. “Thanks, Danny.”

“Any time, Babe.”

“Right.” Steve released him decisively. “I’m going to record a message on the office voicemail for Mary. Then I’ll pack our stuff for today, okay?”

“Er, okay?” Danny responded. “Oh! The date! Pack? What nefarious plans do you have?”

Steve grinned.

“Ah, ah, ah!” Danny waggled his finger back and forth. “I appreciate that you’re Mr. Secretive, but I need to know what we’re doing? Pack? Are we going away for a couple of days? Do I need a suit?”

Steve canted his head to the side, and flashed his goofy grin. “We’re going hiking, for the day. And pack your trunks.”
“Trunks?” Danny echoed.

“My jeans that you cut off?” Steve explained helpfully.

“I know.” Danny narrowed his eyes. “I get to plan the next date, right.”

Steve absorbed that, rolling onto his toes and back down. “Second date? Okay.”

Danny slapped his shoulder. “I’ve gotta ask Chin if I can borrow his hiking boots again. You go make your phone message. I’ll meet you in the kitchen.”

“Okay.” Steve pecked his temple with a fleeting kiss, and was out the door.

Danny regarded the detritus of their breakfast. “Guess, I’m cleaning up then?”

~*~

#55#

The sea wind whipped at his hair as Danny hung his elbow over the open truck window. A landscape of forest and hills had been interspersed by scrubby trees and roughly tufted grassy earth before mountains had grown up on his right. On the left, on the other side of the highway, cliffs dropped off past a flimsy guard rail. The drop presented a grassy edge to the glorious, turquoise blue ocean. They had driven for about an hour, and Danny had a sense that they were coming to the end of the driving part of the journey as the highway began to dip down and the cliff edge became rocks and earth, and twisty, gnarly trees.

“So, you going to tell me where we’re going?” Danny had his phone on his lap, ready to Google.

Steve flashed a smile at him. “Kaena Point. And don’t check it out on wiki, experience it without any preconceptions.”

Danny leaned into Steve’s space, looking out to the sea. “Beach?” The road curved, and a long sandy bay peeked out of the landscape. “We’re going surfing?”

There were no boards in the back of Steve’s black truck.

“Yokohama beach is not for beginners. We’re going a little further.”

Steve slowed down a fractionally responding to the other drivers, who appeared to be angling to park on the side of the road. The crunch of windblown sand under the Ford’s tyres made Danny shiver.

“Is it a good day?” Danny asked. White horses galloped across the ocean directly towards the long beach.

Steve glanced left. “That’s a good swell, actually. Don’t tell Kono that we came out here.”

“Oh. I guess we should have offered her a lift?” Danny settled back in his seat and crossed his arms. “Good thing that I didn’t know where we were going, because it was a surprise.”

“You’re going to say something, aren’t you?”

Danny grinned.

The road continued as straight as a die cutting through the shallow bay. A good high wave, and Danny guessed that the whole lowland area would flood.
“What’s that?” Danny pointed at a two storey, white-topped windowed pagoda.

“Lifeguard station.”

The road abruptly gave way from smooth, marked highway to a rougher macadam surface curved to let rain and seawater run off. Cars were dotted along the length of the road; people getting ready for a post-Christmas day off communing with the waves.

And then bang, the moderately maintained road came to an end. Steve indicated, turned into a parking area, and pulled to a halt.

“Is this it?” Danny had already clicked free his seatbelt.

“Start of the Kaena Point trail.” Steve pocketed the car keys, and rubbed his hands. “Heh. Heh. Come on.”

Danny shook his head fondly as Steve hopped out of the truck.

Steve had prepared two backpacks. A daddy backpack and a baby backpack, Danny observed, wondering what would be the response if he grabbed the daddy backpack. He made a half-hearted grab for it, and it was snatched out of his grasp.

“Next time, Steve. You pack two backpacks of the same size. And just so you’re aware, we will be swapping as we go on this hike.”

He smiled in the face of Steve’s mulish expression.

“It’s called partners. It’s called sharing.” Danny slung on the little backpack, which actually had some heft to it. “We share the weight. Okay?”

“You always make it--” Steve screwed up his nose, “--like a lesson. Why is that? And this is my backpack, it’s fitted for me.”

“I have a seven year old, Steven. I am wise to all your tricks.”

Steve situated his backpack, fastening the chest and waist strap. He reached into the back of the truck and handed Danny a baseball cap, and a SIG water bottle with a handy carabiner.

“There’s not a lot of shade. I know that you’ve got factor 100 on, but the hat’s a good idea. And there’s more water in our backpacks.”

Danny accepted the hat. And then laughed uproariously at the wide brimmed, floppy canvas hat that Steve pulled on.

“Hey, don’t knock the hat,” Steve said easily.

“So how long is the hike?” Danny asked as he hooked the water bottle to the arm strap of his backpack. He retrieved his camera bag from the passenger foot-well and slung it around his neck.

“About an hour or so,” Steve said.

Danny glanced at his watch. “Just in time for lunch, then.”

~*~

The trail was a dirt path, cobbly and pockmarked. It was obviously maintained. A four wheel truck
could have made the route, but there were no tracks in the dry dirt, apart from bicycles. Scrubby dry
grass grew on either side of the path. To the left the Pacific Ocean stretched off to a far horizon. On
the right mountains rose high.

Despite the ups and downs of the path as they ambled along, it was an easy trail. When Steve had
mentioned hike, Danny had pictured rock scrambling and death defying creeps across narrow
pinnacles couched in terror.

But this was perfect, not too strenuous. The sea air was invigorating and Danny hoped that Steve had
packed some more of the pork for lunch.

“Hey, hey,” Steve whispered, coming to an abrupt stop. He pointed at the rocky shore below the
path.

“What?” Danny looked and saw rocks, rocky boulders and folded stone, grey-black.

Steve leaned in close, angling the long line of his arm so Danny could look straight along. He
smelled of Old Spice.

“What? Oh!” A grey white lump resolved into a torpedo-shaped animal with a pretty, doglike face.
“Is that a monk seal?”

“Yeah.” Steve smiled, shrugging out of his backpack, setting it on the side of the path on the grass,
and crouching down. “Get a photo.”

“I should have brought the paparazzi camera,” Danny grumbled as he peered through his lens and
snapped off a couple of shots. You could tell it was a seal, but it wasn’t a good photo. “Can we get
closer?”

Steve paused as he unzipped a side pocket of his backpack. “What?”

Danny walked his fingers across the palm of his other hand. “Let’s get closer.”

“No.” Steve shook his head to emphasise the negative. “They’re critically endangered, vulnerable to
stress. Last thing we want to do is disturb her.”

He straightened, GPS in his hand.

“Oh, are you logging its position?”

“Relative.” Steve tapped at the touch sensitive screen. Danny leaned in close, watching him mark a
’waypoint’ and identify it as Kaena juvenile seal, before holding the device, like a camera, and
snapping off a picture.

“Will we report it?”

“Yeah, when we get home. Or if we bump into a ranger in the park.” He picked up his backpack and
swung it over his shoulders, settling it in position. The GPS went into a cargo pants pocket. “Come
on.”

“Martinet.” Danny said as he fell in an easy pace beside him. He glanced at the seal, half wishing
that Grace was with them, because if she saw a seal she would have been beside herself with glee.

They walked a good half hour or so, Danny stopping every now and again to snap off a photo of
twisted tree trunks, boulders with colourful flecks, and old folded lava twisted like saltwater taffy.
Steve was infinitely patient with their progress.

“Wow, look that’s an arch.” Danny drew Steve’s attention to the natural sea hewn arch down on the shore. “Come on, let’s go down and get a photo.”

Slipping and sliding in his borrowed boots with their two pairs of socks, Danny picked his way down the steep, grassy verge onto the rocks below. The roots of the wind twisted shrubs stabilised the earth. Steve used them like a neat little ladder. Carefully, they made their way across the seaweed strewn rocks and around the boulders. Balancing camera, bottle and backpack, Danny thought about what he wanted to capture.

“Get under there, let me get some perspective.” Danny directed. “Lose the hat.”

“I like the hat.”

“It does its job very well, and I commend it. But it’s a travesty of an eyesore.”

Rolling his eyes, Steve shrugged out of his backpack, placing it on a high, flat boulder and carefully tucked his floppy hat into the mesh map pocket on the front, so Danny couldn’t accidently make it blow away.

“Get close to the water directly under the arch.” Danny got under the arch, but higher up the shore, so that the shot would have the sweep of the arch overhead, coming down to the shore. Steve fetched up against the rock pillar at its base, feet in the surf, and crossed his arms.

“I want a smile!” Danny chortled to himself as he took a handful of pictures of Steve glowering and then, reluctantly, smiling. Danny liked the symmetry of the turquoise water on either side of the pillar with the curve of the shot, with Steve placed perfectly central. The white t-shirt with the beige cargo pants, however, didn’t work. Danny would have got him to wear blue. But possibly the contrast would work --

“Okay.” Steve said, after Danny had got down on his stomach and played with the light settings, experimenting with the contrast of body, stone, sea and sky. “Time to move on.”

“Oh, okay….” His bruised bones were niggling, just a little bit.

Semi-obediently, because that was the way that he rolled, Danny followed Steve back up to the path, snapping off a couple of shots of his well-toned butt.

~*~

Steve stood facing the rolling ocean and breathed in and out, expression serene. Danny left his camera hanging around his neck, untouched. They had walked along the dirt track and then Steve, following some SEAL sense, had cut off the path leading them through undulating sand dunes and slacks.

The rocky shore was of lava -- twisted zoomorphs breaking up against granite basalt forced up by immense geologic power a million years ago.

“That’s the Pohaku o Kauai.” Steve pointed to a mound of a rock off shore. “The demigod Maui tried to link Kaua’I to ‘Oahi -- the rock is the result.”

“So he failed,” Danny summarised.

Steve glared at him, balefully.
Cheesily, Danny grinned back.

“So I guess if I told you that a little further north is the point where the souls depart the earth, you’d laugh?”

Danny pressed his hand over his heart. “I wouldn’t laugh, Babe,” he said seriously. “I just pointed out that this Maui guy didn’t succeed.”

Steve lowered his chin and regarded Danny through his eyelashes.

“Hey,” Danny continued, “you’ve already told me that you believe in -- are predisposed towards-- reincarnation. And, hey, I’ve got no problem with that. It’s myth and legend, which can be rooted in fact, sometimes, possibly, maybe.”

“Danny,” Steve grumbled.

“Hey, I’m being understanding. These souls--” Danny made little scampering motions with all his fingers and then starfished his hands, “--jump off into the Nevernever.”

The glower reached volcanic proportions, which was appropriate given their locale.

“You’re so annoying,” Steve said like it was news.

“I like to think erudite and immune to bullshit.” Danny rocked back on his heels, planting his hands in his pockets.

Steve reached out and grabbed the collar of Danny’s t-shirt and hauled him in close, smacking a kiss on his lips. Danny laughed against the possessive kiss and freed his hands to enfold Steve in. Steve nibbled at his lips, adding a hint of tongue. Danny matched him, enjoying every moment, but taking it no further than where Steve led. Releasing Danny’s bottom lip, Steve pulled back a fraction.

“Never change.” Steve bopped his forehead against Danny’s.

“I’m a complicated guy, change is inevitable.” Danny wrinkled his nose against Steve’s. “Lunch?”

Steve laughed.

~*~

Steve took them back through the troughs of the golden sand dunes, skirting the edge of high, vegetated banks. While their route appeared to meander, they emerged further down the rocky shore, above a narrow sandy spread. Pitted and scarred grey lava structures with black balsamic rock formed the majority of the shore.

Steve pulled out his GPS and consulted it. “Down a bit further,” he pointed.

Danny went along, curious, since evidently, they were going to a favourite place marked on his GPS. They trooped across the sand, angling to a cut in the rocks. The narrow passage led into a tiny cove within the larger beach, protected by the build up of layers of lava, which curved into the water to form a natural pool. On the other side of the boundary of rocks, the ocean beckoned.

“Oh, wow.”

Smugly, Steve twisted off his backpack, and lowered it to the sand. “Good place for lunch?”

Danny scratched his chin, musing. “You know there’s a place in New Jersey….”
“Danny.”

“For lunch, I guess it’s perfect.” He grinned, and knelt beside Steve.

Shaking his head, Steve hauled out Tupperware containers from his backpack. Lunch was portions of: kalua pork; potato, macaroni, and leafy salad; juicy shrimps and seared ahi nestled in almost defrosted freezer packs, and sweet haupia dessert.

“You going to roll me back to the truck?” Danny asked, as Steve handed him a plastic plate and fork.

“I guess I overdid it a bit?” He looked at the Tupperware containers on the plastic sheet he had laid out.

“Nah. I’m pretty sure we can make decent inroads. Have we got anything to drink other than water?” Steve stared. “Oh, I guess I should have brought some beer or something?”

“No,” Danny said in the face of that uncharacteristically unsure expression. First dates were hard. “I was just wondering.”

“Water is best for dehydration,” Steve said, seriously. And it was hot.

“Yeah. I think that I’ll put on some more sun screen.” Danny reached for the baby backpack that he had set beside him. Rooting through it, he pulled out the spare water bottles, extra GPS, first aid kit (which matched the backup in Steve’s backpack), microfiber towel, trunks, and then his hypoallergenic sunblock -- or more accurately Grace’s.

“I’ll get some after you?” Steve asked.

“Yeah, sure.” Danny squeezed a liberal dollop on his palm. “We could sit in the shade of the rocks?”

Steve glanced up at the midday winter sun, almost overhead. “Good idea.” He began moving their feast over into the shade.

~*~

Backs against the rocks, padded by their backpacks, legs outstretched on warm sand, they digested their plate lunches in postprandial comfort. Danny kept his lips firmly zipped shut, deliberately not saying a word, despite wanting to know when Steve had found this place and who he had brought here, because Steve’s tiny little nods as he inadvertently blinked promised one thing -- naptime.

Danny’s patience was rewarded, as Steve’s chin dropped to his chest, and he slipped into slumber. He could only be described as cute.

On his butt, Danny slipped over the sand closer to the water, so as not to disturb Steve. Carefully, he untied his hiking boots, kicking them and extra padding of socks off with a relieved sigh. If Steve proved to be a hiker -- and it appeared that he was -- Danny was going to have to invest in some of his own boots. Borrowing someone else’s boots was in no way ideal, as, despite the multiple socks, his heels were a little red. This had been an easy hike, and, as Steve further recovered, Danny bet the hikes would become more adventurous. Zipping off the legs of his hiking trousers, making them into shorts, Danny decided some saltwater wading would be perfect.

First, though, he unwound the wrapping just above his ankle. The seawater would also be good for his scraped leg.
Careful of his camera, he picked slowly across the sandy mouth of the rock pool, scrunching in with his toes. He wasn’t sure if he could walk barefoot on the lava rocks. Venturing a little deeper, he realised that the bottom of this pool was a flat platform of sheer rock. Fish darted out from the smaller rocks dotted here and there. The rock shelved down, getting deeper -- the pool was a natural lido, sun warmed and deep enough further in to swim.

Steve had told him to bring trunks, so Danny guessed that swimming was on the day’s agenda.

Danny stood up straight observing the world around him. The temptation to skinny dip was fairly overpowering. They had only been passed by a couple of hikers as they had ambled along the trail. Danny snapped off a shot of the slumbering Steve, before swinging around and experimenting with the reflection of light off the still pool, capturing the alien environment. He wanted to experiment with filters. The list of photographic equipment that he had to buy increased with every day he spent on Oahu.

Venturing close to the rocks, he bent over, taking shots of red and green blobs above the water surface, mirrored by similarly coloured, tentacled thingies below. Anemones, if Danny remembered Steve’s lectures correctly. A bright purple pockmarked seastar made its painstakingly slow way along the edge of grey boulder.

Steve grunted, alerting Danny. Turning, he saw Steve sleepily raise his head, immediately scanning the area.

“Hey, Babe,” Danny called, letting him know where he was.

“Danny?” Steve blinked at him.

Danny snapped off a couple of pictures. That had been a short powernap.

“What’s the chance of other hikers coming down here?” Danny asked, upping the volume a tad, since he was a good few yards away.

“Comme ci, comme ça.” Steve waggled his hand from side to side. “It’s a popular area.”

That meant skinny dipping was off the agenda -- pity.

Steve rolled to his feet, and pulled off his t-shirt and silly hat in one smooth motion tossing them on the sand. His cargo pants followed. He wore his shorts underneath. There was a devilish gleam in his eye as stalked across the sand.

“Right.” Danny held his camera up in his hands. “No horseplay; this is my only camera, and it is not waterproof.”

That brought up Steve sharply, Danny was pleased to see.

“Anyway, you’ve still got your aids in,” Danny pointed out. “They’re not waterproof, either.”

Steve reversed -- parade ground carriage rising to the forefront -- and stalked back up to their little campsite. Kneeling, he retrieved his cargo pants and started rooting through the pockets, probably for his ITE case.

Danny took the opportunity to get out of the water, and to squirrel away his camera safely back in its case.

Yodelling -- which was altogether surprising -- Steve ran across the sand and dove into the pool in a
perfect racing dive, barely skimming the surface.

“Christ, Steve and water.” Standing, Danny kicked off his shorts and boxer briefs, making sure that they landed on top of the backpack, because he hated sand in his butt crack. Tush bare, he got his trunks and pulled them on.

Steve emerged from the water, slinging his head around so that the seawater spiralled off his skin.

“Damn, missed photo opportunity,” Danny grumped. And he missed my admittedly awesome butt, he thought.

“Come on, Danny!”

~*~

#56#

Steve, appropriately enough, was like a seal in the water, ducking and diving around Danny. Effortlessly, he torpedo-rolled in the water as Danny doggedly paddled around the tide pool. Every now and again, Steve would catch Danny’s ankle and tug him under the surface. Next time that they did this, Danny thought as he tossed his hair out of his eyes for the umpteenth time, he was going to bring some swim goggles.

A dark haired form slid under the water towards Danny. The only thing that was missing was the theme tune from ‘Jaws.’

“Goof.” Danny got his feet down on the sand, yanked and hauled Steve up against him.

“Hey, Danny.” Steve hooked a leg around Danny’s knees and toppled them over.

There was no way that Steve was going to slow down enough for some nookie; he was enjoying himself too much.

“Goof! Come here,” Danny directed, and when Steve was close enough, he grabbed his ears and hauled him in for a kiss. Steve let himself be towed in with a helpful kick.

Danny backed up the slanting rock platform, easily slipping backwards and down, to sit in waist deep water. He had an interesting lapful of wet SEAL, but only for an instant, before he eel'd around Danny. There appeared to be no way that Steve was letting Danny have the upper hand in water.

Steve nibbled along the delicate skin on the underside of Danny’s jaw. “Salty Danny. Mmmm.”

Danny had to poke him on principle. And for the first time, touched the scarring on Steve’s left side. They both froze. Danny angled his head so that they could look at each other face to face. It was rough under his fingertips, corded and, strangely slick just under his little finger.

“Hey, you okay?” Danny asked slowly.

Steve nodded, suddenly mute.

“Am I hurting you?” Danny asked, seriously.

“Nah.” Steve shook his head. “It’s…. it feels different -- distant. I actually shouldn’t be exposing it to sunlight,” he finished ruefully.
“What?” Danny sat up.

“It was fun forgetting for twenty minutes.” Steve settled back on his heels with an aggrieved sigh. “Scars. Sunburn. Bad idea.”

“Come on.” Danny stood and held out his hand. “My sunblock is waterproof. You should have put some on before. Numbnuts.”

Steve let himself be pulled to his feet, back onto dry sand and to their camp. Danny got the bottle of cream and offered it to Steve.

“Actually, it would be better to cover up.” Steve grabbed one of the water bottles, and lifting his left arm up, sluiced his ribs with fresh water. Danny did not look away, cognizant that Steve was waiting for any reaction. It was, by no stretch of the imagination, not a nasty set of scars -- burnt flesh and surgical intrusion. It was Steve, though. Carefully, Steve patted the skin dry with a tiny microfiber towel, and then tossed the cloth to Danny. He rooted through the first aid kit in his backpack and pulled out a small jar, like the ones that Danny’s mom used to pack up her toiletries when travelling.

“What’s that?” Danny asked.

Steve glanced at him. “I wasn’t looking; what did you say?”

“What is in the jar?”

“It’s called Epaderm.” Steve unscrewed the cap, and angled the contents displaying a thick white cream. Scooping out a generous finger-full he carefully, smoothed his palm down the wing of his ribs curving down to his hip. “Basically, it’s an emollient. Helps with the scarring.”

“Is it working?” Danny asked baldly.

“Keeps it lubricated.” Steve waggled his eyebrows.

Danny eyed him, because when a friend was treating the evidence of a serious wound, his mind really didn’t go there.

“Helps prevent keloid scar tissue formation, prevents ongoing drying and abrasive damage, breaks down the formation of scar tissue and speeds scar maturation,” Steve quoted.

“You use other stuff?” Danny asked, watching his hand slide down to his navel, and slowly return. Okay, so his mind did go certain places.

“Silicone gel. I prefer to mix and match.” Steve winced as he massaged the residual bruising from the thug’s kick. “I used to have to wrap my side in silicone gel patches, but I’m upgraded to moisturisers now.”

“How often do you do this?”

“Two-three times a day.”

“Pain in the ass,” Danny summarised.

Steve didn’t bother to answer, getting another scoop of cream and working the moisturiser into his skin. Part of Danny wanted to volunteer to help, but he figured that that might come with time. He settled on grabbing the first aid kit and working on cleaning and covering the graze on his lower leg.

~*~
It hadn’t broken the mood \textit{per se}, more like matured it. Danny kind of marvelled that Steve was clearly comfortable around him, and content to let Danny see him look after his scars. It wasn’t that he had previously hidden the scarring, but he hadn’t gone out of the way to share -- they were personal.

Danny guzzled down a mouthful of water, and then offered the bottle to Steve.

“Thanks.” He drained it dry, and then packed the empty bottle into his backpack.

“What time is it?”

“Three fifteen.”

“Wow, doesn’t time fly when you’re having fun? Time to move, I guess,” Danny said unnecessarily, since they were packing up. It was about an hour and a half walk -- amble -- back to the truck, and then approximately an hour’s drive to Seolh. They’d be back in time for dinner.

Danny stretched tall, working out the kinks in his back. He prepared to argue with Steve that he was going to carry the larger backpack, since that was only fair and nothing to do with Steve’s ribs or side. This was a partnership.

Steve was watching him, head cocked to the side.

“What?” Danny asked.

“What?” Steve echoed. “You were thinking a hundred different things right there.”

“I was just thinking about our second date.”

“Oh?” Steve stood, picking up his backpack by its strap, ready to swing it around.

“My turn,” Danny said nicely, holding out his hand. And waited, because he was taking the larger backpack on the return trip, no argument or lots of argument, but he was carrying the backpack. Danny resisted the temptation to click his fingers. “My turn.”

“You’re not going to back down, are you?”

“Nope.”

Steve passed the backpack over. “Of course, it’s lighter now since you ate all the pork.”

Danny shook his head. Steve seemed to always want to have the last word.

He would learn.

~*~

“So what are we going to do next?” Steve said with a little skip of anticipation, although Danny bet he would deny it until his dying day.

Danny kicked a pebble off the trail.

“Hmmm,” he pondered. This had been pretty special. Date number two had to be equally special. Danny’s default wine-and-dine at an upscale Italian restaurant suddenly seemed a little bland and unimaginative.
One thing that this day had been was intimate and personal, and dirt cheap. He smiled fondly at Steve.

“What? Do I have something on my face?” He rubbed at his chin.

“No.” Danny shook his head. “It’s gonna be a surprise. Mainly,” he muttered quietly, “cos I don’t know yet.”

“Excuse me?” Steve angled his head. “Don’t mumble.”

“It’s a surprise.” Danny pinched his thumb and forefinger together, and quickly jumped them apart.

“Okay,”

Danny figured that he would be consulting Kono. Ah, she would be as smug as a cat in the cream.

The wind had picked up and it twisted fingers through Danny’s hair, spiking it wildly. The tide was coming in, and in places pushed high up onto the shore. The waves crashed against the rocks. An edge of salty spray speckled the air, drying his skin and hair.

“So how come no one is surfing out there?” Danny asked.

Steve shook his head. “Too dangerous. The rips are unpredictable. It’s also a rocky shore.”

“People do surf out there?”

“You can a little further north. The waves can be astronomically high.” Steve kind of snorted, amused at something.

“Eh?” Danny didn’t get the joke.

“But you surf out there at your own risk. Lots of people are insane,” Steve said matter-of-fact.

Danny paused looking out at the rolling ocean with its peaks and troughs of waves breaking on the shore below them.

Steve stopped three paces on. “What?”

“It’s just something so… beautiful, can be so dangerous.” Danny shrugged.

Steve pursed his lips, contemplating. His brow furrowed. “You just have to respect it. Understand the environment. Work with it.”

“Would you surf out there?”

“No.” Steve jerked his head for them to start walking. “I’m not insane.”

“Really?” Danny said dubiously. But to be fair he had no evidence to the contrary, apart from wacked out car chases after terrorists and fire fighting skills. Steve liked dynamic. He wondered if there was a fairground on the island with a rollercoaster for their next date. Steve would be all over loop-the-loops, rollercoasters, tilt-a-whirls, tornado slides, and water slides. He bet that he could make Steve eat a funnel cake.

“Really. I have documentation to prove it.”

Danny laughed. “Somehow I believe you.”
The path led down to where they had parked the truck. Danny felt himself pick up the pace, just a fraction. Steve’s long legs matched him effortlessly.

“That was a pretty cool day, Steve.”

Steve shrugged, he didn’t go as far as blushing, but there was an air of pleased *aw shucks*. Danny elbowed him.

“We should be back in time for dinner.” Steve consulted today’s large and pretentious black-faced watch on his wrist.

“What turn is it?”

Steve pulled a face. “It’s going to be leftovers, probably.”

The black truck had a fine dusting of sand over it, evidence of the wind blowing straight off the ocean. Steve beeped the alarm, and the hazards flashed. As he moved to the driver’s side, Steve was blindsided by a massive yawn that stopped him dead.

“Hey, can I drive?” Danny asked.

Steve stared at him over the edge of the yawn, sharing pearly whites and pink tongue. He closed his mouth with a click and smacked his lips.

“Fresh air,” Steve explained.

Danny nodded and held out his hand. “I like driving.”

Steve tossed keys once-twice in the air, contemplating, before lobbing them over. Danny couldn’t help but grin. Shimmying out of the bulky backpack, Danny stowed it and his camera on the backseat. Steve slung his pack beside Danny’s and clambered into the passenger seat.

It took Danny a good twenty seconds of changing seat and mirrors before he felt comfortable pulling onto the road. Steve slumped down in his seat, and indulged in another colossal yawn.

“It’s okay, have a nap,” Danny said, nonchalant.

Steve finished his yawn with a chuffing breath.

“I used to be able to go for days on little or no sleep,” he grumbled.

Danny accelerated and carefully shifted up a gear before speaking. “I got chicken pox when I was twenty during summer vacation from school. I was as sick as dog -- spots everywhere, and when I say everywhere, I mean everywhere. Did you know that you can get them in your guts, as well? Every surface in the body; inside and out. I spent the whole of the summer sitting on Mom and Pop’s sofa watching Quantum Leap with my little sister. I barely made it back to college at the start of term. Mamo said that you got pneumonia on top of, you know, being injured, and spent weeks in ICU. I think that you’re doing really well.”

“I’d prefer it if it went a little faster.” Steve wound down the passenger window, letting the fresh sea blast him.

“Understandably. What do your docs say?”
“They’re happy with my progress,” Steve said tersely.

“Maybe—” Danny sped up a fraction, “—it’s time to talk to them about upping your workout programme, talk with a PT? We’ve been walking for three-four hours; you weren’t wheezing, or coughing, or doing the little puffing thing you do.”

Steve’s head whipped around.

Danny, hands on the steering wheel, shrugged his shoulders up by his ears. He was confident in what he had observed.


“Baseball,” Danny said, immediately. “I used to love coaching Grace’s little league team. I like the gym. You?”

“Swimming. Running. I mean, I cross-train -- I have cross-trained -- but by preference I run, if I can’t swim. You should use the gym equipment at the House.”

The dusty unused gym. “Yeah, you’re right. The food’s so good at Seolh, I should up my exercise. I got out of the habit with the move out here.”

“Can you coach here? Does Grace’s school have a team?”

“Her fancy, schmancy, high-priced Private School has dedicated coaches. They don’t need moms and dads helping.”

Steve slumped further down his seat and set a foot on the dashboard. “I know that the community centre downtown where Laka and her baby sisters hang out is always looking for volunteers to help out. They’ve got a little league team -- okay, it might not actually be a little league team, but they definitely play softball.”

“Is this another co-operative local community endeavour?” Danny asked.

“Grandmother might have written them a cheque once or twice, but I haven’t had much to do with it. I just know about it,” Steve said. “Chin does painting classes.”

Conversation ebbed. Danny was happy to tool along the highway. He had driven Steve’s truck a few times and he was surprised at how much it sucked. His sadly sold Camaro had been as smooth as silk. The truck felt heavy. But they weren’t racing. They weren’t in a hurry. The traffic was not bad. Their destination was known -- home.

Hands perfectly positioned -- two o’clock and ten o’clock -- on the giant lunk of a truck’s steering wheel, Danny zoned as only an experienced driver could. His mind surfed over a hundred thousand thoughts. One thought that had pinged on him more than once throughout the day, rose to the surface.

“So I’m going to ask--” Danny dove straight in without a breath, “--have you had a relationship with a guy before. Or is this new?”

Steve stared at Danny, long enough for Danny to start worrying.

“Wow, you just dive straight in, don’t you? Don’t pull any punches?” Steve observed.

“I can.” Danny rocked his head from side to side. “But, to use your favourite phrase. I need some
“Why?” Steve said petulantly. “If you were a girl, I wouldn’t ask.”

“Really?” Danny asked, because he had had some pretty frank, but respectful, discussions in his time. “So you had five boyfriends when you were in the SEALs?”

“Geez.” Steve scrubbed a hand over his face. “Yes, Danny. I don’t have a lot of exper…. Man, I bet you just yank off band aids.”

Steve’s fingers drifted to the little band aid protecting the slice in his hairline as he kept one eye on Danny.

“Fair enough.” Danny had what he needed. “I had a boyfriend in college — didn’t get that serious, though. I guessed that it was an experimental phase. And then I met Rachel.”

Steve dropped his hand. “So it’s been a long time for you.”

“Good ten years.” Danny waited patiently, because he could tell that Steve was winding up to talk about something.

“Drew and I were friends. Kind of danced around it, but we… talked.” Steve stared out to the Wai`anae Mountain range. “We were heading somewhere good.”

Drew who had died and reminded Steve of Danny, if Danny remembered correctly, even if it was only in comparison.

“I’m sorry, Babe.”

Steve shuffled back around so he could watch Danny.

“Girls. Women are easier, especially if you’re in the armed services.” He laughed hollowly. “We’ve got the repeal of DADT now, but… I won’t be seeing active service again, so friendly fire’s not a consideration. I can be the gay, deaf, ex-Navy SEAL, intelligence operative turned instructor Lieutenant Commander Steven J. McGarrett.”

“Go you!” Danny released the steering wheel, momentarily, to punch the air. On the heels of Steve’s words, Danny realised that if Steve had been an active officer he probably would not have kissed him. New legislation aside; people could be homophobic shits, and Steve knew that and also balanced risk against reward like Danny considered whether or not to make lasagne or pizza for dinner.

“And you call me a goof?”

“So I should get you a rainbow flag sticker?” Danny half-probed, interested in the answer. Steve was rewriting himself before Danny’s eyes, and had -- in all honesty -- been before Danny entered Seolh, since surviving the attack in Afghanistan.

“What rainbow sticker?”

“You know. gay and proud.”

“You can get me one if you want. But it’s my business. I didn’t go out proclaiming I was heterosexual when I was dating Catherine.”

“To be fair, that’s entirely different,” Danny said, making a note of the name, “and that would have
been a lie. You’re bi.”

“Danny, you’re going to find that I’m a pretty private guy.”

“No!” Danny plastered a hand over his heart, still keeping the edge of mocking despite the undercurrents of seriousness. “I hadn’t guessed that at all.”

Steve pouted.

Danny laughed, because it was so true. Opposites attract. Introvert, extrovert. Okay, that was simplifying complex personalities, but they had very different styles, there was definitely going to be some fireworks.

Danny was looking forward to it.

~*~

#57#

“Date Two?” Danny asked the espresso maker as it decanted his breakfast coffee. Another day and another dollar -- albeit it he didn’t have a lot of them. Steve had shown Danny himself on their first official date. It behoved Danny to respond in kind, but with Danny what you saw was what you got.

The coffee maker blew a raspberry as it spurted the final dregs into the tiny ceramic cup.

“Damn it,” Danny groused, getting his coffee and making his decision. He was fairly sure that he was going to regret this, but he was always willing to try new things.

~*~

“I’m not entirely sure that this constitutes a date,” Steve pointed out as he pushed open the door into the yoga centre, and they walked into the wide foyer.

“In what way? We’re doing something together. We’re sharing new experiences and learning about each other--”

Steve made a pained expression.

“And I’m sure that we can find a restaurant afterwards for lunch.”

“You haven’t done yoga before,” Steve observed, nonsensically to Danny.

“Hence,” Danny said with an edge of mocking, “experiencing of new things.”

“Okay.” Steve exuded a sense of I know something that you don’t.

The yoga centre had a rough and ready feel. Danny knew that the shop in the shed out back was reminiscent of Costco with functional metal racks. The centre-proper was a prefabricated building, but inside the plywood walls were masked with a mismatch of woods like a jigsaw with no design in mind. Some wood had been polished and buffed to a shine. Organic was the word that sprung to Danny’s mind.

“Heh.” Steve wandered over to walk alongside the wall, running his fingers over a bevelled and uneven surface. It appeared that drift wood had been involved in part of the design.

Danny read a modicum of relaxation in the cant of his shoulders.
The opposite wall had a few notice boards, one plastered with a thousand fliers, and another with a weekly schedule. A third had a bunch of portrait photographs and what looked like certificates. Danny moved to check them out. The double doors at the end of the short corridor from the foyer opened, making him pause.

“Hello.” A short, compact woman dressed in aerobic workout gear poked her head out. “I’m Honor.”

“Hi.” Danny trotted over to meet her halfway, hand outstretched. Her accent was not local. He couldn’t quite place it but definitely East Coast. They shared the same colour blond hair, blue eyes and height, and she kind of reminded Danny of his oldest sister.

“Are you Steve and Danny?” She had a firm handshake -- the kind that Danny liked.

“Yeah, I’m Danny and that’s Steve.”

Steve raised his hand in acknowledgement.

“Makaio’s out back. He’ll come through in a moment.” She smiled. “He asked me to drop by and possibly run the session, if you’re comfortable with that?”

“Oh?” Danny rocked back on his heels. “And why is that?”

“I’ve been teaching Iyengar yoga for twenty five years. I’m a senior instructor here at the centre. I’m also an osteopathic manual practitioner.”

“Which is?” Danny splayed his hands apart.

“It’s an alternative medical practice helping people through manual and manipulative therapy,” she said seriously. “Essentially, I know the structure and function of how bodies work.”

“So good to know if you’ve--” Danny jerked his thumb in Steve’s direction. He was doing the watching thing over by the wall and not engaging.

“Suffered an injury and are recovering,” Honor said calmly.

“Babe, this is Honor. You okay with trying this yoga stuff with her?”

Steve rolled his eyes and came over straight over. “Steve McGarrett, nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you.” She held out her hand.

Practised, culturally automatic, they shook hands, and between one breath and the next, Steve relaxed.

This was going to be okay, Danny realised, and they were going to be trying out this yoga stuff.

“So.” Honor turned, directing them back through the double doors. “I see that you brought a mat, Steve. I have actually got equipment out for us. Danny?”

“Nah, I haven’t done anything like this before.” He plucked at the cuff of his cut off jeans. Steve had told him to wear comfortable, loose clothes. “Complete neophyte.”

“Steve?”

“Hatha and Astanga.” Steve paced around the open plan workroom. The doors on the far wall were
open leading onto a patio. A large garden with a grassy lawn was on the other side of the short wooden fence hemming in the patio.

“While we do have asanas in Iyengar yoga and there is focus on the breath, we work on developing strength, mobility and stability. The props—” Honor smoothly bent over and picked up a belt and a large foam block the size of an encyclopaedia, “—help us achieve the positions and their benefits but also minimise the risk of injury.”

“I approve of that!” Danny said.

Honor smiled. “So if you don’t mind, Danny. I need to get some background from Steve.”

Danny kind of figured that he could take a walk in the gardens.

“Danny can stay,” Steve said surprisingly.

Danny glanced at Steve, who had his phlegmatic face firmly fixed.

“Okay,” Honor said. “I understand that you were injured. Have you spoken to your doctor about yoga?”

“He approved,” Steve said tersely. Before anyone could say a word, Steve caught the hem of his t-shirt and peeled off his top in one smooth motion. He tucked the t-shirt half in the pocket of his shorts and then lifted his left arm up folding his forearm behind his head displaying the damage. “Flail chest, three broken ribs, with pulmonary contusion. I had surgery to remove my spleen and repair the damage my ribs did when they broke.”

“You have good shoulder movement.” Honor somehow had slid smoothly into the arena of Steve’s personal space. “What about your side?”

“It’s definitely stiff, especially when I’m trying to do spinal twists.” Steve looked down the line of his chest and grimaced.

“You’ve been practising at home?”

“Off and on, more off than on. My balance is compromised.”

“Inner ear damage?” Honor summarised.

“Yes.” Steve pulled his t-shirt back on.

“The bruising? That’s recent.”

“There was an altercation. I got kicked.”

Honor took Steve through some very slow gentle bends, demonstrating the move before guiding Steve. Danny’s fingers twitched around a phantom camera, but knew that he would not have taken any photographs.

There were a whole bunch of words bandied back and forth that Danny didn’t recognise, but they resulted in Steve twisting his body in all sorts of different, interesting contortions.

“Okay, here’s a trick for you,” Honor said, moving them over to the wall. “Bring your mat and a wooden brick.”

Steve obediently trailed after her. If he had had a tail it would have been wagging. Danny didn’t see
how twisting yourself into knots made for happiness, but Steve was smiling.

Together they placed the mat lengthwise along the wall. And Danny guessed what was about to happen. Honor was going to use the wall as a support for a wobbly Steve. Lo and behold, Danny was correct. Setting the wooden brick on the floor slightly away from the wall, Honor demonstrated another position. Balancing on one leg and stretching the other out, forming a t-position by inclining her back against the wall, she then raised her left arm at 180 degrees to the right, which was resting on the brick. Her expression was serene.

Danny should have counted, but she seemed to hold the position for hours, or maybe a minute. Dropping her leg, she smoothly stood.

“Using the wall is perfectly acceptable,” Honor said. “I’d like you to stand in tadasana, with your back against the wall, remember to roll your shoulder blades down, then perform Utthita Trikonasana to the left, follow through into Ardha Chandrasana, hold it for thirty seconds, and drop back into Utthita Trikonasana. Return to tadasana, and then repeat for the right side. And then rest in savasana.”

“Okay.” Steve nodded once, already moving determinedly towards the wall.

“Right.” Honor clapped her hands. “Your turn, Danny. Do you have any issues other than your knee?”

“My knee? How did you know—”

~*~

“Beer,” Danny demanded, as he hunched his way out of the yoga centre.

“It’s not really recommended,” Steve said sagely. “Yoga naturally leads to detoxification.”

“Beer.”

“Okay,” Steve said, clearly reading the utter demand in Danny’s deliberately terse syllables. “There’s a good place along the boardwalk.”

Danny felt like he had been wrung out like a wet dishtowel. He ignored Steve opening the passenger door of his enormous truck and bowing extravagantly like he had for Gracie on Christmas Day. Lifting his nose high, Danny got in.

It was a quick drive, maybe five hundred yards down the road, and they pulled into a parking space right outside an open plan bar-restaurant on the seafront. It looked a little too plastic for Steve. But as Danny trailed up the steps in Steve’s wake, he spotted a placard stating that they served fresh, natural and organic products. He came to a complete stop as he spotted the burger menu, and drooled.

“The food’s inside, Danny.” Steve caught his elbow, and towed him in.

They were conducted to a table on a covered balcony overlooking the ocean. The scent of blossoms filled the air. Suddenly, Danny thought of Jersey City and the cold, cold wind that would be whistling down Front Street as he made his way to his photographic studio. After a days work he would stop by his mom and pop’s…

“Danny?”

“What?” Danny covered by grabbing a plastic covered menu and focussing on burger love.
“Danny?”

“Nothing.”

“What’s that tone? I can’t even read it.” Steve reached out and tugged the menu down a fraction, evidently so Danny’s lips weren’t obscured.

“I dunno. It’s the twenty seventh of December and I’m sitting on the beach in my shorts and t-shirt after twisting myself into a pretzel. At home it’s minus nine and it’s snowing. My mom will be making meatloaf.”

“You miss New Jersey. You miss your family and friends,” Steve stated. “You miss your home.”

“Grace is here.” Danny deliberately snapped the menu out so he could see all of his options. “What’s good? What do you recommend?”

“Even if Grace is here. It’s okay to miss your family,” Steve said, ignoring the questions. “Especially at Christmas.”

Danny hunched, truculently.

“What can I get you guys to drink?” A waitress smoothly came to a stop at the end of their table, tablet at the ready to take their order.

“Two Fire Rock Pale Ales from the tap.” Steve raised an eyebrow at Danny, before he could object to an order being made on his behalf.

“Do you know what you want to eat?” she said brightly. “Or would you like a few minutes?”

“I’ll have a Portobello veggie burger. Danny?”

“Oh, I can choose, can I?” Danny scanned. “Outrigger bistro burger, white cheddar instead of brie.”

She tapped away on the screen. “You want any fries with that?”

Danny glanced at Steve, who was watching him with a concerned expression on his mobile face.

Danny was hungry. “We’ll have a basket of shore fries to share.”

“We will?” Steve said.

Danny nodded at the waitress.

“I’ll bring your drinks.”

“It’s okay to be homesick,” Steve said seriously, “even if your Grace is here.”

“I know. I know.” Danny deliberately kept one eye on the waitress at the counter as she waited for the beers to be pulled. “It’s December; it should be snowing. I should be snuggled in front of a fire. Meatloaf. It’s meatloaf day. Mom will be making meatloaf stuffed with eggs.”

The expression that Steve pulled -- which quickly segued into bland -- could only be described as horrified.

“Oh, that rich,” Danny mocked, turning to face him directly. “My mom’s meatloaf is nutritious and delicious and the recipe was handed down from my great-grandma. You consider spam to be a
delicacy. Spam, have you any idea what is in spam? ‘Meat-product’ -- what is ‘meat product’? Mystery meat, that’s what!"

The waitress returned and set two large glasses, condensation sweating on them, on the table.

“Thank you,” Danny said automatically, and pounced. A mouthful of cold refreshing lager glugged down his throat. A little yoga knot unfurled.

Steve set his own glass down, and licked his lips. “Have you seen me eat spam?”

“No.” Danny considered. “But I bet that there are cans in the siege bunker!”

Steve acknowledged that with a smile and a shrug. “It keeps well.”

“For years. Which should tell you something about the ingredients.” Danny tapped the tabletop -- tap-tap-tap. “Sodium nitrite.”

“I think that the canning process has something to do with its longevity.” Steve settled back in his seat.

“What’s that smile for?” Danny demanded. He took another slurp from his glass.

“I don’t know.” Impossibly, Steve’s smile became more luminous. “I guess I’m having good time.”

“Outrigger bistro burger with white cheddar and a Portobello veggie burger?” a server asked, two piled high plates balanced on each hand.

“Veggie.” Steve pointed at the place mat before him, and then at Danny. “Meat.”

“Your fries will be out in a moment.” The server set out the plates.

“Thanks.” Danny licked his lips. The caramelised onion smelled divine. He carefully started to deconstruct the burger so he could eat the lettuce separately.

Steve transferred his roast peppers to Danny’s plate. Grinning, Danny popped one in his mouth with some crunchy lettuce.

“So what are you going to do with your space?” Steve asked as he cut his mushroom burger in half.

“Space?” Danny asked around a mouthful of vegetables.

Steve winced. “Swallow before speaking.”

Danny grinned toothily, sharing fragments of lettuce. “Spwcw?”

There was a glimmer of humour in Steve’s eyes, even as he said, “I did not get that.”

Danny swallowed and took a glug of beer. “Space?”

“At the market. You’ve got a booth in the New Year. What’s your plan? How,” Steve lowered his voice deliberately, “are you going to market your wares?”

“Oh.” Danny scowled on principle at Steve, but hadn’t given thought about the market place. Mrs. Macgregor, manager of the market, hadn’t said anything about equipment. He knew that he had a rectangular area of four yards by two. The other craftsmen and women on the third floor personalised their spaces.

“Wash your mouth out.”

Another server carefully placed a basket of fries on the table between them and retreated.

“I need--” Danny broke it down into what he could achieve. “I need some prints. And I need to be able to display my prints.”

By dint of necessity he would use photographs of Hawaii, because he was in Hawaii, and he only had photographs that he had taken since arriving. Although, he could get his sister to mail him one of the copies of the family portrait…. It was a brilliant shot of the family in Hallowe’en Lord of the Rings costumes. Toddler Grace had been an adorable Hobbit. Dad had been Gandalf. In all honesty, due to his bank balance, he was going to have to do the Wedding Photography gig. If Louise was sending out the Family Portrait, she could also send some of her wedding photographs.

He studied Steve, the shoot on the beach had supplied some awesome photographs -- even if he said so himself. He could have a board with ‘Steve photographs’ with a marine theme. A wedding photography board. And even, given the time of year, calendars -- he had enough photographs of Honolulu. But his plans didn’t have the magic that would garner professional projects. He hadn’t thought about Creativity for awhile: his project to follow the residents of Seolh through their own processes. He could have a board about how he was running Ben’s modelling promotion that might get some clients…

“Danny? Danno?”

Business cards, he remembered belatedly he would have to get some business cards printed.

“Danny, your burger’s getting cold. Switch off your picture head and eat.”

“Picture head?”

“You know, when you go away with the--” Steve drew a tight circle with his index finger, near his temple, “--my Grandmother would say ‘away with the fairies’.”

“Away with the fairies?” Danny echoed.

Steve shrugged. “Grandmother had lots of sayings.”

“What was she like?”

“Grandmother?

“No, your Great Aunt Phyllis,” Danny snapped.

“I don’t have a Great Aunt Phyllis.” Steve scrunched up his nose.

“You’re very literal, aren’t you?” Danny observed.

Steve stared at him, mouth open, processing. “No.”

Danny snorted out loud. Laughing, he slapped the table. Steve munched sullenly on a fry.

“We’ll need to make you display boards,” Steve said between nibbles. “What kind?”
“Something eye-catching,” Danny said thinking out loud. “Different. There will have to be spotlights.” His assigned position was against the far left hand wall, away from the large market hall windows, which once upon a time opened to allow grain to be hauled up and stored in the large open plan area.

“You have to be able to take it down easily.” Steve looked up to the left, thinking hard. “The third floor is only open for arts and crafts on Wednesday and Saturday.”

“What happens the rest of the time?” Danny took a savage bite of his burger. This was getting complicated.

“The space is rented. There’s meetings and shows, I think. A ladies’ barbershop harmony chorus meets on Monday night for practices.”

“Is there storage?” Danny asked, thinking if he needed to move his display boards twice a week, this was going to get really complicated.

“I think so.”

“Man. I definitely need something eye-catching, and easy to move.”

“We’ll hunt through the workshops when we get back home. See what we’ve got. See what we can make,” Steve said simply.

Date number three looked like it was going to revolve around carpentry, Danny thought.

～＊～

Danny tucked his wallet in his back pocket as he followed Steve down the steps to the parking lot. They had gone Dutch. Danny had actually watched Steve bite his bottom lip in thought, evidently contemplating multiple payment permutations before deciding sharing the bill was the way to go. It was kind of cute how obvious Steve was as he tried to figure out whether or not he could or should pay for their meal.

Danny knew that he was going to find his feet. Opportunity was right around the corner.

“Oh, shit,” Steve swore.

“What?” Danny tapped down to steps to stand with Steve.

“Someone keyed my truck,” Steve said indignantly.

“What?” Danny cocked his head, glancing at Steve and at the truck parked nose into the kerb. “How can you see that?”

“I’ve got good eyesight.” Steve jogged down the path to his truck, Danny at his heels.

The passenger side of the truck had a long white scratch going through several layers of paint down to the primer from indicator lights to brake lights.

“Why would someone do that?” Danny crouched and touched the gouge. “It’s just malicious.”

“I’m going to have to get all the panels repainted.” Steve glared up and down the sidewalk for the perpetrators -- but they were long gone.

“Hey, there’s a note under the windshield wiper.” Danny pointed at the paper on the driver’s side
Steve leaned over the hood and grabbed the folded paper.

“What’s it say?”

“Huh,” Steve murmured, scanning the scrap.

“What?” Danny asked.

“Someone -- they left a cell phone number -- saw the guy that keyed my truck. Fabienne? I think the signature is Fabienne. She says there were two guys.”

“Seriously? Someone played good Samaritan?”

“It happens.” Steve glared at the paper. “Damn, why would someone do this?”

“Message?”

“From Wo Fat? Smashing in the windscreen or driving us off the road seems more up his street. And why send a message?”

“I guess…You’ve identified him as -- what did you call him P-One? -- we’ve done the damage. Maybe someone doesn’t like big black, shiny, ostentatious trucks.”

“Damn.” Steve stalked down the driver’s side of the truck, growling. Danny moved around, but the side was unmarked. Then, surprising the fuck out of Danny, he dropped down into a perfect push up pose on the road, alongside the length of the truck.

“What are you doing?” Danny asked, as Steve peered under the engine and behind the wheels.

“Checking.” Steve bounced to his feet. The alarm clicked off and the locks disengaged. He opened the driver’s door, stuck his head right into the foot well peering under the driver’s and passenger seats. He then popped the hood.

“For a bomb!” Danny shrieked, as Steve lifted the hood and studied the engine from cylinder head, across spark plugs, to fan belt.

Steve sort of shrugged at him and widened his eyes. As the hood dropped with a clang, Danny jumped.

“What does that face mean?” Danny demanded. “You genuinely looked for a bomb. A bomb. A bomb under the car.”

A bystander stopped on the sidewalk and stared at them.

“Danny--” Steve said.

“Hey, you,” Danny addressed the bystander, “nothing to see here. Move along, alright?”

The man scurried away, glancing back over his shoulder, dark pony tail swishing back and forth. Danny glared, and the younger man picked up his pace, hefting his squat surfboard under his arm.

“It’s mission appropriate,” Steve revised, “It’s sensible to check,”

“Seriously,” Danny said, leaning forwards a fraction so that he could better see Steve’s eyes. If Steve got bright eyed, his pupils dilated wide, Danny kind of got the impression that he was remembering horrible things.
Steve cocked his head to the side. “What?”

“Is it safe to get in the truck?”

“Yeah.” Steve folded the piece of paper in neat, overly sharp lines and tucked it in his back pocket. He stared at Danny. “It’s safe.”

“I hate that your brain goes there. That you know that it’s a possible risk.” Danny stomped to the passenger door. Feeling the weight of the beer (and half of Steve’s) that he had drunk, he slumped into the passenger seat.

“Welcome to the twenty-first century,” Steve said with an edge of perplexed, as he settled behind the steering wheel and turned the ignition key.

Danny let out a huff of breath.

“Still alive,” Steve proclaimed and reversed out of the parking space.

Danny was momentarily speechless -- momentarily.

“For real? For real! You actually thought that we might blow up. Blow up! I can’t believe that you let us get into the--”

“Danny, Danny.” Steve pulled into the traffic. “I didn’t -- it was a joke.”

“It was in bad taste!”

“Possibly,” Steve judged, with a huff that could have been described as amused. “Look, there was no evidence of tampering under the engine block and the hood hadn’t been touched. There was no smudging on the polish, and I washed the truck this morning. I double checked the engine and seats. We were safe.”

Danny closed his mouth with a clack.

Unreal.

~*~

#58#

“Look, I’m sorry. I can’t actually hear you too well. You’re going to have to speak more slowly.”

Danny stopped dead as he stepped into the kitchen.

Steve sat at the kitchen table, his cell phone on the surface, studying the rectangular black screen as he if was being examined on the content.

“Hey, Babe?”

Steve glanced up, and then quickly patted the seat beside him. Danny trotted around the side of the table and plopped down right next to Steve. He hunched his shoulders and raised his hands in the classic: what?

“Fabienne,” Steve said. “My… friend’s here. He’s going to help.”

“Oh.” Danny figured out what was happening: Steve had called the witness. He glanced at the
BlackBerry’s screen, and there was a mishmash of text, long words running together and some symbols indicating unknown text.

“Hey, Fabienne, I’m Danny.”

“Bonjour, Dannie. Je suis désolée. I am sorry; my English is not very good.”

“Oh.” Danny immediately figured out the problem. “She’s French,” he mouthed at Steve.

Steve rolled his eyes.

“Uhm, bonjour,” Danny said tentatively. “Are you on vacation?”

“En vacances? Oui. I am on holiday,” she said, not pronouncing the h. The cell phone text-app struggled gamely, informing Steve that she was an ‘oldie’. Based on her voice, she was, however, a young lady.

“You saw the truck get keyed?” Danny asked.

“Excusez-moi? Keyed?”

Danny glanced at Steve, who shrugged. “Do you know the French for keyed, Steve?”

“Dégât?” Steve hazarded, leaning towards the phone.

“Dégât? Abimé! Oui -- damaged the car, avec un -- with a--” she paused muttering, “--couteau. A little knife.”

Danny gave Steve an enthusiastic thumbs up, indicating ‘yep, she saw it’.

“J’ai besoin d’une description des hommes?” Steve said clearly.


Danny shrugged at Steve, frustrated. He didn’t speak French, and he knew that Steve at the very least had the rudiments of French, yet without seeing body language and a person speaking he was stymied.

“Fabienne, sorry, I don’t speak French,” Danny said clearly. “Did Steve explain that he’s--”

Steve waved his hand directing Danny to continue.

Somehow saying it out loud made it more real. “Deaf?”

“Sorry?” Fabienne said.

Steve plucked Danny’s phone from his back trouser pocket -- Danny glanced at him primly -- and he tapped on Danny’s phone. Immediately, he opened Google and surfed to what looked like a translator app. He angled the phone to Danny.

“Steve’s--” Danny squinted at the screen, “--malentendant.”

“Ah! I understand!”

“Bonjour, Fabienne,” Steve said. “Je ne peux pas vous entendre. Pouvons-nous nous retrouver au
There was no reply. Danny shook his head at Steve.


There was another zone of silence. Danny didn’t blame her, he didn’t know how good Steve’s French was -- or what he had said.

“Amenez un ami,” Steve said into the stillness.

“Yes,” Fabienne said clearly and staccato. “There is a restaurant near my hotel. Chinese Palace on King Street. I will come at six o’clock.”

Huh, Steve had asked Fabienne to meet them. It would be easier if they could meet the young woman face to face.

Danny leaned close to the phone, and said, “Thank you -- merci -- Fabienne.”

“De rien, Dannie.”

~*~

The restaurant was a little bit of a dive, arrayed with dim lighting and dusky amber wallpaper dressed in random red drapes. They were the only customers, apart from three businessmen in sharp suits at a table by the window. Danny trailed after Steve, who seemed to lumber between the tiny tables like a giant in a doll’s house. The young waitress conducted them to a little table at the back of the restaurant. Steve stood by the cushioned bench by the wall, waiting for Danny to sit first. Raising an eyebrow, Danny sat and slid along the bench. Once Danny was safely tucked in the corner, Steve dropped down next to him, setting his hands palm down on the table.

“What would you like to drink?” she asked.

“Beer?” Danny said, glancing at Steve.

“Bottle of club soda.”

Danny watched her nice, pert bottom -- since he might now have a boyfriend but, yep, definitely bisexual -- as she went to fill their order. He forcibly drew his attention away as she moved behind the bar to talk to an older woman, whose head barely reached over the bar top.

“We’re a little early, Steve.” He checked his wrist watch.

“Yes, it’s commendable.” An interloper sat opposite them.

Erudite, suave, dressed in a pearl grey Armani suit, the man was instantly recognisable.

“Wo Fat!” Steve erupted to his feet.

“Commander McGarrett, sit.” Wo Fat nodded at a table with the businessmen, who all turned as one to regard them.

“What do you want, Wo Fat?” Steve dropped back onto his seat.

“I was curious. I wanted to see the man who has pursued me over continents. To know the man.”
Steve cocked his head to the side. “You killed the governor.”

“Yes,” Wo Fat said. He leaned back in his chair, elegant like a diamondback rattler.

“What’s stopping me from arresting you?” Steve snapped.

Wo Fat’s gaze oozed over to Danny, the threat palpable.

“Hey,” Danny protested, offended by the intimation that he was vulnerable.

Steve’s bottom lip was a downturned line, underscoring glowering, stymied threat.

“Ah,” Wo Fat said mock solicitously, “I see that you are a sensible man, Commander. No, sorry, Mr. McGarrett.”

“It’s still Commander,” Steve said tightly.

“Really?” Wo Fat said, ninety percent of his snake-like focus still on Danny, “I don’t believe that we have a problem.”

“What does that mean?” Danny demanded.

“Oh, the ex-Commander understands.” Wo Fat stood. He reached into his breast pocket slowly and deliberately -- Steve bristled -- and tossed a couple of bills on the table. “Dinner is on me. Oh, and your young date won’t be coming.”

“What did you do to Fabienne?” Danny asked loudly, drawing the interest of the young waitress. She was abruptly chivvied out to the back kitchen by the elderly woman.

“Danny,” Steve said softly, “she was a plant.”

“Oui, mon ami.” Wo Fat smirked. “If you follow us, there will be a random shooting incident. Random, as in I’m sure that there are some young families out there since we are in the middle of the tourist district.”

His companions ranged around him and en mass they slid out of the restaurant.

Steve thumped his clenched fist on the tabletop hard enough to make the table jump.

“Jesus, Steve.”

Seemingly teleporting, Steve was suddenly up by the large plate glass window beside the door and was peering out to the street. He had his cell phone and ITE remote in hand and was calling Commander White.

“Sir? McGarrett. I’ve just had sight of P-One. Chinese Palace on King Street. He’s heading east, going to turn onto a pedestrian walk-way through to Queen Street. There are numerous civilians in my line of sight. Following--”

“What!” Danny shrieked.

Steve batted a hand at him, demanding silence.

“P-One has eyes on me and has threatened civilians if he is followed. I will be unable to tail the suspect. Have a team deployed to Queen Street to initiate surveillance, but do not approach the suspect. Another team is needed to interview the owners of the Chinese Palace.” Steve slid out the
Swearing volubly, Danny scuttled after Steve and barrelled straight into his back as he stopped dead.

“Damn.”

Danny peered around Steve’s shoulder. Directly opposite, on the other side of the road, astride a large motorcycle, a dark-visored, helmeted man regarded them. Insolently, he lifted a finger and waved it from side to side.

Steve’s shoulders drooped, and biker drove off with a scream of tires.

“Damn it all to Hell,” Steve swore.

~*~

“So, Commander, you met with Wo Fat?” Lieutenant Commander Rickety levelled a pale, intense gaze on Steve.

A team of Naval Investigator people had descended. Danny thought that he had heard someone call themselves CIS, which didn’t make sense since they weren’t in Vegas.

“No,” Steve said plainly, “I did not meet with Wo Fat, he manufactured a reason for us to be here where he could engage.”

“Manufactured a reason?” Rickety echoed dubiously.

“Where is Commander White?” Steve asked.

“Commander White is co-ordinating the response to Wo Fat’s sighting,” Rickety drawled the final word.

“What does that mean?” Danny interjected.

Both naval officers turned to regard him.

“Sorry I asked.” Danny held up his hands. Rickety was a dick. Since the second that he had descended on the restaurant, chest puffed out and short strawberry blond hair spiky with gel, and started ordering people about, Danny had felt his hackles rise.

They had been directed to sit and wait as Rickety had sent team members to search the restaurant, interview the staff, and others to scour the area. Steve had spent the time that they had been benched firing off numerous texts to what looked like a Navy account, directing a Lieutenant Rollins to locate Fabienne’s cell phone. Leaning over and watching the screen, it appeared to Danny that the attempt had not been successful. After an unconscionably long wait -- during which Steve had been a busy-busy-bee, texting loads of people at a J-TAC account -- Rickety had finally turned his attention to them.

“Why did Wo Fat manufacture a reason to meet with you? What did he want?” Rickety raised an eyebrow, as he looked down from his standing position.

“Honestly,” Steve began.

“Preferably,” Rickety riposted.

Steve scowled. “It was baiting exercise.”
“To bait you? Why?” Rickety asked.

“The guy’s arrogant and confident,” Danny spat. “He was enjoying himself. He enjoyed that we couldn’t do anything. Made him feel superior.”

Rickety rocked back on his heels, and blew out a heavy sigh. “Doesn’t make any sense.”

“Correct.” Steve made a patent scan of the restaurant. “You’re talking to the staff.” It wasn’t a question, but Rickety answered with a terse yes.

“Transcribe me a verbatim account of your meeting, assuming that you can, Commander,” Rickety said.

“What does that mean?” Danny bit.

“Danny.” Steve hand waved the question. “Yes, I can provide you with a detailed report.”

Rickety turned on his heel, catching the attention of one of his subordinates.

“Give Commander McGarrett your iPad, MacArthur.”

“Yes, sir.” The young man came over, already pulling out his tablet and firing it up. Mutely, he set the iPad on the table before Steve, and backed, respectfully, away.

“Thank you,” Steve said tersely, folding back the cover to act as a stand.

Grace had an iPad (or two) but Danny hadn’t ever played with one. Craning his head, he watched as Steve’s fingers played over the flat screen’s image of a keyboard. Steve was a demon; typing out a report of the setup that led them to the restaurant, a precise account of their conversation, and an analysis of Wo Fat’s body language.

Steve re-read the statement, fingernail tapping against the side of the housing. The account matched and exceeded Danny’s recall of the meeting. There wasn’t even an extraneous comma.

“You concur?” Steve asked Danny.

“Yeah, looks good,” Danny said.

“I’ll just format it and sign it,” Steve said, despite the fact that Danny could clearly see that authorship was defined, dated, and it looked neatly formatted.

Steve, curiously, saved multiple copies. Then as Danny watched, Steve connected to the internet. He surfed with deft clicks and taps to some sort of Navy email webmail and opened his account with the longest password known to man or beast. Opening a blank message, he cut and pasted his text, uploaded a pdf, and saved a draft copy. A second email with the pdf attachment was then sent to joseph.white@cnic.nav.mil. Steve logged out of his account, and then accessed the internet history and began deleting.

*Sneaky Steve is sneaky*, Danny observed.

“Lieutenant MacArthur.” Steve held up the tablet. “All yours. I’ve saved it as a time stamped pdf and rtf on your desktop.”

“Thank you, sir,” MacArthur said.

Rickety, watching as he leaned against the far wall, straightened. “Let me review the text,
Lieutenant.”

“Dick,” Danny muttered under his breath, too low for anyone to hear.

Rickety spent more time reading the account than Steve had spent writing it. Steve, nonchalant, lazied back in his seat, while Danny tapped his foot against the floor.

“You’re free to go, Commander, Mr. Williams,” Rickety said.

“Gee, thanks.” Danny stood, and made a deliberate effort to saunter out of the restaurant with studied insolence.

~*~

“So that was basically a threat,” Danny said.

Steve sat like carved granite stone, arms straight as he held onto the steering wheel of his truck, as they drove through the late evening traffic.

“Yes,” Steve said, voice level.

“Why?” Danny asked. “Rickety didn’t ask that. I mean Rickety really just seemed to be an ass.”

“Rickety was only in charge of the back up team scoping out the restaurant and immediate area -- which he adequately performed.” A smile graced Steve’s chiselled expression. “The main team was out tracking Wo Fat. I think that galled him.”

Danny hummed in agreement; Rickety had had an air of frustration around him.

“So, why was Wo Fat threatening us?” Danny asked again.

“Therein lies the question,” Steve said.

“What question?” Danny shifted around in the passenger seat.

“Wo Fat said: I wanted to see the man who has pursued me over continents.”

“And?”

“I didn’t know who Wo Fat was before you captured him on a photograph. I was pursuing the Hesse Brothers. Yet, Wo Fat has made this personal. Curious.”

“Curious?” Danny echoed.

“Yes. Wo Fat thought that my pursuit was personal. And now, he has made it personal.” Steve turned his head to regard Danny. “It makes your account of Wo Fat mentioning McGarrett when he was mocking us on the highway all the more relevant.”

“Eyes on the road,” Danny blurted as his thoughts whirled. “I might have misheard.”

“I trust your ears. It made a mark on you.” Steve lapsed into silence.

“There were a lot of machinations to simply bait you,” Danny observed. “Keying the truck. Getting someone to pretend to be Fabienne. Despite being a hunted terrorist, he made a special effort to meet you.”
“Yes. He’s arrogant and overconfident.” Steve’s face was strangely smug. “And that is an exploitable weakness.”

“There’s something else as well,” Danny said.

“Yeah, what?”

“How does Wo Fatty Pants know you speak French? I’m kind of assuming that your résumé is top secret?”

“Service record, not a résumé,” Steve said absently, so wrapped in his thoughts, he drifted in towards the guard rail on the side of the highway.

“Driving!” Danny shrieked.

Steve jerked and abruptly straightened the truck. “Victor Hesse and I have been playing cat and mouse for years -- Paris, France, is only one of the places we’ve been.”

“We’ve been.” Danny raised an eyebrow.

“You know what I mean.” Steve huffed.

“Actually no,” Danny said.

“Funnily enough--” Steve said, speeding up, “--I can’t tell you about it.”

Danny rolled his eyes heavenward.

~*~

Steve pulled the truck up its customary space, in front of the workshops, and was out of the truck before Danny could click free his seatbelt.

“Man on a mission,” Danny said out loud.

The kitchen was empty, unusually. Danny shut and locked the door behind him. There were sounds from the playroom; the television was on.

Danny poked his head in the room. Chin and Kono -- no Steve -- were ensconced on the sofa watching….

“What are you watching?” he asked.

Kono hit pause. “K-drama.”


The television had paused on a quiet scene with a man and woman sitting in a meadow. The man balanced a heavy sharp sword over his shoulder as he gazed, abstracted at his feet.

“Historical drama?” Danny asked.

“Action, historical. That’s Song Tae Ha with Un Nyeon.”

“Okay,” Danny drew out the vowel, as he started to back out the door. “I’ll leave you to it.”

“We’ve got it on DVD.” Kono extended a pointed toe at the box set lying on the floor before the
player. “There’s English subtitles. It’s pretty good.”

“We’ve only just started watching,” Chin said. “It was a Christmas present. We can start again.”

“It’s really, really good,” Kono revised.

“Sure. But I can’t at the moment. I have to go find Steve.” Danny glanced back to the screen, curious and intrigued to try something new. “Yeah, it would be good. But…”

“What’s the matter, brah?” Kono turned in her seat to regard him directly.

“We just had a run in with Wo Fat.”

“What?” Chin asked. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, we’re fine.” Danny delivered a terse précis of the encounter. “What was weird, though, is that he seems to really have a beef with Steve, which doesn’t make sense.”

“I guess that was Steve running up the stairs?” Chin said tangentially. “Why?”

“Dunno.” Danny blew out a sigh. “Hence, I’m going after him.”

Kono stood. “Let’s go find him.”

~*~

Danny knew that the House was large. It was, in fact, of mansion dimensions, but there were only so many places where a SEAL could hide.

“Okay, do we seriously have to look in the catacombs?” Danny asked Chin and Kono.

Steve wasn’t in his garret, or the reception rooms, or Seolh’s office. They had even called out, but unsurprisingly, had no response. He wasn’t lost in Toast’s electronic labyrinth.

“Okay.” Chin scrubbed at his jaw. “I’ll go check the workshops. Kono grounds. Danny, House from top to bottom.”

They split.

Danny actually looked in the pantry, but there was a crate on the floor blocking the trapdoor, so Steve hadn’t ventured into the basement.

“Right, House from top to bottom,” Danny repeated Chin’s instructions.

He took the curving staircase two steps at a time. He was about to turn right, and head along the long corridor, over the reception rooms, to the twisty staircase that led to Steve’s eyrie, but he stopped. Looking down the shorter extension of the corridor to his left, he ventured into unknown territory. His room was the first in the line of studios, yet the dressing room and his bathroom didn’t have windows on the far wall. And on reaching the end of the corridor, he realised why: there was a matching poorly lit twisty staircase. Cognizant of creaks, he crept up the stairs, using the light from his cell phone to illuminate his way. At the top, the door was shut and there was a pale green, illuminated keypad at the side.

“Huh.” Danny immediately texted Chin for the code.

The phone pinged back immediately: *Guess; it’s not hard.*
Thinking, Danny tried 123456789 -- with no result. He didn’t know Steve’s birthday. An obvious number? He typed in 666 -- which didn’t work. Thinking on the way that Chin’s brain worked, he hit c-clear and then 73654. The door clicked open. He was definitely going to make Chin change the number because that was way too obvious.

Inside, the room was lit with red lights, and the air was cool and dry -- humidity controlled. This was Steve’s museum in an attic. And, shit, he wasn’t kidding; this was indeed a museum. Floor to ceiling storage units ringed the walls, some with obvious slots for framed art work, others consisted of bins to hold rolled up canvasses. Shelves were strewn with various-shaped, fabric-wrapped blocks. It wasn’t all storage. On a pedestal, centre stage, was a giant carved wooden cow head, or antelope, with two straight horns. It bore an intricately wrought bridle and headpiece, so carefully carved that on first glance Danny thought that it was fabric -- but no, it was part of the wood. Highlighted by a single red spotlight, it dominated the room. Danny circled around the massive head. It looked old -- much older than Seolh.

“What are you?” Danny asked.

It didn’t answer.

Danny drifted further into the maze of storage. Past the wooden head, moving between a doorway formed of shelving, he walked into a hodgepodge of felt covered boards supported by giant easels. Each board bore three pictures. Modern angles vied with detailed romanticism. A redheaded girl lazing in a sunflower rested above a picture of a dissolving clock. On a far wall, singled out, was a simple picture of a woman wearing an eye patch throwing a pot on a potter’s wheel. Danny stopped before the painting, wondering on its special position and glass case.

“It’s the Matisse.”

Danny clutched his frantically beating heart. “Steven!”

“Sorry.” Steve shrugged, unrepentant.

“What are you doing up here?” Danny demanded.

“I wanted to look at my dad’s papers.” Steve jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and turned, leading the way.

“Why?” Danny trotted after him through the detritus of Seolh’s residents. Steve passed through a swinging door, and into a better-lit room, dominated by a table with an old fashioned desktop computer and bulky monitor. Steve had been busy; a number of official looking folders and crates filled with files were laid out on a tapestry rug.

“My dad’s papers from the PD. Any mention of Wo Fat, if he thinks it’s personal, should be in the files,” Steve explained.

“Chin did say that your dad was investigating the Yakuza.”

Steve looked at him dead on.

“But Chin also pointed out that Wo Fat might not be Yakuza,” Danny continued in the face of the scrunched expression that graced Steve’s face.

“You’ve been talking?” Steve chewed on each word.

“Yes,” Danny said simply. “You said that Wo Fat was with the Yakuza when we were on the
highway before the governor got shot. How did you know they were Yakuza?"

Steve went still, and then his head canted to the side. “The guy that I fought -- who kicked me -- I tore his shirt collar. I saw his irezumi -- tattoos. They were Yakuza.”

“Okay. So we look through your dad’s files for any mention of the Yakuza and Wo Fat.” Danny clapped his hands, once.

“Exactly.”

As Danny stretched his leg along the floor, keeping his gammy knee straight, Steve settled beside him on the carpet. Danny accepted a thick blue folder.

“You alright?” Danny asked, tugging the folder from Steve’s fingers. He got that Steve was a man on a mission, but the sudden disconnect from little touches and bright smiles was disconcerting.

Steve nodded, without saying a word, and picked up a second folder -- focus absolute.

Belatedly, Danny realised that he had better text Chin and Kono that he had found the Emperor.

~*~

Danny’s stomach grumbling broke his concentration, and stopped him dead. Steve -- hyperaware -- stopped reaching for another file from the battered cardboard box before him. Suspiciously silent, Steve froze and waited for Danny to speak. Glancing at Steve’s chunky watch on his wrist, Danny realised that it was nearly nine o’clock.

“Your father’s handwriting sucks, and he can’t catalogue to save his life.” He dropped the file that he was about to open back on top of its Jenga pile.


“I think--” Danny gestured expansively, at the walls of shelving, and books and files, creating an office space within the larger attic, “--we need more space to lay all this stuff out.”

“It’s only those five shelves of dad’s stuff.” Steve pointed -- two of the five were empty; the contents strewn on the floor. “It’s sort of in chronological order.”

“How come this isn’t all at the Honolulu Police Department, in some sort of archive?”

“They’re copies.” Steve held up one of the really old documents, which was created with carbon paper. His fingertips were black.

“But why be so--” Danny got laboriously to his feet and planting his hands on the small of his back, leaned to the side with a wince, “--OCD?”

“This isn’t OCD. It’s cryptic.”

“With a capital ‘C’.”

“He was head of the organised crime unit working towards uncovering the local oyaban. The unit was working to prevent the expansion of the Yazuka into Hawaii. He didn’t trust the people he worked with. He couldn’t trust a lot of the people he worked with; it’s the reality of working against powerful criminals.” Steve stood. “My father and my mother died because dad was trying to keep the islands of Hawaii safe. This is his legacy.”
“And now we know that Hiro Noshimuri is the head of the Yakuza. You mentioned that at the Governor’s Ball. How did you know that?”

“Intel that I was privy to. Hmmm.” Steve’s fingers went to his bottom lip. But then he sighed heavily.

“Look we’re not going to figure it out in one day.” Danny deliberately didn’t smile at the dark smudge now marring Steve’s bottom lip.

Steve licked his lip, and then stuck out his tongue, disgusted.

“The carbon stuff. The black stuff,” Danny explained. He started to reach out, to smush his thumb over the mark, and caught himself as in the back of his mind Kono chimed coddle.

“Oh.” Steve made an about face, stepping over the strategic piles on the Arabian carpet, and walked over to the middle bookshelf. He pulled the whole unit back like a door and stepped into his front room.

“Holy shit.” Danny trotted after him. The door-case pivoted behind him and closed with a soft snick. The wooden mock panelling of the yacht-façade of Steve’s eyrie hid the door perfectly. “You just loved murder mysteries when you were a kid, didn’t you?”

Steve gave him the thumbs up. “Hardy Boys. Although I did prefer Willard Price.”

“You’ve got a fucking secret room.”

“Hardly. I have a secret passage.” Steve preened just a little bit.

“Goof.”

“You saw the microfiche reader and the old movie projector. It’s actually the archive room -- relating to the stuff in storage. You’ve seen how much crap we’ve got squirreled away. It has to be catalogued. How do you think that we got to know Toast?”

“Toast is Seolh’s librarian?” Danny asked, but he kind of thought that he knew that.

“Grandmother put mom and dad’s stuff in there because it was climate controlled,” Steve explained. “Protecting old photos and the like.”

He crossed over to the little wet bar-come-kitchen in the corner of the open plan living room, and leaned over to wash his mouth directly under the faucet.

“Photos?” Danny turned to the panelling and pressed here and there, trying to figure out how to open the door. He couldn’t see where the latch was concealed. “Anything with Wo Fat?”

“Nah.” Steve rinsed and spat. “Mom’s photos on the bottom shelf. Mom liked photo albums. They’re not police photos.”

Ah, Danny hadn’t seen any photo albums, but he hadn’t been looking. They might provide ammunition against any future attempts on Steve and Kono’s part to inveigle baby pictures out of Danny’s mom. Danny pressed what in any reputable Indiana Jones film would be the knot in the wood that would open the secret door, and it just turned out to be a knot in the wood.

Steve snorted as he returned to Danny’s side, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Oh, come on,” Danny demanded.
“Sorry, it’s a secret,” he said as he opened the main door of his apartment and lightly darted his way down the staircase.

Danny followed, standing on the narrow landing that matched the one on the opposite side of the House. Why hadn’t it occurred to him that there were rooms behind the wall? He tapped it with his knuckles, but it was reassuringly solid.

“You’re very annoying,” Danny called even if Steve had turned out of sight.

~*~

#59#

The following morning, Danny awoke to banging, clattering, and voices. He grabbed the old hooded sweatshirt that he used in lieu of a bath robe, and clattered out of his studio with his cell phone to hand.

They hadn’t been invaded. Outside Danny’s door, a young white man with a crew cut was stabilising a step ladder for his colleague. The guy on the ladder had his head and shoulders up into the ceiling panelling.

“Hey,” Danny said to the kid.

“Sir.” The young man nodded.

Respect, coupled with the crew cut, got Danny to thinking: military. The kid had the words TDK-US Security emblazoned on the back of his tan overalls.

“What you doing?” Danny asked, shorthand.

“We’re upgrading the alarm system, sir, as per Commander McGarrett’s orders.”

Yep, military.

Relaxing, Danny tucked his cell phone in the front pocket of his sweatshirt. He picked his way down the main staircase, seeing a guy and a gal by the propped-open front door positioning a light above the lintel.

There were a host of workmen strewn around the house. Steve had been busy. Steve had mentioned getting the security system updated (Danny hoped that there wasn’t a cannon being loaded onto the roof), and it appeared that their run in with Wo Fat last night had been a catalyst. This seemed like an immediate response sort of thing.

There were another two working in the kitchen by the de facto main entrance to the house installing a keypad just inside the door.

“Hi, Mrs. Keawe.”

“Good morning, Daniel. Coffee?” She held up a coffee pot. She had a tray of mugs on the kitchen table and was pouring out rich, dark Kona coffee -- obviously for the workers.

“Thanks.” Danny skirted around her and grabbed a mug from one of the hooks hanging under the units above the sink.

“So did all this take you by surprise?” Danny gestured with his mug at workmen one and two.
“This is Seolh, nothing surprises me,” Mrs. Keawe said, unflappable, waiting for him to stop gesturing with the mug so that she could pour. “And I get to make cookies for an appreciative audience.”

“I’ll appreciate your cookies any time you want to make them, Mrs. K.,” Danny said eagerly, holding the mug still. “Especially those coco puff things.”

“Not for breakfast,” Mrs. K. said, mock-severely.

“Aw.”

“Would you like eggs?” she said as she poured.

“It’s okay, Mrs. K.. I can make my breakfast. You must have other things to do.”

“I’ll get started on your eggs. You take the coffee and cookies to the boys and girls.”

Danny decided not to argue. His coffee could sit for a minute or two to cool down.

They were everywhere, like a hive of worker bees. Sensor lights and keypads were being set discreetly. Danny peered up at one of the new lights, cocking his head to the side. The fixture was mock old, ornate enough to match the House’s exterior. The pads were garish but they were the only visible electronics and they were all tucked in the shadow of lintels or jutting woodwork.

“Is it wireless or are you putting stuff -- wires and things -- behind the panels?” Danny asked as he set the tray on the single corner table that was the only piece of furniture in the foyer.

An older guy stopped fiddling with a piece of electronics and tapped a picture-free hall panel with his knuckle. “I don’t know what this wood is, but I’m fairly sure that I would be hung, drawn and quartered if we damaged this stuff. It’s a wireless system for the most. The lights need to be hooked up to the electricity.”

“Excuse me, are you Mr. Daniel Williams?” a young black woman, wearing a light tan, sharply-pressed uniform, asked, as she came in through the open door.

Some kind of junior Navy person, Danny guessed. She looked down at him earnestly from her easily six foot plus one or two inches of height. Danny wasn’t even remotely intimidated, because she was obviously a brand new naval person -- fresh faced and exuding amber, wide-eyed, eager naivety.

“Yes? Can I help you?”

She reached, without looking, into her dark blue messenger bag, pulled out a hand-sized black box and presented it.

“You shouldn’t have,” Danny said, accepting the box. He turned it over. The transparent top shielded a large Rolex watch. “We’ve only just met.”

Her laugh was surprisingly deep and rich.

“Can you sign for it, sir?” She proffered an electronic board with attached pen.

Tucking the watch case under his elbow, Danny automatically signed on the highlighted cell with the stubbed-nibbed pen. It looked as if a demented spider hooked on caffeine had wobbled across the page.

“Thank you.” She had the board off him in a flash. “Do you require instructions, sir?”
“About what?” Danny juggled the box back and forth between his hands. Thinking, he flipped back the cover. Its heft spoke of a solid watch, dressed in gold with a large shiny face. It was the sort that he would choose for himself. “Has it got special buttons?”

“Yes, sir. To initiate the alarm you need to press and hold the top left hand button for ten seconds.”

“Alarm?” Danny said hollowly.

“It will link with J-TAC and a team will be deployed.”

“Deployed….”

“Yes, sir. The instruction booklet is in the housing under the watch stand.”

“An alarm. I’ve got a personal GPS and security alarm?”

“Is there a problem, sir?” She lowered her chin and stared down at him.

“No… Have you seen Steve? Lieutenant Commander McGarrett.”

She glanced at her electronic clipboard. “He ordered items, sir. But I haven’t met Commander McGarrett.” She checked her list. “Are you any relation to Miss Grace E. Williams?”

“What?” Danny snatched the clipboard off her. Grace’s name was halfway down the list with ‘locket’ in the column next to her name. “I’m her father.” He held out his hand.

“Is she a minor child?”

“Yes,” Danny said tensely.

“You can sign for her.”

Danny scrawled another spider line across the highlighted cell two cells along from Grace’s name.

Carefully, the young woman drew the clipboard from Danny’s grip. In her other hand she held a silver box. She waited patiently for Danny to take it. He set his watch box precisely on the table beside the coffee tray, before accepting it.

The locket inside the box was delicate, wrought in slivery metal to create a filigree pattern of flowers. It lay on a faux blue velvet cushion. Grace would love it.

“Another alarm tracker thingy?” he asked tightly. “And how does this work, pray tell?”

She stepped back a fraction.

“Two ways, sir. If you break the chain or if you open the locket and then twist the front piece through 180 degrees and press them back together.”

Danny lifted the locket free of the box. At least Steve hadn’t put any photographs in the two holders. He could see how it could twist.

“Is it live?”

“They’ll be activated at midday, sir.”

“It’s Danny, not sir,” he said absently, twisting the top frame around. One part of him was happy to
GPS tag his Monkey. The other was mightily irked at Steve’s highhandedness.

“Is that okay, sir? I have to find Ms. Kalakaua,” she pronounced Kono’s surname with the local inflection.

“And what’s Steve picked for Kono?”

“Watch, sir, similar to yours. Would you know where Ms. Kalakaua is?”

“Stairs.” Danny hooked his thumb at the slightly curving line of the ornate staircase that dominated the foyer. “Kono’s studio is third on the right. There is a nameplate.”

Watching her go, Danny kind of knew that he was furious, but in a distant abstract kind of way. The fact that Steve had initiated this degree of protection for the entire crew at Seolh diluted his ire. It was highhanded and authoritarian, and scary in how fast Steve could get it initiated, and that it was required. A sudden cold sweat line prickled along the length of Danny’s spine.

“Hey, Kaniela, what’s that face for? Are those coffees hot?” Mamo lifted his chin in the direction of the tray, perched on the side table. He snagged one without asking, taking it black without sugar.

“Your omelette is ready, Daniel,” Mrs. K. called from the kitchen.

“You’ll want it when it’s hot,” Mamo prodded. When Danny didn’t move immediately, he added a helping hand under his elbow.

“Did Steve get you a fancy watch?” Danny asked as he was herded back to the kitchen and food.

“Yes,” Mamo said, slowly. “I left it in my workshop. I suppose I better go get it.”

“Ah, there you are,” Mrs. K. said. The aroma of lightly fried cheese with a salty tang of bacon filled the air.

“Is there enough for two?” Mamo asked, setting his coffee mug down.

Mrs. K. answered by plating up a second golden omelette, and holding out two plates.

“Grab some knives and forks, Kaniela. We’ll take these out to my workshop and get out of the way of all these workers.”

Since Mamo immediately sailed out of the open kitchen door with Danny’s breakfast, he simply had to follow. He snagged his coffee mug and Mamo’s en route.

Peculiarly, lying on the lawn outside Mamo’s workshop were an array of colourful surfboards of all shapes and sizes. Danny and Mamo ended up sitting, side by side, on the wide stone step into Mamo’s workshop. The early morning sun was weak, but warming as they sat shoulder to shoulder watching the activity of worker bees around the House.

“So Stevie’s got a bee in his bonnet,” Mamo said evidently reading Danny’s mind.

Danny snorted at the imagery of Steve pictured in one of Rachel’s ‘Pride and Prejudice’ BBC televised dramas complete with fancy hat.

“So what triggered this?” Mamo asked, waving his egg laden folk at the men hauling a ladder into place against the veranda, so that they could climb on the slanting roof.

“We met Wo Fat yesterday. He told us to back off or else.”
“Whoa.” Mamo froze, fork halfway to his mouth.

“He also pretty conclusively said that he’s got a beef with the McGarretts. Steve and I spent most of yesterday evening going through John McGarrett’s old police reports.”

“Did you find anything?” Mamo asked carefully.

“Nah, we’ve only just started. But!” And Danny jabbed a finger at the guy picking his way up the ladder. “This means that Steve’s worried. I’m worried! That creep threatened us, and now we’re chipped. And Steve has chipped my daughter. And I’ve got to think about Monkey.” Danny hauled out the necklace from the pocket of his fleece. “I don’t believe it. I’m going to have to tell Rachel that the international terrorist who murdered the Governor of Hawaii might target my daughter.”

“I’m sure Steve’s just being careful.”

“Careful? Careful isn’t the right word. My daughter is at risk. And I can’t leave; because then we won’t have access to this protection.” Danny flung his hand back out at the workers, the locket spinning on the end of the necklace. But his ire was abruptly spent and he slumped.

“And you don’t want to leave Steve,” Mamo said quietly.

Danny shifted around on his ass. “You know.”

Mamo’s wide grin was completely unnecessary.

“Steve is a lot of things, but he is not subtle.”

“He’s kind of wanting to keep it private.”

“I’ve known Steve a long time, son,” Mamo said warmly. “Look, Steve protects everyone, including himself. Steve has always had a protective streak wider than the Grand Canyon. He looks after his ‘ohana. He can’t not look after his people.”

“But--”

“You’re asking him not to be himself, the boy he’s been since he was little… especially after his mom and dad passed. His little sister, Mary, used to call him her Smother.”

“Smother?” Danny inadvertently smiled. “Man, it’s becoming a theme. No wonder Steve laughed when I said ‘smothy Seolh’.”

Mamo shuffled and leaned against the doorframe. “I know what’s made your cheeks pink -- it’s that he didn’t ask. That he didn’t tell you about what’s happening? Yell at him about that but don’t yell at him for caring -- in his own inimitable way.”


“I’m sure, though,” Mamo said around a mouthful of omelette, “this has been several days in the making and he just sped this up after this Wo Fat Kanapapiki turned up again.”

Danny glowered. “You’re very good at diffusing.”

“I have five children, and I’ve lost count of the grandchildren.”

“Two,” Mamo said without hesitation.

Danny shovelled a forkful of omelette into his mouth. It was perfectly fluffy and just the right temperature. It was such a simple meal: mature cheese, bacon and eggs. The touch of salt and a sprinkling of fresh herbs enhanced the skill and love that had went into its creation.

“So speaking of Stevie, have you seen Steve this morning?” Danny mumbled. Steve had, as was habitual, wandered off to bed after their late supper of oatmeal; the warm milk had been very soporific.

Mamo walked his fingers in midair in the direction of the tangled wood that led to the peninsula in lieu of speaking, as he swallowed.

“Jogging?” Danny translated. “Along the peninsula.”

“It’s a good trail. If you twist up and back on yourself it’s a good couple of miles and -- what did Steve call them -- inclines. He said that he was upping his training programme.” Mamo smiled proudly at Danny.

“I haven’t done anything,” Danny disavowed. Changing the subject, he asked, “What’s with the boards laying on the grass?”

“Oh, my great nephew dropped them off early before he went into work. He wanted to try some new--” Mamo wrinkled his nose, thinking on the word, “--plastic paints? So I gave him some of my blanks to practice on. He can’t store them at his place, so he returned them, after practicing.”

“Oh, so, they’re like moulds or something, not real boards?” The array of patterns and colours that Mamo’s nephew had produced were gaudy like Bird of Paradise gaudy. They were strikingly vibrant.

“Mostly. There are a few duds -- boards that I am not happy with -- that I let him play with.”

“What are you going to do with them?” Danny asked, an idea germinating.

“The duds, I’m going to give to some kids I know to learn on. The blanks? Strip off the plastic stuff, maybe. I’ll have to check. Might need some nasty solvents.”

“Could I maybe borrow some of the blanks?”

“Sure,” Mamo said immediately. “What for?”

“I’ve got a stall at the market. I need display boards for my photographs. Something eye catching--”

“Oh.” Mamo set his plate to the side and started levering himself to his feet. Danny put his coffee down and matched his movement, ready to help. “Some of them are plywood, nice and light. We’ll need some sort of stand to prop them up on.”

Danny walked with him to the boards spread higglety-pigglety on the grass. Mamo laid into the pile; man on a mission. Danny couldn’t really help, but he quickly figured out which were the real boards based on weight, and which were the blanks, he started judging them on their art and length.

Movement caught his eye as Steve emerged from the edge of the wood leaving the dirt trail. His feet hit the decorative paving stone that bisected the lawn, with the sharp, light, repetitive slap of a runner. Seeing them, Steve immediately angled off the path and jogged over. He was an appetizing sight in his tight, black base layer and running shorts.
“What are you doing?” Steve came to a stop beside them, and leaned over, resting his hands on his thighs. A drop of sweat dripped off his nose and onto the sparse grass, as he breathed heavily.

“Display boards for my photographs at the market.” Danny leaned back, liking the long, straight line of Steve’s back. His posture was enviable. His butt was pretty good, but not as awesome as Danny’s own.

“Huh, that’s a different idea,” Steve huffed. “Did Tyler paint them?”

Mamo nodded.

“He’s improved,” Steve said a little snottily. It sounded to Danny like there might be some history there.

“I guess I’ll have to ask Tyler if he’s okay with me using his painted boards?” Danny realised.

“I’ll ask him,” Mamo volunteered.

“I’ll be happy to put a little card on saying he painted them,” Danny offered. “And you know hand out business cards?”

“He’s not that organised,” Mamo said. He pointed at Danny’s small pile of boards. “These ones?”

Danny had selected a handful of shorter boards -- there were more than a few that had easily topped nine foot in the main pile -- painted with bold, wide swirls of colour against monochrome backdrops, rather than ones with detailed illustrations. Steve finally straightened and took a long step so he stood beside Mamo, and could better examine the boards.

Mamo squatted, and ran a knowing hand over the length of a swirl.

“These are Tyler’s attempts at using the sprayer. Experimenting with viscosity and pressure.”

“So you don’t think that he’ll object?” Danny asked. It had seemed like a good idea, but if there was a problem (Steve was still scowling as if the boards insulted his very being) Danny didn’t need the additional stress. Actually --

“Steven,” Danny began, drawing out the name long and firmly.

Steve regarded him warily.

Deliberately, Danny extended his wrist, around which he had looped Grace’s new necklace.

“Anything you want to tell us about?” Danny swept his arm dramatically towards the House and the workers.

“Have you got your watch?” Steve asked, gaze fixed on Danny’s wrist.

“No. I think that maybe, possibly, I left it somewhere,” Danny said snarkily.

Steve’s bottom lip dropped into that firm downturned line.

“Boys,” Mamo interjected.

“Because, you know, there’s other ways I can ensure that it is on your person,” Steve finished euphemistically.
“I’d like to see you try,” Danny riposted.

“So what are you actually objecting to?” Steve stood taller, crossing his arms over his chest. “The fact that you can now call a trained team of professionals to render aid at any time day and night or that you have to wear a really, really heavy wrist watch?”

“That you didn’t ask!” Danny yelled. “We’re not your subordinates. We are your ‘ohana, Your Benevolent Dictatorship, sir.”

“Were you going to say no?” Steve asked, a tad baffled, and then answered his own question. “No, you wouldn’t say no. This is a sensible and measured, proportionate response to a possible threat.”

Steve slid a questioning glance in Mamo’s direction, clearly hunting for a clue. Mamo was avuncular perfection; shaking his head in resignation.

“Oh, for the love of god.” Danny threw his hands in the air. “Mamo, can you explain to the doofus?”

“Son,” Mamo said, “when you’re making changes to the infrastructure of the House and tagging the residents, you should call a general meeting and update your team.”

“I recall--” Steve scrunched up his nose, “-- saying that I was going to update the security system. You were there, Danny. Right?”

Reluctantly, Danny nodded.

“See.” Steve unfolded from his crossed, defensive stance. A smile began to blossom on his long face.

Danny rolled his eyes. “Grace. My daughter. My daughter. Remember that you talk to me when it involves my daughter? And you only absently mentioned that you were going to update the security system. No, details. No, nothing.”

The smile segued into defensive.

“He’s right, Stevie.” Mamo moved into Steve’s space and threw a heavy arm over his shoulders smoothing the chastisement, as he tugged him in close. “We’re family, not a SEAL team. Keep us in the loop. That’s all we ask. Okay?”

Steve sagged like a frustrated teenager.

“Okay. Okay. When I can,” Steve added. “There are aspects of this mission that I can’t divulge.”

“Really?” Danny said automatically. “What aspects?”

Steve scowled.

Danny grinned because Steve was so easy to tease.

“Yes, Danny, there are things I can’t tell you. And, okay, I should have discussed the locket with you.”

“Thank you.” Danny could be gracious, once he had won.

“But.” Steve shot a glance at Mamo beside him and then focussed all of his considerable attention on Danny. “I definitely think Grace should wear it. I’m advising that you ensure that Grace wears it and understands its use.”
Danny couldn’t disagree with the man, even though on principle, he really wanted to. He was not looking forward to that conversation with Rachel and then Grace. Awesome.

“I’ll call a meeting.” Mamo hauled out his antique Nokia, and craning his head back looked down the length of his arm at the phone. “We’ll have it after dinner. I think that it’s your turn to cook, isn’t it, Stevie?”

~*~

“Hey, Chin…. Babe, are you okay?” Danny asked.

The man was sheet grey, eyes stark, dark wells against unnatural paleness. Danny caught Chin’s elbow and stopped him dead in the corridor, outside Seolh’s office. Chin wavered, and Danny got a hold of his biceps in a two handed grip, turning the older man to face him.

“I’m going to be a dad,” Chin said hollowly.


“Mr. Waincroft is going to kill me. Slowly, with a chopstick.”

Danny had only met Malia’s father once, but in all honesty, he kind of thought that that was an accurate summation.

“Come on, Chin, my man, kitchen. My ex would say that you need a cup of sugary tea. I’ve seen you drink tea, so I’m going to get you one.”

It said something about Chin’s discombobulation that he let Danny shepherd him into the kitchen. Danny got him sitting at the kitchen table before he passed clean out or, worse, puked.

“You just sit. One sweet tea, coming up.” Danny rattled through the cupboards, grabbing a canister of black tea and a sealed jar of white sugar. Fingers busy, he decanted tea into Steve’s little metal tea bomb. “You know, it’s going to be okay. In fact, it’s going to be better than okay. It’s going to be awesome.”

Chin dropped his head on the table, with a hollow thump.

Danny got the kettle on. “You know, in ten, fifteen years, I’m so going to mock you about this. I’ll be all ‘Hey, Chin, remember how you passed out when you found out that Baby Kelly was on the horizon?’ Hilarious.”

Chin turned his head on the tabletop and opened one eye.

“Trust me, Chin. There’s nothing like it.” The kettle sang as the water inside reached a rapid boil, and Danny splashed hot water in the mug with the tea ball. “I remember when the midwife handed me Gracie -- although she didn’t have a name then -- she was so freakin’ tiny! I thought breathing on her would break her. And then I looked at her. And she looked at me, and bang -- mine.”

Chin was watching him one eyed. His colour had improved. Danny set the stewing tea down.

“Kono’s going to be so stoked,” Danny observed, into the silence of Chin’s shock. “Steve is surprisingly good with kids. Have you seen him with Little Dee? You’ll have babysitters lined up around the block. Tell you what; Rachel would say that this was a travesty--”
Danny turned back to the sink. A water filter lived beside the draining board. He poured some into a glass, so that he could take water over to Chin and slosh some into his tea mug so that it was cool enough to immediately drink.

Danny patted his shoulder. “Sit up. The tea will help. But don’t tell Rachel that I said that. Come on, Chin.”

Robo-Chin sat up and mechanically took the tea. Danny let him have some space, covering by finagling a cup of coffee from the ancient coffee maker. Chin and Malia were engaged to be married, but they hadn’t set a timetable. Danny figured that the ceremony now would happen sooner rather than later.

I wonder if Chin will stay at Seolh? he pondered.

Last night, everyone had met Steve’s briefing on the new security system with remarkable aplomb. Given the frankly weird tomato and three bean stew concoction that Steve had devised, they had probably been distracted by the incipient diarrhoea. Danny’s morning had certainly been explosive. But a new baby on the way and Malia probably having her own place might mean that the President would be resigning. Albeit, Chin didn’t seem to spend much time over at Malia’s; maybe she had a roommate or two since rent in Hawaii was insanely high?

Chin blew out a measured, slow breath. He set the mug down with great deliberation.

“Thank you, Danny,” he said seriously.

“You’re welcome.” Danny flopped into the seat directly opposite him. Chin’s colour was better. “So I’m guessing that Malia just called you? Maybe, I should borrow Steve’s truck keys and drop you off at your fiancée’s place?”

“Yes. Yes.” Chin stood up straight. “Yes.”

Sadly, Danny left his coffee on the table, and got the truck keys from the little woven basket on top of the fridge. Chin stood there, waiting for instructions. Danny scribbled a note on the fridge magnet pad, leaving it so Steve would find it.

The re-instigation of the buddy system was a pain in the ass.

~*~

Danny decanted Chin outside Malia’s by giving him a helpful push out of the cab.

“You’ve got your cell phone?” he asked.

Chin nodded. His back was to Danny as he stared at the front door of the red-roofed bungalow.

“Gimme a call when you want me to come and pick you up. And remember it’s going to be okay, in fact it is going to be great. Buck up, man!”

Chin shook himself and marched up to the door. Part of Danny wanted to hang around, the other part, thought leave them to it. He waited until Chin lifted his fist and knocked on the door before putting the truck into gear and pulling away from the sidewalk.

He was kind of a little at a loose end. Normally, he would not be out and about this early. The whole day lay before him. He was halfway to the city -- he could drive in to the city centre and explore. He still didn’t feel like he knew Honolulu and its surrounds.

It wasn’t fun without Steve.
He flipped out his phone as he tooled along the road, and hit speed-dial two.

“Danny?” Steve answered immediately.

“Hey, Steve, where are you?” Danny deliberately spoke slowly.

“Why did you have to drop Chin at Malia’s so early? Why didn’t he take his motorcycle?” Steve demanded.

It was kind of Chin and Malia’s story to tell, but there was an edge of dog-with-a-bone to Steve’s tone and he wasn’t going to be fobbed off with a casual ‘Chin wasn’t feeling too steady, so I had to drive him’ excuse.

“Malia’s expecting,” Danny said clearly, and it suddenly struck him that that was a funny word to ascribe to having a baby.

The cell phone resonated with silence for a multitude of heartbeats.

“A baby?” Steve finally checked.

Danny bit his bottom lip, because it was hardly like she was going to have a velociraptor.

“Yes. Chin was a little shocky; so I drove him to Malia’s. I’m heading back to Seolh, now. Unless…” Danny said leadingly.

“Unless what?” Steve asked.

“Is there any way that you can get into town? Or do you have other plans for the day?”

“Uhm.”

“It’s okay. I can come get you. I just thought, it would be kind of fun to explore Honolulu. Chin left his motorcycle?”

“I can’t drive Chin’s motorcycle,” Steve said quietly.

“Really? Okay, I’ll come get you.” Danny glanced at the time on his phone. “Should be about half an hour, forty five minutes.”

~*~

Steve was waiting patiently, sitting on the veranda steps, a little backpack beside his feet. By the time that Danny had turned the truck around in a wide circle on the pebbly drive, Steve was poised by the passenger door.

“Hey, Babe,” Danny greeted, as Steve clambered into the cab.

Steve eyed him for a millisecond, bobbing a fraction towards Danny. Ahah! Danny had no such reservations; shifting sideways out from under his seatbelt, he leaned right across the parking brake into Steve’s space.

It was hard to seriously kiss when grinning like a loon.

“A baby for Chin and Malia, huh?” Steve said when he fell back.

“Uhm, yeah, I’m kind of guessing that Malia just found out.” Danny grinned. “And called Chin
milliseconds later.”

Steve scrunched his nose, perplexed.

It wasn’t like she could have been at her gynaecologist’s at eight o’clock in the morning. Steve had never been married; Danny wasn’t sure if he had had a serious girlfriend, so he doubted that the man had had a run in with the panic initiated by a pregnancy test.

“What have you had a girlfriend?” Danny asked.

“What?” Steve asked, seemingly confused by the segue.

“Girlfriend. You know, a girl who is a special friend?”

“Have you had your coffee this morning?” Steve demanded. “Yeah, I’ve had girlfriends.”

“Oh, coffee. Only half of my first cup. I haven’t had breakfast.”

“I think that I should drive,” Steve said seriously.

Danny smiled with all his teeth and pulled away.

~*~

“So, where are we going?” Danny asked as Steve directed him into a parking space near the Kaka’ako Waterfront Park.

“You want breakfast, right?”

Danny didn’t even bother responding to that question. Steve jumped out of the cab, slinging his tiny backpack across his shoulders, and arrowed over to the parking meter to get a ticket. Grabbing his wallet from the glove compartment and tucking it in the pocket of his shorts, Danny, somewhat resignedly, considered his own casual shorts and t-shirt combination. At least he had grabbed a shower before bumping into Chin.

Danny was half out of the cab as Steve leaned in right close across him, placing the ticket on the dash. He smelled of citrus and mint shower gel. Danny couldn’t resist and dropped a kiss on the sensitive spot just under the bone behind his ear.

Steve shivered, delightfully.

Danny made a mental note as Steve jack-knifed away, a light flush rising on his cheekbones.

“You’ve been for a jog again this morning,” Danny observed. “Have you had breakfast?”

“Does this constitute our third date?” Steve asked, seriously.

“I guess.” Danny waggled his eyebrows.

“Okay.” Steve turned away, leaving Danny to lock the truck. He chased after Steve, every now and again needing to speed up a fraction to keep up with Steve’s ridiculously long legs. The pace Steve set was focussed and intense for a simple trip for breakfast.

Danny let the weirdness slide. He had decided, very early on, that he would give Steve the space that he needed. Steve had been odd since Wo Fat had waylaid them in the restaurant.
“You want to slow down a little bit?” Danny laughed inwardly at the double meaning.

“Sorry.” Steve immediately slowed. “We’re going to one of the independent coffee shops. It’s in the Waahila Hotel -- over there.” He pointed across the wide road, to a multi-storey, blue window-faceted building surrounded by palm trees.

Steve stepped down off the high kerb. A car horn beeped, brakes squealed, and Danny automatically grabbed the carry strap on the top of Steve’s backpack and hauled him back onto the sidewalk. The Porsche screeched past them.

“Jesus, Babe!” Danny slung an arm around Steve’s narrow waist. Steve’s heart was beating like a trip hammer. “You all right?”

Steve coughed. “Yes.”

“Okay.” Danny spun him around. “You need to relax. What’s going on in your head? You just almost got smashed.”

“Sorry,” Steve said inexplicably, sagging against him.

“Talk to me.”

Steve looked left, looked right. “Sorry.” He dipped down, as if to kiss, aborted and hugged Danny in tight.

Danny soaked in Steve’s warmth, as he let Steve relax into his hold. “Come on, Babe. We need the most important meal of the day.”

~*~

“Okay, Steve, talk to me.” Danny said to Steve, sitting opposite him. Luckily, in the quiet, conservatory-café there were a preponderance of nooks and crannies, with private booths half obscured by abundant foliage. The waitress had taken their order and was going to return with coffee and hot chocolate, and two plates of pancakes.

Steve chewed on his bottom lip, then deliberately retrieved his ITE remote from his cargo pants thigh pocket and set it on the table. So many thoughts scrolled across his face, Danny could only marvel, and fail to know what he was thinking. He could make an educated guess, though.

Deliberately, Steve rested his knees against Danny’s, and Danny took that as a good sign.

“Okay, tell me why you’re squirrelly,” Danny asked. “You’re not a squirrelly person. Should I be looking for a pod back in the basement at home?”

Silence.

“Do you want me to start?” Danny offered.

“No,” Steve blurted.

“Well, talk to me, man.” Danny waited. “What about I lend you a notebook? So you can make a list?”

“Okay,” Steve said firmly. He carefully set his elbows on the table and steepled his fingers together. And then stared, mutely.
“Third date doesn’t mean anything, Steve,” Danny said, into Steve’s discomfort. “You don’t have to put out on the third date. I am comfortable with your pace. You know, what you’re comfortable with. I like kissing.”

Steve blushed a bright, vivid red.

“Look,” Danny continued, “this is all new for you. You’re thirty five, and -- man, your brain is like a clockwork, insane, knotty maze. And you’ve never done this before. You have to talk to me. You know that you can talk to me.”

“Talk,” Steve echoed.

“Because that is what this is about.” Danny moved his finger rapidly between his chest and Steve. “Us. It’s okay to be embarrassed. It’s kind of cute.”

“Cute,” Steve said affronted.

Danny settled back in his side of the booth, feeling ever so superior. Steve still hadn’t moved his feet from around Danny’s.

“It’s complicated,” Steve said wincing at the trite words. “And I’m not embarrassed. I’m…”

“Out of your depth,” Danny supplied helpfully.

Steve kicked him. “You’re annoying, you know that?”

“We’ve had this conversation.”

“I seem to recall I stopped it by kissing you,” Steve said.

Danny raised a smug eyebrow.

“Ah,” Steve said in realisation. “Every time, I start to say something, I can hear just excuses. I don’t like excuses. They’re not excuses.”

“Geez. I genuinely can get you a notebook so you can write out a list.” Danny held up his hand, and extended his fingers, and began to count them off. “One, this is new. Two, you’re inexperienced. Three, you put the capital ‘R’ in reserved. Four, you’re a little bit of a control freak. And, five, there’s a freaking terrorist on your radar who’s just threatened your friends and family. It’s okay. I understand.”

“So, Freud, since you know everything, what the answer?”

Danny wasn’t impressed with the snark; he was the Master of Snark. “You could drink your hot chocolate and eat your pancakes.”

Their waitress had returned with their food. Smiling, she set the dishes on the table.

“Anything else, boys?”

Danny cast about. There was maple syrup and honey in the small condiment carrousel on the table.

“I’m, okay. Steve?”

“Fine, thanks.” Steve’s smile was automatically charming.
“Holler if you need anything.” She sauntered off, hips swaying.

“You’re so reasonable,” Steve said, his focus exclusively on Danny.

Danny had been accused of a lot of things, mostly by Rachel, but that was a first.

“I don’t think reasonable is the right word,” Danny said. In the back of his mind he could hear Kono muttering *coddle* again. “Look, we’re both guys. We don’t talk about this sort of shit. But if there’s one thing that I’ve learnt from my marriage and divorce: you actually do have to talk if you want to have a hope in Hell of having a good relationship. And I’ve always been good at talking.”

“Huh.” Steve accepted that without argument.

Danny dug into his pancakes after smothering them with maple syrup. Steve opted for a light drizzle of runny honey.

“Wo Fat threatened all you guys,” Steve said.

“So you thought pull back, and we’ll be safe?”


“Steve?”

“I know that ‘pulling back’ won’t work,” Steve said. “We’re ‘ohana. If I was in Timbuktu, we’d still be ‘ohana.”

Danny mentally cheered.

“I just don’t understand why Wo Fat started this, but doesn’t finish it.” Steve lifted his head. “There’s nothing in my father’s records to link him to the McGarretts. If he does have a problem, why the machinations? If I was him, I would have wound up the Hesse Brothers and pointed them in my direction. They probably could take me out. It’s… It’s not as if … I’m not one hundred percent.”

Steve had spent the majority of the day before sequestered away in the archive room, nose stuck in file after file, achieving nothing, before inflicting grievous digestive harm on the residents of Seolh. Danny had kind of left him to it, checking up on him, in between working with Mamo to cobble together stands for the surfboards. In hindsight, leaving him to himself had been a mistake. Steve was proving to be a brooder.

“Wo Fat threatened you,” Steve said pensively.

“Fucker,” Danny said pithily.

Steve blinked.

“And,” Danny said, “that pisses me off. And it’s kind of insane. And unbelievable. And like something out of *Starsky and Hutch*, or *Miami Vice*. If I think about it too much, I’ll start freaking out.”

“I think you’re starting to yell, Danny,” Steve said quietly.

Danny had also risen from his seat.

The young family in the booth in the corner had all stopped eating and we’re looking at them. The smallest kid sat with his mouth wide open, sharing the masticated contents with everyone.
“Don’t mind us. It’s okay. Sit. Eat.” Danny ordered, and dropped back with a thump. He leaned across the table towards Steve, intimately. “Look, I know that you’re not going to stop looking for Wo Fat. Are you?”

“I can’t, Danny.” Steve licked his lips. “I’m best placed to figure out what he’s up to. I hunted the Hesse Brothers, and by inference him; I know how they think. I can’t let him dictate my actions.”

“What do you mean: what’s he’s up to?” Danny latched on to that, amidst the acid resurgence of terror that a freakin’ terrorist had threatened him.

“Sure, think about it, why is he still on the Island of Oahu? He murdered the governor. Staying here is insane.” Steve picked up his fork and stabbed a piece of pancake with intent. “The Hesse Brothers left. Simons is currently chasing them through Germany.”

“So meeting us was,” Danny began, and as he applied thought to terror, terror receded, “misdirection?”

Steve regarded him, a bead of honey on the tine of his folk, slowly burgeoned, and then started to extend in a long glob. He hummed under his breath, a frozen statue of thought.

It was kind of weird to observe, Danny mused, that the fact that they hadn’t been attacked was strange.

“Yes, likely.” The bead of honey broke and dropped to Steve’s plate. “J-TAC was concerned that he was still on Oahu. I wish that we had a profile on Wo Fat. But what gels with the man that we met yesterday is that he’s self-assured and definitely is playing some sort of long game.” He smiled luminously at Danny.

Danny couldn’t help but smile back at him. “We have to catch this guy, Steve. And, you know, we can’t pull back because of what Wo Fat might or might not do.”

“We?”

“Okay, you,” Danny said easily.

Steve’s thumbnail went unerringly to his pursed lips as he concentrated. As statues went he was easy on the eyes -- but only some sort of modern, experimental artist would have a statue of Steve frozen with a fork in one hand and doing his adult version of sucking his thumb.

“Eat, Babe.” Danny pointed with his fork at Steve’s plate. “Sugar helps with concentration.”

“Glucose,” Steve corrected, “facilitates concentration.”

“Whatever. Eat.”

Steve ate methodically, evidently deep in thought. His feet were still entwined with Danny’s.

Okay, Steve had neatly segued the conversation into Wo Fat rather than that he was a little concerned about taking their relationship to the next level. Danny let it slide, for the moment. Danny had dealt with the new untested territory of a relationship with another guy, going against the familiar -- and dare he say it, normal -- when he knew that normal was only what you experienced on a day to day basis, and should never be the guidepost on how you should commit your life. ‘Normal’ as a word had to be redefined -- in its most recognisable incarnation it only brought pain.

It was undeniably hard being perceived as different by the majority. People were bastards, but you
Danny guessed, and would bet money on it, that over the years Seolh had at its very heart supported everyone that it had encountered. Danny had brought his boyfriend home for a couple of visits, his Mom had been fine, but his Pop had indeed struggled with the concept, and Danny still didn’t speak with Aunt Joyce -- the bitch.

“So?” Danny began.

“Oh?” Steve weighed him.

“What’s that face?” Danny said. “You look like I’m going to make you eat Brussels sprouts.”

“I might, you know--” Steve tapped his left ear with his index finger, “--but I can actually read tone, especially a low lone. And you have a tone.”

“Oh,” Danny echoed, “and what does my tone tell you?”

“You’re going to ask me something that will make me uncomfortable?” Steve kind of hedged, showing that he wasn’t completely confident in reading tone.

Danny puffed out his cheeks letting out a little huff of air. Amazingly, he kind of sometimes forgot that Steve was deaf because he compensated so well. One characteristic should never be the defining characteristic.

“It’s like you’re planning a photo shoot,” Steve griped as he appropriated Danny’s mug of very nice Kopi luwak coffee and took a sip.

“Hey, that’s mine.”

“Wow.” Steve flared his nostrils. “It really does taste like cat crap.”

“Philistine.” Danny took his mug back. It was perfect, albeit now on the tepid side.

“You’re so sensitive that,” Steve mused, “I figured that you’d be against drinking coffee that was shit out of a cat.”

“Palm civet,” Danny corrected. “And I eat eggs, so I don’t really have room to complain.”

Steve’s disgusted face was hilarious as he made the connection.

“So my tone?” Danny gave the poor man a break; he was trying the conversation thing.

“So what got your forehead wrinkling?” Steve asked. “What are you thinking about now?”

“You wanna tell me about Drew?”

Steve raised an eyebrow. “Really? Where did that come from?”

“Dunno, just seems relevant.”

“Relevant?”

“Quite echoing,” Danny said. “I know that he was blond. You like blonds?”

“Blond? Blonde? Blond? Nah, not specifically. I don’t have a type.” He smirked. “Okay, it’s more of a personality type thing.”
He leaned back in the booth seat, entangling his long legs with Danny.

“Care to elaborate?” Danny said with a deliberate sloe-eyed look. Steve was a delicious long line from his booted feet tucked up against Danny, his stupidly long legs, and no doubt deliberately picked teal t-shirt -- even the tiny band aid tucked against his hairline only made him look rakish.


“Stop. Stop,” Danny raised a hand. “You’re making me blush.”

“Yeah, I will stop. I need to use the head.” Standing, he leaned right over the table a bussed a kiss against Danny’s cheek.

A personal display of affection in an open area, Danny cheered inwardly. Steve sauntered off, loose and long limbed. Danny wasn’t a saint; he was working really hard on minimal clues to start a relationship on a firm foundation. It was a hard learned lesson of divorce that he was determined to follow. But he was human and hot-blooded. Danny shifted uncomfortably in his seat, Steve was sex on legs.

It didn’t escape Danny’s notice that Steve had successfully derailed the conversation, again.

Danny finished his very nice coffee in one long gulp and put it down on the table with a thump. The waitress was clearly monitoring the few charges in her area with a detailed eye, since she immediately came over. She held a carafe.

“Would you like another cup of coffee? House blend.” She held the pot a little higher. “Or Kopi luwak?”

“House, please.” Danny pushed his mug into her orbit, conscious of the expense of the Kopi luwak. “Thank you, hon.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie.” She sauntered off in her own way. Danny preferred Steve’s narrow hips, but he wasn’t oblivious.

It was curious that Steve had taken his little backpack, yet he had left his ITE remote on the table with his BlackBerry. Danny picked up the remote, and examined it for the first time. It basically resembled a black, thick iPod nano complete with LCD screen and wheel control. It was locked, with a key and padlock graphic on the screen. Technology was so very clever. Steve tweaked and flicked the control depending on the situation, and, Danny knew, switched his ears off, when pained or in a very noisy situation.

Carefully, Danny set it back by Steve’s phone. Thinking on cell phones, he got his own one out and laboriously constructed a text to Chin, ostensibly checking up on him, and because he was curious to know how they were doing. Chin was pretty good at responding to texts, but there was no quick reply.

It was taking Steve an inordinate time for a simple piss. He leaned out of the booth, looking up along the path of the conservatory. An old guy, rotund, wearing a hideously colourful shirt with a toucan print, came out of the restroom. The double doors swung behind him, and while it was a restricted view, the restroom looked empty.

Danny grabbed the BlackBerry and remote, and stood.

“Two seconds; I’m not running.” Danny extended two fingers to the waitress and started towards the
facilities.

“Your companion stepped outside after he came out of the restroom,” she said, coming over to Danny.

“What?”

“Yes.” She pointed to a set of saloon doors, constructed to look like something out of western, albeit in bamboo.

Danny pulled out his wallet, and thrust a mess of bills at her. “That’s enough?”

“Should be. I can--”

“Keep the tip.” Danny was out the batwing doors and on the sidewalk. Steve had intended to come back; otherwise he wouldn’t have left his cell phone or his remote. Danny couldn’t call him. What the fuck had happened? Steve had been prickly uncomfortable by their conversation but he hadn’t been freaked.

Where was he?

~*~

#61#

The sidewalk was busy with people, holidaymakers of all shapes and sizes, sharply dressed business women and men, support personnel, and folk simply goofing off. The road was busy. A brass band was playing on the grassy park across the street. Cars revved their engines at the traffic lights ahead.

Danny cast left and right.

A family of six, the dad easily the side of a small shed, moved off the sidewalk to enter the hotel’s main entrance. A duckling-like line of kids trooped in dad’s wake.

“Steve!” Danny hollered.

Steve stood in front of a short blonde woman wearing a purple top and a short black mini skirt. His hands were splayed out and he jerked them back and forth vigorously. She was giving it back just as intently, her finger stabbing at his chest.

Danny jogged over. “Steve?”

“You’ve actually been on the islands, Mare? Why didn’t you come home?”

“Steve, you okay?” Danny was breathing hard, even if it had only been the shortest of jogs. His mind had gone a hundred thousand places and none of them had been good.

“Danny.” Steve stared at him. His eyes were wide and bright.

“Hi, I’m Danny,” he said to the stranger.

“Danny?” she said, charily. “Danny Williams?”

“Yeah, how? Ah…” Danny pointed at Steve and let his finger drift back to the woman. There was little or no physical similarity, but the inference was obvious. “You’re Mary McGarrett. Didn’t know that you were in Honolulu.”
“Are you visiting, Mare? Or have you actually been living here?” Steve persisted.

She crossed her arms, and lifted her chin. “Visiting.”


Mary shrugged a shoulder. “I hadn’t decided.”

“You ‘hadn’t decided’?” Steve echoed again. “It’s your home, Mare.”

“No, it’s not.” Mary shot back. “Remember? I don’t create; I destroy.”

“Oh.” Steve stepped backwards. “Really? That was a long time ago.”

Her eyes shared that same brightness that flashed in Steve’s hurt eyes.

“Morris was upset,” Steve continued. “You didn’t have to take it to heart.”

“Grandmother agreed.”

“She did not,” Steve said truculently and defensively.

Oh, there was a story there of monumental proportions. Danny winced, hunting for clue as how to act in the face of Godzilla meeting Mothra.

“And who are you?” Mary demanded.

Danny splayed his hand over his chest. “Danny. I told you.”

“So you’re a resident. What’s your thing?” She looked him up and down.

Steve shifted over to the left, closer to Danny. And then he said, with great deliberation, “Danny’s my boyfriend, Mare.”

“Holy shit!” Her mouth actually dropped open. Her jaw shut with a clack that made Danny wince. Grinning wildly, she said, “You actually got the balls to act on your inherent gayness. Colour me surprised.”

Steve rolled his eyes, and Danny was offended on his behalf. But Steve seemed to take it in his stride.

“You never change,” Steve said.

“Apparently you do.” Mary stood a little taller. “I thought that you said he was deaf,” she said to Danny, and then mercurially, her attention slid straight back to Steve. “You don’t seem deaf.”

“What does deaf look like?” Danny said immediately.

Steve did affronted really well, but Mary seemed impervious to his upset like any familiar little sister.

“I can buy him a t-shirt,” Danny said, “with the word ‘deaf’ on if that helps.”

“Danny,” Steve gripped Danny’s shoulder with a warm hand.

Mary subsided. Evidently, she realised amidst high emotions that she had gone a little too far.

“You look well, Steve,” she said, and she chewed on her bottom lip.
And, Danny thought proudly, he did. Steve had dressed up today. The teal blue complimented him in a hundred ways. His hair was a little long with an enticing curl, especially at the nape of his neck. He had put on a handful of pounds, moving away from gaunt ill health.

“Getting there,” Steve said. “You all right?”

She shrugged. “Sure.”

Abruptly the not-conversation segued into uncomfortable, with all participants standing in the middle of a busy sidewalk with people skirting around them.

“Do you want to go for brunch?” Steve said, even though he and Danny had just had a late breakfast.

“No, sorry, I can’t,” she said immediately. “I’m meeting a friend.”

“Mare,” Steve began.

“Don’t call me Mare. It’s Mary.”

Steve backed off, sliding further into Danny’s orbit, his arm moving to cup his shoulders.

“I’ll give you my cell phone number.” Steve patted his pockets, hunting for his phone.

“Here.” Danny handed over Steve’s BlackBerry and remote.

“Oh, thanks.” Steve stroked the screen bringing it to life and looked expectantly at Mary.

“Okay.” She got her own phone from her enormous blue and gold chain dressed shoulder bag.

“What’s your number?”

Steve rattled it off, in lieu of linking his phone with her phone, since she wasn’t volunteering her own number. Carefully, she programmed the number manually in her phone. Danny took it as a win.

“I guess I’d better be going.”

“I…,” Steve began.

“Leave it, Steve.” She turned away, blinking hard.

“No. I…” Steve started. Danny felt his muscle tense. “Look, Mare -- Mary. There’s stuff going on. If you are visiting, it might be sensible for you to cut it short.”

“What?” she said stridently, spinning back towards him. “What does that mean?”

Steve rubbed the divot between his eyes. “It’s a naval intelligence thing from before. I’m -- everyone in Seolh -- is under protective custody. It’s precautionary. But I wouldn’t want you to get caught up in it.”

“I don’t believe you. You’re so fucking complicated.” She hefted her shoulder bag higher and stalked away without another word.

They stood amidst the sea of people around them, Danny providing a prop for Steve should he need the support.

“Okay, that went well, not,” Danny said succinctly.
“You're not kidding.”

Steve kept his focus on his sister stomping away in her tiny pink Keds. She weaved between the people on the busy sidewalk, evidently trying to get as far away as possible.

“Okay,” Steve said inexplicably. “Now.”

“What?”

Steve didn’t answer but started walking in Mary’s direction.

Danny grabbed a hold of Steve’s shoulder. “We’re following her? We’re following your sister.”

“Of course,” Steve said simply. “There’s something going on with her. We need to find out what.”

Danny used the hold to spin him about. Steve loomed over him, nostrils flaring in shock at the manhandling.

“No, Steve. That is a woman, upset and emotional, and you can’t just stalk her.”

“That is not a woman; that is my sister. And she’s obviously in some sort of trouble.”

Steve dropped his shoulder in a rolling disconnected sort of movement and, abruptly, Danny was standing alone on the sidewalk and Steve was making long legged strides away in Mary McGarrett’s direction.

Shaking his head, Danny scurried in his wake.

~*~

Mary kept up a rapid pace for several blocks, but as she hit the shopping district she slowed. Darting across the road around slow moving traffic, she headed to an open air bazaar with vendors selling arts and crafts, clothes, and food of what looked like every ethnicity in the world. The old fashioned lampposts dotted along the street were festooned with bunting formed of flags from a variety of countries. Street performers moved in between the stalls: juggling; fire-breathing; miming; busking, and even setting up something that looked like a flea circus.

“Obviously not meeting someone,” Steve noted, as Mary stopped to paw through a table of brightly coloured scarves.

“So what’s the ‘create-destroy’ thing?” Danny asked as they fell back to a slow amble and pretended to be engrossed by a guy doing magic tricks.

“Oh--” Steve shrugged, “--Morris had painted this awesome picture of us all outside the House doing stuff. It was a little weird -- we were all kind of spiky and angular. She tore the corner off. We were all looking at it. She just reached out and ripped the corner off. Grandmother was furious. Morris was in tears. She could never explain why. She just did it.”

“How old was she?”


“What was it like growing up at Seolh? I mean after, you know, living with your Mom and Dad? You did live with your Mom and Dad, didn’t you, until ….”

Steve glanced at Danny down his long nose, dubiously. “We lived in the Aina Haina
neighbourhood. Dad was at work a lot. Mom taught. Me and Mare spent a lot of time at Grandmother’s. Moving there afterwards… wasn’t that much different.”

There was more said in the phrasing and omissions than his actual words. Danny could only stare at him until Steve looked away, effectively ending the conversation. Danny didn’t know Mary, but he assumed a young, teenaged girl living in a commune with an itinerant bunch of obsessive creative types wasn’t the easiest thing to swallow.

Or so he guessed.

“Discipline. She’s always needed some focus. If she was in the service--” Steve snorted. “I would know what to do.”

“Make her run laps?” Danny said, deliberately shifting so Steve could see his face -- he wasn’t stopping the conversation that easily.

“That would be where I would start. Come on.” Steve slid away from the magician’s stand, moving to a booth filled with insanely decorative mirrors.

“And what, Captain Space Cadet, are you going to do when you find out what’s up with her?”

“Fix it.”

And that was probably where all the mistakes originated. Danny kicked himself, because he really didn’t know Mary; it was all supposition on his part.

“Steve?” Danny got in close, and realised that Steve was using the array of mirrors to keep an eye on his sister five booths down. “Don’t take over. I mean, yeah, if she’s in danger do your thing, but not if it’s just stuff.”

“Stuff?”

“Yeah, like boyfriend stuff.”

Steve’s expression could only be described as pained. Danny laughed. The rising pink flush on Steve’s defined cheekbones layered cute over the pained. It was hilarious. Steve stuffed his hands in his pants pockets and glowered at the mirror. The saleswoman was watching them charily, and had evidently decided to err on the side of caution and let them look at her mirrors. Danny flashed her a smile.

Danny spotted the pair at the exact same second that Steve scoped them out. It was the wide angle Tamron 17-35 Canon lens pointed deliberately in their direction that had caught Danny’s attention. Steve turned like a robot, and set his laser eyesight on them. The photographer patiently continued firing shot after shot. His assistant standing behind him was neatly masked by his bulk. Only a high bun of glossy black hair was on show as she cowered behind his shoulder. Plainly caught, Steve glanced to where his sister was shopping and then back to photographer.

As fast as an arrow fired from a crossbow, Steve blasted way, leaving Danny standing open mouthed in his wake. The straight line to the photographer included the table by a booth, a stroller, a handful of people… Steve vaulted over the table and then the stroller (to screams of terror from the mother), and dodged around people, intent on the man.

The photographer bolted, like any reasonably intelligent person with a seriously pissed off SEAL coming down on them. The assistant hared off at a tangent, shrieking and waving her arms. Steve pursued the photographer.
Danny lost two long seconds, stunned by the predator-like speed that Steve displayed. Madly, he turned to check on Mary McGarrett. She like everyone else in the crowd had turned, caught by the race and screams. She spotted him instantly.

Danny started after Steve, weaving amidst the scattering people.

The photographer was running straight up the boulevard. Steve was gaining fast. Running in a straight line was a foolish choice for a chunky man with a skinny runner on his heels. Like a cat playing with a mouse, Steve lined up with the man, ran with him for a step, and then bump-tackled him right into a booth selling bolts of fabric. The man took out half the booth, collapsing it to the ground, to screams from the young seller. Steve went ass over tea kettle, long limbs tumbling, like a slapstick gymnast, rolling over the other side of the booth and out of sight.

“Steve!” Danny yelled.

Steve popped up on command, and promptly toppled over. He swore volubly. The photographer flailed amidst the shambles of the booth, struggling to roll over like a turtle on its back. Steve skittered along on his hands and knees like a crab. Grunting, he flipped the photographer over, yanked a strip of sample fabric from a display and tied the man’s fat wrists together. He howled in protest.

Danny skidded to a halt. “Shit, are you okay?”

Imperiously, Steve stretched out his hand and shook it. Obediently, Danny loaned him a hand, gripping Steve’s larger hand strongly and helping him to his feet. Steve weaved like a bamboo in a storm.

“Are you alright?” Danny splayed his hand over Steve’s sternum, holding him steady.

“Yes,” Steve said tersely. “Check his camera.”

“What?”

“Check it.” Steve pointed haphazardly in the direction of the camera lying in a basket of ribbons and bows.

“Check it? Check it?” Danny echoed. Steve was listing slightly to the side; Danny wasn’t letting go to check on any damn camera.

Steve yawned, canting his head to the side.

“Did you hit your head?” Danny demanded.

“No!” Steve snapped, he lurched away from Danny to grab one of the decorative lampposts. “I moved too fast. Balance. Camera!”

The fat guy was rolling in the bulky debris of the stall, trying to get his knees under him. He was swearing fit to colour the air blue. Steve left the support of the lamppost, dropping to his knees beside the man.

“Who are you?” Steve grabbed the man’s shoulder and forced him onto his back.

“Fuck off, you insane bastard,” the photographer hollered, spraying spittle.

“I don’t believe it,” Danny grated, finally remembering that Steve’s deafness affected his balance. It
didn’t seem to be stopping him, though.

“Camera,” Steve prompted. He rocked back on his heels, staying close to the earth.

“Okay. Okay.” Danny grabbed it, flicked the camera into the play function and scrolled back through a sports mode capture series of them both in the market bazaar. Past their photographs were a detailed selection of women, who Danny guessed were models -- based on their uniform height and ultra, verging on skeletal, skinniness -- striding past the lens with their hands or handbags covering their faces.

“Another paparazzi.” Danny summarised. “Or is it paparazzo, if there’s only one of them?”

Deftly, Steve patted the man down and extracted his wallet. Flipping it open, he stopped at one leaf, and thrust the wallet in the man’s face.

“There’s an injunction, you parasite,” Steve snarled.

“Gag order,” he spat back. “What are you hiding? How did you get away with murdering the governor?”

Steve recoiled. “What?”

“Ha! Murderer!” he screamed, writhing ineffectually on the ground.

“Hey, what’s going on?” a man in the crowd asked loudly.

Suddenly, Danny realised that they stood in the centre of a ring of people, stunned by the suddenness of Steve’s takedown. The gap between them and the crowd spoke of unease. A couple of folk also had their cameras and smartphones out.

“Help me,” the photographer beseeched, “he’s insane. He attacked me.”

“Hey, man—” a local guy, brown-skinned and taller than Steve, lifted his chin, “—what’s going on?”

Steve flashed a scowl at the crowd. He had his own BlackBerry out and was squinting at the screen. In his other hand he still held the photographer’s open wallet.

“Stand aside. Stand aside.” A voice commanded. The crowd parted at the order. A uniformed cop appeared. He was short, Asian, and a bit wrinkly for a beat cop. He took in the scene instantly.

“Stevie?”

Steve lifted his head from his phone. “Uncle Choi. Hi….”

Geez, did Steve know everyone on the island?

“What’s going on?” the policeman, Uncle Choi, asked.

“This creep has been stalking us.”

“Let me up, you bastard,” the photographed howled.

“You shut up,” Choi said addressing the photographer. He then waved his hand at the crowd. “And you people, move along. Now. Go on.”

As orders went it was casual and unfussy, maybe it was his hand on his holstered weapon, or kanaka and Kama’aina relaxation, but the crowd started to disperse.
“Help me! Help me?” the photographer yelped. “Someone.”

“Shut it,” the cop drawled. “Stevie?”

The crowd frittered away and Danny saw Mary at the back, watching, her hands covering her mouth. Catching his line of sight, abruptly she feigned relaxation, dropping her hands.

“So, keiki.” Uncle Choi looked down at Steve. “What’s the story?”

“This piece of shit—” he glared at the photographer, “—is contravening a national security letter issued to his paper.” Huffing out a breath, Steve got his feet under him. Clearly finding his equilibrium, he stood as firm a redwood braced against a gale.

“I am not. I know nothing about that,” the photographer yelped.

Steve flashed the man’s wallet at the cop. Danny could see that it had fell open on the distinctive yellow and green press pass for the Honolulu News Tribune.

“You know fine well the consequences of flouting a NSL.” Steve regarded the photojournalist with nostril flaring contempt. “You’re not an unrelated reporter. You’re an employee of the Tribune.”

Danny watched Mary watching the tableau. Suddenly, she strode away stretching her arm high, clearly flagging a cab.

“Steve?” Danny interrupted, as he flicked the camera back into picture-capture mode.

A cab pulled up besides Mary. Slowly, she extended her middle finger in a perfectly understandable action in Danny’s direction, and then jumped into the back seat of the taxi.

Danny lifted his second purloined paparazzi camera of the week, and snapped off a high definition shot of the cab pulling away.

~*~

#62#

“Here.” Steve tossed the Ford’s keys roughly in Danny’s direction, forcing him to lunge to the side.

Steve growled and stalked towards the truck with the perfect deliberation of a drunk. Danny flicked the alarm off and unlocked the door as Steve reached it.

“Thanks,” Steve said tersely, as he clambered into the passenger seat, tossing his backpack at his feet.

“You want to lay down in the backseat?” Danny offered, unsure of what was needed. The reading that he had painstakingly extracted from Google and Wikipedia with his goofy thumbs had not covered what to do with fucked up ears and balance. He hadn’t thought to look that up specifically. In hindsight, that had been a mistake.

Seated, Steve had his eyes closed firmly and his head braced against the headrest. He reached blindly for the door handle to slam the door shut.

“Steve.” Danny kept the truck door open with his knee and leaned in. “Steve? Do I need to take you to your ear guy? What’s his name, Messel? Steve?”

Steve cracked open an eye. “What?”
“Do we need to go see your ear guy, Messel?”

“No.” Steve closed his eye. “It will pass. It’s just vertigo. I’m gonna switch my aids off, okay? It will pass.”

“Really?” Danny said loudly.

“Danny, this is nothing.” Steve paused as he rooted for his remote control in his pants. “I couldn’t even lift my head off a pillow when it first happened. I’m just gonna shut my eyes and be quiet for a while. Okay?”

“Quiet? Quiet? I can do quiet.” Danny slid his hand up Steve’s neck and threaded his fingers through his short hair. The skin under his fingertips was cool and edging to clammy. It was a miniscule movement, but Steve leaned into the caress.

Furious Steve was furious, Danny observed. Once again, he had been effectively sidelined by his injuries. Uncle Choi had called for local assist and another couple of beat cops had taken the photographer away. Danny wasn’t too sure what they were going to charge the man with, but it was out of their hands. Uncle Choi had sent Little Stevie home.

Home, Danny decided -- settling the matter with a firm kiss to Steve’s temple.

~*~

“Steve, we’re back.” His colour was edging to greenish. Motion sickness, Danny diagnosed.

There was no response. If his eyes were closed and his ears were off; Steve was very deaf.

Danny gripped Steve’s thigh.

Steve jumped in the seat. “What!”

“It’s okay. We’re back at Seolh.”

“Oh yeah.” Steve squinted his eyes to mere slits and reached for the door.

“Hey, come on.” Danny kept a hold of Steve’s thigh. “You can sit for a minute. We’ve stopped.”

“Sure… fine,” Steve said nonsensically, pulling away he got out of the truck. He crossed the grassy lawn, heading unerringly to the kitchen. Danny grabbed his new camera, got out of the truck and chased around it after him. Steve was a man on a mission. He didn’t, however, head to his eyrie, but went straight for the television room, and planted face down on the long sofa, muffling his head between a cushion and the backrest.

“Come on, Babe, talk to me.” Danny dropped onto the arm of the sofa, tossing the paparazzo’s camera aside on one of the armchairs. He stroked the back of Steve’s neck. The long muscles and tendons were bunched up hard. Steve let out a low moan, like the air being let out of a balloon, as Danny kneaded the tense muscles. Hoping that he was doing the right thing, Danny kept up the massage. “Steve?”

He leaned over but the only ear that he could see was clear of any tiny beige aid. Steve had taken them out.

“Stupid ears,” Steve grumbled.

“Yeah, I know,” Danny commiserated, moving to dig his fingers into the base of Steve’s skull. “No
more somersaults, okay?”

Steve sort of squeaked and sagged, puddling in Danny’s hands, so he took that as permission to continue. Danny liked the squeaky sound; he wanted to elicit that again.

“Pssst?”

Kono whispering stopped him dead. Steve moaned in protest. Half turning on the armrest Danny caught Kono in the doorway, face scrunched in concern.

“Do I call Malia?” she mouthed.

Danny shook his head, part amused that for once he knew something that Kono didn’t.

“D--” Steve demanded.

“Yeah. Yeah.” Danny dug his thumb and index finger between the two long muscles running down behind his ears. Steve made his adorable -- Danny would never tell him -- mouse squeak.


Danny shook his head. “Vertigo,” he whispered. And, Danny wondered, possibly a smidgeon of sibling induced stress?

Kono winced. She blew out her cheeks pretending to be about to hurl. Danny nodded. A subtle shift under his fingers alerted him to a now sleeping SEAL. Carefully, Danny drew back and raised his finger to his lips. As he breathed out for quiet, he smelled Steve, salty in the main, but sweaty and stressed.

Kono nodded in the direction of the kitchen. “Coffee?”

Danny crept after her, pulling the door ajar. Once in the kitchen, Kono stood aside and let Danny wash his hands and then finagle coffee from the House coffee machine.

“What happened?” she asked.

“Pass the milk over. Another paparazzo trying to get photos of Steve. He took him down, but--” Danny spiralled his finger, “--and bam, he went green.”

“Yeah, he did that early on a lot. Chin said it was because of his ears.” Kono poured milk into their mugs. “I think that he had meds for it when it was real bad.”

Danny looked in the direction of the television room. “Best leave him sleeping, I think?”

“Probably.” Kono opened the door of Chin’s tea cupboard and contemplated the array before them. “There will be something in here to settle his stomach.”

“Really?” There were a lot of teas. “Where the Hell do we start?”

“Chin,” Kono said succinctly, getting her cell phone out.

“Chin’s kind of busy with Malia.” Danny had not had a reply to his text from earlier. “Understandably.”

“Looks like you’re going to be an Auntie,” Danny said with a wide grin, and braced for the fireworks.

“That’s awesome!” Kono’s smile was instantaneous. She was incandescent with glee.

She practically leaped on Danny, hugging him against her sparse chest. Danny didn’t object.

“A baby in the House. This is going to be so cool.”

“Well,” Danny said, hooking his chin over her shoulder, “maybe Chin will move in with Malia.”


Danny was surprised how much her surety comforted him. He was brand new at Seolh, but he didn’t want it to change.

“This is so cool.” Kono released him and danced around the kitchen table. Holding her arms high in the air, she twined the blades of her hands sinuously around each other to an internal rhythm. “I’m going to be an Auntie. I’m going to be an Auntie.”

Oh, for his camera.

“So, if Malia is going to move in sooner rather than later--” Kono continued to dance, “--we need to move Chin into another suite. He’ll need more than the studio set up.”

“Well…” Danny pondered. The room next to his studio was basically a mirror image of his own, apart from the shower. Kono’s studio, one along, was basically exactly the same as Danny’s. Then there was Toast’s den of electronics followed by Chin’s room. The little staircase that led up to Steve’s eyrie was next along the corridor. Grace could have probably drawn a map of the different rooms in Seolh, but Danny really hadn’t ventured into any rooms other than what was needed.

“Chin will want to keep painting in his studio. He chose it for the light.” Kono made one final pirouette. “I guess he’ll want the rooms opposite.”

“Rooms opposite?” Danny squinted, contemplating on the architecture. Of course there were the rooms on the other side of the corridor. They wouldn’t get the morning light. Idiot. “Has this place ever been filled to capacity?”

“Full of artists?” Kono checked.

“I guess. Creative types?”

“I think that it was used as a hospital during the Second World War.” Kono said, finger drifting to her mouth. “Mamo says that the 1960s were awesome. In all senses of the word. That’s pretty much when Seolh came into its own.”

Danny grinned. “Like Woodstock?”

“Have you checked out the gardens that Chin looks after?” Kono regarded him.

“Not particularly, no.”

“You haven’t seen The Bush?”

“The Bush?” Danny said, capitals evident.
“Oh, you’re so sweet.”

Danny stared at her suspiciously, extrapolating on the Woodstock connection. “I’m guessing that this is a bush that could get us all arrested?”

“Nah. It’s been there a long time and the Kellys and the Keawes and the Kahikes all know that it’s there.” Kono sucked on an imaginary stubby cigarette.

“So I live in a drug den?” Danny summarised.

“No. I don’t indulge. Chin, once in a blue moon. Toast, however....” Kono shrugged. “Honestly, I don’t think that he harvests his weed from The Bush; it’s like seven foot tall. I would guess it’s past its sell by date.”

“I’m kind of guessing that this place in the sixties was outrageous.”

“The photos are hilarious.”

Danny snorted, envisioning mini skirts and pillbox hats, ridiculously long eyelashes, and paisley prints with bell bottoms.

“Hello, keikis.” Mrs. K. carried one of the little wood crates that they used when harvesting fruit and vegetables from the plots into the kitchen. “Stevie’s in the playroom room, asleep.”

Danny grinned, imagining Mrs. K. at House parties.

“Hi, Mrs. K. Hey, how long have you been housekeeper?”

“Uhm.” She set the empty crate down on the kitchen table. “Since just after my oldest was born. 1965.”

It occurred to Danny that, maybe, Mrs. K should be thinking about retiring. But he kind of doubted that she considered looking after Seolh’s residents as a job. She came and went on her own schedule. If she did more than seven hours a week, Danny would have been surprised.

“Stevie’s asleep on the sofa.” She shook her head at them both, a tad chastising.

“Yeah.” Danny nodded. “His ears were bugging him.”

“When you put someone down for a nap, you should put them on their back.” Picking the crate back up, Mrs. K. headed for the kitchen door shaking her head all the way.

Danny bit his lips. Foolishly, he stared at Kono as he tried not to laugh. Kono’s face puckered with glee. She waited until Mrs. K had wandered past the windows out of sight, and then started laughing.

“Steve would be absolutely mortified,” Danny said.

“Do you want to check on him or me?” Kono asked, failing to find deadpan.

“I don’t need to check on him,” Danny said. “He won’t have smothered himself.”

“Are you sure?” Kono said singsong.

“I’ll prove it to you,” Danny said, and scowled, because he had manoeuvred himself or, possibly, been manoeuvred. Regardless, they were checking up on Steve.
Kono bent over, cackling like a hyena. Danny stalked past her, nose in the air. Laughing so much she could barely breathe, Kono hee’d, and held her ribs. Hiccupping, she tottered after him.

Danny curled around the door and peered into the television room.

Mrs. K. had somehow cajoled Steve on to his side, and draped the throw from the back of sofa over his shoulders. Even better, she had pulled the coffee table over, so if he did roll off the cushions, he would not fall on the floor.

“You’re in good company, Mom.” Kono patted Danny’s shoulder.

“Dad,” Danny corrected. He turned and dug his finger into her side, tickling. Kono squirmed away from his unerrring skill, and Danny steered her back into the kitchen. He was definitely putting out beets when they laid the table for lunch.

~*~

Danny toasted a loaf of sliced bread that was a little past its best, and then layered on a mix of mushed up beef tomatoes, basil, oregano with garlic and white truffle oil, and stuck them under the grill in the oven.

“Mmmm.” Kono bent over beside him and licked her lips.

Danny kind of figured that the aroma would draw Steve out from his nap and into the kitchen. He had stuck his nose into the television room a couple of times and there had definitely been drowsy muttering on the last check.

“Do you want to get the salad stuff and anchovies out of the fridge?” he asked.

“Sure.” She turned to the fridge. “Hey, Steve.”

Danny’s siren call of warm bread and garlic had worked. Steve had an interesting cowlick going on and his cheek was sleep-creased. Angling with intent, Steve came straight over to Danny, bypassing Kono. Automatically, Danny opened his arms -- he was astounded, but Steve hugged in like a missile, folding down and engulfing him. Danny was once again impressed by how big Steve was.

“Hey, Babe.” Danny threaded his fingers through the hair at the back of Steve’s skull.


“It’s okay,” Danny said, quietly. He looked to Kono for a clue. But she was conspicuous by her absence: she had made herself scarce. Danny concentrated on hugging. Steve smelled warm and savoury and sweaty. The only thing that Danny could kiss was his ear, so he did. He was content to stand, broad under Steve’s weight, and be there.

“Sorry.” Steve hugged and released. He yawned, and then rubbed his face. “Man, you must think I’m a total nut bar.”

Danny canted his head to the side and considered him. In another universe, he might have ranted at Steve about his lemming-like characteristics in running down an unknown -- what if the guy had had a gun? Hollered at him for being embarrassed for needing a hug when he had woken from a bad dream. But this wasn’t the time, actually...

“I’m happy to hug you anytime, day or night. I would be annoyed, no… aggravated, exasperated, and irritated if you didn’t hug me when you need it.” Danny extended his arms, showing that he was
intact and unharmed, since he could guess what had upset Steve.

Steve squinted at him.

“You don’t have your ears in, do you?” Danny tapped his own ear.

“No,” Steve said succinctly.

Danny reached out and entwined his fingers in the collar of Steve’s shirt and pulled him down. The light bristle of midday skin against his own made him shiver. Steve’s lips parted, and Danny nipped his bottom lip lightly with his teeth. A warm hand slipped under the hem of Danny’s t-shirt and tugged him in tight against a firm body. Kisses in the kitchen was becoming something of a theme. Steve moved along his jaw, kissing all the way. Danny’s toes curled.

The oven timer pinged. Steve continued to press lips against Danny’s skin, mapping back to his mouth. He stopped, and pressed his forehead against Danny’s.

“Thanks.”

Danny leaned back in their embrace. “Why?” he said slowly and clearly.

Steve shrugged. “Being you.” Suddenly, he sniffed and looked to the oven.

“Lunch.” Danny limited himself to one word communication. He squirmed a hand free, and pretended to munch on his fingers.

“Oh.” Steve released him. “Smells good.”

Bending to look into the oven, Danny noted that they were a little on the well-done side. They were edging towards caramelised as he pulled the baking tray from the oven. Steve didn’t need any instructions. He took serving plate that Danny had in the sink warming in hot water and dried it en route to the kitchen table. As Danny slid the bruschetta onto the plate, he observed that Steve wasn’t putting his aids in.

“Coffee?” Danny asked.

Steve scrunches up his nose. “I’ll just have water.”

Kono sailed back into the kitchen, and immediately took up from where she had left off, opening the fridge and reaching for the salad mixings and the anchovies.

“You okay, Steve?” she asked as she grabbed food.

Steve glanced at Danny.

Danny nodded.

“Yes,” Steve said.

“Good.” Kono turned away from the fridge and set the fixings on the table. “How about some cheese? Auntie Mele brought some interesting ones to the Christmas luau. I think that Chin put some aside when everyone was tidying up and parcelling up the food.”

“Tomatoes and cheese -- match made in heaven.” Danny said.

Kono pulled a cheese board from the fridge. They worked around each other, finishing putting the
typical House lunch together. Steve took a second to toss cold water on his face, as Danny made his fifth coffee for the day, and Kono hit the lunch bell.

Mamo appeared as if by magic from the workshops out back and Toast came clattering down the stairs as if the hounds of hell were on his heels. Mrs.K. had gone home earlier after spending an hour ironing.

“Food! Smells awesome.” Toast dropped into his favourite chair and rubbed his hands together.

The trick with good food was good ingredients. Danny had learnt that lesson at his mother and nana’s knee. While the sunshine in Hawaii was pretty much constant and annoying, coupled with the rain, it made for delicious fruit and vegetables. Danny sat, and Steve dropped next to him, shifting his chair a little closer, and pushed his thigh against Danny’s.

Steve typically picked at his round of toast and sipped on his water, but Danny didn’t call him on it, even when he didn’t go for the bowl of anchovies like a puffin or seal.

Conversation ranged around them, Danny was content to be the bulwark so Steve could sit in the eye.

~*~

#63#

Steve didn’t put in his aids back in as they ate lunch. Danny didn’t know if it was because his ears were hurting, because sound would upset his balance, or because he didn’t want to engage in conversation. It was probably a combination of all three, Danny supposed, and because he was an anti-social, private, control freak.

Steve flashed a quick smile at him and reached for an anchovy.

And also really endearing and protective.

Steve limited himself to only three anchovies and then stood, slowly, and started clearing the dishes away. Mamo started to help -- as he reached across the table to grab some dirty dishes, the elderly man stared questioningly at Danny.

“Everything’s fine,” Danny said quietly.

“Okay,” Mamo said, but he studied Danny.

“You know.” Danny shrugged and stood up to help, even though he had prepared and set out the lunch.

All working together, it didn’t take long to clean up, even if Steve preferred to hand wash the dishes instead of using the old dishwasher.

“Gonna.” Steve jerked his thumb over his shoulder and wandered out of the kitchen.

Steve still hadn’t put his aids in. Stymied by the fact that conversation simply could not happen, Danny stood in the kitchen, and gazed heavenward.

“What’s happening, keiki?” Mamo asked.

“Honestly, a bunch of stuff.” Danny stared at the older man. “We bumped into Mary when we were downtown.”
“Whoa.” Kono rocked back on her heels. “What happened?”

“They fought in the most pissily passively, indirectly aggressive way I’ve seen since watching Downtown Abbey with my ex.”

“Pissily?” Kono asked.

“Rachel – it’s an English thing.” Danny hand waved the word away, it was obvious in context. “And then there was another paparazzo trying to get photos. Steve caught him, but he moved too fast, and had an attack of vertigo. The guy -- the paparazzo -- accused him of killing the governor.”

“What!” Mamo gasped.

“That’s insane!” Kono said.

“Yes. But the Navy’s issued some sort of letter telling Newspapers not to investigate. So they’re curious. Then Uncle, Uncle….” Danny cast around for the name. “Choi. Your Uncle Choi, Kono?”

“Chin’s really. But also mine.” Kono leaned forward intently.

“Appeared and arrested the photojournalist. I’ve no idea what he’s charging the photojournalist with, but Uncle Choi basically sent Steve home -- because he looked like death warmed up -- pale as a ghost.”

“He was very quiet at lunch,” Mamo said unnecessarily.

“He was sidelined and couldn’t do anything about it.” Danny threw the damp dish towel over the oven hood.

Kono winced.

“Okay….” Mamo shifted his bulk backwards, and leaned against the kitchen counter. “Mary, Mary…. You saw Mary. How was she?”

That was the question that everyone asked.

“Not happy to see Steve,” Danny summarised after a moment’s pause.

“Drugs?” Mamo asked reluctantly.

“I don’t think so,” Danny said slowly. “I don’t pretend to know much of anything about drugs. But she looked healthy. Tanned. Bright eyed.”

“Is she going to come visit us?” Mamo sounded a little sad.

“I don’t know. She has Steve’s cell phone number, but she wouldn’t give us her number.”

Mamo contemplated. “If she’s staying on the island we can ask around and find out where she’s staying.”

“Yeah,” Kono said eagerly.

“Why don’t we leave it?” Danny offered. “The ball’s in her court; she knows Steve wants to see her. He has no way of calling her.”

Danny thought on the photo that he had taken of the taxi -- the image would be of good enough
resolution that the tags would be able to be read. Steve’s contacts in the Navy would probably be
able to find out where she lived. Assuming she’d gone to wherever she was staying.

“What if she’s in trouble?” Mamo sighed. “How can we help her if we can’t talk to her?”

“That’s a given,” Kono said, and then covered her mouth, abashed. “That wasn’t nice.”

Danny was fairly sure that something was going on. Complicated seemed to be the raison d’être of
Seolh.

“We’ll give her until the second of January, and then we’ll find her,” Mamo decided.

~*~

Danny retrieved the Canon from the television room and then remembered that he had left Steve’s
backpack in the truck. While he hadn’t looked in it, he had a good idea what was inside. There
weren’t any kids around but he took himself to the Ford with alacrity.

It turned out that Steve -- the military survivalist nut bar -- had packed for a trip up the side of a
mountain and back down instead of a visit to a high-end, prissy coffee house in downtown
Honolulu. First aid kit, multi tool, two survival blankets, two micro towels, power bars, packs of nuts
and raisins, a scarily serrated foot long knife, small set of binoculars…. He didn’t find a gun. Danny
had thought there would be one in the pack, but Steve must have been secreted one away in an ankle
holster or somewhere easily accessible.

“Money? Different currencies?” Danny marvelled as he flipped through a fat leather wallet. There
were easily thousands of dollars in large denomination US bills, Mexican and Philippine pesos, and
Japanese yen. Okay, not hill climbing. Steve was planning on running away. He rifled further, and
found a Ziploc bag with five days supply of antibiotics, phenergen, a small jar of moisturiser, and a
pack of tiny, fingernail-sized batteries. Also a box of Danny’s Alka Seltzer.

Danny stomped into the House, up the stairs, and continued stomping all the way to the eyrie.

“Steven J. McGarrett.” He held up the backpack. “What the Hell is this?”

Steve, lying supine on his sofa in his garret, dropped a folder on his chest, and stared at him. His eyes
darted, left and right, checking.

“Thanks?” Steve hedged.

“Put your fucking aids in.”

“Hang on.” Steve extended a finger.

“What’s the plan with this thing?” Danny shook the bag. “There are two sets of blankets. And
you’ve got my Alka-Seltzer. What the fuck is this for? I was expecting guns and shit, but this will
allow both of us to go on the run.”

Steve palmed his eyes, but dropped his hands quickly. “You’re yelling and you’re talking fast, and--”
he gritted his teeth, “--I haven’t got my aids in.”

“What are you planning on doing with the duct tape?” Danny pulled out the thick grey roll.

“It’s a survival kit. It’s possibly the worst kit that I’ve put together,” Steve observed. “But there’s
family around. Why are you yelling at me?”
“Why?” Danny shook the backpack again.

“What’s. The. Duct. Tape. For?” Danny deliberated on each word.

“You’d be surprised how useful duct tape is.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Pervert.” Danny snorted. He couldn’t help himself. “Can you put your aids in?”

“Can I wear my hearing aids?” Steve checked. He hadn’t moved from the sofa. Absently Danny noted that his feet were bare. He had long feet with knobbly toes ending in neatly cut toenails.

“Yes.” Danny nodded.

Steve shrugged. “If I had to.”

That he would prefer not, went unsaid.

Danny tossed the backpack on the armchair opposite Steve and plonked down next to it -- even if he would prefer to lie down with him.

“You’re still feeling dizzy.” He made the classic swirly wiggle by his temple with his index finger.

“It will pass,” Steve said with his typical studied practicality.

“You just need quiet, don’t you? Lie still?”

Steve’s forehead scrunched. “Sorry?”

“Damn.” Danny rocketed to his feet, as quickly as he sat down. He crossed the short distance to Steve’s side. “I’m going to do some reading in the museum, okay?”

The frustration was now palpable. Steve reached for the bulky pocket at his right thigh.

“No, Babe.” Danny caught his hand. “It’s okay.”

He leaned over and dropped a kiss on Steve’s parted lips, but straightened before Steve could return the kiss. If Steve was feeling nauseated and weird, it really wasn’t the time for a make out session. And he had also eaten anchovies -- there were limits.

“Research?” Danny pointed over his shoulder. He didn’t wait for permission. He was going to figure the route into the museum’s data archive, if it killed him.

The wall was the light coloured amber wood that dominated Steve’s mock-ship. Danny had already checked the few neat echoes of knots in the natural wood. He contemplated the wall, rubbing his palms together. The door was perfectly concealed and swung inwards. Setting his hands on the area he pushed lightly. He expected a click and the door to sigh open -- he was disappointed.

“Do you want a clue?” Steve asked dryly.

Danny glanced at him in askance over his shoulder.

Steve hadn’t moved a muscle, but he was smiling.

“Okay.” He nodded.
“Warm.”

“You’re kidding. Hotter-colder?” Danny turned back to the wall. He kind of suspected that it was an easy trigger, and close to the door. Making a step backwards away from the door, he waited.

“Colder.”

Okay, back to the door. He rubbed his hands together again, and stepped forwards.

“Warmer.”

When the door opened it swung inwards back into the records room. Danny scrutinised the wall at natural, easy reaching height. Steve wasn’t going to make opening the door difficult.

“Hotter.”

Nothing caught his eye. No smudges of fingerprints were on the polished panelling. Checking the door to the staircase beside the hidden door showed there was nothing on the lintel even remotely like a latch or button.

“Colder.” The grin in Steve’s voice was evident. Danny stood straight again. It had to be an entire panel. Setting his palms face down on the panels at chest height on either side of the concealed entrance, he waited.

“Hottest!”

He pressed, and under his left hand the panel retracted. The secret door fell inwards.

“Goof,” Danny said fondly and went in.

~*~

It was more of the same: boring files in McGarrett senior’s crabby doctor-like handwriting. Occasionally, Danny was distracted by a sideline into a horrible case about the blitzkrieg response of the Yakuza to any real or perceived threats to their authority. No one was safe. Civilian, cop or fellow gang member were equally vulnerable as the Yakuza worked to set their claws in the Islands of Hawaii. Danny could understand why John McGarrett had been determined to stop the encroachment. But the McGarrett family had paid a high price. Danny rubbed his forehead, disillusioned and a little depressed at his insight into the criminal underworld. He leaned over for one of Steve’s mom’s photo albums on the lowest shelf and opened it on his lap.

“Heh. Heh.” It wasn’t the hilarious photographs from the 1960s, but the early 80s judging from the pogo ball that Steve McGarrett appeared to be determined to master, judging from the tense expression on his chubby little face. The next photo showed that falling was inevitable. A tiny girl, holding one of the creepy cabbage patch kids that were so iconic of the 1980s, was pointing and laughing at him. Danny leafed through the pages.

They were family photographs, badly framed, but full of love in sepia tones. Mrs. McGarrett was organised. Each picture was carefully annotated, with names and locations. Family vacations seemed to be restricted to Hawaii but, given the price of airfare, that wasn’t surprising. Danny found his first picture of Grandma Audrey. There was a lot of Steve in her height and build, in Audrey’s piercing, direct gaze at the photographer -- or, more accurately, a lot of Audrey in Steve. They had the same nose. His first thought was that Audrey seemed austere, but then he saw the next set of photographs of a beach picnic. Audrey held six or seven year old Mary in her arms, turning and protecting her with her body as a now skinny and gangly Steve kicked waves of surf at them. They were all
laughing. The notation read: Audrey, Mary and Steve playing, September 1985. Seolh, judging from
the next set of photographs, had not changed. It occurred to Danny that he didn’t know if Audrey
was Steve’s maternal or paternal grandmother.

Danny slotted the album back. Mrs. McGarrett either didn’t take a lot of photographs or these albums
were her favourite photographs, since one chunky album covered 1982-1985. Counting back along
the shelf, Danny selected an album that should provide ample teasing opportunities.

“Goldmine.” Danny rocked back on his butt, overbalanced, and sprawled out on the Arabian carpet.
He held the album carefully. Page number one tented above his head. Stevie McGarrett, March
1978, in camo footsie pyjamas, rolled on a colourful patchwork quilt, intent on getting his foot in his
mouth. Danny was going to scan this and, when his parents did visit, he was going to have this as
backup. There were a sequence of photographs on a beach, hemmed in by tall trees and bushes,
which Danny didn’t recognise. Baby Steve wore a bulky diaper as his mom sat behind him,
supporting his wobbly attempts to walk by holding his hands above his head. Steve smiled gummily
at the photographer. Another photo showed Steve napping on his father’s lap as they both sat on a
deckchair. Dad was smoking.

Still laughing, Danny sat upright, and carefully put the album on the carpet, and continued to leaf
through it. There was another ubiquitous barbeque on the same beach, recognisable from the trees
and white deckchairs, despite it being late evening. Guests in typically horrendous late 1970s
hairstyles and loud shirts were drinking beer. A couple of young women were caught in the moment
of dancing by a bonfire on the beach -- Doris McGarrett and Haruna Noshimuri according to the
copperplate writing beneath the photograph.

“Noshimuri,” Danny repeated, sounding the name out. “Noshimuri.”


“Holy shit.” There in the background, recognisable despite thirty-five years due to the supercilious
expression on his face, was Hiro Noshimuri. Why was the head of the Yakuza, against whom John
McGarrett fought so hard, at a family party?

Danny rolled to his feet, pausing a moment to shake off residual stiffness from sitting too long.

“Hey, Steve.” He trotted into the living room with the album.

The sofa was empty. The folder, which looked like one of John McGarrett’s police files, was set
aside. Danny, guessing that if Steve had left the garret would have said something, ventured up the
spiral staircase. The bathroom door was ajar, a fan was whirring. There was no sound of water
running. Steve was nowhere to be seen. He had had a shower, and finished a shower, very recently.

“Danny?” Steve came out of the bedroom next to the bathroom pulling on an old, soft-washed blue
Navy SEAL’s t-shirt, to match a pair of blue shorts. Comfort clothes. He appeared miles better.

“Have you got your aids in?” Thinking, Danny cupped his index finger and thumb around his ear in
a ‘c’ shape.

Steve shook his head.

Crooking the same index finger, Danny drew Steve across the expanse of his loft to the magnificent
architectural table set up. He set the photo album on the first leaf of the massive table, and waited.

“What?” Steve came in close, sort-of inching into Danny’s space.
Danny simply pointed at Hiro Noshimuri and his scrunchy little face. Steve went still. Danny waited; he wasn’t disappointed.

“That’s Hiro Noshimuri.” Steve flicked rapidly though the pages. “That’s my mom and dad’s house - the beach out back.”

It was nice to know that his guess that it was the McGarrett family home was correct.

“Are there anymore?” Steve asked, as he continued to look.

Danny shrugged expansively.

“But. But. That doesn’t make any sense. He’s Yakuza. Why’s he at the house?”

Offering a possible interpretation of events, Danny drew his finger under the date, emphasising that 1978 was a long time ago.

“Before he joined the Yakuza? Hiro was friends with my mom and dad?” Steve wondered, and then pointed at a blonde woman who was with Noshimuri. “That’s Auntie Pat. The governor. Ex-governor. We need to look through Mom’s photos. Come on.”

Whirlwind McGarrett was back, Danny observed, left in Steve’s wake as he rushed away. Danny picked up the photo album and chased after him.

~*~

Inside of fifteen minutes they had a bunch of photographs identified with Steve’s coloured post-its and written notes, and the hearing aids were back in position. Doris McGarrett seemed to be a party animal. Governor, Auntie Pat, Jameson was evidently a close friend of a family, old enough to spend time with both Audrey and Doris. Hiro Noshimuri and his wife Haruna with their children featured in more than one set. One photo showed Steve building a sandcastle with Marie Noshimuri.

“Marie Noshimuri?” Danny asked, when Steve identified her.

“Her given name was Momoko, and Mary couldn’t say Momoko -- she kept saying Mamo and getting really confused -- so we called her Marie.” Steve sagged on his heels and palmed his eyes. “This is so weird. I played with Marie. Play dates. That she was a Noshimuri didn’t register. They were just mom’s friends.”

“Not dad’s?”

“Dad wasn’t around a lot. First he was in the Navy and then he was in the police.”

“Perhaps,” Danny said slowly, “you’ve been asking the wrong question? You’ve asked how your dad linked with these people. Maybe you should be asking how your mom knew these people?”

“My mom.” Steve drew his finger along the curve of his mother’s cheek.

Danny thought on cagey and defensive Joe White, friend of the family, who was also in the photographs.

“What about Wo Fat?” Danny wondered, turning the album with the bonfire photographs around to he could study the pictures. “He’d be young in these photos, I guess? He’s what forty something; he’d be a teenager?”

“You think that Wo Fat might have known my mom?”
“I don’t know, Steve, but Hiro’s in the photos, Governor Jameson….”

“Actually--” Steve stood, “--there’s someone else who would have been around. Someone who has been peripheral as we’ve followed our so-called investigation.”

“Who?”

“Mamo.”

~*~

#64#

“Mamo!” Steve barrelled into elderly man’s workshop.

“Kiwi?” Mamo was caught in the moment of sawing a length of wood. Professional, he followed through, and drew the saw back without marring the wood grain. “You feeling better?”

“Tutu,” Steve said.

“What’s the matter?” Mamo set his saw aside and came along the workbench. “Son?”

“Mamo. Mamo. Do you know anything about Mom and….” He looked mutely at Danny.

“You know everything that’s going on, right?” Danny began. “You know we’ve been trying to figure out why Wo Fat’s so interested in Seolh, and is staying around?”

“Uhm?” Mamo bent over slightly so he could see them over the dip of his bifocals.

“Okay, there’s something really weird going on.” Danny gripped the photo album that he had brought with them against his chest. “The arson attack was because I took a photo of Wo Fat. Who is a terrorist and potentially works with or is part of the Yakuza. Have you heard of Hiro Noshimuri?”

“Tutu, do you know Wo Fat?” Steve interjected.

“Noshimuri knew Steve’s mom?” Danny offered.

Clearly perplexed, Mamo looked to his adopted grandson.

“Think back a long time ago,” Steve said.

“Here.” Danny opened the photo album with the bonfire party, and angled it so Mamo could see the participants. “That’s Hiro Noshimuri.”

Mamo pushed his glasses up his nose and then accepted the book. Cradling it in his arms, he looked at the photograph for an age.

“I remember him and his brother, Koji. He’s a cop. He’s bad news. Your daddy came back from the Navy and made your mom never talk to them ever again. There was a fight, remember? It was the first time that you came and stayed at Seolh.” Mamo paused.

“No. I don’t remember that,” Steve said. “Mom and dad fought? They separated?”

“You were--” Mamo’s hefted the album like it was an imaginary child, “--six? Mary was two?”

“So what happened next?” Danny asked.
“Your mommy agreed and she left her job, and became a teacher.”

“Sorry?” Steve shook his head.

“Your mom was very progressive. She had a job. Audrey and my Maru looked after you and Mary, when she was at work, when your dad was away.”

“What did my mom do?” Steve asked carefully.

“She worked for the government. At Pearl. Something clever. She couldn’t say what.”

Steve digested that with a plainly unpalatable expression on his face. He looked like he had swallowed a rabid rat.

“I have to talk to Joe,” Steve announced.

“Hang on a second,” Danny said, before Steve could stride away. He set his hand on Steve’s chest, holding him in place. “Mamo, do you know Wo Fat?”

Mamo shook his head.

“Have you seen a picture of Wo Fat, Mamo? We’ve talked about him, but have you seen him?” Danny patted Steve’s stomach. “Steve, have you got a photo of Wo Fat?”

Steve hauled out his BlackBerry and thumbed through the image files until he could hold out the phone with a picture of Wo Fat. Leerily, Mamo peered at it. Danny held his breath.

“Think back, Mamo. If he was with Hiro Noshimuri when Mom was hosting parties or organising play dates it was nearly thirty years ago. I can’t think why he would be around, but think, Mamo.”

Danny patted Steve’s stomach again, cajoling calm. Steve subsided.


“Never thought what?”

“Yongfu might be related to Fat; they have the same surname. Although, Fat is a little unusual, it may really be Yun-fat?” Mamo set the album on his workbench and started to look closely at the picture on the phone.

“Was Wo Yongfu around?” Steve asked.

“He died,” Mamo said absently, “car bomb.”

“What!” Steve demanded.

“I think? It was a long time ago.”

“Mamo, did my mom know him?”

“Steve, calm, let Mamo think.” He fisted his hand in Steve’s t-shirt hem, tugging sharply.

“Wo Yongfu or Wo Fat?” Mamo asked.

“Either!” Steve said tightly.
“I don’t know,” Mamo said slowly.

“Babe.” Danny slid directly into Steve’s line of sight, demanding his focus and attention. He lifted his finger holding it just before Steve’s eyes -- they automatically crossed. “You need to chill. Mamo will help. We’re all going to go upstairs and look at the albums. Okay?”

~*~

“I can’t believe that my mom used me and my sister to get close to the Noshimuri family.”

“That’s not fair,” Mamo rebuked.

“It’s true, though.” Steve spun the latest photo album on the architect’s table that they were using in deference to Mamo’s knees. He tapped his finger on the open page: tap-tap-tap. Steve’s mother sat with Haruna, both with babies on their laps. Steve and Momoko were playing with dolls on the grass at their feet. Young Steve held a blonde, improbably proportioned Barbie in his fist -- later it would be hilarious. In the background, almost caught off camera, Joe White was ostensibly passing the time of day with Hiro.

“Who took that photo?” Danny asked.

“What?” Steve asked. But the tilt of the question was explain ‘your thinking’ not ‘repeat that, subordinate’.

“You’re four there, maybe? So your dad is still in the Navy. He’s not taking the photo. Your mom’s there. She’s not in a lot of the photos. The party pics; anyone could have picked up the camera. This was a small family soiree.”

“It could be my Grandmother.” Steve flipped through the other photos but there were no other images of the occasion. “Maybe dad was on leave? I have to talk to Joe.”

Decision made, Steve was away, striding towards the spiral staircase. Danny let him go, turning his attention to Mamo.

“Is there something you want to share, Mamo?” he asked.

Mamo presented a perfect example of shifty.

“Mamo?” Danny tried again.

“Doris was--” Mamo pushed his glasses up his nose, “--very… ruthless. There’s a lot of Steve in her -- or the other way around? I always get that wrong. Focussed. Dedicated. I don’t know if you understand, but this was the 70’s. She didn’t have a job to bring home money for the family; she had a career. It was very important to her.”

“It took precedence over the family?”

Mamo closed the album. “John and Doris fought over her work. She gave it up. And she was frustrated. Their fights were....”

“Violent? Battery?” Danny said.

“No. No.” Mamo shook his head. “Poisonous. They had cold fights. I remember when John would bring the children here to Audrey, and then returned to their home.”

It painted a picture that made Danny wince. Thank God that Steve and Mary had had Seolh.
“I get that a woman having a career in the 1970s was a little unusual, but it wasn’t the Stone Age. She was allowed to have a career.” Danny pondered. His mom had worked when he was a kid, she had to so that they could have bread on the table. “You don’t know what she did at Pearl, but do you know if John knew?”

“You know where Steve gets his tenaciousness from? His daddy. John would have known.”

Danny pinched the bridge of his nose. “We still haven’t found Wo Fat in these photos.”

“They stop in 1990 when Doris died.”

Actually, the oldest album was 1988. Two years before the accident that killed John and Doris McGarrett, and orphaned their children.

“When did Wo Yongfu die?” Danny mused. “How do you know the guy?”

“I don’t remember when he died. Wo Yongfu was notorious, everyone knew he was bad news, but he was—” Mamo clapped his hands together thinking hard, “—charismatic. He was in politics. He wanted to be governor. The first Asian American governor of the State of Hawaii, but George Ryoichi Ariyoshi was better and beat him to the post by years.”

“So how do we find out about Wo Yongfu?”

“Easy. We ask the family.”

“What?”

“Keiki,” Mamo said chidingly. “There are any number of police officers who we can ask to pull the files from Hyo Kelly to Koa Keawe. I think that I will also speak with my nephew.”

“Yeah right,” Danny said darkly.

“One day—” Mamo reached out and patted Danny’s cheek, “—you and Kavika will become friends. I feel it in my bones.”

~*~

Steve reappeared with the chime-light combination of the dinner bell, and dropped in his seat next to Danny without a word. Thankfully, he wasn’t scheduled to prepare the meal. Kono had made sushi and sashimi, and was so very, very proud of her culinary accomplishments that Danny let her choice of food pass, and because he knew that Steve adored sushi.

They were kind of very sad sushi, a little floppy and collapsing as they watched.

“I don’t think I used enough mirin?” Kono speculated.

“Anyone heard from Chin?” Danny asked, because while he wasn’t fond of sushi, Chin’s Japanese dishes were professionally put together, and beautifully photographic to the eye.

Steve used two spoons to scoop up a nigiri from its black lacquer plate rather than using his Ohashi. Abstractedly, Danny marvelled that a month ago he would not have known that Steve was eating a salmon nigiri nor that ohashi was Japanese for chopsticks.

Only Kono, Danny, and Steve were at the dinner table. Mamo had gone home, via popping in to see Mrs. K. to get Koa on the case. Toast was around, but he would appear when he would.
Steve hummed contentedly as he munched, and Kono smiled with all her body. The air around Steve lightened to Danny’s photographer’s eye.

The discombobulation of the morning was well past.

“Try the wasabi, Danny.” Kono pointed to a vibrant green mess in a porcelain dish. “It’s kind of like horseradish, but not. You might like it.”

Danny had avoided it last time, following Steve’s lead in the face of an unfamiliar repast. But he liked spicy food, while Steve’s tastes ran to the more bland. He spread some on a layer of rice topped with a flattened shrimp.

“I got a text from Chin,” Kono said. “He’s staying with Malia tonight.”

The wasabi burned his sinuses and transported the sushi thingy to utterly delicious.

“Do we know for sure that there is a new member of Seolh on the way?” Danny asked.

“Chin and Malia seem pretty sure.”

“Excellent.”

“Joe White’s gone on manoeuvres,” Steve announced.

They took the subject change with aplomb, since, really, they had been waiting for Steve to bring up what was on his mind. Danny had updated Kono, because if anything the day’s events had shown them that the ‘ohana definitely had something to contribute to the mystery.

“Manoeuvres? That’s a euphemism for out of touch?” Danny summarised.

“Yes.”

If Danny had ever needed a definition of terse -- that was it.

“He’s gone after Wo Fat?” Kono translated.

Steve shrugged. “Possibly. It’s not like P-One is the only person of interest to NI.”

Danny scooped up a thingy consisting of translucent bright green tentacles dotted with little sesame seeds onto his plate as he thought.

“Joe can tell you about your mom as a person, I guess. And was around when the photos were taken…. But is there anyone you know in the Intelligence place-department-thingy at Pearl who can pull your mom’s records?” Danny asked. He kind of forgot, but Steve had been in Naval Intelligence longer than he had just been a SEAL. He snorted at his own thoughts just a Navy SEAL.

Kono looked at him in askance, but Steve evidently missed the exhalation.

“I’ve put in a formal request, which should be fulfilled in the next ninety six hours.”

“What about Wo Yongfu, who Danny told me about?” Kono said. “Have you asked for information on him?”

“Yes, I’ve directed them to pull all files. There was no record on Wo Fat’s parents on the files that we held. But our information is pretty scarce. We know that he was an officer in the Chinese equivalent of the Secret Service, but went independent in 1990.” Steve pursed his lips. “The same
“And you think that’s relevant?”

“I think that it’s germane.”

Danny made a mental note to look up the meaning of germane, he was pretty sure that it kind of meant relevant, though.

“So in the meantime?” Danny asked. “What do we do?”

“We now wait,” Steve said, with his ‘I’ve just eaten a rabid rat and it tasted vile’ expression. “The waiting game.”

“But we’re further along than we were this time yesterday.” Danny ferried another disintegrating mound of rice and fish onto Steve’s plate. “That’s positive.”

“True,” Steve said truculently.

“And we can keep hunting through your mom and dad’s stuff. We might find another clue.”

“True,” Steve repeated, but he brightened fractionally.

“Well, all work and no play makes for boring. What are we going to do for New Year?” Kono deliberately changed the subject.

“Yeah, true.” Danny automatically glanced at calendar on the wall beside the bookcase. New Year’s was descending upon them. “What do you normally do?”

“There’s always a really good party on Waikiki Beach or street parties at the Aloha Tower Market Place. There will be massive crowds at the Kaka’ako Waterfront Park -- there will be a barge with fireworks off shore. It’s pretty spectacular.”

“Yeah, right, crowds. No,” Danny said automatically.

“Will you have Grace?” Steve asked. He picked a green wrapped roll of rice with what looked like the kalua pork in the centre and dropped it on Danny’s plate.

Danny shook his head. After Steve’s über-organising shenanigans over Christmas, New Year’s was exclusively Rachel’s bailiwick. Stan had organised some shindig at their palatially plastic residence (Seolh had character) for friends and business colleagues. Stan had plans to put together some sort of faire on his grounds, which had Grace beyond excited.

“I’d be up for a beach party,” Kono said. “Get a few friends around, grill some burgers and steaks?”

“That sounds about right.” Danny popped the pork thing in his mouth, chewed and nodded at Steve.

“Sounds good,” Steve agreed.

~*~

#65#

“What are you doing?” Danny asked Steve, as he stood on the kitchen back step in the morning sunlight, tapping on his BlackBerry.
“Accuweather.com -- there’s a fifty eight percent chance of precipitation tonight.” Steve showed Danny the screen.

“So? Welcome to Oahu,” Danny said cynically.

“So since we can’t run to the House from the beach, we’ll take the big tent down and set it up for the beach party,” Steve informed him.

“Is this like a pavilion or something?” Danny asked, imagining something from MGM’s classic film ‘Ivanhoe’ with Seolh’s flag on top merrily flapping in the sea breeze. “Does Seolh have a flag?”

“What?” Steve cocked his head to the side. “That, I didn’t follow.”

“I just thought that Seolh should have a flag or, you know, some kind of insignia.” Danny did his own lean to the side, checking that Steve had his aids in. It was difficult to make them out since the sun was at Steve’s back.

Steve followed the lean, smiling down at Danny. He was, Danny thought, inhumanly attractive. The rising sun behind him made him all the more brilliant. He wore his tight black running top and shorts. The glowing backdrop created an aura around him.

“Can you just stay there a second?”

“What?” Steve said loudly, as Danny turned on his heel and ran to get his camera. “The morning non sequiturs before you’ve had your coffee are really hard to follow!”

Danny ran, because Steve was a lot of things, but he wasn’t patient. Snatching up his camera beside his laptop in his studio, he made double-time back to the kitchen.

Steve had settled into a cross-armed pose in the doorway. “You’re going to take photos, aren’t you?”

In answer, Danny held up his camera. “You don’t need to smile, because we’re going for a silhouette effect, although can you turn your head sideways.”

“For real?”

“Yeah, I want to try something.”

“I wanna go for a run,” Steve said petulantly.

“And you will, as soon as we have some photos.”

“We?” Steve said dubiously, as he turned his head. Danny zoomed in on his ridiculously long eyelashes. He focused in tight, and Steve was luminous. The bright morning light highlighted every single, individual lash. Steve’s irises were very green in the brilliance. Snapping off five or so shots, Danny zoomed out and went for the silhouette part of what he was imagining. The shading of the veranda overhead reduced the glare fractionally, but Danny was fairly sure that this photo would need some *ad hoc* tweaking in Photoshop.

“Okay, enough. Come here.” Steve crooked his finger.

Danny lowered his camera and regarded him. “What?”

“I want my morning kiss.”

Surprised, Danny laughed. “‘I want’ doesn’t get.”
“Okay, I need my morning kiss.”

“You,” Danny struggled for a suitable description.

“Kiss.” Steve pursed his lips.

“You’re not attractive when you do that. You look like a duck.”

Tutting, Steve tossed his BlackBerry on the kitchen’s recipe bookcase. “Okay, I’m going for my run. I’ll see you later.”

“Hey.” Danny was across the kitchen in three strides. He tried to grab the fabric of Steve’s tight t-shirt across his chest and sort of just groped him. But Steve remained in place as if pinned. Danny stretched up. Steve hadn’t shaved. He would shower when he had returned from his morning exercise. The cut of Steve’s nascent beard against Danny’s freshly shaven skin made him shiver. Danny was still within the refractory period after his morning shower, but he felt a thrum of arousal stir his blood. Steve blew gently in Danny’s ear.

“Jesus,” Danny whispered.

Steve, the bastard, laughed. He dipped in, kissing Danny firmly, but with a simple press of his lips against Danny’s. Danny slid a hand around Steve’s narrow waist and tugged him close. Steve’s interest mounded against his waist.


“You’re a fucking tease,” Danny hollered as he bounded away. He hoped running with a rising erection sucked.

Danny set his hand on the lintel and watched the fine lines of Steve’s running form. He lifted his camera one handed and snapped off a desultory shot. It wouldn’t be professional but he was going to like it. They had kissed. They had hugged. They had for all intents and purposes been chaste. And while Steve had given every indication of enjoying their make out sessions -- except when he had been freaking out about Wo Fat’s threats -- he had not been massively engaged. Yet, this morning he had.

It had never occurred to Danny for one millisecond that Steve’s libido might be squashed in the face of PTSD and ongoing recovery.

“Shit.” Danny sagged against the doorframe and pondered on the revelation. “Nah. He wouldn’t have started us….” And if that had been his first burgeoning erection since whenever he wouldn’t have fucking run off.

Danny’s thoughts spiralled. Steve battled with exhaustion. Danny couldn’t believe that it hadn’t occurred to him that Steve’s sex drive might also be revving on low on top of Steve being a neophyte at gay sex. Danny looked to the woods where Steve had disappeared. Steve had been interested … euphemism for the win. Danny rubbed the back of his neck. He had been entertaining himself with his own right hand for months; he could continue.

“I deserve a nomination for sainthood,” he grumbled.

“You okay, Danny?”

“What!” Danny jumped, almost fumbling his camera. “Jesus, Chin, you’re like a ninja.”
“Sorry, brah. You were miles away. I wasn’t creeping.” Chin drifted towards his tea cupboard.

“You’ve been conspicuous by your absence. Kono’s going to be all over you.” Danny grinned cheekily. “How’s Malia?”

“You can ask her yourself, she’s here for the barbeque.”

“So I have to ask, being nosey and all, how are you doing?”

Imperturbable Chin could blush, who knew.

“Thank you for your help the other day,” Chin said.

“My pleasure.” Danny laughed, but not at Chin. “Been there got the t-shirt.”

“Grace?”

“Yeah, best day. Hang on.” Danny set his camera next to Steve’s BlackBerry and fished his wallet out of his pants to pull out the much folded black and white image of Rachel’s first sonogram. “Grace -- three months. See she’s got my nose.”

Chin laughed at the joke.

“Man, we’re going to be asking you for so much advice.”

“Happy to supply.” Danny puffed out his chest. “And possibly babysit with sufficient, you know, recompense. I take credit cards.”

“It’s a deal.” Chin held out his hand.

They shook on it.

There were questions that Danny wanted to ask: had Mr. Waincroft gone for Chin’s kidneys with a blunt knife; did they plan on both living at Seolh, and was the wedding being brought forwards or pushed back? Danny figured that Kono would find out and tell him.

“So why are you a saint?”

Danny jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the great outside. “For putting up with his Imperial Goofiness.”

“What’s he done now?”

“I couldn’t begin to tell you.” Danny shook his head mock sadly. “It’s far too complicated.”

~*~

“Danny?” Kono thrust opened his studio door, without knocking, and rushed over to his desk

“What’s the matter?” Instantly concerned, Danny stopped dead, hand poised over his laptop mouse.

“Toast, just im’d me.”

“He whatsit?”

Kono’s expression segued into fond for an instant, before switching back to concerned. She held an iPad -- Chin’s -- Danny recognised it from the art deco decal on the back.
“Toast sent me a You-Tube link. You know what You-Tube is, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Danny said drolly. He wasn’t a complete Luddite -- only partial at worst.

“Okay, Steve’s gonna be furious.” She set the iPad on his desk so they could both watch.

It was the scene from the Market Place when Steve had taken down the photojournalist. The quality was very high, easily capturing Steve’s horrified expression when the paparazzo loudly and deliberately accused him of murdering the governor. The video was entitled: This Man Killed Governor Jameson! As it continued to play, and Uncle Choi sauntered into view, Danny asked,

“Can Toast do some magic and make it disappear?”

“This is a download.” Kono pointed at Window icon on the laptop screen. “And Toast has done something temporary on You-Tube. But the user, some guy called News!Freedom has a lot of watchers and subscribers. Steve needs to get the Navy people involved. Toast can’t do it, ‘cos Steve is kind of official, and then Toast will get into trouble, when the Navy people do what Navy need to people do.”

“So you want me to pretend that I found it?” Danny hazarded.

“No.” Kono laughed. “Steve might be ‘official’ but he’s also pragmatic. Do you know where he is?”

“Digging out some sort of giant tent for the beach barbeque.” Danny gestured over his shoulder, pointing out the large windows of his studio towards the workshops out back beyond the House. “Let’s go find him.”

Kono snatched up the iPad. “Nice photo, by the way.”

He had been sectioning a shot from the rocky shore photoshoot, from what seemed like an age ago, when Steve had modelled Ben’s cheesecloth shirt. It was one of the images after Steve had fallen into the rockpool. Wet -- the contrast of his dark hair and pale skin was all the more perceptible. His furious expression as he glared at Danny, seawater glistening on his skin, nebulous swirls of hidden tattoos on the edge of visible through the almost transparent shirt made for a shot that Danny could look at again and again, finding something new each time. That to him spoke of magic.

“Let’s go get Steve. Set the hounds on this News Freedom guy.” Danny forcibly drew his attention away from the mesmerising photo, and stood.

“No, here he comes.” Kono pointed at Steve walking out of the northernmost workshop. Al’u and his cousin Theo swung a tarpaulin covered giant sausage between them. They had commandeered the carry straps and were effectively excluding Steve from helping, as he paced beside them.

Danny crossed over, skirting around the base of his bed, and swung open the far window. “Steve!” he hollered.

Al’u immediately glanced up at him. He lifted his chin, and Steve turned to look up at the window. Danny waved his arm in a ‘come here’ gesture.

“Downstairs.” Kono tugged his shoulder. “Steve might be able to call someone direct. But he might need to hightail it asap to Pearl-Harbour Hickam.”

Danny chased after Kono since she had the tablet. Even as they clattered down the curving staircase, Steve came around the bottom of the staircase using the newel post as a fulcrum. He froze one foot
on the bottom stair as Kono and Danny skidded to a stop on either side of him.

“What’s the problem?” Steve demanded, looking to Danny then Kono.

“A video’s been uploaded on You-Tube of you taking out that fat guy,” Danny said. “Toast is doing something to keep it offline, but the guy who hosts the thingy is popular.”

“What?” Steve asked.

Kono slid the iPad between them. The screen had changed from the mini-movie on the windows page to what looked a standard You-Tube page with a black screen and bunch of recommendations on the right pane.

“User News!Freedom posted you being accused of murdering the governor at the Market Place.”


“Toast has it temporarily on the fritz.” Kono stroked the screen and it switched over to the video that she had played for Danny earlier. “This is the download--”

“Let him watch, Kono,” Danny said softly, things were happening too fast and furiously.

The scene started where Steve crab-walked over the sidewalk to flip the photo-journalist onto his back. Steve hit pause and then stroking the screen flipped back to the You-Tube page. He looked up from the iPad.

“Am I identified by name?” Steve asked.

“No,” Kono said succinctly. “But it’s a high quality image.”

“How long was it up before Toast spotted it?”

Kono shrugged. “Not long, I guess?”

Steve took the foyer steps two at a time, and was halfway up the staircase before Danny could blink.

“Do we follow?” Danny asked.

“Hell, yeah.” Kono headed up the stairs on long legs.

“This place is never boring.” Danny muttered and chased after them.

~*~

“There’s no perception of responsibility. They’re just after the adrenaline rush of hits.” Steve threw his phone against the sofa. It barely missed the iPad lying on the cushions. The phone bounced over a cushion and disappeared down the back.

Steve had conducted a typically terse conversation with JOIC at Pearl Harbour-Hickam. Danny had finally found out what the acronym meant: joint operations intelligence centre. The upshot was that News!Freedom’s -- also known by her mother as Robin Elkins -- You-Tube channel was being shut down as were her Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace accounts.


“Well, Ms. Elkins is going to find out that I have the freedom to utilise the very persistent lawyers
that I have on retainer. Let’s see how she likes being sued for defamation.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“She accused me of murdering Auntie Pat -- the governor. That’s slander. She’s accused me of a criminal act.”

“I’m kind of guessing that she’s young?” Kono hazarded.

“That’s no excuse for stupidity,” Lieutenant Commander Steven J. McGarrett stated.

Danny felt for the hundreds of junior officers and baby SEALs that Steve had coached and trained, or was going to teach in the future. Danny had also had one stringently detailed phone conversation with the senior partners of Hollister & Pegg, who were going to be handling his custody arrangements with Rachel’s lawyers from Batch & Son, so that they could prepare for their face-to-face meeting. Ms. Elkins was going to learn a hard lesson.

“Just out of curiosity, what happened to the photographer?” Danny asked.

“Let’s just say that he won’t be following me anymore,” Steve said neutrally.

Kono winced.

“There’s like a hundred things that are wrong about this conversation and a hundred things that are right.” Danny shook his head.

“When my ‘ohana is threatened indirectly or directly, I don’t pull any punches.” Steve levelled his hardest agate glare on him.

“I understand, Babe.” Danny met the glare head on, unflinchingly.

“Danny’s always going to be the voice of reason,” Kono supplied. She leaned over and picked up the tablet off the sofa. “For now and forever, amen.”

“I know.” Steve’s expression segued into fond.

~*~

As parties went it, was a nice accompaniment to the massive Christmas lu’au that Seolh had hosted previously. It was actually more like the Christmas evening in the Gazebo. Light winds rose as the sun started to set. Mamo had the most comfortable lounger under the sprawling tent’s massive awning. Al’u and Theo had lugged down the chair from the House.

The sky was largely clear, amber in the west with a frittering of clouds that resembled fish scales as the sun slipped below the horizon.

A pot luck dinner had been carried down from the House -- it made for a dietary mishmash. Danny poked at a Hawaiian Salad, which he hoped wasn’t leftover from the Christmas feast, and decided to stick to the burgers that were being grilled under Chin’s watchful eye.

Danny debated on snagging a beer from Mamo’s cooler.

“Hey, keiki.” Mamo grinned at him. He looked supremely comfortable, his clasped hands over his tummy as he lounged, feet up.

Someday Danny hoped he would be like Mamo, secure with life.
“Hi, Mamo. Do you want a beer?”

“I’m okay.”

Danny winked and moved on because a nap appeared to be on Mamo’s agenda.

Volley ball was the game of the day. It wasn’t something that Danny normally played, but they didn’t actually appear to be following any rules. He pulled off his sweatshirt, tossed it aside, and jogged over to join in.

~*~

Once the illumination from the burning torches and the bonfire wasn’t enough to let them follow the ball as it bounced from person to person, Kono called for a halt.

“We need a glow-in-the-dark ball.” She tossed the ball in the air, spun in a tight circle, and caught it on its descent.

“Food’s ready.” Al’u ambled towards the gas barbeques. “We were going to finish any rate.”

“Oh, burger.” Danny picked up speed, easily beating Al’u, who was size of a small pick up truck, to get to the barbeques first.

Grabbing a white roll, he squeezed on ketchup on one side and a handful of grated cheese on the other half. He presented the cheesy half-bun, on his open palm, to Chin.

“Well-done or medium?”

Danny checked, since well-done could be a euphemism for ‘charcoal briquette’.

“Well-done it is,” he decided, on seeing the array on the barbeque.

Chin dolloped a burger onto the roll and Danny quickly moved on, before he could be stampeded by the rest of the hungry volleyball players. He cast around the sprawling family celebrating the New Year. There was an empty chair beside Steve in the tent, so Danny took it -- because it was his, by definition.

“Fun?” Steve asked, when Danny had shuffled into position amidst the array of family members.

“Yeah.” Danny dropped down on the flimsy chair. “Chaotic, but fun. You not interested in playing?”

Steve shrugged, and Danny decided to leave it at that. If Steve didn’t feel comfortable playing a fast-paced, frenetic game, Danny wasn’t going to call him on it.

The burger was rich and tasty and Danny enjoyed every last bite -- all four of them.

“I’m going to get another burger. You want?” he asked Steve.

Steve stared at Danny’s empty hands considering. He finally nodded.

“How do you like it?” Danny asked.

“Just some ketchup and some onions,” Steve said.

“Okay.”
Danny grabbed two plates, adding a handful of chips and salad greens before getting two burgers. Chin had relinquished the barbeque to Al’u. He had got his ukulele out and was strumming away. One of Mamo’s sons, Danny hadn’t got then all straight, pulled out a guitar from a case tucked behind his deckchair and joined in.

Danny ambled between the Kahikes and Seolh’s residents back to his position.

“Here you go,” he said, as he gave Steve his burger.

“Thanks.” Steve smiled.

Danny ate his second burger with much more decorum.

~*~


“Where did you get that?” Mama sat up straight, and levered out of his chair.

“Back of Uncle Kema’s truck.”

They set it on the sand at Mamo’s feet and tipped back the lid. It was filled with more than a handful of firework rockets and a large cardboard box containing a selection of fireworks from Catherine Wheels to Roman Candles. Danny winced; the twins were going to be in so much trouble.

“You know better than to touch fireworks,” Mamo’s chastised as he bent to pick up the box. Danny scrambled to his feet to help get the box or, more importantly, get the lid back on it, so no wind-tossed embers from the bonfire could accidentally waft in.

“Thank you, Daniel.” Mamo let Danny grab the crate and lug it to back in the tent.

Steve watched him like a hawk, from his own lounger, but didn’t say a word as Danny set it in the far corner.

“We just brought the box,” the twin on the left said rapidly.

“We didn’t touch the fireworks,” the other said quickly. He crossed his heart. “Just the crate. Promise.”

That they had obeyed the letter of the law and not the spirit drew an amused huff from Mamo. The twins both continued smiling in eager anticipation at the joy of fireworks.

Mamo slid a checking glance at Steve, who shrugged why not.

“We will have the fireworks later,” Mamo said, “and you two will be helping with the clean up tomorrow.”

The twins glanced at each other and then back to their grandfather, both equally confused.

“We always help,” they said simultaneously.

“True.” Mamo reached out and ruffled the hair on both their heads. “You know what you did wrong, don’t you? Makana? Nohea?”

The twin on the right regarded his feet, while the other twin shrugged.
“Nohea?” Mamo prompted.

Nohea lifted his head. “We shouldn’t have touched the crate. Uncle Kema didn’t tell us we could go in his truck.”

“Makana?” Mamo said leadingly.

“We gotta apologise to Uncle Kema? And fireworks are dangerous….”

“Exactly.” Mamo clapped his hands. “Scoot.”

They scooted -- giving the bonfire a wide berth and disappearing into the night.

“Kids.” Danny stood next to Mamo, in the gently flapping entrance to the tent, and set his hands in his pockets.

“They’re certainly firecrackers,” Mamo said proudly.

Steve came up beside them, as quiet as a ninja in his black hooded Navy SEALs sweatshirt and pants.

“You okay with firing off a few fireworks, keiki?” Mamo asked.

“Yeah, sure.” Steve shrugged. “It’s not going to be a surprise, is it? And there will be fireworks going off all over the island at midnight.”

Driftwood in the heart of the fire hissed as residual seawater steamed. The fire popped and burning embers danced into the sky.

~*~

“Hey, Malia, how are doing?” Danny dropped down on the tartan blanket beside her.

“Hello, Danny,” Malia said warmly. “Thank you for looking after Chin.”

“Ah, it was priceless.” Danny looked to Chin, who with every musical aficionado in the Kahike family, were producing a twisted cacophony that sort of put Danny’s nerves on edge. Everyone else appeared to be enjoying the music, based on the dancing around the fire. “I should have taken some photographs.”

“Danny,” Malia leaned to the side and pushed against his shoulder mock-chastisingly.

“I don’t imagine that the opportunity to tease Chin comes around very often,” Danny pointed out. “You have to take advantage of them.”

Malia giggled, and immediately covered her mouth with her hand. “You’re awful.”

“Hi, Malia.” Steve emerged from the night’s darkness, and stood over them. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you, Steve. It’s a little early, but well, the news got out -- it’s Seolh.”

“So like, uhm….” Steve scratched side of his neck. And even in the firelight, Danny could see that he was blushing.

“Spit it out, Babe,” Danny said, amused.
“Can we set up the blue studio for you guys?” Steve blurted.

A smile blossomed over Malia’s face, brighter than the sun in the morning.

“I think that Chin and I would like that, Steve. Thank you.”

“Yes!” Danny punched the air, and then added his own blush to the group, which he was definitely blaming on the heat of the fire.

Malia laughed, rose onto her knees and kissed him on the cheek.

“How could we not want to live here?” Malia smushed off a hint of lipstick from Danny’s cheek with her thumb.

“When?” Steve said, practically.

“My lease isn’t up for four months. So that gives me and my roommate time to find someone to help Karen with the rent when I move out. So about April, maybe. If that’s okay?”

“No, it’s perfectly fine.” Steve nodded decisively. Judging from suddenly firmness of his jaw, he was thinking hard. “We can redecorate. It doesn’t have to stay the blue studio, if you don’t like blue.”

“A fresh coat of paint would probably be nice. I like blue, Steve.”


“Let Chin and Malia pick the paint, Babe, for their studio. We can help with the painting.” Danny was going to make this happen -- there was going to be no shopping in his future. “So what’s the blue studio like? Isn’t that the one that Mamo and Maru use sometimes?”

“It’s an actual apartment, a bit like my place,” Steve said. “There’s a living room, kitchen, two bedrooms. Good for a couple.”

“Hey.” Chin leaned over Malia and bussed her cheek, before folding into a cross-legged position on the blankets. He laid his ukulele on his lap.

Danny leaned around Malia. “Do you like blue, Chin?”

He raised an eyebrow. “Blue as in the --?”

“Steve mentioned the blue studio, Chin.” Malia curled into him. “I told him my lease was up in April.”

“Ah.” Chin put his arm around his fiancée. “Thank you, Steve.”

Steve scuffed his toe in the sand. “You don’t have to thank me, Chin. This is your home. You’re like the -- what does Danny call you? -- the Soul of Seolh.”

“Actually--” Danny held up a finger, “--that was Toast. I was calling you The President. Both really important, seminal, positions.”

“Thank you,” Chin said seriously. “I appreciate that.”

“It wouldn’t be Seolh without you,” Steve said.
“Hey, Steve.” Danny slid up beside Steve, who was watching the New Year’s Eve bonfire with studied intensity. He appeared to have been caught by the mesmerising dance of yellow, amber, and white hot flames amidst the coals and burning wood.

“Danny?”

“I’m like -- by definition -- a ‘new resident’.” Danny made speech marks with his fingers. “Can I call a meeting?”

Steve turned with alacrity. “Is everything okay?”

Danny patted Steve’s chest. “Sure. I think that you’ll like this. Can a new resident call a meeting?”

Steve froze for a moment, thinking. “Yes,” he said definitely.

“Okay.” Danny stepped away from the fire and into the area between the fire and the large pavilion tent, where, as the clock ticked to ten o’clock, the party congregated. He raised his arms. “Hey, everyone, I’d like to call a meeting.”

There was a discordant plink as Al’u stopped strumming his guitar.

“Mamo. Chin.” He nodded at the pair under the awning of the tent. “Steve. Where’s Toast gone?”

“Here. Dude?” Toast came slipping and sliding around the side of the tent.

All the faces were turned towards him, waiting. Danny thumped his chest, coughed, and cleared his lungs.

“I came to Seolh just over a month ago. And my Christmas present was to be promoted -- is it promoted? -- elevated to an actual resident. But I wouldn’t be here without Kono. I met her on a beach, when I was taking photographs of these little black banded sea snails. I now know, thanks to Steve, that they’re called pipipi. It hadn’t been a great day. My ex had told me that I didn’t have Grace that weekend because she and her new husband were taking my Monkey to the Big Island. Kono came across and spoke to me. The next thing I knew was that I was clinging to the back of a jet ski taking photos as Kono surfed. A week later, my apartment was firebombed. Kono found me again, sitting on the beach watching the surf, trying to figure out what to do next.”

Kono was looking at him. Her eyes were bright in the firelight.

“She went into the nearest café, and grabbed me a coffee. She also grabbed a napkin and borrowed a pen. She wrote ‘Seolh’ -- underlined three times -- and an address on that napkin. And she told me to come by. And here I am.”

Mamo looked like he was about to clap, but held himself still.

“About a week after I started, everyone figured out what I had known all along,” Danny said, and Steve snorted derisively, “that Kono is an artist, and she moved in. So I think that it’s about time that we all voted, and Kono -- if you want? -- becomes a resident.” Danny raised his hand.

Kono nodded.

“God, I love this place,” Toast exulted. He thrust his hand in the air. “You couldn’t bottle it.”
Steve already had his hand up, stretched as high as it could go.

Chin smiled at his cousin and raised his hand.

“Motion passed.” Mamo declared.

“Yes!” Kono bounced to her feet and flung herself at Danny.

“You okay?” he said into her ear, as she curled her arms around his neck.

“Thank you,” she whispered back.

“Hey, my turn.” Steve tapped Kono’s shoulder over Danny’s. “Come here, Kono.”

Laughing, Kono released Danny and launched herself into Steve’s arms. He carefully spun her around in a slow circle making her giggle.

“Let my cousin go,” Chin said, waiting his turn.

Steve released her. He leaned into Danny. “Good idea.”

“I have them, occasionally.” Danny settled back on his heels. Basking in satisfaction, he regarded the group — just over a month ago he had been in a bad place, now he had a community.

“What if I said,” Steve said voice low, breaking Danny’s thoughts, “let’s get out of here?”

Danny craned his head, and regarded Steve. The firelight suited him, raising a healthy glow. He didn’t look tired, but it was very late for Steve. Normally by this time of night, he would be sacked out.

“Sure.”

~*~

Steve led Danny into his eyrie. He flicked on the lights and arrowed straight to the kitchenette, kicking off his flip flops into the corner of the room.

“You want a beer?” Steve asked.

“Sure.” Danny dropped on the sofa in front of Steve’s to-die-for television and gamer set up.

Steve grabbed a couple of bottles from the fridge, flipped off the caps by tapping them against the countertop, tossed the caps in the sink and then came to join Danny on the sofa.

“1787 Abbey Single Ale!” Danny marvelled as he accepted a bottle. “How did you get these?”

“Special delivery. A taste of home, I thought?”

Steve held his bottle out. Danny clinked their bottles together.

“Thank you,” Danny said appreciating the effort.

The beer was usually served at a slightly warmer temperature, but Steve had refrigerated the bottles. The liquid slipped down easily, nevertheless.

“Not bad.” Steve smacked his lips. “Not too hoppy.”
“When you come visit with me in New Jersey, I’ll introduce you to all the local microbreweries.”

Steve grinned happily.

“What’s that face for?” Danny asked. His Steve was exuding happiness.

“You want me to visit New Jersey with you?” Steve sat up straight, and set his bottle on the floor at his feet.

“Of course. I’ve told my mom and pop all about you, and they’d love --”

Ambush kissing was kind of hilarious. Danny toppled back across the cushions, with a gianormous lunk looming over him. Danny wrestled back, grabbing Steve’s collar and holding him in place as they kissed. Showing ridiculous presence of mind, Danny felt Steve relieve him of his bottle of beer. Multi-tasking, Steve didn’t stop kissing for an instant as he moved the bottle out of reach. Danny slid his now cold fingers under Steve’s sweatshirt -- he shivered delightfully. Steve nibbled at the edge of Danny’s mouth, and then moved on following the line of his jaw. Daringly, Danny skimmed the edge of a scar, curving his hand around Steve’s ribs.

“God, Danny,” Steve breathed heavily against his neck.

Danny curled around him, holding Steve close, aiming for that little patch of skin just below his ear that made Steve shiver. He latched on, humming a kiss against the zone.

Steve made a little ‘oh’ sound, shuddered, and flopped against him.

_Holy shit, Batman, hair-trigger_, Danny marvelled. Steve had just fucking come from kissing. Danny scrtched his fingers through the hair at the back of Steve’s head, soothingly, and kissed the ear that was the only part that he could reach.

“You okay, Babe?” Danny asked softly. _How long has that been building?_

Steve hummed contentedly. He shifted his leg deliberately against Danny’s crotch, rubbing. Danny breathed hard, as his cock showed considerable interest. It seemed to be the only movement that Steve was capable of, as his weight pinned Danny down. Danny rubbed back against the firm thigh and his breathing speeded up.

Steve lifted his head, and smiled crookedly at Danny. “Can I?”

Danny could only nod.

Steve shifted them sideways on the sofa, relieving some of the pressure -- no, weight -- from Danny. The pressure was mounting. Steve slid his hand down the front of Danny’s shorts. Danny lifted his hips and managed to push his shorts and underpants down. Steve’s blunt nails scratched through coarse hairs, unerringly heading downwards.

“Jesus, fuck,” Danny swore, as Steve curled his hand around his cock. It had been too long since someone had touched him. He arched into Steve’s fist. Thank God his shorts were loose. A little too carefully, but amazingly, nevertheless, Steve pumped him, his massive hand providing a channel for Danny’s cock. Danny rocked his hips. Steve shifted again, losing the movement. Danny mewed in protest. Steve kissed the corner of Danny’s eyelid, and lifted his weight off Danny except for his hand.

“Steve,” Danny protested though gritted teeth.
“I want to watch you.” Steve’s thumb smoothed over the blunt tip of Danny’s cock.

Danny gasped and came undone.

~*~

What might have been a thousand heartbeats later, Danny blinked up at the idly turning ceiling fan above him. Steve’s head was heavy on his shoulder, his longer form curled along Danny’s side.

“You awake, Steve?” Danny asked.

Steve only hummed, but he lifted his head, and followed the motion by sitting up on the wide sofa.

“Come on.” Steve’s hand curled around Danny’s hand -- it was sticky -- and tugged. “We need a shower.”

“Together?” Danny wasn’t adverse. He wanted to continue lolling, but a shower sounded nice. He drew his shorts up, leaving them low on his hips. Steve pulled him along, weaving just a tad. Danny moved in closer, following him up the spiral staircase.

Steve’s bathroom was obscene, happily big enough for six adults, dressed in sparklingly white tiles and navy blue accents. The massive, enclosed triangular shower unit took up the entire corner of the large room, and a third of the area. Inside there were more fixtures than the kitchen.

“What the Hell is that?” On seeing it, Danny actually woke up a fraction.

“An indulgence. The Navy would not approve.”

“It looks like something out of Star Trek.”

Steve huffed a laugh. “I think that you’ll enjoy the massage heads and steam.”

Easing his fingers free from Danny’s, Steve stripped off his hooded fleece and skinned out of his sweatpants. He dumped his clothes in the laundry hamper by the door. Naked, hands on his hips, he waited for Danny to get with the programme. Danny indulged himself in watching. Shameless -- no, confident -- Steve let him look his fill, from his mussed up hair; down the defined lines of his torso; the nestled, quiescent cock; long legs with firm, muscular thighs and calves, all the way to neatly turned out feet.

Making it a little dance, Danny drew off his own sweatshirt and t-shirt, and shimmied out of his sticky shorts. He tossed them after Steve’s into the laundry hamper. The floor tiles were cold beneath his bare feet as he toed off his sneakers.

“Man, you’re hairy aren’t you,” Steve observed. He came over, setting his hands on Danny’s chest and raking his fingers through the curls. “Shower.”

Danny followed. He let Steve take the lead, because it looked like you needed an instruction manual to run Steve’s shower.

“Ears,” Danny prompted, just as Steve moved onto the step leading to the very high lip into the unit.


He kissed Danny again, and moved aside to the vanity unit on the far wall, pinching the aids out of each ear, and setting them in a little bowl that was obviously set aside for the purpose beside the sink.
“Tramp stamp!” Danny blurted, seeing the curving Celtic knot work above his dimpled, bare ass.

Steve spun. “What?”

“Tramp stamp.” Danny bit his lip, trying in vain, not to smile.


“If you say so, dear,” Danny said carefully, the widest of grins blossoming over his face.

Steve lunged and Danny hopped over the lip into the shower, laughing. The thing was deep enough to bathe in. Steve crowded in after him, pushing him up against the mirrored wall between the dual showerheads and kissing him firmly. Danny laughed against his mouth. Steve was so easy to tease. The mirror was cold against his back. Steve caught Danny’s wrists and lifted them above his head, pinning them to the wall.

My god, we’re going to have so much fun in this shower, Danny thought dazedly, as he arched his neck, letting Steve latch on. Showing that amazing ability to multi-task, Steve slid the blue-tinted glass door shut.

~*~

They played in the shower. Kissing, with a smidge of wrestling over who got the upper hand, was the name of the game. Danny might have been smaller, but his centre of gravity was lower than lanky Steve’s and he knew that he could topple the redwood. Although the fact that they were surrounded by glass kind of prevented out-and-out warfare.

Regardless of hands and kissing and slippery skin, they weren’t teenagers and Steve flagged in all senses of the word. Danny wasn’t getting it up after their activities on the sofa, either -- he had come like the proverbial freight train.

“Tired,” Steve said ruefully bracing his hand against the smooth wall.

“Me too,” Danny said pushing his hair out of his eyes, “and I’m turning into a prune.”

Kissing segued into using shampoo and shower gel in the pursuit of cleanliness. The crisp scent was so Steve but the tingly mint shower gel seemed designed to strip natural oils from Danny’s hair and skin. Steve rinsed off the final suds, lifting one foot and the other, spraying his long toes clean, as Danny still fought with the second showerhead to sluice off the lather coating his skin. The man was a speed demon.

“You’re really fucking hairy.”

“Manly.” Danny mocked a strongman’s pose. He was pretty sure that Steve manscaped, not to a massive degree but there was definitely some tidying up going on.

“What?” Steve looked down the length of his torso.

Hundreds of years in the Navy appeared to have made him kind of indifferent to his body. Danny had seen his scars. The damage on his left side was an extensive spider web of red scars, but Steve didn’t seem remotely sensitive about it. Danny knew that he could have been, some people understandably would be, but Steve didn’t appear to be body shy.

Danny shrugged, finished rinsing off, and followed Steve out of the shower, straight into a face-full of towel, as Steve cannonballed one at his head.
“Geez.” Danny pulled it down, and began to dry off.

Danny had barely got his hair dry, as a dry Steve stood beside him carefully moisturising his ribs and vulnerable flesh. He had to do this several times a day, if Danny remembered correctly.

“Moisturise me. Moisturise me,” Steve said jokingly.

“What?”

“You don’t watch Doctor Who? Cassandra?”

“No,” Danny said slowly.

“Bad joke,” Steve said and moved to the sink to wash his hands clean of the oily cream.

Danny glanced at the mirror over the sink, and saw the travesty of his hair. The drying properties of the citrus-mint gel had turned him into a troll doll.

“Geez.”

Steve laughed softly at the mess of Danny’s hair before leaning in to steal a kiss. If showering together became a habit, Danny decided, he was going to have to move his own shampoo and conditioner into Steve’s Star Trek shower.

“Bed.” Steve said cracking a yawn.

Danny hesitated a moment, wondering about returning to his studio. His clothes were in the laundry hamper and he was not putting them back on. Running naked to his studio did not really appeal. Kono was sure to be heading to her own rooms for something. Danny would have bet money on encountering Kono under such circumstances, it was practically fated.

“Come on, Danny.” Steve had curled his fingertips around Danny’s and began to draw him out of the bathroom. Danny followed, padding in a barefoot naked way, all the way through Steve’s ostentatious apartment, up the winding staircase to his lighthouse bedroom.

Steve arrowed to his pillows like a guided missile latched onto a target. In all honesty, Danny thought, looking down at him fondly as he burrowed in, Steve slept like a child. Part of Danny was mightily jealous. Any time day or night, Steve moved, he ran around, he achieved, ordered people around. And then he crashed like the dead, recharged, and then did it all over again. Steve was already out for the count, curled on his good side in a mound of pillows, before Danny had even started to consider which side of the bed to sleep in.

Danny moved to the far side, and slid in under the thin quilt and sheet, flopping back against Steve’s stupidly numerous pillows. The enormous bed was as comfortable as he had expected.

“Wow.” That was the only thing that he could think to say. “Wow.”

He shifted sideways, until his hip felt the warmth of Steve’s back. Danny slumped against the bed’s headboard, pleasantly wrung out, edging into somnolence. Sagging a little lower, Danny tossed a couple of pillows onto the floor, and kicked his feet out, trying to get comfortable.

Steve muttered. Danny froze. Holding his breath, Danny leaned over slightly. That was a face that was indeed asleep -- relaxed and line free.

A flash of light on the horizon out to sea caught Danny’s attention as it starburst into a riot of
colours. The direct line of sight from Steve’s lighthouse stretched over the long roof, over the wood of the peninsula, and out to sea. The landscape was dressed in dark blues and blacks highlighted by the low, full moon. Another flash, closer to home, rocketed into the sky followed by another then another. Blues and greens vied with ambers and red flashes. The family were setting off the fireworks on the beach. The cruise liner anchored offshore set off its own cascade into the night sky. Carefully, Danny drew up the light quilt that covered them, creating a tent to shield Steve from the show.

“Happy New Year, Steve,” he whispered.

~*_*_~

Tbc
Co-operative Chapter Two [season II]

#67# Wednesday 1st January

Morning came with glorious lassitude as the sun peaked over the horizon. It woke the island of Oahu, and filled Steve’s bedroom with golden sunlight.

“No wonder he wakes up so freakin early,” Danny griped. The idiot could have pulled the curtains behind the headboard so that they had a little bit of shade. It was like sleeping in a fishbowl. There was definitely going to be curtain pulling in the future, because Daniel Williams was not an exhibitionist.

They had migrated to opposite sides of the enormous bed, or to be accurate, Steve had rolled onto his back and sprawled out, while Danny had curled into his favourite position. Danny shifted over so that he could look at Steve. The blankets were tucked low across his hips, his head was tipped back on a pillow, his arms outstretched. He was a picture of repose.

Danny didn’t think that he could touch. To slide across the sheets was tempting, but surprised out of sleep, Steve could come up fighting. There was probably a shiny silver knife tucked amidst the pillows. They were going to have to do something about the pillows. Why did he need eight? And also, the knife was going to have to migrate to the bedside table or somewhere.

He could throw a pillow at him.

Danny lollled back. He kind of guessed that it was about sevenish. He yawned and let his eyes close. He could doze like a cat in sunlight.

He hovered on the edge of sleep and wakefulness, chasing Grace through surf made out of pineapple juice, arguing about stickiness. Weirdness segued into exploring the House, turning through the dining room-come-gym directly into the attic? Why was the kettle full of spinach? Danny blinked awake and sat up.

“Hey?” Steve squinted at him. He had curled onto his side at some point during Danny’s doze.

“Morning,” Danny said quietly.

“Morning,” Steve echoed, watching carefully.

“None of this,” Danny decided and pounced. Steve laughed and met him halfway, tried to roll Danny so that he was on top, and failed.

“Oof. You’re heavy,” Steve complained stretching up to kiss, as Danny bent over him.

“You want to get off this morning?” Danny asked, poised. “Or do you want to argue, hmmm?”

Steve studied him hawkeyed, listening hard.

“You okay?” Danny asked.

Steve nodded mutely, craning a little further. Kissing had to come first; closed mouthed, because well, morning breath. Danny reached down between them. He was already hard; it was morning. And Steve rose to meet him so that Danny could guide their erections together.

Steve’s irises dilated as his hips jabbed forwards. This was going to be fast again, Danny could tell,
and Danny was going to be with him every step of the way. Danny looked down between the length of their bodies, under the tent of the sheet. He saw Steve’s foreskin drawn back and then he was coming. Danny was a visual thinker; it was as hot as Hell. Shuddering, he joined in. Fireworks like last night sparked behind his eyes, as pleasure rolled through his hips. Steve was keening. And then Danny relaxed, letting his weight flop down on Steve -- now he could complain about Danny’s weight. Steve’s arms came around him possessively, one low on his ass cupping the curve, the other smoothing between his shoulder blades.

“We should get you a cat,” Danny mumbled.

“What?” Steve said, but it was a sleepy question.

Danny turned his head and kissed the side of Steve’s face. They simply soaked in the moment, revelling in early morning inertia and afterglow of sex.

~*~

“I need to piss,” Steve said, smacking a kiss to Danny’s temple and shifting out from under him.

Danny winced as they stickly unglued.

Steve shuffled over the expanse of his bed, and rolled off. Standing, he stretched tall, raising his hands over his head -- arms straight, palms facing each other, shoulder width apart. Some kind of yoga move, Danny guessed. It gave Danny an unparalleled view of his tramp stamp. Danny slid over for a better look.

Unmistakably Celtic in design, it curved, twisted, and bent over the swell of his buttocks. Coming together like two challenging waves, where the separate elements of the knot work met, rather than arrowing down, they splashed upwards following the dimple of his spine to a twisted apex. It was not a generic piece; this had been designed with a plan in mind -- it screamed of the movement of the sea.

“Who designed that? What’s the idea?” he asked.

There was no answer. Danny shook his head self-depreciatingly: when would he fucking learn?

“Huh?” Steve turned.

“Later.” Danny moved to stand up, and then looked to the vast expanse of the world around them. Intellectually, he knew that no one could possibly see them, but, man, this was open plan to the wide-wide world.

Steve cocked an eyebrow, as he stood there in all his naked glory.

“You are a nudist.” Danny said ‘nudist’ with the emphasis on ‘nu’.

Steve shrugged. “I’ve got nothing to be ashamed of.”

He sauntered off, letting Danny grab a sheet and twist it around his waist.

~*~

“You got some shorts that I can borrow? Or something?” Danny asked. The bedroom on the same level as Steve’s orgasmic shower (and that wasn’t hyperbole) and artist studio turned out to be pretty much his dressing room.
Steve was wrapping a translucent, wide belt around his torso.

“Do you need help with that?” Danny asked. There had been another round of showering and moisturising, and now some sort of high-tech plastic sheeting.

“I’m okay. There’s Velcro straps.” He nodded to the floor to ceiling wardrobe. “Underwear is in the top left hand drawer. There’s some Calvin Klein boxer briefs still in their package. You can have them. Shorts second drawer down on the right. T-shirts hanging up in the narrow wardrobe.”

“OCD freak,” Danny muttered. The drawers were organised by colour, although Steve’s underwear was either black or white, with no colour combinations, and his sock choices were boring. Danny randomly selected a pair of black shorts, because he was not creeping through the House with figure-hugging underpants on -- Kono would be lurking -- and contemplated Steve’s ironed t-shirts.

“What?” Steve reached over him and selected a green t-shirt from between a light green t-shirt and a dark camouflaged green t-shirt.

“Ironed?”

“Mrs. K. adores ironing. It’s practically zen for her.”

“Okay.” Danny grabbed a white t-shirt, stretched up on his toes and kissed Steve high on the cheek. “I’ve got to get some conditioner on my hair before it dries. I’ll see you downstairs. Put the coffee on.”

“Yes, dear.”

~*~

“Nice t-shirt, Danny. Is it new?” Kono sipped on her coffee as she regarded him smugly across the kitchen table. “It’s a little tight.”

Danny leaned back in his seat. “No. I borrowed it from Steve.”

“Aw, isn’t that cute.”

“I will tickle you to death, Kalakaua.”

“You could try.”

“I think that I’ve proved conclusively that you are ticklish.”

“Not as ticklish as Steve,” Kono observed twisting in her seat. Steve was frying up some scrambled eggs under Danny’s watchful eye -- he didn’t trust him not to add curry power or even anchovies as an experiment.

“I’m not ticklish,” Steve said, which made both Kono and Danny laugh.

Pouting, Steve came over with the frying pan and scooped lightly scrambled eggs onto three plates. He dumped the hot pan in the sink where it hissed, and then sat in his customary seat.

“What’s your plan today?” Kono asked. “Have you heard anything from Navy Intelligence?”

Steve considered that question before answering, clearly editing what he couldn’t say from what he could say.
“Today is a National Holiday. Our request for information wasn’t flagged as critical, so I won’t get the information today. Tomorrow, maybe.”

Danny winced at the epic glowering beginning to blossom, and pushed a mug of coffee into Steve’s orbit.

“You said that it would take a few days, Steve,” he pointed out.

“True.”

“So what are you guys going to do? There’s a good tide out of Waikiki, I’m going to hook up with some friends and surf. Do you want to come?”

“What’s the weather forecast?” Steve asked, although he was already tapping on his BlackBerry, scrolling to his favourite weather app. “How good do Chin’s hiking boots really fit, Danny? Would they be up for a reasonable hike?”

Danny leaned back in his seat and looked at his bare toes.

“Honestly, they don’t fit that great. And the three pairs of socks turn the boots into a sweatbox. I’m going to have to buy my own.”

“You’ve got sneakers, haven’t you?” Steve leaned into his space and stared at his feet. “They’re practically trail running shoes. Good grips?”

“Yeah, I’ve only had them a couple of months.”

“Let’s check them out. Where are they?” Steve said decisively.

“I think I left them in your bathroom.”

“Really,” Kono drawled.

“Yes, Kono,” Danny lowered his voice dramatically. “I was in Steve’s bathroom last night. Dum dum dum! And you--” Danny pointed his fork at Steve, “--finish your breakfast.”

“But--”

“I assume that you’re thinking about some hiking into the boonies. So you’re going to need all your energy. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. And we haven’t agreed to go anywhere. It’s the first of January: post-season college football bowl games. Is there a game today?”

“You like football?” Steve asked, interested. “I used to be a quarterback.”

“Well, there’s a surprise,” Danny drawled. “I prefer baseball. But only a fraction more than football. Is there a game we can go see? Parades and events?”

“I’ve never been to a baseball game,” Steve mused, as he utilised the power of Google to search out local football games.

“Somehow that doesn’t surprise me.” Danny looked over his shoulder at the screen.

“There’s nothing scheduled today. Well, there’s an NCAA game tomorrow.” Steve showed Danny the screen. “But there’s an NFL pro-bowl game at the Aloha Stadium on the 29th of January. You want to get tickets?”
“Of course I want to get tickets, doofus.”

“I can talk to someone about tickets,” Kono said.

“Make it a family thing?” Steve proposed, a little hesitant. “It’s a little late to get a lot of tickets together.”

Kono cocked her head to the side, humming. “We’ll see. I might be able to source something.” She grinned like a shark.

“I’m guessing I don’t want to ask,” Danny observed.

“It allows you plausible deniability,” Kono said -- worryingly chirpy to Danny’s ears.

“So hiking then?” Steve went back to the original suggestion, with undeniably cute eagerness.

“I guess,” Danny said. Who could resist Steve’s enthusiasm? “Where are you planning on going?”

“There’s this place in the Ka’a’awa Valley.” Steve was polishing off his eggs with all the decorum of a garbage disposal as he talked. “Let’s check out your sneakers.”

Danny pondered. “Okay, I’m up for a hike. And don’t eat so fast, it will give you indigestion.”

Kono was laughing silently at them. Steve slowed his hoovering.

“What’s so special about the Kaaawa’a’awaha Valley?” Danny wasn’t moving until he had finished his breakfast. He might even have a bowl of fruit, just so he could watch Steve churn in anticipation a little longer.

“I want to show you some ki’i pohaku.”

“You what?” Danny asked.

“Petroglyphs. Images carved in stone. They’re awesome, you’ll love them.”

“Okay,” Danny said dubiously. Hiking to see some stone pictures; it sounded like a quiet day out.

~*~

The view was pretty impressive. The scope of the plain stretched out between banks of greenery enshrouded mountains, as if a giant had taken an ice cream scoop and hollowed out a valley. At the visitor centre at the bottom of the valley, Steve had bypassed the tourist displays in the parking lot, opting to point out the edge of the shield volcano and the twisty route that they would be taking in the distance. The vista was different to the north shore, more lush, despite the same underlying volcanic nature.

Danny trailed after Steve. His sneakers held up to the trail, but he was regretting wearing black jeans, even if they did protect his legs from the vegetation. Steve had changed into a pair of Capri hiking pants that hugged his slim thighs and butt very well, Danny thought admiringly. The experienced hiker also wore light weight trail shoes. Danny accepted that he was going to have to balance his cheque book and hit a few sports shops in downtown Honolulu to invest in suitable footwear and lighter, wicking tops and trousers more suitable for Hawaii’s infernal weather.

“My father used to bring me up here. You know, the view hasn’t changed.” Steve paused and regarded the landscape with a happy sigh. “Everything else has changed, but not this. Do you think Grace would like to come another time?”
“Grace likes manicures and pedicures and days at the beach. Hiking; not so much.” If she had come with them, Danny would have definitely been giving her a piggy-back ride by this point. He rested his hands on his hips and breathed, thankful that Steve’s pace was fairly relaxed. This was a more strenuous hike than their walk along the beach the day after Christmas.

“What?” Steve presented him with a Sigg bottle from the pouch hooked to his daypack.

“Thanks.” Danny had his own, but it was easier to drink Steve’s water than wriggle out of his backpack, which he had festooned with carbineers and hung two cameras off with a couple of lens packs. He glugged and handed it back. Steve wiped the neck of the bottle and took his own slug, like they hadn’t been kissing like fiends for the past week. He slotted the bottle back in its neoprene pouch.

“Oh, look.” Steve bent over and picked up a fat brown nut from the trail floor. “Kukui nut. Candlenut.”

“Candlenut?” Danny swung his preferred Canon on its length of strap around and snapped off a picture of the large nut sitting on the centre of Steve’s palm.

“Yeah.” Steve rifled in his pockets, found a lighter, and lit the sharp tip of the nut. He cupped the nut in his hands to protect the flame from the light, continual winds whipping around them. “Takes about fifteen minutes to burn. People on the islands used them to measure time.”

Danny focused in, and snapped off a couple of shots of the guttering flame. Steve stood patiently, even if he did roll his eyes.

“The oil of the kukui nut is very useful,” Steve continued his lecture. “It’s used in traditional medicine for everything from diarrhoea to hair treatment. The oil can be used as a varnish. You can roast the nuts and make a condiment called ‘Inamona. You can even make ink for tattoos. Finished?”

“What?”

“Photos?”

“Yes.” Danny clicked his camera into standby mode.

Steve blew out the flame, and then crouched down, scuffling the tip in the damp soil underfoot. Standing, he didn’t throw the nut away, but tossed it from hand to hand. Danny watched the impromptu juggling wondering if he should get his camera again.

“There’s a lot of oil in the nuts,” Steve explained under Danny’s indulgent gaze. “I want to make sure it’s really out, before I toss it aside. Come on, we’ve got a ways to go before we get to the petroglyphs.”

He set off, exuding happiness with every step.

~*~

“This is honu -- the turtle.” Steve pointed at blatantly obvious turtle shape scoured into the rust-coloured rock face, and then to stick men brandishing spears. “And these are the warriors of the hunt. This is the birthing mother.”

Danny considered the smaller stick figure beneath the open legs of the larger figure.

“Are they hunting the giant turtle or the mom having a baby?” Danny asked.
Steve parsed that question. “Yes, Daniel, the warriors are hunting the mother.”

Danny grinned at the sarcasm. Steve pointed to the main cadre of stick warriors that were pointing their spears in the same direction towards a gash in the rock.

“I’d guess that there might have been a shark or wild boar or something carved here, but the wind, weather or even someone trying to deface the petroglyphs has removed it. Or maybe even the gash itself.”

“What? Hunting something in the hole?” Danny crouched and peered inside.

Steve squatted next to him, smoothly moving in close. He had his Maglite out and shone light into the gap. There was no sign of any carvings inside.

“Looks like there is a flattish platform,” Danny said. “Maybe there was a -- I dunno -- statue or icon or something in there?”

“Could be.” Steve shrugged, pecked a kiss to Danny’s hair, and stood. He turned to stand before the landscape framed by the mountainous edge of valley to the ocean beyond. The narrow ledge on which they stood meant that Danny couldn’t get far enough back to effectively capture the sight with the lenses he had to hand.

Danny contemplated the petroglyphs, trying to figure out how to best photograph them. The midday sun was almost directly overhead. They didn’t actually speak to him. They appeared a little random. He snapped off a couple of desultory shots, recording them almost scientifically. Setting his camera close to the rock face, lens pointing upward, he played with the settings, trying to get a long shot, elongating the warrior with the cloud frittered blue sky dominating the scene.

Shading the back of the camera, he tried to make out the image on the LCD screen, but the sunlight was too bright.

“Hey, maybe you shouldn’t stand too close to the edge?” Danny said, spotting Steve looking over the vista. *Your balance isn’t great,* went unsaid.

Steve didn’t move an iota. Danny slipped his camera into panoramic mode and started to create a segmented panorama of the entire view from left to right. He would have to stitch them together at home. The mountains to the north were jagged like carnassial teeth supported by tree-covered buttresses that undulated down into the valley below as if folds of cloth. The fields of light green across the valley floor appeared to be smooth, but Danny knew from their passage that they were dominated by tufts of dry grass and stubby bushes that rarely were higher than a man. The ocean off in the distance was turquoise-blue centred by a tiny little island that looked like a conical hat with a cheeky little tip to the side. Steve came into the shot, caught in profile, expression contemplative. Maintaining slow even breathing, Danny continued smoothly turning, constructing his shot, even if he would have liked to pause. The valley curved up to the south, growing into toothy mountains that matched the mountains to the northern rise. There was a bank of pale grey and dark blue clouds building up precariously against the tips of the southernmost mountains. They looked as if they were about to tumble down the mountains’ sides into the valley.

Click, final shot.

Danny flipped his camera off, let it hang from its carabineer, and then ever so calmly and carefully walked up to Steve.

“Hey.” He caught a handy strap hanging from Steve’s backpack and gripped. Steve had left a good
yard between himself and the edge, but it made Danny feel better. “Penny for your thoughts?”

“Just everything, you know,” Steve said, uncharacteristically open. “There was something going on with my mom; she had links with criminals. Apparently they -- mom and dad -- fought and that’s why me and Mare spent so much time with Grandmother. I never realised.”

“Hey, you were a kid -- a little kid.” Danny slid his other hand under Steve’s t-shirt, stroking the small of his back. “According to Mamo, your mom stopped doing whatever she was doing when you were six?”

“Apparently,” Steve said grimly.

“Apparently?” Danny echoed. The skin under his hand was warm, and Steve hadn’t shrugged him off, but he wasn’t yielding to his comfort.

“I’ve been thinking. I was only thirteen when mom and dad died, but I remember…”

“What do you remember, Babe?” Danny said quietly.

Steve glanced at him, looking at his mouth.

“What do you remember?” Danny said at normal volume.

“I was thinking about the night. The night of the crash. We were driving fast. Mom was driving. Mom never drove. Dad usually insisted. They fought about that a lot. I think dad had had an Irish whiskey with Uncle Brian. They liked Irish whiskey.”

“Where had you been?”

“A party at Auntie Pat’s. It wasn’t really a party. It was a once a month type of thing. Mom, Dad, Auntie Pat and Uncle Brian played Bridge. Me, Mare, Charlie and Robert played games, ran riot in the yard, or something. Mary was dozing; she was a little kid. It was raining. Mom and Dad were arguing about something. I wasn’t listening. I should have listened. It could have been important.”

“Thirteen, Steven. Thirteen.” Danny lightly smacked his back, underscoring his words. “I couldn’t tell you a single thing that my parents talked about when I was thirteen.”

“Yeah, but it was the last time that I heard my parents talk.”

Danny got him shifted around so that they stood face to face.

“You didn’t know. Do you hear? You did not know,” Danny emphasised. “You were coming home from a traditional family night out. Chin told me that you got hurt. You got knocked out in the crash. Even if you had heard something, you got your brains scrambled.”

Steve heaved out a sigh. “You’re probably right.”

“Of course I’m right. I’m always right.” Danny slid an arm around his waist under his backpack and drew him away from that precarious edge. Steve went willingly.

“I don’t know about always right.” Steve curved around Danny. They met halfway. The kiss was sweet, with only an edge of need and melancholy -- Danny could almost taste Steve’s complexity. Steve cupped Danny’s cheeks between his large hands, and each kiss was a treasure.

The temptation to drop to the earthy loam, and lose himself in Steve was nigh on irresistible. But their position was once again a precarious precipice. What was it with Steve and open heights?
Exhibitionist. Danny pulled back a fraction.

“You’ll learn,” Danny said.

“What?” Steve tugged him around, settling him into his good side.

“I’m always right.”

Steve snorted, ruffling Danny’s hair. It was a curious sensation to be tucked beneath the hold of a lover, instead of the other way round.

“So, lunch?” Danny offered with a smile. They had the ledge and an unparalleled view.

“I don’t know. I don’t like the look of those clouds,” Steve said, jerking his chin slightly in the direction of the building clouds on the south shield wall. “The forecast was good, but the Pacific throws up stuff. Let’s get lower down into the valley before it starts pouring.”

~*~

Steve had called it right, and luckily they had got off the rock face before the clouds dumped rainwater into the valley.

It was like walking under a shower and it was definitely not as much fun as Steve’s Star Trek shower. But they were well equipped -- obviously having your own personal SEAL on hikes was the best possible preparation. They were getting wet because the ponchos that Steve had packed in their backpacks were now wrapped around Danny’s cameras and lenses that were securely packed in their backpacks. Their windproof light jackets kept them warm like wetsuits, although it wasn’t going to get too cold -- it was humid and tropically warm. Danny’s wet jeans were riding up his ass, but it was his own fault, Steve had advised that he wear cargoes or chinos.

Visibility was abysmal, but Steve had a GPS and, as backup, an impressive liquid-filled handheld compass with what looked like a sight attached to it. Danny kept a hold of Steve’s trailing strap like an impromptu toddler leash, as they slipped and slid along the now muddy track.

“Steve, how’s about finding somewhere to hole up?”

“What?” Steve asked. He had taken out his aids and put them in their protective case.

“Cave?”

Steve pursed his lips as he concentrated. “No,” he said definitely.

“Why?” It seemed like a good idea.

“One, I don’t know where any caves are. Two, we’d have to climb away from this valley to find a cave, up one of the channels, which are funnelling the rainwater. Three, I’m concerned about flash floods.”

“Oh.” Danny looked behind them. In the droning downpour, visibility was a mere couple of yards. The vee of their trail was a muddy morass rapidly draining water. Imagining a wall of water rushing down towards them, churning death in its wake, wasn’t difficult.

Steve followed his gaze, with a huff of amusement.

“Well, if you hear anything like a boom or rushing water, tell me,” Steve said.
“What!”

Steve grinned and continued walking. Perforce, Danny followed, keeping a hold of the leash.

“What sort of wet Hell is this?” Danny demanded.

“We’ll be fine. Come on.”

“We’re doomed. We’re going to die.”

“We’ll be fine.”

~*~

#68#

“Jesus,” Danny blasphemed out loud and automatically ducked, even if his mom was a million miles too far away to bat his ear.

They could have worn the most high-tech manmade fibres ever designed, but they still would have been drenched to their underpants. Danny wouldn’t have been surprised if his favourite nudist had stripped off and finished the walk naked. They doggedly sluiced along, skirting the edge of the trail, fording through rivulets of ankle-deep fast running water, trooping over muddy earth and slippery grass.

“It’s okay, Danny,” Steve hollered, a bit overly loud, as he did when he didn’t have his aids in.

What was impressive was that the rain was unrelenting. It was like a shower that was going on forever. Maybe it was the start of the apocalypse?

“Here,” Steve spoke again. He twisted, presenting Danny with a view of the rain splattered GPS screen.

There was a little star with a text box spelling ‘truck’ and a line leading to an arrow in the bottom right hand corner of the screen. Danny squinted through the rain. Ahead of them were a bunch of dark blocks in a line -- cars, Danny guessed. They stepped off mud and there was the hard asphalt of a parking lot underfoot.

“Safe!” Danny said as he released Steve’s strap, but the joke went unheard.

Steve didn’t head to their truck, cutting through the puddle strewn parking lot to a darker, larger blob ahead. He unerringly led them to the Ka’a’awa Valley tourist centre-café. They struggled through the double doors and into the welcome of a well-lit, warm and dry room.

Pushing his hood back, Danny sighed in relief. There were a few chortles of laugher as other refugees from the storm noted their entrance.

“Hi. Hi. Hi.” A blue polo shirt-bedecked Ka’a’awa Valley ranger helping buss the café tables waved at them. “There are some paper towels beside you. Dry off some before you come in. If you could take off your boots -- that would be really awesome.”

“Steve.” Danny caught his wrist, before he could stride over to the café service area.

“Huh?”

Danny clicked his fingers and then pointed to the commercially large rolls of paper towels on a table
by the door. Some bright soul had set trays on the floor and an array of people’s walking boots and trail shoes were piled up.

Steve gave him a thumbs up and crouched to pick his laces apart. Danny toed off his sneakers and sopping socks onto a tray, resigning himself to the end of their days -- they had been loyal shoes. Shifting off their backpacks, they struggled out of their jackets and left them to hang on hooks by the door, to drip over another set of trays. There was a black, absorbent mat underfoot. Danny stripped his hands down his thighs trying to draw some water from his jeans. Steve scrubbed his hair dry with a handful of blue towels. The tiny band aid protecting the cut on his scalp came off under his vigorous rubbing.

“Hey.” Danny caught his collar, pulling Steve down so that he could examine the cut. “What happened to the stitches?”


Danny tapped the thread-thin bright red scar.

“Oh, I got Malia to snip them out.” He grinned. “It’s okay, Danny. She’s a trained doctor.”

“Unreal.” Danny bent over and picked up and pocketed the used band aid.

Steve grabbed some more towels and painstakingly dried his ears.

“Crap.” He stuck his finger in his right ear.

“What?” Danny got in close.

“It’s okay, D.” He cocked his head to the side, cupping his palm over his ear. “Just got some water trapped.”

Water in ear, equalled no hearing aid, Danny guessed.

“It’s my good ear -- better ear,” Steve griped.

It had never occurred to Danny that Steve’s hearing was different in either ear. But given that the damage was on his left side, it kind of stood to reason that his right side had been somewhat protected from the explosion that had injured and deafened him.

“It’s okay, Danny, honest.” Steve grabbed more towels, drying off his arms and patting dry his t-shirt.

As dry as they were going to get, they padded barefoot over to a table by the windows and dumped their backpacks on two chairs of a four-seater set up.

“Food?” Danny restricted his communication to one word and pointed towards the service area.

Nodding, Steve strode towards the long counter, with its espresso machine, and glass cases filled with cakes and muffins. Danny grabbed a tray from a holder beside the counter.

“Hi,” another happy Ka’a’awa ranger greeted them from behind the array of pastries. Above his baseball-capped head were blackboards with the day’s food offerings carefully written out.

“Hungry?” Danny rubbed his hands together.

“Are you hungry?” Danny circled his hand up and down over his tummy.

“I guess.” Steve looked at the boards. “What’s today’s soup?”

The server looked at Danny. “Carrot and coriander.”

Danny elbowed Steve. “Carrot and coriander. Vegetable soup. Sounds good?”

Steve nodded. Danny’s stomach was clawing against his backbone. Steve’s attention was back on the boards. He chewed on his bottom lip.

“I’ll have the soup, and goats cheese and sun-blushed tomato panini,” Steve finally decided. He hauled out his wallet and passed it to Danny. “I’ve got to hit the head.”

He loped off on long legs. It was a canny and clever way of footing the bill, Danny thought fondly, with a soupçon of exasperation. The server regarded Danny and the wallet in his hands, and waited, his expression a little nonplussed. Danny arched an eyebrow at the kid.

“Head. He means the bathroom,” Danny finally volunteered. “He’s in the Navy.”

“Oh.” He scratched his long dark sideburn. “What do you want, brah?”

“Two carrot and coriander soups. Goat’s cheese panini, I’ll have a -- uhm -- chicken, salsa, peppers and Monterey Jack cheese panini.”

“Okay.” The ranger wrote down the order. “Coffee?”

“Yeah.” The coffee machine was of a good specification (Danny was particular about his coffee). “I’ll have a café latte and Steve will have a … peppermint tea.”

“Oh, Brah. You want the drinks with the soup or the sandwiches?”

“Sandwiches,” Danny said decisively, setting his tray on the countertop.

“It comes to $32.46.” He scribbled on a notebook, adding up the bill.

Danny cracked Steve’s wallet, because his wallet was in his backpack, and he had paid the bill at the Waahila Hotel Coffee House. The kid doled out two bowls of steaming hot soup, and set them on the tray, with a couple of rolls and knobs of butter.

Steve sailed past them. “I’ll get us cutlery and stuff.”

Danny gave him a thumbs up. Steve went to their table by the window. Using a wad of napkins he brushed off the surface, and then set their cutlery down. Danny carried over their tray, weaving between the tables. The café was busy, but it wasn’t bursting at the seams. Mainly, it was filled with chattering, happy families, and an older couple -- apparently dedicated hikers based on their high-tech gear. A mom overseeing her family of four grinned at Danny as she fed her toddler in his highchair. The soup smelled amazing; being hungry was always the best appetizer.


Steve made a confused, scrunchy smile in his direction. “That I did not get.”

“Eat.” Danny dug in with his spoon.

It was delicious -- just right: tasty, smooth and buttery, blending carrot and coriander perfectly. Steve
dug in, humming contentedly to himself. There was no real need for conversation as they gently steamed dry. Steve dunked his un-buttered bread roll in the soup. As Danny was polishing off his soup, mopping up the final dregs, the kid came over with their drinks, and two plates of paninis presented with side salads and globs of coleslaw.

“Here you go,” he said, setting the plate before Danny, and then carefully putting the second in front of Steve. The hot drinks followed.

“Thanks,” Danny said.

“Can I take the bowls?” he asked Danny.

“Sure. Steve, you’ve finished, yes?”

Watching carefully, Steve moved his empty bowl to the tray, and then sat back. The kid bussed their dirty bowls away. Steve didn’t immediately dig into the sandwich, twisting a piece of napkin into a wad and sticking it in his right ear.

“Hey, you shouldn’t do that.” Danny batted at his hand.

Steve leaned further back, and continued wiggling.

“You’ll hurt your ear,” Danny persisted.

“I can’t hear you,” Steve said singsong, albeit with his typical monotone drop.

“Put your left aid in, then,” Danny said, nodding at Steve’s case on the table.

“What?”

Danny cupped his own left ear with his index finger and thumb, and then pointed at Steve.

Steve shook his head, and mock shivered. “It’s too weird with just one. Any rate that ear’s crap,” he said with absolute honesty. He stopped prodding his right ear though, and picked up his panini.

A sturdy little kid, five or so, came stomping over to their table. He stared up at Steve and grinned. He had a veritable mop of glorious sun-bleached blond curls and bright blue eyes.

“Hi,” Danny said, amused. The kid ignored him, staring at Steve with all the innocent intensity a scrappy kid could when intrigued.

He sort of saluted Steve, and then tapped his right index and middle finger on top of his similarly held left index and middle finger. He followed the sign with a quick finger-spelled series of letters. Danny caught the first initial, possibly a ‘J’.

Steve froze.

The kid was signing, Danny recognised. Danny had recently watched a few videos and had read a few articles, thinking on the value of learning the language, even if Steve wasn’t ready to use American Sign Language. Danny was a visual person; sign language appealed to him.

The kid was fast, but seeing no response to his friendly hello, he stopped.

Taking a deep breath, Danny waved, getting the little kid’s attention. He was probably going to show the worst display of signing in the history of signing, but he was going to give it a go. Danny had read that the grammar and structure was different than English -- hopefully the kid would get the
gist of what he was trying to convey.

He pointed at Steve, shook his head and then rotated his index fingers as if spinning bicycle wheels. Biting his lip, he added a sign which he did know -- he drew his finger down his cheek from ear to near his mouth. Then Danny shrugged because he didn’t know the sign for ‘new’ or ‘just gone’ deaf.

Clearly perplexed, the kid fired off another raft of signs, to which Danny could only return with a clenched fist rotated over his chest -- sorry.

Jay turned and signed to his parents who were watching, with appropriately hawk-like gazes at their wandering offspring. The fair-haired mom, who had been feeding the toddler, stood up, and smoothed her long purple skirt. She ambled over, flashing of a handful of signs at her kid.

“Hello,” she said in a deep resonant voice, at odds with her slightness. “Julian wanted to say hi. He saw your hearing aid sign and thought that he had found a kindred soul.”

“Oh, I’m a kindred soul.” Danny grinned at Julian. He pretended to grab a page from an imaginary book on his left hand and stuffed it in his head -- learning. “I’ve just been checking out a few websites, for Steve.”

They all turned to look at Steve, who smiled with all the grace of a polar bear. Danny kicked him under the table.

“Sorry, I don’t sign,” Steve said, mostly to the little kid. He pointed at his ear. “This is new. Few months.”

“Ah.” The mom crouched down to her son’s level, and proceeded, Danny assumed, to explain that Steve couldn’t hear, but had only lost his hearing recently.

You didn’t need sign language to understand that Julian didn’t quite follow the explanation. Being unable to hear, Danny guessed, simply was for little Julian, that it could happen was inconceivable.

Danny didn’t know what he asked his mom with his cupped hands, but he knew that it was a question by his scrunched up face.

“No, baby. That’s private.” She followed up her words with a series of smooth signs.


Steve, Danny saw, had plugged in his left hearing aid. Watching him, Julian’s mom nodded decisively, and then proceeded to tell her son something. Julian absorbed and then barrelled over to hug Steve’s knees.

“Hey, it’s okay.” Steve gingerly patted his curls. “Honest.”

“It will be quite a transition for you,” Julian’s mom said. “I’m Irene, by the way.”

“Danny,” Danny said, and pointed at Steve. “Steve.”

“Nice to meet you.” Still kneeling she caught her son’s shoulder and drew him into her hold, and stood. “There’s ASL classes at the university, or there’s a coffee house on South King Street near the driver’s licence office where learners meet on Tuesday evenings at seven. We just hang out and practise signing, I go along because … well, I can sign and hear. My husband is Deaf, he teaches at the university.” She automatically pivoted to smile at her husband minding the toddler.
Julian had his mom’s snub nose and splay of freckles, but Julian’s dad was the source of the kid’s abundant curls. He waved.

“We’ll think about it,” Steve said with plastic intention.

“When we’re ready,” Danny clarified.

She nodded understandingly. “Looking forward to seeing you. Say bye-bye, Julian.”

Julian leaned back in his mom’s hold and made a deliberate goodbye wave, followed up with, “Bah.”


“Bah-eye,” Julian said very carefully to Steve.

Steve mimicked Julian’s very deliberate wave and smiled.

“You’re learning signing?” Steve said.

“No,” Danny said honestly. “I looked up a few websites, found a good one. And I’ve looked up some words and watched a few You-Tube videos.”

“They’ve been using signs,” Steve said suddenly. “I’ve seen you do that cheek stroke thing before. And you cup your ear when you ask me if I have my aids in.”

“Told you.” Danny swallowed and repeated his words, “Told you. I’ve watched some tutorials. Hey, I gesture when I talk. It’s genetic. Wait until you meet my mom. I’m surprised that she doesn’t float a foot off the air when she gets going.”

Steve held up his hand, and then canting his head to the side, made another attempt to loosen the water in his ear. Judging from his satisfied expression, he succeeded. First drying his ear with a napkin, he then plugged in his right aid.

“Better?” Danny asked.

“Yeah.”

“So go on, talk to me,” Danny prompted.

Steve glanced at the happy family. Dad was telling Julian a story -- something seemed to be eating something else based on the chomping fingers. The toddler banged his spoon against his highchair table enthusiastically.

“Signing seems like giving up. Accepting it,” Steve said quietly. “There, I said it.”
“Wow,” Danny said. He wasn’t entirely sure what to do with that revelation, but he had to do something.

“Some days I can’t remember what it’s like to hear properly… like I could before. No more concerts. I can’t go to a concert and listen to Jimmy Buffett. Okay, I can go to a concert, but I’ll only get bits of it. It will be a different experience,” Steve trailed off frustrated.

“Okay, uhm.” Danny pinched the bridge of his nose and then reached out to grip Steve’s hand. But Steve moved back in his seat. “I can only try to understand. Today you can’t hear. Tomorrow? But I’m kind of guessing that someday soon there’ll be bionic ears that you can get, if you want. I don’t know if you’ll ever ‘accept it’ but learning to sign is another way of communicating.”

“I know that it doesn’t make any sense,” Steve said.

“But it’s how you feel.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “I’m going to get phobic about eating with you. It always becomes a session about feelings.”

Even if he was barefooted, Danny kicked him hard.

“Ow,” Steve said sullenly.

“It hurt me more than it hurt you.” Danny took a slug of his coffee. “Look, I get it. It sucks.”

“Very eloquent. Perhaps you and my therapist should meet and discuss,” Steve said with an edge of temper. “Look, I’m actually living this. You want me to say that it could have been worse. Yes, it could have been worse. It could be better, though. Accepting things doesn’t… I don’t like to accept things. It’s not part of my mindset. And, yeah, I’m pissed.”

Danny chewed on his bottom lip. He kind of wished that Steve’s therapist was sitting next to him.

“Good,” Danny said. Pissed was better than down in the dumps or depressed.

“Good?” Steve echoed.

“Okay, sorry, I don’t have an answer. All I know is that I’ll help you figure it out. Figure out everything. Capisce?”

“Codpiece?” Steve cocked his head to the side. “What?”

Danny flushed and plastered a hand over his face. Seriously, would he ever learn? Warm fingers curled around his hand and tugged it down.

“Codpiece? What the Hell did you say?” Humour tinged Steve’s voice.

“I said ‘capisce’ Italian for ‘understand’.”


Danny squeezed Steve’s fingers. “We’ll figure it out, okay? What works for you. What doesn’t work for you. It won’t be today. It won’t be tomorrow -- because you’ve entered a whole new confusing world. But we will figure it out.”

“Codpiece.” Steve smiled.
Danny knew that his smile was overly indulgent, but he couldn’t help himself. Steve needed that simplest and most complicated of things: a friend. *I’m gushing,* Danny mentally kicked himself. A little bit of unintentional humour displaced what had been a confession of hurt. It didn’t dismiss it, but had allowed Danny to show that Steve wasn’t alone, and they were all goofs together.

Steve squeezed his fingers, and released, moving to finish off the heel of his sandwich, as a totally obvious avoidance of the subject. Danny abandoned his panini, since cold chicken and peppers didn’t appeal. Steve gnawed, his gaze unerringly fixed on Danny.

They could continue the conversation, but Danny knew that Steve’s tolerance was limited. He had made a massive admission; it was time to let it rest. Danny kind of guessed that Steve would be checking out a few American Sign Language websites as soon as they got home.

“How long is this going to last?” Danny asked, glancing to the window on his right.

“How long is this going to last?” Danny asked, glancing to the window on his right.

“How long is this going to last?” Danny asked, glancing to the window on his right. “Hmmm?” Steve munched, and swallowed.

Danny brushed his hand over the condensation masked window.

“No, I guess. It wasn’t forecasted -- so I figure it’s a small storm cell.” Steve squinted at the grey nothingness beyond the windows. “Relatively small storm cell; it will run out of gas.”

“An hour? Two hours?”

“Let’s see, it’s been raining hard for forty minutes.” Steve checked his chunky black, no doubt waterproof, watch. “If it was a full on storm, it would be much more windy, and colder. I figure that this is unusual, possibly even record breaking. It’s a weird time of day for it to be raining this hard, but we’re in a rain trap.”

“Torrential,” Danny clicked his fingers. He liked the word.

“Yeah, it’s torrential,” Steve echoed, a little perplexed.

“Yeah.” Danny frittered his fingers in the air. “What a day. I mean, we went for a hike in what I thought was a firetrap, stood on the edge of a precipice -- I thought you were going to fall -- trekked through an imminent flood intent on flushing us into the ocean. Weathered -- I’m hilarious -- something scary.”

“I never knew you were a pessimist,” Steve said.

“I’m not a pessimist,” Danny said. “I’m a realist.”

“Look on the bright side,” Steve said drolly, “the day isn’t over yet.”

~*~

#69#

“Dessert?” Steve asked, and pointed at Danny’s empty plate.

The pastries in the tourist centre café looked *glorious:* chocolate, fruit, sugar-sprinkled, and creamy -- all-in-all rich confectionary of grandiose proportions. Cakes, apart from Mrs. K’s contributions to Seolh’s fridge, had been largely absent from Danny’s diet since arriving on Seolh’s doorstep. In all honesty, Danny thought that he might have lost weight.

Danny kind of got the impression that the offer was a sort of apology. For getting annoyed? For
being a complicated human? Danny thought that perhaps Steve wasn’t even too sure why he was semi-apologising.

Daniel Williams never turned down dessert.

He nodded and Steve left the table to amble over to the counter. Danny watched, curious as to what Steve would pick. Steve pondered the display, hands clasped behind his back.

Julian’s dad was still animatedly storytelling. Julian’s laugh was infectious. Danny did like the idea of sign language. Steve’s ears hurt him at times, talking to more than a couple of people was difficult, and noisy situations were a pain. Apart from Seolh’s residents and trips to Pearl Harbour-Hickam, Steve really did not appear to interact with people. Isolation was a real possibility -- it had taken some considerable cajoling to get Steve to go to the yoga centre.

Steve had a therapist, who Danny thought maybe he had seen once or twice in the past month, but did he have…? Danny didn’t even know how to formalise the concept: a guide to help him navigate his new reality? His audiologist Messel might have insight. Question was, would Steve listen, since he was all mixed up and hurting. Perhaps, Danny thought acidly, I’m a worrywart?

Steve had made his selections and was paying.

Steve had bought more cakes than was needed. He stopped by Julian’s table and stooped over, presenting the tray to Irene. She laughed and hauled Julian onto her lap, so he could point to the strawberry-enrobed cream puff that appealed to him.

Steve sauntered over to Danny, both his tray lighter by four cakes, and his step.

“What did you pick for me?” Danny laughed when he spotted the chocolate éclair. “Pervert.”

“What?” Steve slid down into his seat.

Danny curled his fingers around the éclair.

“It’s just an éclair,” Steve said, confused.

Danny wrapped his lips around one end and sucked the cream out. Steve’s jaw dropped, and who knew that Steve could blush so red?

“There’s kids here,” Steve grated in a low whisper.

“I’m just eating an éclair.” Danny munched -- a lot less lewdly -- as two of the kids ran past them to the windows, pushing and pulling at each other. There was flirting and flirting. However, Steve’s pupils had dilated. “Eat your carrot cake.”

Steve lifted his square of carrot cake up, his tongue peeked out and licked at the thick cream cheese frosting, delicately, like a cat. As attempts to flirt went, it was cute. Actually, Danny realised, Steve didn’t flirt much at all -- he was more an ambush kind of guy.

A flash of lightning and a boom of thunder rocked the restaurant. All the lights went out. Danny dropped his cake and wrapped his hands around Steve’s wrists. A little kid started crying. A man swore.

“It’s okay,” Danny said. The pulses under his fingers were hammering like snare drums.

Someone was protesting, as another person demanded to know what was happening.
“I’m okay, Danny,” Steve said tensely. He stood up, and leaned over in the gloom to kiss the top of Danny’s head. “Stay put.”

“What?”

“Ranger?” Steve crossed over to the younger female ranger. Her blue top was the brightest thing in the room.

“Sir?”

“Is there a generator?” Steve flinched as another wave of lightning and thunder crashed on top of each other, overhead.

“Just a little one, out back. You’ve got to manually start it. I was just going to --”

Rain was hammering, driven by rising gusts of wind. Lightning illuminated the room in a stark, eye-searing blast. The thunder rolled on top of the light.

“Best to stay inside, until this passes,” Steve ordered. “Does the centre have a lightning rod?”

“Yes.” She pointed to the door marked ‘private’ behind the counters. “It earths out back.”

“We obviously took a belt. The storm is directly overhead.” Steve turned to face the milling members of the public. He rapped the tabletop beside him -- hard. “Attention!”

It was rather impressive. Everyone stopped, from the elderly couple of hikers by the door, both of whom were supremely unbothered by the furore, to the crying kid on his dad’s lap. The kids who had their noses stuck to the window turned to face Steve. The guy who was swearing stopped.

“We’re in the centre of a strong force cell. Move away from the windows to the other side of the room.” Steve pointed. “This will pass. The building has a lightning rod. Move to the other side of the room.”

The windows rattled. Danny stood up and clicked his fingers at the kids. Their mom was already moving to corral them.

Another flash of light illuminated the café like an electric shock. The boom of thunder was immediately behind it. Danny darted into his backpack for his Canon. Catching the stark illumination of the lightning would be difficult. He pondered on the approach, as he set the camera on his backpack in lieu of a tripod. Positioning the camera, he set it to catch the windows and the abandoned tables and chairs. The mom was grabbing her son and daughter.

Medium shutter time and wide aperture, Danny decided thinking on depth of field as he set the timer to take five photos.

Thunder on top of lightning boomed again, and he missed the spectacle. Belatedly Danny checked on Steve -- he was putting on his walking boots. Rain lashed loudly over the howl of wind. Lightning flashed and thunder rocked the cafe. The white-on-black illumination of the foliage outside was apparent even through the rain splattered windows. A fork of light lashed the earth outside. Danny prayed that his camera caught the image. A crack fractured down the lone pane before him as if capturing the fork lightning beyond. The sonic boom of thunder rolled--

Then the window imploded.

“Danny!” Steve screamed.
Danny was no longer by the windows; he was under the table. His momma didn’t raise a fool. The thunder made his ears ring. Jesus!

“Danny!” One handed, Steve hauled the table clean off Danny. He had to have teleported across the café. Danny was very impressed.

“Danny!” Steve was stuck on one word. He pulled Danny to his feet and patted him down -- checking him with fervour. “Danny?”

“I’m okay, Babe.” Danny caught his hands. They were actually trembling. All around him was strewn with glass, but seeing the crack had given him time to hide.

Steve yanked his hands free, but before Danny could protest Steve latched on and hugged him in hard. All the breath huffed from Danny’s lungs with the force of his grip. Squished, Danny managed to free one hand to pat Steve’s back. The scared trip-hammer beat of Steve’s heart thrummed against Danny’s chest. Steve was terrified.

“I’m okay. Honest.” Danny kept patting. “I’m okay. Steve, talk to me.”

Steve was stock-still. He could have been carved from wood or even granite. It was akin to being hugged by a wooden manikin.

“Talk to me, Babe. I need to know that you’re tracking.” Danny blew in his ear.

Steve shivered. He backed off as if burnt. He stood before Danny, round shouldered, breath coming harshly.

“Hey.” Gently, Danny reached out.

Stepping back, glass crunched under Steve’s feet. He looked down at his boots.

Danny wiggled his own bare toes in response. “Oh, that’s going to be difficult.”

Still conspicuously silent, Steve looked at Danny’s face and then to his feet.

“Oi! Danny protested as Steve swooped in, swinging him into his arms with a huff.

“Not a damsel!” Danny batted his shoulder. Danny was no light-weight, and had to hook his arms around Steve’s neck to stop them from over-balancing.

Robo-Steve carried Danny ever so carefully over the glass and gently deposited him beside his sneakers.

“Not a girl.” Danny thumped Steve’s bicep on principle.

Petulant, Steve glanced at him, and paced measuredly away. He stopped before a young woman who was sitting on the floor, propped up against the food counter. She was pale white under a mess of hair that was so black it had blue highlights. A millisecond later, Steve ducked behind the counter, avoiding the male ranger, who seemed frozen in position. The kid still held a plate with a muffin, and looked like he belonged in a store window.

It was bedlam. The final blast appeared to have blown out the storm along with the windows. Glass and water were strewn across the floor. The woman sitting amidst the devastation was shocked and silent. A boy, one of the window gazers, cried sheets of tears. Danny shook himself and pushed his feet into his soggy sneakers with a disgusted shiver.
Danny headed to the kid.

Steve emerged from behind the counter with a large wad of freshly folded dish-towels and a couple of trays. Skirting around the counter, he knelt by the stricken, silent woman. The elderly couple, obviously experienced grandparents, beat Danny to the wailing boy by a hairsbreadth. The boy’s mom had her hands full with her screaming daughter.

The young female ranger was kind of helping, running back and forth, checking on everyone, but not stopping for a second. A middle-aged guy, a little too well-dressed for a tourist café, had his cell phone out and was trying to call someone.

As the panic and storm finally ebbed, Danny found a centre of calm. It looked like people had cuts and bruises in the main.

Julian and his family were up against the far wall. Irene had Julian and his younger brother firmly wrapped in her arms. They were crying, quiet, hiccup-like tears. Their dad was heading over to Steve. Shaking himself, Danny went to join them, crunching over the glass fragments.

The young woman, Danny realised stopping by her outstretched feet, was in trouble. He crouched down, beside one of her discarded low-heeled shoes. A long, jagged shard of glass had pierced her just above her right hip. It stood proud. There was a large well of blood staining her cream blouse. Steve gripped her hands, knuckles white, preventing her from grabbing it.

“Hello, milady,” Danny said, with a little bow trying to draw a smile and her attention away from her bleeding wound. “I’m Danny Williams. This is Steve and Julian’s Dad. What’s your name?”

She stared at him. She was as silent as Steve.

“Steve here is a Navy SEAL, Lieutenant Commander McGarrett,” Danny continued. “He’s got medic training. He’s practically a paramedic.”

Steve blinked at Danny.

“You can’t pull out the glass.” Danny had seen that on *Vegas CSI* -- the arterial spurt had been very graphic. “The docs need to do that. Okay? Kid? Okay?”

She nodded.

Carefully, Steve released his grip on her hands. He was kneeling on one of the trays that he had carried over. Ever so carefully, Steve began to examine the shard. Flicking out his magic black knife, he slit the material of her blouse around the glass, and gently lifted it away. It was such a weird sight, Danny thought. It didn’t look real -- like a Christmas cake with white fondant icing jabbed with an icicle, and strawberry jelly leaking out.

Danny had to glance away, and stared straight at the businessman on the phone.

“Hey, you?” Danny waved his hand. “You calling Emergency Services?”

“No, my wife,” he said defensively.

“We need an ambulance. Tell her you love her. And then call 911. Now!”

Wide-eyed, the man ended his phone call. Immediately, he pecked away at the keypad.

Steve was rolling the towels that he had taken from the kitchen area into fat tubes. Mutely, he looked
at Julian’s dad, kneeling opposite him on another tray and jerked his chin at his backpack toppled drunkenly on the floor besides Danny’s upturned table.

Julian’s dad nodded and stood.

“Hey, you gonna use your words?” Danny asked Steve.

Steve ignored him. This was new or maybe not, Danny realised. Steve had not been particularly verbose when he had previously had flashbacks.

Julian’s dad returned. He already had the pack cracked open and tumbled the contents onto the tray on which he had been kneeling.

“I’ve got them to send a helicopter,” the guy on the phone yelled.

“Oh my god,” their patient finally spoke, freaked, understandably.

“Hey, you’re going to be okay.” Danny got around the two who were actually doing something. He cleared the ground of glass beside her with his foot. “I’m going to sit down next to you, okay?”

She made a noise that Danny translated as ‘okay’.

He settled right next to her, letting her soak in his warmth and to provide some physical support. He guessed moving was a seriously bad idea.

Steve plucked a roll of duct tape from the pile on the tray, flipped his black knife over handle first, and presented both to Julian’s dad.

“Steve’s stabilising the little piece of glass,” Danny told her brightly as he figured out what Steve was up to.

“Little?” She raised her eyebrow. Spirit -- Danny liked seeing it. She was as pale as Steve on a bad day -- like today.

“Yeah. Little. Tiny. Infinitesimal.” Danny hugged her warmly. Steve positioned the fat towel rolls on either side of the jagged shard.

“I can’t look.” She moaned.

“Then don’t. I’m Danny. And you are?”

“Dolce.”

“Dolce. That means ‘sweet’.”

“I know. My dad’s Italian.”

“So’s my nonna.”

“It’s really Orazia, but my dad always called me Dolce.”

Danny heard the past tense in her voice, and didn’t press.

Julian’s Dad didn’t need any instruction, pulling out stretches of duct tape and securing the towels as Steve held them in place. Once Dolce was wrapped, pretty much like a mummy, Steve curled bloody fingers around her wrist. A fleeting smile crossed his stony face.
“Good pulse. Good news.” Danny translated.

Steve, like a ghoul, stared directly at Danny and Dolce, assessing.

“Got to check the others. Stay still,” he finally said.

“I’m not moving an inch,” Dolce said staunchly.

“Okay, Babe.” Danny nodded.

Dolce was shivering. Shock was a real and significant complication.

“Hey, can someone get us some blankets? Or more towels,” Danny had his job. Keep Dolce calm and warm. Immovable, he watched the drama around him.

Steve snatched up his first aid kit from his backpack. The younger female ranger had stopped running around and got the centre’s first aid kit from somewhere and was helping the grandparents with the kid. Julian’s dad headed back to his family, plucking the baby from his wife’s grasp.

“Who are you here with, hun?” Danny asked.

“Boss.” Her eyes slid in the direction of the businessman, who was pacing, ear glued to his cell phone. “Catering for the centre. Meeting.”

“I think you need a new boss; he’s a bit of a dick.”

“Nah, his wife’s expecting their first baby,” she whispered. “He’s a little self-absorbed at the moment. And, yeah, a dick.”

“Did you make the éclairs?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re an artist,” Danny said fervently.

“Sir.” Steve moved into the businessman’s space, angling towards his phone. “Are you still on the line with Emergency Services?”

“Uhm, yes.” He offered Steve the phone, who could only look at it.

“Look, I’m deaf. You need to ask the operator: one, ETA; two, type of helicopter, and, three, origin. And tell me what they say.”

“What?” he responded, eyes wide.

Steve plucked the cell phone from his hands, and immediately crossed to Danny and Dolce. He knelt back on the tray as he thumbed the loudspeaker on, and held it on his outstretched palm.

“Operator,” Steve opened with, “this is Commander Steven McGarrett, US Navy. I’m with the patient. What is the ETA on the helicopter?”

“Ten minutes, sir.”

Danny echoed her.

“Type of helicopter? Originating from?” Steve curled his fingers around Dolce’s ankle, his large
hand easily spanning its width.

“It’s a Coast Guard HH-65 Dolphin helicopter, sir. USCG ISC Honolulu.”

Danny repeated the alphabet mishmash back to Steve.

“Operator,” Steve said, voice amazingly level, “we’re going to clear the parking lot. It’s sufficiently large enough for a Tupperwolf to land directly.”

“Do you want me to patch you through to the co-pilot?”

Steve glanced momentarily at Danny. “Have them call my cell phone,” he rattled off the number, and then tossed the cell phone back to the business man.

“Do I stay on the line?” the business man asked.

_Idiot_, Danny thought. “Yes, you keep us updated.”

“I want the drivers to move their cars off the parking lot onto the road,” Steve said authoritatively as he stood tall. “We need to clear the area for the helicopter. Now!”

Drivers of all shapes and sizes rooted for their keys and obediently headed out the door, at which Steve was conveniently pointing. He shepherded them out the door, his own keys in his hand.

“Wow, he doesn’t pull any punches,” Dolce said.

“You’ve no idea,” Danny said, grinning. “You’re in good hands.”

Dolce shivered.

“Can I get those blankets?” Danny demanded.

The grandmotherly woman came over shaking out a tightly packed sleeping bag into a puff of fabric. She laid it over Dolce’s legs, carefully avoiding the prominent shard and tucked it around Dolce’s ankles.

“This will keep you nice and warm, Sugar. It’s my Benny’s, he insisted on bringing a four-seasons sleeping bag to Hawaii -- what a Banana,” she finished fondly.

“Thank you,” Danny said.

She winked at Danny. “How’s about a coffee?”

Danny could really do with one, preferably with a tot of whisky, but even his basic knowledge of first aid told him that Dolce shouldn’t have anything to eat or drink. And having a coffee in front of Dolce was a little cruel.

“Nah, we better not, you know.”

The grandmotherly woman nodded. “Yeah, you’re right.” She stood up.

Dolce moaned, grabbing all of Danny’s attention.

“Hey, hey, come on, you’re doing fine.” Danny took a hold of her cold hand. “You’re going to get a trip in a helicopter.”
“I hate flying,” she said softly.

“It will be something to tell your kids.” Danny gently squeezed her shoulders.

“Kids? Yuck.” She gripped Danny’s hand tightly.

“Hey, they’re wonderful. I’ve got a daughter. She’s seven and a half. Grace,” Danny prattled away, keeping her distracted from the fucking foot-long knife in her guts, as she paled and got more sweaty.

The second ranger, the guy, started to ferry out hot drinks, determinedly announcing that there was no charge.

Seeing the helicopter land on the tarmac parking lot was the best thing that Danny had seen in an age. The kids up by the windows (lesson evidently not learned) obviously agreed, judging by the whoops of excitement.

Steve conducted two paramedics into the café manhandling a basket-like contraption through the door. Steve snapped his fingers at the granddad and the businessman.

“Find something to jimmy this door open so we can get the Stokes basket out easily,” he ordered.

“Any other patients?” The taller paramedic pulled off her baseball cap and tucked it in the medic bag hanging at her side as she scanned the café. She arrowed over to Dolce, her younger partner right on her heels, and they set the basket down.

“Just cuts and bruises, except for--” Steve began.

“Hey, honey, what’s your name?” The younger, dark-skinned paramedic eyed one of the trays, clearly figured that it was a good idea, and knelt.

“Dolce.”

“Huh, Italian, like me? Well, part Italian.”

“Yeah,” Dolce said, quietly.

“Right, okay, penetrating trauma to the lower right quadrant. Nasty.” The taller woman took command of the other tray, and looked Dolce over, assessing. She pulled off the sleeping bag and tossed it aside.

“Beth,” her younger partner chastised, as she pulled a blood pressure cuff from her own medic bag, and set to work wrapping it around Dolce’s bicep.

“And you are?” Beth eyed Danny, in a really flat, assessing way. Danny shivered.

“Danny. Here for moral support.”

“Good work with the duct tape.” Beth nodded her closely dark-blonde shaven head, as she simultaneously pressed index and forefinger just under the prominent bone on Dolce’s right ankle.

“Wasn’t me. Was Steve.” Danny moved his chin fractionally toward Steve looming over them. His role was to keep Dolce still; no shrugging, no moving.

“Freshly laundered dish towels, packed the wound tight,” Steve said.
“Thank you.” The younger paramedic released the blood pressure cuff. “We’ll leave that alone, Beth?”

“Agreed. We don’t want you in the Stokes basket, though. We want to keep you sitting upright.” She rubbed her pointy chin

“Snatch and grab, Beth?”

Evidently, Beth was the boss.

“Set an IV, first.” Beth turned on her heels, and addressed Steve, “Are there any evacuation chairs in the building?”

Steve glanced at one of the café chairs, calculatingly. Danny read its imminent demise in his eye, or at least its back would be bent so Dolce could remain in a semi-slumped position.

“Uhm?” Irene came forwards. “Julian’s jogging stroller is in the trunk of our SUV. She’s not that big. We can take off the hood and bend the frame.”

“Show me.” Steve caught Irene’s shoulder and turned her to the door.

“Okay.” Beth turned back to Dolce. “Pulse is okay. Blood pressure’s a little low. You’ve had good first aid. We don’t want to move that glass fragment, or move you around that piece of glass. So we’re going to jury-rig a chair to get you out of here, in pretty much the position that you’re in.”

“Danny?” Dolce said.

“Yeah, Honey?” He kissed her sleek black hair.

“I think I’m scared.”

“You think you’re scared?” Danny mocked lightly. “You’re not scared. You’re brave. My Steve’s gonna jury-rig Irene’s stroller into a chair, to get you out of here, without moving a muscle.”

“Your Steve, eh?” Dolce smiled.

“Yeah, it’s fairly new. But he’s my… partner.” Danny winked, keeping her distracted as Beth inserted needles and stuff that Danny really didn’t want to look close at.

“Must be nice.” She sighed.

“He’s a gianormous goof, with issues on issues. But yeah, it’s nice.”

“I want a boyfriend, too.”

Steve came barrelling back into the café pushing a simple stroller. It had no hood or accoutrements. It kind of looked like a sling in a metal frame.

“Perfect,” Beth announced.

“Okay.” Steve set the stroller beside them, and then studied the problem. He interlaced his fingers and then turned his palms outward, stretching. “Danny and I will support Dool’s torso, if you lift her legs.”

“Dool?” Dolce said, a little affronted.
“He doesn’t hear that well,” Danny whispered for her benefit. “Accident.”

“I am bigger than a toddler.” Dolce pointed out.

“We just need to keep your butt situated and keep you in a vee position.” Beth stood.

Danny was seriously impressed by Dolce. If he had had a foot of glass stuck in his gut, he doubted he would have been so, relatively, calm. Shock and fear was a weird combination.

Carefully, Danny got his feet under him, but stayed crouched, ready to lift Dolce, when Steve gave him the nod. Steve mirrored his pose. Danny curled his arm around Dolce’s back. Steve’s arm was warm against Danny’s skin as he reached around her. His gaze was measured as he regarded Danny. His pupils were normal, not glassy or massively dilated.

Beth and the younger, unnamed paramedic took Dolce’s legs. The café was silent, watching.


They lifted. Dolce hissed through her gritted teeth. One step, two step, and they slung her over the stroller.

“Careful,” Beth said, as they lowered. “It’s okay if it’s a bit tight. Better that way.”

“Hang on a second, we need to keep her legs raised.” Steve looked about. “Ball up the sleeping bag, under her knees.”

Irene obeyed with alacrity, balling it up quickly and carefully tucking under Dolce’s knees. Dolce hissed.

“You okay?” Beth asked.

“Uhuh,” she said, unconvincingly.

The younger paramedic handed off the IV to Steve to hold high, as she checked Dolce’s pulse at her neck.

“You’re doing fine,” Beth said. “A trooper.”

Dolce sniffed, a tear trickled down her cheek.

“Come on, none of that.” Danny kissed the top of her head.

“I’m sorry, Danny.”

“Okay.” Beth nodded at Steve with the IV. “We’re gonna roll this handy-dandy chair out to the Dolphin and get you to the Honolulu Medical Centre. We’ll be there in fifteen minutes. You’re going to be fine.”

Purposefully, Steve took a stroller handle, waited the heartbeat it took Danny to match him, and together they began to slowly push the stroller out of the café. Beth and the other paramedic kept a hold of her legs, which were too long for the impromptu stretcher, keeping Dolce as supported as possible.

“That was a good sleeping bag,” the granddad said, resigned, as they got out through the double doors.
“You didn’t need it anyway, Benny. We can share.”

“Okay, Doll,” granddad said -- which was more than Danny needed to know about two adults older than his parents.

There were two uniformed guys with the helicopter, and they moved to help. They both had heavy helmets and goggles -- Danny recognised them as pilots from his last meeting with helicopter guys. It was easy for the six adults to lift Dolce and the stroller as one into the helicopter. Steve handed the IV off to Beth, as she clambered into the helicopter.

“Déjà vu,” Danny muttered. But at least this time he didn’t have to take a trip to Tripler.

“Danny?” Dolce said.

“Yeah, Sweetie?”

“Thank you.”

“I’m glad that I could help.” He smiled at her, tiny little Dolce, who’s Dad had called her ‘sweetie’.

“Thank you, Steve. Look after Danny, he’s a keeper.”

Steve blushed. He nodded firmly. “Take care.”

“Okay, I need you guys to step back away from the blades.” The pilot started to pull the sliding door into position.

“Understood.” Steve loaned a hand, slamming the door shut.

Danny got in a final wave to Dolce through the window as the pilot got up front into the cockpit.

“Come on.” Steve plucked at Danny’s elbow and drew him away from the span of the rotors. Once near the entrance to the café, the pilot at the controls gave Steve a thumbs up. Steve returned the gesture.

As the helicopter lifted into the sky, Danny breathed a sigh of relief. He bent over, hands braced on his thighs.

“Do you think she’ll be okay?” Danny asked.

Steve shrugged. “Probably. Seen worse.” He examined his bloody hands front and back.

“Bathroom.”

He strode away.

It felt like a dismissal. Danny eyed Steve’s straight back, as he stalked through the café, heading to the bathroom. He would give him five. Danny wanted one of those coffees that the squirrelly ranger had been handing out to people.

Danny’s camera was on the floor beside his backpack, and a half squished carrot cake. Breathing a sigh of relief he switched his camera on -- it worked -- and the lens was intact. The tumble hadn’t damaged it, apart from a tiny scratch on the housing. It was tempting to check the images, but needs must. He packed the camera in its Lowepro padded bag, and then moved to get Steve’s stuff piled on the tray. There was a bloody mark where Dolce had been sitting.

“Hey, can I get a coffee?” Danny asked, as he packed up the stuff that Steve seemed to think an
average day needed -- although he was actually right today.

What an utterly, utterly bizarre life he was leading.

Fuck.

~*~

#70#

The Ford’s windshield wipers swished back and forth against the miserably heavy drizzle. Had the winter season on Hawaii started? Danny didn’t know. He kind of got the impression that Hawaii had a summer and a rainy season that were semi-interchangeable. Steve had chosen a short-cut to keep them off the busy main roads and all the vacation travellers abandoning the Ka’a’awa Valley. It might be a short-cut, but the road was old, pockmarked and twisty.

“Hey, you gonna sit there, cogitating? Talk to me, Steve. Not that fond of a zombie driver.”

Steve turned his head and scowled. “I’m just thinking.”

“Yeah, well, talk to me.”

“I’m also concentrating on driving.”

“Okay,” Danny said slowly. He shifted around in the passenger seat, and pulled his camera bag onto his lap. The LCD screen lit up again and he breathed a sigh of relief. Flicking back through the image files, he found the five shots of the storm.

“Oooh, oooh, oh.” The camera had caught magic. It was something akin to The Matrix. The fragments of exploding window were caught in time. Light and shadow were stark lines of perfect delineation. It was such a perfect shot that you would probably not believe that it was real. He turned the camera to Steve. “I got the perfect shot of the window blowing out.”

“Really? Really?” Steve snapped. He jerked on the steering wheel and practically jack-knifed the truck into the shoulder.

“What-the-hell?” Danny breathed hard, hand braced against the dash.

Steve spun in his seat. “Was that damn photo worth your life? Was it? I told you to move. And you just stood there. You could have been Dooll. But instead of it being in your guts, it could have been through your heart. Would the damn photo been worth that? Danny? Would it?”

“I--”

“I told you to move. Everyone else obeyed.”

“Hey. Hey. Obey?” Danny spat back, sitting up straight. “You’re not the boss of me.”

Steve came right into his space, eyes agate hard. “You could have died.”

Danny closed his eyes. About five conflicting thoughts crashed through his head: Steve looked kind of hot when he was furious; he was an aggravating son-of-a-bitch; he -- Daniel Williams -- didn’t obey anyone on the freaking planet; Steve was right, and Steve was wrong. Danny opened his eyes.

“And if that happened, Steve, it would have been my fault,” Danny said directly into Steve’s face.
Steve blinked and sat back, hard.

“Good call.” Danny waved his finger back and forth. “You were right. Good call. But you didn’t know that it was going to happen. You’re not omni--, omini--?”

“Omniscient,” Steve said hollowly.

“Yeah, that word. You’re not omniscient.”

Steve sagged a little more. He looked small, Danny thought.

“I get that you want to protect everyone,” Danny said, still waving his finger. “I really get that. I don’t think that you went into the Navy cos’ you like shooting things. Okay, that was probably part of it. But Kono calls me ‘mom’. I’m a dad, though. I understand wanting to keep everyone safe.”

“You could have died,” Steve said sullenly, and regarded his lap.

A frisson of a shiver danced along Danny’s spine. He had seen graphically what flying glass could inflict on vulnerable skin.

“I know. And I’m sorry for scaring you.” Danny clicked his seat-belt free. “Babe, look at me.”

Gently, Danny set his two fingers on Steve’s lowered chin, and lifted.

“You’re not the boss of me, Steve. I’m not your ensign. We’re--” he thought, but the answer was right there, “--we’re partners.”

“Partners?” Steve echoed.

“Yeah. And I’m gonna listen to you. I did listen. And when that glass started to crack, I was primed to duck. Because you were worried. And because I’m not an idiot. I can look after myself.” Danny skirted his fingers along the line of Steve’s jaw, mapped the flickering pulse at his throat down the oh-so-prominent jugular vein, crooked said fingers around the collar of Steve’s t-shirt, and pulled him in close. “It’s really nice to have someone looking out for you, though.”

“Nice,” Steve echoed.

“Yeah, nice, doofus,” Danny said. The myriad of hazels, and blues and greys in Steve’s eyes were apparent. They shone in the glisten of held back tears. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“I thought--” Steve pounced, fiercely mapping Danny’s mouth and cheeks with his lips, rasping through the day’s stubble. His hands bracketed Danny’s face, holding him tightly, as he kissed and kissed. Belatedly, Danny curled a hand around the back of Steve’s neck, and matched his zeal. Steve had thought that he had been injured, possibly dead. He had been shocked, and no doubt lost in memories. Thoughts were superseded by kissing, as Steve sucked on the pulse point just under the angle of his jaw. Danny’s toes curled.

“Oh, god.” Danny threaded his fingers through the short curls at the nape of Steve’s head. He craned his neck, falling back in pleasure, Steve began to move with him.

Steve jerked abruptly to a halt, and swore.

Danny found a semblance of logic amidst desire. “Seatbelt,” he muttered.

“What?”
“Your seatbelt is still on.”

“Oh.” Steve looked at the release mechanism, dazed and flummoxed.

Before Steve could pull out his little black knife and saw at the heavy duty nylon, Danny flicked the catch free of the lock. It zipped back, and Steve came right over the top of the handbrake into Danny’s space.

“We gonna do this?” Danny asked. The windows were already starting to steam up.

“Oh?”

Danny laughed. “My little exhibitionist.”

“I’m not little.” Steve bent in to kiss.

“You’re an exhibitionist.”

Steve waggled an eyebrow as he leaned in. Danny popped the button on Steve’s pants. Steve’s pupils dilated and in a good way. It was a pleasure to kiss him, to bring delight. Danny couldn’t believe that they were doing this on a back road, short cut, in outback Hawaii. Anyone could stop to check if they needed help. Danny slid his hand into Steve’s tighty-whiteys. Steve’s cock rose under his fingers constrained within Danny’s knowing grip and the firm elastic.

“You say that I’m an exhib--” Steve huffed into his neck.

“Shush.” Danny’s only other boyfriend had been circumcised, like Danny. He swirled his thumb over the head, gently massaging the foreskin, helping it retract as Steve’s erection rose. He wanted to taste, but the angle was all wrong. Steve bracketed over him, all hands and knees. Danny was amply trapped by his damp jeans, and they were tight.

Danny wasn’t good at doing two things at once; he fumbled at his button one handed.

“Don’t stop,” Steve muttered, in between nips at Danny’s jaw.

“Gimme a second.” Danny got his fly down, and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Huh?” Steve looked down. “Ahah?”

His large hand mapped the mound covered by the pouch of Danny’s boxer briefs. Their coordination was shitty. Steve didn’t seem to be able to find the way into Danny’s boxers, too focused on jabbing his hips against Danny’s hold and fervently kissing.

“Fuck it.” Danny was a martyr; he smoothed his hand under Steve’s briefs, over the swell of his butt, and delved.

Steve squeaked as Danny pressed behind his balls, his hips juddered, and he came. Steve was just one damn big ball of sensitive knots. Danny was looking forward to exploring massage. Groaning, Steve somehow managed to not collapse on Danny, apart from dropping his massively heavy head on Danny’s shoulder. Hot breath gusted over Danny’s throat.

“You gonna give me a hand?” Danny managed to say coherently, wiping his hand on his t-shirt.

“Wha--?” Steve said disjointedly, but at least he wasn’t asleep.

Lights filled the cabin of the truck. White from headlights and then flashing blue from the strobing
lights of a police car pulling up behind them. Galvanised, Steve sat up on his knees. Frantically, he tucked himself back in his pants, and zipped up.

“Holy shit.” Steve looked down himself as he dropped behind the steering wheel, craning his head to look out the wing mirror. “Does anything show?”

Danny giggled. He couldn’t help himself; he felt like a teenager.

“He’s coming,” Steve said, glancing madly at Danny’s lap.

If it hadn’t been so funny, it would have been painful. Danny snagged his camera bag from the foot well, and set it on his lap. He got his camera from the floor. It was still on. Luckily, he hadn’t accidentally -- possibly on purpose -- switched over the camera into video mode. He held it protectively over the wet patch on his t-shirt.

Steve wound down the window. “Hello, officer,” he said with perfect, enviable composure.

The policeman was a local guy, heavyset, with a craggy, pockmarked, round face.

“License and registration,” he said stoically.

Steve tipped down the sun visor and extracted the vehicle registration from its pocket. He handed it over.

“My licence is in my back pocket,” Steve informed the officer before he leaned over to get his wallet. He presented the open wallet to the officer.

The policeman scrutinised the licence, and then flicked through wallet leaves. “Navy?” he asked, showing what Danny guessed was an ID card.

“Yes, sir,” Steve said levelly. “At Pearl Harbour-Hickam. JOIC.”

“Why did you pull over? Everything okay?” the officer said, warming.

“Danny wanted to show me a photo he got of the storm,” Steve jabbed a thumb at him. Danny pointed helpfully at his Canon, still firmly on his lap. “I didn’t want to drive and look at the camera on this road.”

“We didn’t figure that it would be a problem?” Danny said, rolling down his own window and looking out. It was a quiet road, just two lanes. The view was pretty amazing, even in the drizzly rain. The rain was backlit from the sun peering through the overcast clouds. He had to get the angle just right to not over expose and catch the raindrops. Danny took a shot, and then popped the flash at its lowest setting to double-light the droplets.

“He’s a bit like an autistic savant,” Steve was saying, “when he sees something that he wants to photograph, you kind of lose him.”

“What?” Danny turned and glowered.

“Okay, Commander. I’m glad everything’s fine.” He handed back Steve’s wallet. “The road’s okay. But, yeah, continue driving carefully.”

“I always do,” Steve said with the utmost sincerity. “Thanks for checking up on us.”

“Okay.”
“Bye.” Danny waved as the officer walked back to his unit.

Danny stared at Steve, Steve stared at Danny. Co-ordinated, they rolled up the windows simultaneously. Danny bit his bottom lip. Steve coughed out a laugh as he turned the key in the ignition.

“So my little exhibitionist, did you learn a lesson?” Danny asked.

Steve pulled onto the road, conscientiously using his indicators -- mirror, signal, manoeuvre.

“Told you: I’m not little.”

“Yeah, but you are an exhibitionist.”

Steve flashed a grin at him. “Takes one to know one.”

“Yeah.” Danny dropped his camera and bag on the floor. He picked at his damp t-shirt. “Ewww.”

“I think it’s ruined.” Steve observed.

“Ah, that’s okay, I borrowed it--” Danny paused a beat, “--from you.”

Danny was still feeling very horny. The road was quiet, a bit twisty and turny. Craning his head, Danny looked out the back through the tinted window. The police car was executing a three point turn and heading back up the road. Danny set one foot on the dash, and shimmied his jeans down his hips.

“Jesus, Danny. You’re not, are you?” Steve glanced at him sideways. “I’m driving.”

“That’s okay, I’m watching the scenery.” Danny pulled himself out of his boxers, as he leered at Steve. There was an enticing flush on Steve’s high cheekbones. One-handed, Danny got one of his ubiquitous tissues out of a pocket. Slowly, measurably, he jacked himself, rolling his hips. Steve was such a bad influence. Danny slumped lower in his seat, thankful that they were on a quiet back road. Adrenalin thrummed in his veins.

“I can’t believe that I’m doing this,” Danny laughed.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this.” Steve slumped in the driver’s seat, mirroring Danny’s posture, eyes fixed on the road. “You want me to pull over?”

“Nah. I’ve got it in hand.” Danny said, double entendre deliberate.

“Geez.” Steve breathed hard.

Danny rubbed and rolled, taking it slow. The road straightened, and driving one-handed, Steve reached over.

“Can I?” he asked, courteously.

Danny sort of hee’ed out a laughing yes. Steve set his gianormous hand low on Danny’s tummy, and rubbed a slow, large circle. He felt his way over Danny’s skin, keeping his eyes on the road. Unerringly, Steve worked his way downwards, nails scuffling, until Danny thrummed like a guitar string.

“You don’t have a treasure trail,” Steve observed, fingers curling around the base of Danny’s cock. “You have a treasure highway.”
Danny blanked, lightning rolling through his nuts and base of his spine as he came. He rode the waves, caught in the moment, and surfing into the little death, to finally sag into a happy lump.

“Better than porn,” Steve said, as he drove, calmly and sedately. “I’m really happy I can multi-task.”

~*~

#71#

Ho-Sin sauce? Danny munched determinably on a mouthful of bok choy and wondered what it tasted like when it was cooked. Cabbage, he guessed. *Al dente* was pretty much a tiny, infinitesimally polite euphemism for what were really raw vegetables in Danny’s humble opinion. Chin had produced a stir fry packed with his signature vibrantly colourful garden vegetables, but it still wasn’t cooked thoroughly.

“Steve? You okay?” Chin asked.

Steve glanced at him owlishly, and then shook himself.

“Yeah, sure. Delicious.” He speared a piece of baby corn.

Steve’s appetite had improved recently, Danny noted. He had put on a few well-needed pounds. Danny wondered if Steve had always been a picky eater? Danny wouldn’t have thought being in the armed services and being a picky eater went hand-in-glove.

Steve was now exercising more, and he was still strikingly underweight. Danny had smoothed his hands over his fragile ribs, felt the jut of his sharp hip bones. Steve needed to consume more calories to offset his increased activity.

“Danny? Danny?” Chin said.

“What?” Danny startled. He guessed that his name had been called once or twice.

“Where were you?” Kono asked, and winked.

“Miles away. What’s for dessert?” Danny blurted.

“You haven’t finished your main course,” Chin pointed out like a good parent-in-training.

“Yeah, *mea culpa*. Rude: I guess I have a hankering for ice cream.”

“Bound to be some in the freezer,” Chin said between munches.

_I wonder if I can get some Ensure down Steve’s throat?_ Danny mused as Steve chased a piece of tofu around his plate.

“You all right, Steve?” Kono asked.


“Busy?” Chin questioned.

“Yeah,” Steve said. “There was a storm.”

Danny rolled his eyes at the understatement and set his fork down in preparation for some important gesticulation.
“We got caught in one hellacious storm. Thunder, lightning -- the works!”

Kono laughed, as Danny flung his hands out, spreading his fingers wide.

“We marched through a monsoon. Steve had to use a GPS to find the tourist centre. Then the storm \textit{descended} -- descended like a ton of bricks -- on the tourist centre.”

Danny slapped his palm down on the tabletop.


Steve half-choked on his glass of water. Danny automatically patted his back.

“Careful, Babe,” he admonished, and smiled. “You need to drink that slowly.”

Danny had always wondered what the ‘hairy eyeball’ looked like. Oft times, he heard Kono muttering ‘coddle’ in the back of his head, but his Grandma Williams’ ‘you’re incorrigible’ sounded pretty loud, sometimes.

Steve started to say something, but a yawn cut his words in two. Their drive back had been long and tedious, even with the twisty short cut. Eventually, they had had to join the main highway, and that road had been slow in the heavy rain and with the, thankfully, careful drivers.

“Fresh air,” Steve said around a yawn, “best soporific.”

“We’ll have to check up on Dolce.” Danny made a mental note. “Where did they take her?”

“Honolulu Medical Centre.”

“Must have been a bad cut,” Chin said.

“She’ll be okay,” Steve said.

“It sounds like you really had a super busy day.” Kono waved her fork at them, emphasising her words.

“Oh, yeah. So what did you guys get up to?” Danny asked. “Did you go surfing?”

“Yeah.” Kono lit up and started to spin a tale about ‘tube riding’ and ‘soul arches’, which sounded very photographic, but Danny didn’t have a clue what she was talking about. There had been what sounded like an impromptu competition with visitors from Australia, hosted by Coral Prince. Kono had wiped the board, punishly, with them.

“You know,” Chin said, as Kono splashed a hand against the tabletop in a spectacular fall, “I do believe that you’re gloating.”

“You guys should come out tomorrow,” Kono said gleefully. “Bulldog and Acadia are here for the rest of the week.”

Danny glanced sideways at Steve who was contemplating his mangled chunk of tofu as if it held all the answers in the universe.

“Yeah, sure,” Danny said for them both, wincing internally at the prospect of sun, sand, and sticky
sun screen. Although given the storm clouds lowering: overcast; grimy, and humid was probably more accurate.

“Dude--” Kono’s voice interrupted Danny’s thoughts, “--you need to crash. Otherwise, you’re going to face plant in your stir fry.”

“What?” Steve asked, staring at them with his stunned owl impression. His freshly washed hair, puffed up in a fauxhawk, only reinforced the impression.

It was well after eight o’clock in the evening since their drive had been long -- Chin and Kono had waited for them because Chin had announced before they had set off to the Ka’a’awa Valley that he was creating a Thousand Jewel stir fry. Given that the dish appeared to consist of barely-cooked vegetables and pomegranate Danny guessed that it wasn’t good reheated.

Danny kind of wanted to send Steve off to bed, but he wasn’t a child -- he was an adult.

Steve scrunched his nose at Danny. He finally huffed out a sigh. “Just say what you’re thinking, Danno.”

“Just looking at you is making me tired, Steven.”

Danny regarded Steve as his expression of tired incomprehension meandered into a waking zombie doze.

I give up, Danny thought. He set a gentle hand under Steve’s elbow and stood up. “Come on, Steve.”

“What?” Steve stumbled to his feet.

“I’m putting this doofus to bed,” Danny told Chin and Kono.

“Oh, yeah, we got together on Christmas Day,” Danny recalled.
“You’re allowed in his space, dude,” Kono said.

“You have conversations without saying a word.” Chin decanted his colourful concoction onto a fresh plate at Danny’s setting. “Just like me and Malia. But Kono’s right. You can get right in close. And that is… Steve likes his personal space.”

Danny speared a thankfully-cooked snow pea with his fork, and chomped down before speaking. “What can I say? I’m a personal space invader kind of guy.”

Kono laughed.

Still playing chef-waiter, Chin grabbed a bottle of red standing on top of the kitchen wine rack beside the fridge. He carried it, and three wide bowled wine glasses, interlaced between his fingers, to the table.

“Not normally the wine that I would serve with a light vegetarian stir fry—” Chin contemplated the label, “—but it’s a Chapel Hill Shiraz from the McLaren Vale in Australia — 2003.”

“Okay,” Danny drawled, noting that the cork had been previously pulled to allow the wine to breathe, yet Chin hadn’t partaken. Evidently, there was something on Chin’s mind, which he thought needed a glass of wine to smooth. Danny wasn’t adverse; he liked red wine, and Chin consistently provided very nice red wine.

Chin carefully dispensed the red wine into a large glass. As the wine rolled around the wide bowl, light from the halogen lamps over the counters was reflected as luminescent ruby glints.

“Oh, for my camera,” Danny lamented.

“I’m sure that we’ll have wine again, and you’ll have your camera.” Anticipating, Kono rubbed her hands together, sea-dry skin rasping lightly. She pounced as Chin finished filling the first glass and moved onto the second.

Finally, Chin slid a glass across the wide wooden tabletop so Danny could reach for it.

“So, what’s on your mind, Chin?” Danny asked directly, picking the glass up and admiring the colour.

“Mamo found out where Mary is staying. I was going to tell Steve, but he went to bed.”

“Oh.” Danny took a fortifying glug and ignored Chin’s wince. “I guess we tell him in the morning.”

“Oh course,” Chin said.

There wasn’t any decision to make -- Steve had to be told. In all honesty, Danny didn’t think that Chin had debated telling Steve or not, only whether or not to share the information now rather than waiting for Steve in the morning. Danny was a little disappointed that they hadn’t had to use his photograph of the taxi-cab’s licence to track down Mary’s address.

“So where’s she staying?” Kono asked.

“Ewa Beach. Small place off of Kauiki Street.”

“That’s kind of a nice area….” Kono observed, in a slow drawl.

“Mamo says that she’s staying with a friend.” Chin contemplated his own wine, and then stuck his nose in the glass and inhaled.
“Look, I get that Mary’s got a history.” Danny took a sip of his wine, thought it tasted of sweet blackcurrants, and continued, “But that’s history, isn’t it. We don’t know that she’s trouble.” He didn’t want Steve to get hurt, though.

Chin nodded, slow and heavy. “True.”

“If she doesn’t -- by definition -- ‘create’, being here would be a little hard to bear, I guess….You know?” Danny regarded the cousins.

“Yeah, maybe. You’re right, Danny.” Kono hummed and hawed.

“Yes, you are very right, Danny. Maybe she’s been trying to carve a new life?” Chin deliberately presented his glass as a toast. “To new beginnings.”

Danny could get onboard with that. “To new beginnings.”

~*~

“Okay!” Steve rattled on Danny’s door, opened it and stomped into Danny’s studio.

Danny jerked up on one elbow, ripped straight out of a deep sleep. My god, he is totally a morning person, he thought, horrified.

“Mamo has Mare’s address!” Steve brandished a sheaf of notepaper.

Danny got sitting up. He leaned over and snagged his wristwatch off the bedside table. It was just after nine o’clock in the morning, so it wasn’t too horrible. But being woken up like this had to be nipped in the bud.

“Babe, calm down.” Danny shook his head at the morning miscreant pacing across his studio. “Sure. I guess you want to track her down. But -- Coffee!”

“What?”


Steve pouted at him.

“What? I thought that you liked orders?” Danny crooked a finger at the big goof.

Obediently, Steve came over and leaned into Danny’s space. Danny curled a hand around his neck, entwining his fingers in the curls at his nape.

“I’m in the Navy.” Steve nuzzled an affectionate kiss against Danny’s mouth.

Danny squeezed his hand, holding Steve still. Almost avuncular, Danny smacked a kiss on Steve’s lips. Steve smelled of lemon and mint; clean from his morning shower. Danny’s mouth was dry from sleep. Noses bumping, Steve squinted at him. Danny squeezed again and released his grip.

“I have to brush my teeth.”

Steve accepted that with a wrinkle of his nose. “Coffee?”

“And a bagel with cream cheese. And juice, Commander.”
Steve straightened. He tapped the edge of his eyebrow in the laziest salute known to man.

“Yes, sir.”

Danny waggled his eyebrows -- liking the sound of that.

“I don’t think that there is any cream cheese.” Steve moved towards the door. “Butter? Sliced bananas with sugar and cinnamon? Mare liked bananas.”

“Why do you call her Mare?” Danny kicked off his sheet. “Mary’s pretty short, isn’t it.”

“Oh, it’s short for Nightmare, because she was one,” Steve said offhandedly.

Danny rubbed his face and sighed into his palms.

~*~

Anoniui Street in the Ewa District was a modern conurbation with a wide street and neatly turned out wooden, one storey bungalows in pale pinks, beiges, creams and whites. Steve pulled his truck over opposite a bungalow with a painted rose-red roof, matching the wall around the boundary of the small property. A single palm tree grew through a precisely cut, brick edged hole in the paved yard. The covered parking garage was empty, but the garbage can was on the sidewalk waiting to be emptied.

Steve blew out a sigh.

“So?” Danny said. They had discussed in the truck whether or not this was a good idea, but the way that Steve saw it was that he didn’t have Mary’s phone number therefore (and he had said therefore) it behooved him (he had also said behooved -- adorable) to make the attempt since he knew where she was staying. Mary had, he said, a tendency to rewrite incidences in her own mind to her own benefit. If he didn’t try, and Mary did know that the family would be able to find her anywhere on Oahu, he would be in the wrong.

“If she wanted to get away she would be on the mainland or in Timbuktu.” Steve regarded the bungalow, and didn’t move from his seat.

“Maybe just this once leave the onus on her?” Danny proposed even though the first time he tried the idea it hadn’t sat well with Steve. “She called you at Christmas.”

In answer, Steve reached over the dash board and snatched up the note that he had previously written, in case his sister wasn’t at home, and got out of the truck.

Danny chased after him across the wide street, skirting the edge of a large puddle, and up the drive. Steve’s long legs meant that there had been more than enough time for him to ring the doorbell, but he waited, ostensibly for Danny to join him.

“You gonna ring or just stare at the door?” Danny set his hands in his pockets.

Steve pressed the doorbell and stepped back a fraction. The ring clearly sounded inside.

Steve looked at Danny, and Danny pursed his lips and shrugged.

“Once more,” Steve said and there was a sense of finality in his words. The bell echoed through the house.

“I don’t think she’s in,” Danny said.
Bending, Steve slid his note through the letterbox, taking care not to crease or mar the envelope. The purr of a car engine and a gentle hiss of brakes caught Danny’s attention. He glanced over this shoulder as a small compact Honda Civic started to turn into the wide drive.

“Hey, Steve.” He tapped Steve’s shoulder. It wasn’t Mary at the steering wheel it was —

“Jenna Kaye!” Steve darted forwards.

Her expression was a picture-perfect example of stunned. Wide eyed, she flung the car in reverse and screamed backwards off the drive into the road. Steve scrabbled for the driver’s door handle.

“Steve!” Danny hared after him.

As Steve caught the door handle, the car made a handbrake turn swinging sharply onto the road. Pulled violently along, Steve stumbled and fell out of sight on the far side of the car.

“Steve!” Danny screamed. Suddenly, he was in front of the car, looking straight at Jenna Kaye over the hood.

“Get out of the way!” she shrieked loud enough to be heard on the next street, and gunned the engine.

Danny jumped to the side, and the car missed him by a hairsbreadth. He felt the fender brush by his legs. Danny didn’t watch it go; Steve lay sprawled face down in the street.

“Steve!” Danny was there in a heartbeat, crouched over Steve. He ran his hands over Steve: mapping the plane of his long back; touching his face; curling fingers to find his pulse.

“I’m okay.” Steve flopped onto his back, and lay there, right in the middle of the road on the black tarmac.

“Holy Fuck.” Danny rocked back on his heels. “You shouldn’t be moving.”

“I’m fine.” Slowly, Steve got up on one elbow.

“Did you move too fast?” Danny scooped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him in tight.

Steve grunted. Danny rested his forehead against Steve’s hair — but just for a moment.

“I’m okay,” Steve repeated, breathing hard.

“Come on, we have to get you off the road.” It was lucky that they were deep in suburbia; coupled with mid-morning in the post-Christmas period, it meant that the roads were quiet.

“Can you see my aid?” Steve scanned the road. “It came out.”

“What?” Danny looked with him.

“Steve! What the Hell are you doing?”

Mary’s strident words were actually the last thing that Danny wanted to hear.

“Freeze,” Danny ordered. “Can you see Steve’s hearing aid?”

“What?” Mary asked, but she obediently studied the ground. She stooped over and picked up the tiny device. “Found it.”
“Mary, how do you know Jenna Kaye?” Steve demanded.

“Jenny?” Mary asked, perplexed. “She’s my roommate.”

“What!” Steve hollered. “Are you nuts?”

“She’s my friend!” Mary yelled back at him.

“She’s a terrorist!”

Mary fell backwards a step, but covered with a sneer. “She’s a secretary, not a terrorist.”

“Stop it,” Danny ordered. “We need to get off the road.” He got an arm under Steve’s shoulder and levered him to his feet. Steve swayed, but remained upright.

“Damn.” Steve twisted his right arm to better see. An impressive road rash scraped his skin up from wrist all the way down his forearm. Blood dripped off his elbow.

“Ew.” Mary winced.

“Your roommate is working with an international terrorist. She’s an ex-CIA analyst, who went AWOL,” Steve rapped out.

Okay, yeah, so Steve had more information than he was sharing with his ‘ohana.

“No way.” Mary lifted her chin high.

“What’s her license plate?” Steve shrugged Danny off, and got his phone out of his left cargo pants pocket.

“What? Why?”

“So I can get the authorities after her,” Steve snapped.

Mary blew a derisive raspberry. “I’m not letting you set the cops on my friend.”

“She’s not your friend!” Steve said, as irate as Danny had ever seen him. Simply being in the presence of his sister seemed to shorten his fuse to a mere nub. “She’s working for the guy who murdered Auntie Pat!”

Mary’s jaw dropped. “No way.”

“Truth!” Steve crossed his heart.

Mary mirrored his gesture. “GSN 595, I think. I’m pretty sure, yeah. GSN 595.”

Steve stabbed at his phone. “Danny, get Mary to pack an overnight bag. Don’t touch anything else in the house. Just Mary’s stuff and then clear the scene. We’ll need forensics down here.” Shoulders taut, he turned away intent on his phone.

“Okay,” Danny drawled. He leaned forward and plucked Steve’s hearing aid from Mary’s palm without touching her skin. It had to be his left aid judging from the fact that he could use his phone.

“What?” Mary glared at him.

“We need to get you a bag. I don’t think you can stay here,” Danny explained.
“What?” Mary shook her head, disbelievingly.

“The police, or the Navy or FBI, maybe even the CIA, is going to search this place. Jenna Kaye works for this guy called Wo Fat. He’s a terrorist.”

Mary’s eyes widened, she turned and bolted into the house.

“I guess, uhm—” Danny pointed after her, “--I better go with?”

Steve was focussed on his phone, so Danny trotted after her. He kind of guessed that Mary was possibly retrieving something of a pharmaceutical nature. But, maybe, something else. Something that Steve needed to see. The front door was open. Danny moved down a short corridor, following a clatter, which led him to a small bedroom that looked as if a bomb had gone off in it.

Mary froze, a tiny baggie of cannabis in her hand.

“It’s medicine grade. It’s for my nerves.”

“Sure. And you have a medical card.” He wasn’t her mother, or her smother, and guessed that Steve would go ballistic if he found her with drugs. Chin had said that she had problems and Steve had got her into treatment after her Grandmother’s funeral. “You best flush it.”

“That’s the first place that they look.” She rolled her eyes.

“I’m not up on the best way to dispose of drugs. Leave it. Say it’s Jenna’s.”

“What? This is primo stuff.” Her fingers curled around the bag.

“You’re not taking it to Seolh.”

“Have you met Toast,” she said sarcastically.

“Toast hasn’t done any drugs around me. My daughter visits Seolh.”

“I guess you haven’t found The Bush either.” She cast around the room, and grabbed a backpack. She tossed the baggie in the backpack.

Shit, Danny thought, boundary testing. Well, he was an old hand at boundary testing -- oldest of a mess of siblings and a dedicated dad. He leaned over and plucked the baggie from the backpack.

“You can toss this in Kaye’s room or flush it. But you’re not taking this to Seolh.” Danny crunched the bag in his fingers, only feeling dried leaves, nothing else hidden in the package.

“You’ll ruin it.” Mary snatched it from his hands.

“Ruin what?” Steve sailed into the room. “Mary!”

“It’s just cannabis!”

“It’s a schedule 1 hallucinogenic substance.” Steve snatched as fast as Mary -- they had to have genetically fast reflexes. “You--”

“Give it here.” Danny took the bag from Steve, and dropped his hearing aid on his open palm.

“Don’t,” Mary protested.
“Car keys.” Danny held out his hand. “Now.”

Steve glanced at him, weighing his expression in an instant, and handed over the keys.

“Do something about that road rash,” Danny chided, “you’re dripping on the floor.”

“Shit, the deposit!” Mary yelled.

Danny tuned out the skirmishing siblings. The house was close to the ocean, it would be easy to toss the cannabis into the waves.

As he pulled away, a Honolulu Police Department cruiser and a black sedan drew to a halt outside the house.

~*~

#72#

Danny pulled up in one of the many empty parking spaces at the Ewa Beach Park. The parking lot was relatively empty due to the grey and overcast day, the lowering clouds overhead threatening rain. Danny looked around, but didn’t see a parking metre or a metre maid. Not wanting to leave Steve alone a second longer than necessary, he quickly locked the truck and then jogged down the winding path, past the kids’ playground, skirting the toilet block, and onto the sparse green grass. The ocean was grey and storm tossed. A couple, hand in hand, walked idly between the widely planted palm trees far off to his left. Danny kicked off his dress shoes and socks, and bent over to roll up his pants.

Gritting his teeth, Danny sloshed into the rough surf, wincing at the chill. Walking through the calf deep waves he shook out the plastic baggy, leaves drifting into the churning water. Flicking off a fragment of leaf off his slacks, he watched the cannabis sluice away.

Evidence gone.

He wouldn’t have done this for everyone, but he would do it for Steve’s sister. Scrunching his toes in the sand, he walked parallel to the beach. Paranoid, maybe, but they lived in the world of Big Brother, and Steve had a network of family, friends and intelligence personnel watching them. Danny ripped the plastic bag into twisted and stretched out fragments, and tossed the bits into the water. Grace would be appalled to see him polluting.

He walked a little further, simply a man walking in the surf on a grey January morning. Making an abrupt right-angled turn, he stepped back on the dry sand, and made his way to his shoes and socks. Back under the palm trees, there was a man on a bench seat, leaning back against the attached picnic table, arms stretched out.

Danny didn’t like him on sight, even if, far off, he was fairly vague. The man was overdressed for the beach. As Danny collected his shoes, he kept one eye on the man.

Barefooted, Danny headed back to the truck. The man didn’t move -- his gaze now on the sea. Danny supposed that he made a similar strange figure, in his shirt and pressed trousers, rather than t-shirt and shorts.

Danny got back to the truck unmolested by random watchers or metre maids with parking tickets. He sat sideways in the driver’s seat, using his socks to brush off the sand between his toes onto the parking lot.
A quiet day on a beach on Oahu was a weird occurrence. Danny hadn’t checked the weather forecast, and it was his first winter in Hawaii -- maybe the locals stayed in when it rained? Although, Kono had headed out very early to the North Shore to surf.

The man was still sitting on the bench. A car pulled up two spaces down from Danny’s parking space.

Paranoia, you’re my bitch.

Danny pushed his bare feet into his shoes, turned and shut the door. He pulled away before the young family got out of the Nissan.

~*~

There were a whole mess of people outside the bungalow. The ubiquitous police patrol vehicles (darn, Koa Keawe had shown up), a very large white truck with ‘NCIS’ emblazoned on the side (Danny hadn’t known that they were actually real and not just a television programme), the black sedan (that looked as if it belonged to the Men in Black), two grey-green US Navy jeeps, and, a giant Hummer that looked like an autobot.

Danny pulled over, and jumped out of the Ford, with the three coffees that he had picked up from the drive-through at the local Starbucks. As a cover went, it was pathetic, but it was still a cover.

The family opposite Mary’s bungalow were watching fascinated from their bay window. Danny gave them a little wave.

Koa was as predictable as ever, striding over to intercept as soon as he saw Danny.

“What are you doing here, Williams?”

“Hi, Koa,” Danny said, easily. “I went for coffee while Mary packed a bag. Figured she’d need one. Why are you here? This isn’t your investigation.”

Koa’s jaw firmed. “I have a vested interest. This involves my family.”

“And I’m sure if you actually came to Steve as Koa instead of Detective Keawe, he’d probably brief you. But last time I checked this was outside of your bali--”

Three men with NCIS windbreakers buttoned against the heavy drizzle, came out of the house carting a mess of computers: desktop towers, hard drives and at least two laptops.

Danny had never been as happy to see computers in his life. Kaye was Wo Fat’s computer geek; there could be answers on those computers. The three agents loaded the boxes into the back of the NCIS truck.

Assuming NCIS shared any intelligence with the Navy -- actually Danny thought that that was a given -- would Steve share anything that he learned with his ‘Ohana?

“Excuse me.” He pushed by Keawe.

For once in Hawaii, he fitted in -- his shirt and neatly pressed slacks allowed him to bypass the random officers and agents. The vats of branded coffee only added to the deception.

“Hey, Steve. Mary.”

Steve stood over his sister, who was crumpled on the living room sofa, like a lighthouse, warning off
the sea of officers and agents ranging around them.

“Danny,” Steve said tersely.

“I brought coffee.”

“I can see.” Steve regarded them as if poisoned, then swept his gaze back over the room.

“Sugared, Mary—” Danny levered a cup out of the cardboard holder and passed it over, “—’cause I didn’t know how you would take it, but I figured that you would need the sugar.”

“Thank you.” She found a smile from somewhere deep. “So, I’ve been living with a terrorist. Awesome.”

“I live with a Navy SEAL. We all have our crosses to bear.”

“What did you just say?” Steve demanded, spinning on them.

“Coffee, Americano with a dash of full fat milk -- just the way that you like it.” Danny put their coffees down on the occasional table. “Here let’s have a look at that.”

“What?” Steve eyed him.

Danny clicked his fingers at the dish towel wrapped around Steve’s forearm.

“Did you find a clean one, or just wrap any old dish towel around a bleeding wound? Do you have a first aid kit?” he addressed the question to Mary.

“Bathroom.” She pointed helpfully.

~*~

It was a tight squeeze but they all fitted in the tiny space. Kneeling, Danny got Steve sitting on the edge of the bath, arm over the adjacent sink, so he could rinse off the wound. Steve glowered at him stoically, not even hissing as Danny washed off tiny pieces of grit and clotted blood.

“It’s not too bad,” Danny judged. There were only three deeper cuts, but mainly it was an expansive swash of surface scrapes and bruises. Akin to the -- just about healed -- scrape on his own leg.

“Here.” Mary held up the world’s tiniest tube of Neosporin antiseptic cream.

Danny glanced at it in askance.

“It’s all we’ve got,” she said.

“Soap and water should suffice,” Steve said steadily.

“No spleen, remember? You have to be careful of infection.” Danny accepted the cream.

“What!” Mary demanded. “You’ve lost your spleen? Why the Hell didn’t you say?”

Steve juddered back on his perch. “It didn’t crop up in our polite conversations,” he said waspishly.

“I thought that I was bad with my little brother,” Danny rapped out loudly, before Mary could respond. “Sit still and shut up the pair of you. Now!”

Mary dropped beside Steve, and pursed her lips together. Steve started to speak, but clamped his
mouth shut when Danny held up a quelling finger. They were matched bookends.

Danny carefully smoothed the cream over the wounds, concentrating on the deeper scratches, and then covered the scrape with three pieces of gauze, in a bandage jigsaw, before wrapping his arm. It might have seemed a little overboard, but well -- no spleen.

“Thank you,” Steve said.

“You’re welcome.”

“So, Kaye, how did you meet her?” Steve asked, into the stilted silence of the bathroom.

“Coffee shop.” Mary toasted them with her coffee, and then took a massive gulp. “It was busy; the seat at my table was free. We got chatting.”

“Just like that?” Steve said.

“Just like that. Convenient.” Cradling her coffee, Mary leaned over, setting her elbows on her knees. “She was new to Honolulu. Lost. Needed a roommate.”

“When did you move in?” Steve asked.

“About three-four weeks ago. It was cheaper than staying in a hotel.”

“Three weeks,” Steve echoed. “How long have you been here?”

Mary flung herself to her feet, but constrained by the tiny bathroom, she could only set her back against the door.


“Why didn’t you come to Seolh?” Steve asked.

“It’s not my home, Steve.” Sighing, she looked to the far wall. “It’s a place where I used to live. But it’s not my home.”

“You could have stayed with Mamo,” Steve offered, into the silence of the aftermath of her words.

Mary didn’t deny the offer. Danny kind of guessed that Mamo and Maru would have been ecstatic to have Mary with them.

“Okay.” Steve changed the subject, “Kaye. Has she been here with you the whole time? Did she have any visitors?”

“She went away over Christmas, back to her parents’ house in Minnesota, I think. She was away a lot, travelling, with her boss.” Mary slumped against the door. “She’s quiet. A bookworm. I had to drag her out to go clubbing. She’d lost her fiancé -- she was sad, you know.”

“Josh Hirsch, CIA,” Steve said.

“Jesus,” Mary said, wide-eyed.

“There had to be a reason why she made you her roommate?” Danny asked. It was weird. Kaye had been quietly living with Steve’s sister when she was instrumental in invading Seolh and stealing Danny’s photographs.
“Like what?” Mary asked.

“Did this man visit?” Steve pulled out his BlackBerry, and showed Mary the screen with Wo Fat’s photograph.

“No. And, whoa, I would remember him.” She grinned appreciatively, reaching for the phone.

“Terrorist.” Steve chided, leaning back away from his sister’s hands.

“It isn’t tattooed on his forehead, Steve.”

“Look, Kaye connived you into becoming her roommate,” Steve said. “There had to be a reason. Did she do anything that you thought was weird?”

“Weird?” Mary’s thumbnail went to her mouth, thinking hard.

“Anything. The smallest thing.”

“Ohay. Okay. Jesus. She only really harped on about one thing -- even after I told her to change the subject -- Seolh. She was fascinated by Seolh.”


“Mom?”

“Yeah.” Mary took a slurp of coffee. “She said that she wrote stories. She thought that it would make a good background for a novel. She even took notes.”

Steve went stock still. The aura of thinking around him was so intense that Danny could almost imagine the smell of burning.

“On her computer?” Steve stood crowding the room.

“Yes.” Mary squeaked, as perforce, she had to quickly shift to the side as Steve got out of the bathroom.

“NCIS took the computers.” Danny scrambled to his feet and chased after him.

“What?” Steve stopped dead, rucking up the hall rug.

“NCIS agents. Took all of Kaye’s computers.” Danny jerked his thumb at the open front door. The white truck was no longer parked just outside the front yard.

“They’ll have taken them to the field office to Cyber Operations,” Steve rapped out. There appeared to be no wind-breaker bedecked NCIS agents for him to interrogate in the officer-filled bungalow.

“Lieutenant Commander McGarrett.”

Oh, shit, the Eddy Izzard look-a-like -- Lieutenant Commander Rickety -- was on the scene. Danny managed not to roll his eyes.

“Lieutenant Commander Rickety,” Steve returned.

“Your sister needs to come with us for a debriefing,” Rickety said without any further ado.
“Yes,” Steve said flatly, “she does.”

“I do?” Mary ran straight into the back of Danny. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“You’ll come voluntarily or be arrested,” Rickety said.

Mary clutched Danny’s shoulder.

“Steve will go with you. Won’t you, Steve,” Danny said levelly. Say ‘yes’, Steve, he thought.

Steve stood tall. “Of course, I will.”

~*~

Danny parked Steve’s truck in its customary place behind the House, and sat, quietly, just for a long moment, thinking. Steve had gone with Mary and the pissant Rickety to Pearl-Harbour Hickam to be debriefed, leaving Danny to return home.

Danny stared blindly at the pottery building.

Actually, this needed a pad of paper and a pen. The kitchen was the best place for thinking. Suiting action to thoughts, he headed there, using key and code to get into the kitchen.

“Toast?” he yelled, poking his head into the corridor. The computer nerd would be good for a brainstorming session. Kono, he knew, was on the North Shore, surfing monster, winter waves, which no one in their right mind should go anywhere near. “Idiot,” he chided.

He hit the dinner bell, ringing SOS throughout the House. If there was anyone in it would bring them running.

There was no answer to his summons.

A little sullenly, Danny got the notepad and pen from the fridge and set them on the table. Another cup of coffee was needed, and, hopefully, cookies. He cast about the kitchen, looking for one of Mrs. Keawe’s treats. In a cookie tin, he found some buttery shortbread. He munched on one, as he finagled a coffee from the kitchen espresso machine.

“One,” he said to the world at large as the machine hissed and splurted, “Wo Fat didn’t know what Jenna Kaye was up to. Two, they’re independently looking for something.”

Danny turned in a circle.

“Three, something to do with Seolh.”

~*~

#73#

Danny mixed the par boiled spinach with ricotta and nutmeg. The aroma of eggplant drizzled with good quality olive oil and crushed garlic roasting in the oven filled the kitchen. It wasn’t his night to cook, but he had texted Kono and taken over, because he was happier with his hands busy. Kono had been content to swap days -- evidently she was having a great time with the Aussie surfers.

The oven pinged -- perfect timing. He would dollop the spinach and cheese mixture on the slices of roast eggplant, roll them up making little parcels and then cover them with his homemade tomato sauce. And then bake them to perfection.
His phone vibrated and danced across the kitchen table, announcing the arrival of a text. Danny hit the receive button with his little fingernail in lieu of washing his hands.

Steve and Mary were on their way home.

He felt like the mom.

It would take them easily a good hour to get to Seolh; traffic was a pain at five o’clock. Danny had time to make a starter.

“Caprese salad or Tuscan bean bruschetta?”

~*~

“Oh, my god, that smells amazing. I am so hungry,” Mary announced her presence, loudly. She flopped down at the kitchen table, leaving Steve to close the kitchen door and set her bag on the floor beside the bookcase.

“You’ve got time to have a quick wash.” Danny dried his hands on a dish towel and then tossed it on top of the oven.

Mary regarded him. “Sure. Where am I sleeping, Steve?”

“The blue studio is set up.”

“Okay!” She launched herself to her feet, snatched up her bag and flounced out of the kitchen.

Steve sagged, exhaustion writ over his face.

“You okay, Babe?” Danny got in close, curling his arms around those narrow shoulders and letting Steve snuffle into his neck.

“Yeah. Thanks.”

“Everything okay? Mary’s not a suspect?”

Steve straightened, and Danny kept a firm hold. He waggled his eyebrows, because, it wasn’t improbable that Mary -- estranged, ex-drug addict -- McGarrett could be coerced into working for Wo Fat.

“She can’t lie to save her life. And she was surprised by Wo Fat and all the stuff going down. Jenna Kaye wanted something from her, but we still don’t know what.” Steve looked at him glumly.

Danny stretched up and kissed that frown away. The kitchen was their place. Steve sighed into Danny’s mouth, and communicated all he felt through a simple, dedicated kiss.

“Kaye was operating without Wo Fat’s knowledge or consent,” Steve finally said.

“Yeah, I know,” Danny said. “Or I figured that out.”

“What else have you figured out?” Steve asked.

“Hmmm?” Danny kissed, and then squirmed free from Steve’s hold. He retrieved his notepad and handed it over.

Steve studied it for a long moment. “Huh, great minds think alike. Kaye’s looking for something that
will give her some sort of hold over Wo Fat.”

“Why?”

“Something to do with her fiancé Joshua Hirsch, I guess.” Steve set the notepad down on the kitchen table, amidst the plates and cutlery, picked up the pen, and wrote Josh Hirsch on the bottom of Danny’s list. “ Practically the first thing that Kaye said to us was that Wo Fat was going to kill Hirsch.”

He sat and sucked on the end of the pen, thinking.

“What would Mary know about Seolh that you wouldn’t?” Danny asked, as he squatted by the oven to check on the bruschetta. They were ready.

“Nothing,” Steve said arrogantly. “But Kaye could hardly shack up with me, could she? Needs must.”

“Mary doesn’t know that this is something to do with your mom?” Danny asked.

Steve slid a glance at him, and then slowly shook his head.

“The thing is it’s not our mystery, is it?” Danny observed.

“What?” Steve asked.

“Okay, this is a treasure hunt.”

“Explain?” Carefully, Steve tore Danny’s list from the notebook, folded it up and slid it into the front pocket of his green polo shirt. ‘Treasure hunt’ was number four on the list.

“We don’t have the map, or really even know if there is even a treasure.” Danny carried the warm bruschetta over to the table. “We don’t even have the first clue -- we were just dumped halfway through the story. Wo Fat tried very hard to make it so you couldn’t figure out who he was -- so hard that you actually did figure out who he was. I like that -- it’s evil karma.”

“I thought that you didn’t believe in karma.”

“Whatever.” Danny tapped the tabletop. “Once you knew Wo Fat existed, you were never going to let it go. A terrorist mastermind controlling the Hesse Brothers?”

“They tossed the House,” Steve said, inexplicably.

“Yeah? Okay?”

“When they drugged us. Hesse, Kaye, and their flunkies tossed the House looking for something -- I think that it wasn’t just for your camera -- they figured out pretty quickly that you could hide a nuclear bomb in here.” Steve snagged a hunk of warm bruschetta. “I guess that Wo Fat didn’t make the immediate link between my mother and I, but once he did, he had to know that I was going to start investigating him, and maybe find what he’s looking for?”

It had the ring of rightness to Danny’s ears.

“You’ve wondered why Wo Fat didn’t just kill you -- why the machinations? It has to be because of that. He can’t find it; he thinks you might.”

“Yeah, I think that we’re right,” Steve said, broodingly.
“I’m so hungry.” Mary sailed back into the kitchen and captured a slice of bread, popping it into her mouth. “Oh, yum,” she said around a mouthful.

Danny waited for Steve to say something to Mary, but his lips were firmly sealed. Danny moved to ring the dinner bell. Chin and Malia were back in the House watching episode twelve of *Chuno* in the living room, and Kono was staying out with her surfing friends. Toast was with his girlfriend.

Standing, Steve pushed bread into his mouth sideways and munched. “I’m gonna wash my hands,” he mumbled.

“‘kay,” Danny acknowledged.

“Hi, Steve,” Chin said, skirting by Steve at the kitchen threshold. “Mary! Nice to see you.”

“Chin, hello.” Mary turned in her seat.

Danny let Chin introduce Malia to Mary, and vice versa, as he moved the eggplant bake to the bottom of the oven to keep warm as they ate the bruschetta.

“Chin, you want to pick us out a nice wine?” Danny said. The introductions hadn’t resulted in any awkwardness, although Chin was about as phlegmatic as anyone could be, in Danny’s humble opinion.

“Sure, what are we having?” Chin asked, as Malia sat down next to Mary.

“Spinach and ricotta with eggplant.”

Chin stroked his bottom lip. “Tomato sauce?”

“My secret recipe.”

“Sangiovese, I think. A Chianti.”

Chianti, Danny wondered. His ex liked Chianti -- Chianti sucked. There was another round of doorway dancing as Steve returned from the ground floor bathroom and Chin headed towards the cellars. Searching Seolh was going to take forever.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Steve brushed a kiss on the edge of Danny’s jaw and continued around the table to his seat.

Danny touched his cheek. Steve had kissed him without thinking, and no one had noticed. Mary was congratulating Malia, and Chin was out of the room. It hadn’t been a covert kiss, only an absent thought.

“Ah, you know, lots to think about.”

Steve only nodded in agreement. Evidently he didn’t want to discuss the mystery any further with Mary in the room.

“Malia, what would you like to drink? Chin’s gone to get us some wine. Steve, what about you?”

“Do you have any sparkling mineral water?” Malia turned in her seat.

“Yeah, Chin got some.” Mineral water was good for delicate, morning sick tummies; Chin was a dedicated husband-to-be. “There’s a bottle in the fridge.”
“I like water,” Steve said.

Danny filled two tumblers and ferried them over, as Chin returned with a red and a white bottle of wine.

“I have a Ruffino Riserva Ducale Oro Chianti Classico Riserva for those of us who like red.” Chin set the bottles on the table. “And a Cru Schimberg, Dirler-Cadé, Pinot Grigio from Alsace for the white lovers.”

“So you’re still a wine snob, Chin,” Mary said, reaching for the Chianti.

“We all have our vices,” Chin returned evenly.

Manfully, Danny didn’t guffaw.

~*~

So Steve was one big ball of knots. His back was a roadmap of terrifying snarl ups. Naked, Danny straddled Steve’s hips as he ran his fingers over his knobbly back. In all honesty, Danny wasn’t great at massage. He knew when he got a good massage, an electric tickle would walk along his nerves, but he got no feedback when he massaged people. Steve didn’t seem to mind; clean and refreshed from his long shower, he sighed under Danny’s even strokes.

The creamy lotion wasn’t too oily, and smelled of ginger. Steve was a predictable sort. He seemed to lean towards scents that were also herbs or fruit. The ginger was warming.

The skin on Steve’s back felt smooth. Splaying his hands, Danny circled Steve’s shoulder blades and moved downwards, deliberately skirting the scars edging over the wing of his ribs. The heavier moisturiser protecting the scars slowed his smooth motion.

Danny managed to continue his stroking without a hitch. Thumbs in the well of Steve’s spine, Danny slid his hands back upwards to curl his hands over the firm muscles at the base of his neck. Too firm, too hard -- Danny worked on a knot in the thick muscle over his right shoulder blade, digging his thumb in hard. Steve squeaked, but didn’t protest.

“Okay?” Danny asked, neither quietly or intimately, because Steve had his face muffled between two pillows.

“Don’t stop,” he moaned.

“You wanna talk?” Danny worked on the matching large muscle over his left shoulder. But it wasn’t anywhere as knotty.

“Trying to think of where to start.”

Massage was proving to be a good method of getting Steve to open up; normally getting information out of him was next to impossible.

“Has Navy Intelligence given you any files on your mom?” Danny prodded.

Muscles scrunched under his fingers, so Danny took that as a yes. He smoothed his hands over the long plane of Steve’s back, soothingly.

“Steve, I’m not going to tell anyone. Who would I tell?” He jabbed a finger over Steve’s left kidney.

“Ouch,” Steve said mock-sullenly. But they were both naked and there wasn’t anything literally or
“CIA. Old-School. Decades ago. Ran operations in Asia.”

“Wo Fat’s dad?” Danny realised that he had stopped his massage. He rose onto his knees and made a point of going back to the tense muscles at the base of Steve’s neck. A dribble of pre-cum dripped on the small of Steve’s back. Danny bit his bottom lip and focussed on the task at hand.

“Did you say Wo Fat’s dad?” Steve checked.

“Yes.”

“Can’t get the specifics. She worked before the era of networked computers. Unbelievable. They’re sending over the hardcopy files from the Mainland. Wo Yongfu was associated with the Triads. Probably the regional Dragon Head.”

“The whatsit?”

“Boss, basically. So yes, my mom likely encountered the head of the local Triad, along with the up-and-coming member of the Yakuza, Hiro Noshimuri.”

“So back to the library, then?” Danny said lightly, and worked the heel of his hand into a stubborn knot. “In the morning, though.”

“Okay,” Steve drawled out. But he was irrepressible. “I figure we’re looking for some evidence, hard core evidence, which could break open the local Triad or the Yakuza.”

“Even twenty years out of date?”

“Excuse me? Out of date?”

“The evidence is going to be really old,” Danny said clearly.

“I guess it must be explosive.”

Danny leaned over and kissed the smooth skin between Steve’s shoulder blades. Steve shivered. Danny dropped a lower kiss.

Steve shivered again.

This was kind of fun. He mapped the prominent ridges of Steve’s spine bestowing each a worshipful kiss. The dip of his lower back was a perfect arc. Oh, for a camera.

“You okay, Babe?” He stroked his hands over the contours mapped by the sea tattoo.

“Uhuuuuh.”

Danny bit his bottom lip. He shifted back a fraction, sliding down Steve’s sparsely haired thighs, enjoying the brush of coarse hair against his cock. Danny twitched.

Steve was really, truly new at this. Slow and sure was the way to go. The peach fuzz over his butt practically begged to be bitten, but Danny prevailed, only gently kneading the lean muscles. Danny blew gently over the heated skin.

“Oh, for the love of--” Steve flipped over, and Danny almost toppled off the bed. “And you call me a
Danny laughed outright, as Steve latched on, pulling him down. Okay, wrestling was the name of the game, Danny was okay with that.

~*~

Danny awoke to early morning low light. The curtains were pulled except for the pair directly overlooking the ocean. Steve refused point-blank to sleep in a cave. Danny turned his head. Steve slept on the far side of the bed on his right side, facing Danny. The loose curl of his fingers, resting on his pillow, brushed his lower lip. One day, perhaps they could cuddle. Perhaps he would be able to kiss Steve awake.

There was no lying abed; Danny needed a piss, badly. There was something about red wine that always aggravated him. It had to be about seven o’clock judging by the sunlight, Danny guessed. It was early, but too late for him to go back to sleep.

Grumbling under his breath, Danny rolled off the bed.

He took a long shower, pissing down the shower drain as he lathered up with Steve’s herbal shampoo and shower gel. Once clean and working on towelling off, he pondered on the day, Steve was probably going to insist on searching the House. But that was a next to an impossible task; the place was enormous.

He grabbed Steve’s ratty bathrobe, and padded through the apartment. He needed his spray-in conditioner before his hair dried too much or it was going to turn into a rat’s nest.

The House was quiet as he meandered back to his studio.

“Morning.”

“Jesus.” Danny clutched his chest dramatically. “Mary.”

She was wandering up the curved main staircase with a mug of coffee.

“Nice legs.” She leaned against the top banister and grinned, lasciviously. “Steve’s had that horrible bathrobe a long time.”

“It’s comfortable.”

“And you look very comfortable.”

He didn’t like her tone. “And what exactly do you mean by that?”

“Only that you got comfortable here very fast.” She shrugged.

Frankly, Danny had no time for innuendo and insinuation at the best of times. He hadn’t had his breakfast mug of coffee yet.

“Six weeks,” Mary mused, “and you’re already shacking up with my brother.”

Danny laughed -- outright. “Maybe you’re trying to protect him, somehow, someway. Uncharacteristically?”

“I--”
“What’s between your brother and me -- is between me and your brother. He’s an adult.” Danny opened the door of his studio. “Do you honestly think that I could pull the wool over your brother’s eyes? You really don’t know your brother do you?”

Mary huffed, outraged. Pushing away from the banister, she stalked off to the blue studio. Danny waited until she had slammed the door shut, before moving into his apartment. Resting his back against the door, he growled through his gritted teeth.

siblings.

~*~

Danny pondered the contents of the fridge, trying to decide on breakfast. He wasn’t hungry, but if he didn’t have breakfast inside of an hour or two he would be grumpy.

“Hey,” Wearing shorts and t-shirt, Steve wandered into the kitchen, pinked and sleep-mussed.

“Juice?” Danny asked, leaning out of the fridge for a kiss.

Steve mashed a kiss half on Danny’s lips and half on his cheek. Sleepy Steve, was decidedly, sleepy. He reached past Danny and pulled out the cloudy apple juice from the door shelf.

“I woke up and you weren’t there,” he grumbled. He padded barefoot around the kitchen, drinking straight from the carton.

“I needed a piss. You looked comfortable. How’s the arm?”

Steve was using the arm that was scratched up to heft the carton. It didn’t seem to be paining him as he glugged the carton dry.

“Fine.” Steve set the empty carton down and stretched, his t-shirt riding up, displaying a thin dark trail of hair that Danny now knew very well.

“What do you want for breakfast, or are you going for a run?”

Steve rotated his shoulders, freeing up kinks, and lowered his arms. “I don’t feel like running this morning. I guess I got my exercise last night.” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Oh, smooth, Babe.”

Steve grinned, cheesily.

Danny shook his head. He set the milk on the table, and added a Tupperware container of chopped fresh fruit, followed by cereal.

“Is there any yogurt left?” Steve asked, as he moved to get the breakfast bowls and cutlery.

“Some of your flavourless bio-active crap.”

“It’s good for you.” Steve dropped in his customary seat.

Danny sat opposite him, so that Steve could watch his face. He poured cereal in the two bowls, and let Steve dollop yogurt on his cereal instead of milk.

“So what’s our plan of action?” Danny asked.
Steve munched. “We have to figure out what Wo Fat is looking for. It could be anything. Searching Seolh from top to bottom won’t reveal it. It could be one of the pictures in the foyer. We need more information.”

“What about Kaye? Or her files?”

“I’ll go into JOIC today, and visit the NCIS field office at Pearl Harbour. NCIS Cyber Operations may have taken first crack at the laptops, but NI counter terrorism will have them now.”

“What about Mamo?”

“What about Mamo?” Steve froze, spoon poised.

“He was finding out more about Wo Egg Fu Yung.”

Steve stared at him. The joke fell resoundingly flat.

“Wo Yongfu,” Danny corrected. “Mamo was asking Koa Keawe and the Kapu about the man.”

“Yes. I remember.” Abandoning his barely touched breakfast, Steve glanced at the kitchen clock on the wall. “I’m going to go into Pearl-Harbour Hickam first thing. If you see Mamo, ask him. Send me a text if he has any intel. Oh, and can you keep an eye on Mary?”

“Yes,” Danny said slowly. The things that you did for love….

~*~

“Ooh, uniform.” Danny darted across the foyer, intent on catching Steve before he headed out the front door. “Can I muss you up?”

“No.” Flushed, Steve stepped out of the reach of Danny’s grabby fingers.

“Aw,” Danny joshed.

Steve closed his eyes for a moment, and rubbed resignedly at the edge of his eyebrow with his thumb.

“You don’t normally—” Danny waved his hand up and down encompassing Steve’s neatly pressed, head-to-toe beige-ness. “There’s lots of bling.”

“It’s a US Naval Officer’s khaki uniform. The bling are my ribbons.”

“And very nice it is too, but why are you wearing it? Normally, you just head over to the base in your cargo pants and t-shirt.”

Steve stared, processing. He looked kind of cute when he was bamboozled.

“If I need to go to the NCIS field office for an update,” Steve finally said, “this will facilitate matters.”

Ah, the big words were out. Commander McGarrett was rising to the forefront.

“And no, you can’t take any photographs.” Steve held his finger out.

“How’s about a private viewing later?” Danny asked, grinning lecherously.
“Maybe, if you’re good.”

“I can be good.” Danny nodded vigorously.

“I’ll believe that when I see it.” He pecked a kiss high on Danny’s cheek, turned on his heel and stepped over the threshold, setting a proper peeked cap on his head.

“I like your hat,” Danny called loudly.

“It’s a combination cover,” Steve said as he stepped out of view.

So easy to tease, Danny thought fondly, you’d think a SEAL would have a thicker skin.

~*~

#74#

“Chin?” Danny knocked twice, firmly, on the door to Chin’s studio. He could hear the plink of some type of classical music (Danny didn’t know his classical from his country).

“Come in,” Chin called.

Danny slipped into Chin’s studio. He had only been in it once before, during his first day at Seolh, and only for a few minutes, before Chin had taken him on a tour of the House. The studio was filled with paintings, in different phases of preparation from beginning through to completed. A few blank canvasses lay on the floor, ready and waiting. The scent of paint was omnipresent, but the watercolour odour was light. Danny figured if Chin painted with oils all the time, he wouldn’t be able to live in the same area.

There was a clear delineation between art studio and Chin’s living space by the windows, formed by the back of a long five-seater sofa looking out over Seolh’s gardens. It appeared that Chin slept in the little room set kitty corner to the studio. Thinking on the schematics of the room, Danny noted that it was actually under the staircase that led to Steve’s apartment.

It was a restricted living space for a man about to be married, who was going to be bringing his wife and a new baby home, and was a recognised, successful professional artist. Danny could see why Steve had thought that the blue studio was a good idea.

“Morning, Danny,” Chin greeted from his perch next to an easel. The painting appeared to be in the early stages, with only a pale green swath of colour covering the lower part of the canvass.

“Sorry.” Danny shook himself. “Malia gone home?”

“To work.”

“Do you know if Mamo is coming in today?”

“No idea. Why?”

“Steve asked him to look up a guy who we think is Wo Fat’s dad. You know, ask Koa Keawe, and his nephew about him. I just wanted to know if he’s found out anything.”

“You could call him.”

“I don’t have Mamo’s number.”
“Oh, well, that’s easily remedied,” Chin said.

He wiped his hands on a rag, leaned over on his stool, and picked up his iPhone from his worktable. He flicked off the music. The disconnect was visceral. Danny stared at the iPod dock. It was so rare to have music playing in the House.

Chin’s phone rang, rang again, and then again.

“It usually takes him a couple of attempts before he picks up,” Chin explained. “He puts it down and forgets where it is.”

“Hello, Chin,” Mamo said -- evidently he hadn’t forgotten where his phone was this time.

“Hi, Mamo, it’s me and Danny here.”

“Hi Mamo.” Danny leaned over the phone on Chin’s outstretched palm.

“Hi, Kaniela,” Mamo said loudly from the phone. Danny guessed that Mamo might be getting a little hard of hearing in his old age.

“I was wondering if you’d got anything from Kavika about Wo --” Perhaps they shouldn’t have been doing this on the phone, Danny thought belatedly. Toast was amazing with computers, but it was all black magic to Danny. Wo Fat might be pulling their conversation from the internet or something.

“Yes, I--”

“Are you coming to Seolh today?” Danny interrupted.

“No. I’ve got the two youngest.” He heaved a sigh. “Maru had a meeting at the library. It’s just great-grandfather Mamo.”

Danny considered Chin, who held his iPhone on the palm of his hand, like a supplicant.

“Do you need a hand?” Chin asked.

“Please,” the request was heartfelt.

“We can come over in about thirty minutes,” Chin said.

Danny tapped on the door of the blue studio. His knuckles were going to get bruised.

“What?” Mary hollered from somewhere inside.

Danny cracked the door open, and popped his head into the room. And, wow, they had been remarkably unimaginative when they had named the blue studio the blue studio. Aquamarine blue painted walls, same shade blue curtains, and blue furniture. It was certainly very blue. Danny had to get the story behind this worship at the altar to the colour blue.

Mary craned her head over the back of an unsurprisingly blue sofa and stared at him.

“We’re heading out to help Mamo with rambunctious toddlers. You want to come?” Danny almost said, ‘Mamo said he’d love to see you’ but he thought that she would balk.

“Toddlers?”
“Dunno, really. Great-grandkids.” Danny had probably met them at the Christmas Luau, but there had been hundreds of thousands of people at the luau. Okay, maybe there had been thirty or so, not including the kids.

Mary contemplated him. “Yeah, sure, it would be good to see the old homestead.”

~*~

Danny was seriously impressed by Mamo and Maru’s gardens -- and they were gardens, not a little yard. This was full on dedicated horticulture. The arched gate before the path leading up to the house dripped with white and pink flowers. The lawn was a perfect sweep of green, not a single dry patch. Danny hoped that they were not on a water metre.

“Who’s the gardener? Maru?”

“Well, Mom, first. But Auntie Maru made it work,” Mary volunteered, as she pushed open the gate.

“What?”

“It’s where--” Mary thought a second, “--it was mom and dad’s house. It’s part of the Seolh Estate.”

The photos that Danny had seen of Steve’s home had been from the back yard or the living room.

“How big is Seolh?” Danny mouthed at Chin, as Mary sauntered up the path. Instead of going for the front door, she turned down the side, to skirt the edge of the house.

“Substantial real estate on Oahu and Maui, couple of islands, predominantly focussed on agriculture and reserves,” Chin said promptly.

“Islands?” Danny caught Chin’s elbow.

“They’re the reserves. Seabird and seal sanctuaries.”

Danny really wanted to ask how much Seolh was worth, but Steve would simply say ‘priceless’ and it was kind of a crass question. Damn, he wanted to know. He did know that the very mention of the name Seolh was enough to disrupt any custody shenanigans on Rachel and Step-Stan’s part.

“Guys?” Mary called.

Chin patted Danny’s shoulder, and moved after Mary. Danny contemplated the house. If this was the young McGarrett family home, was there a clue somewhere inside?

Mamo was on the lanai, lounging on a deck chair, rocking a tiny car seat with his foot. Under the shade of a drooping tree, a cheerful toddler was sitting in a sandpit, destroying a pile of sand.

“Hey, keikis, you came. Mary!”

Belying his girth, he was up and out of the seat, gathering Mary into a big hug. Danny rocked back on his heels, liking the sight. Mary was engulfed as Mamo lifted her off her feet.

“I’m so happy to see you.” He set her back down, and beamed.

“You’re looking well, Uncle.” Mary stroked her fine hair flat. “How’s Auntie Maru?”

“Out and about, doing her thing. I think I should call her and get her to quit her library meeting. She’d love to see you.”
The baby in the car seat chose that moment to squeal, waving its tiny limbs.

“"A whole twenty minutes,”” Mamo said, with dry fondness.

“Kali’s crying again, tutu,” the toddler informed everyone seriously.

“Yes,” Mamo said slowly.

“Hey.” Danny took a step forwards. “Let’s let Chin look after Kali. It would be good training.”

“What?” Chin said.

Danny scooped little Kali out of the impromptu cot. The scrap was only wearing a yellow onesie and, judging from the bulk, a very full diaper.

“Here.” Chortling, Danny carefully deposited Kali in Chin’s arms. Hah, Chin’s aplomb could be rocked. Danny made sure Kali was secure in the cradle of Chin’s arms. “Yeah, Babe, just like that. Where’s the diaper bag, Mamo?”

“Living room, on the sofa.”

“I have done this before,” Chin said. “I do have lots of cousins.”

“Good.” Danny peered at him. “Been awhile though, hasn’t it?”

Danny let Chin deal with the impressively stinky diaper, as he padded through the house, trying to imagine a young Steve and Mary rocketing through this space. The photographs that Doris McGarrett had taken added fuel to his imagination. Maru and Mamo had redecorated since the early 1990s. The Navy memorabilia now rested in Steve’s office in the eyrie. The kitchen was old fashioned, and sparkly clean. The photograph of Maru that Danny had given them for Christmas was in the central position of honour on top of the family piano, which was festooned with framed photographs.

This was Maru and Mamo’s home now. Where would they begin looking for the shadow of Doris McGarrett?

“What’s on your mind, keiki?” Mamo interrupted his thoughts. Belatedly, Danny realised that he was pacing through the man’s home without permission.

“Sorry, Mamo.” He shook his head. “I didn’t realise this was where Steve was brought up. But I was thinking if this was Doris McGarrett’s home maybe there’s some sort of clue here?”

“Clue?” Mamo asked.

“We think that Wo Fat’s looking for something -- we don’t know what. It’s just a guess, but maybe something that Doris McGarrett had?”

“Mostly everything went into storage at the House,” Mamo blew out a breath, his hand drifting up to rub his chin. “It was a long time ago. Perhaps you should ask Mary?”

“Huh.” That was a good idea, Steve’s first instinct, and second instinct, seemed to be to shield his sister. On consideration, Steve didn’t think that his sister had anything to do with Wo Fat, despite the fact that Jenna Kaye had been subtly interrogating her for weeks. Danny wasn’t privy to the results from Mary’s de-briefing at Pearl Harbour-Hickam, but she had to have an inkling of what was happening.
Danny trotted back on the lanai from the dining room, because if he gave this another second of thought, he probably wouldn’t ask.

“Hey, Mary.”

She was curled up beside the sand pit, pulling back a bucket from a perfect sand castle turret, which the toddler promptly mashed into the ground. He rolled on his pot-belly tummy chortling gleefully.

“Hiya.” She cocked an eyebrow at Danny and Mamo.

“So yeah, this is your old place.” Danny jabbed his thumb over his shoulder, getting straight to the point. “If your mom was going to hide something here -- where would she hide it?”

“Why?” Her expression turned calculating.

“Because if this Wo Fat guy is looking for something, which he thinks has something to do with the McGarretts, it’s probably something to do with your mom or dad.”

“Or Grandmother,” Mary observed.

“Grandmother?” They hadn’t actually considered any link with Mrs. Audrey McGarrett. Assuming that her surname was McGarrett, Danny still didn’t know if Audrey was Steve’s maternal or paternal grandmother.

“Yeah, I know. I can’t imagine dear old Grandmother being involved with this Wo Fat guy.” She brushed her hands free of sand, and then smoothly stood. “Mom was the one with all the secrets. There was a hidey hole in the dining room, under the floorboards. It was just filled with old, pretend passports -- well, I guess they were false -- and a box with old photograph canisters.”

Mamo plucked his great-grandson from the pit, showering sand.

“False passports?” Danny stared at her.

“Yeah, Steve and I used to play with them when we were playing Secret Service.”

“Where are they?” Mamo asked, intrigued, as he brushed sand off the little boy.

“Back in the House, I guess. You’d have to ask Steve.”

“Steve knew about this hidey hole?” Danny asked, because it was kind of relevant.

“No.” Mary strode to the house, through the open doors on the deck, and into the dining room. She peeled back the rug protecting the polished floor. She tapped the boards with her toe, until she found a hollow sound. Squatting, she hooked her long nails around the board, and levered it up a fraction. It popped free.

“You know, I’ve been meaning to do something about that creaky floorboard for years,” Mamo said.

“Anything in there?” Danny squatted beside her.

“No, I cleared it out before we moved to Grandmother’s. I saw mom putting stuff in it, late one night. It was kind of cool knowing that it was there.”

“What are you doing?” Chin asked. Kali lolled in his arms, now that her needs had been met, blowing spit bubbles.
“Turns out that Doris McGarrett had a secret stash of CIA stuff.”

“CIA stuff?” Mary echoed, Mamo a heartbeat behind her.

“Apparently,” Danny said, wincing internally, “your mom worked for the CIA in the 70s.”

“No way,” Mary declaimed. “Mom?”

“Apparently.”

“Huh, Jesus. Uncle Mamo, you got any whisky?”

“It’s a little early,” Chin said soberly.

“I really thought that this had to do with Super SEAL Stevie. Not Mom.” Mary stamped her foot.

“We’re not—” Danny waved his hand encompassing everyone, “—sure what it’s about. But it’s led to firebombing, attacks and the death of the governor.”

Mary looked at Chin. “Are you sure it’s too early for alcohol. ’Cause I fucking need a drink.”

~*~

Chin deftly coasted his Chevrolet to a stop outside the front of the House as Steve screeched up the pebbly drive in his Ford truck. Steve slowed for a moment, Danny guessed that he was thinking about parking in the space in front of the House, but he turned, going for his customary spot beside the pottery workshop.

Danny, with Chin and Mary on his heels, rushed for front door, fighting to be first into the House. Danny got in first, stabbing his key-code in the touch pad. And all of them fell into the House just as Steve, coming through the kitchen, slid into the corridor at the far end of the foyer.

“What? What have you found out?” He stalked forwards, eyes bright, face flushed.

They had perforce sent a somewhat cryptic text indicating that they had found ‘something’. Danny had even managed to get his thumbs to find the quotation marks on his phone, so that Steve would know that it was an actual something, instead of a something-something and texted: ‘something’ codpiece! @SoElh.

“Remember the dress-up box?” Mary said, excitedly.

Steve stared at her, nonplussed. “Your dress-up box? Uhm… kinda.”

“Where is it?” Mary said directly.

Steve blinked, and thought hard, gaze drifting upwards. The speckle of coloured sunlight through the domed window in the foyer ceiling cast him like a numinous image in a stained glass window.

“That was a long time ago Mar--Mary. I….” Steve abruptly strode towards the large double doors leading to the corridor of reception rooms. He paced unerringly along the dark wood corridor. The second room on the left was his destination. The reception room was chock-a-block with typical Seolh ‘Room of Requirement’ plunder. There was a definite aquamarine blue trend in the furniture in the right hand side of the room, matching the hue in the blue studio. Dusty motes tickled Danny’s nose.

“I’m guessing that this is your Grandmother’s stuff?” Danny ventured.
“Yeah,” Steve said slowly. “Why are we looking for the dress-up box?”

Mary ranged past him.

“What actually are we looking for?” Danny asked.

“Chest. Sailor’s chest. Black with rope handles.” Chin held his hands apart describing a box about three foot long.

“Hah, you remember it well.” Mary turned down an alley of bookshelves standing proud of the east wall.

“Well, you were very fond of dress up,” Chin said, reminiscently. “Steve looked very fetching in a bonnet with a feather.”

Steve pouted at him. “I was a pirate.”

“You were what? Thirteen -- still playing dress up.” Danny grinned because this could be fun. He wondered if Steve still liked playing dress up.

“I was the thirteen year old brother of a nine year old sister, who had just lost her mom and dad,” Steve said tightly.

“Okay, Babe,” Danny said, nodding soberly. He could only imagine what it was like to be an orphan. He could never know.

“Found it!” Mary carolled from somewhere in the back of the room.

Mary had popped the lid by the time that they had got through the clutter to her side. She knelt between an old-fashioned leather Chesterfield divan that could seat a family of twelve comfortably and a wall of carefully stocked boxes. A gap showed where the dress-up box had lived.

“Remember this?” Mary pulled free a vintage fox stole complete with head and paws. The amber glassy eyes caught sunlight and were distinctly evil.

“Ew.” Danny summarised, because… well, it was pretty horrible.

Steve chortled. “I used to wear it like a headdress and creep up and freak you out.”

Mary delved into the box, pulling out flowery frocks and long tubes of nylons with fabric stuffed in them. The aforementioned pirate hat was really a green sunhat with a dyed plumed feather, which was a little dented.

“Here.” Mary held up an old fashioned metal lock box about the size of a chunky hard-backed novel. She popped the latch and pulled out a handful of passports. Fanning, them like cards, she presented them to Steve. “Pick an identity.”

“What?” Fox stole draped over his shoulder, Steve plucked one from the pile and opened it.

Danny leaned in close. There was a picture of Doris McGarrett, although her name was Elisabeth Shelburne, staring serenely at them.

“Hang on a sec.” Mary leafed through the passports, and passed a specific one over.

It had Steve’s picture and the name David Shelburne. Danny really did not know what to make of
“I can’t believe that I forgot about these.” He considered his glowering pre-teen image. “Why is there one for me?”

“The photograph canisters aren’t in here.” Mary showed them the box. There were only a knot of beaded and paste glass necklaces.

“Photograph canisters? You mean the cartridges that a film spool fits in?” Danny clarified.

“Metal with a screw cap.” Mary held her thumb and finger up, holding them about two inches apart.

“35mm film,” Danny judged. “Old film if they were in metal cartridges. Was there film in them?”

“One of them was filled with coins. Old Chinese coins -- the ones with the square holes.”

“Did you open the canisters?”

“Sure.”

“Did any of them contain film?” Steve asked, looking up from contemplating his false passport.

Mary blew out a sigh. “It’s been awhile, you know. I think that there was film in them.”

“Are they ruined, Danny?” Steve said.

“If the film was pulled from the spool in daylight -- yes. If they’ve sat in the canister they’re still pretty old. It depends on heat and light exposure. Some brands have a better shelf life: Kodak, for instance. The negs might be iffy,” Danny mused, and then rephrased the sentence. “The negatives may be of poor quality. We would have to be very careful when we process them.”

“But where are they?” Chin pointed out.

“Mary?” Steve asked intently.

“I don’t know, Steve,” Mary said heatedly. “It’s been over twenty years.”

“Hey, calm.” Danny waved his hand between them. “Let’s ask Toast, he’s been cataloguing Seolh’s stuff.”

“Is he in?”

“Let’s find out.” Chin held up his ever-so-useful iPhone, already tapping the keys.

~*~

Toast was in his studio. They should have checked instead of using text. Danny guessed that Chin had some sort of free-text plan, though. They trooped through Toast’s electronic treasure trove that rivalled Smaug’s hoard.

“Hey, dudes and dudettes.” Toast leaned back in his gamer-chair. The image on the computer before him was of an improbably proportioned guy holding a rocket-launcher wider than he was tall. “To what do I owe this pleasure? Is that Mary? Mary! You’ve dyed your hair.”

“Hi, Toast,” Mary drawled.
“Blonde’s a good look on you. You should have done your eyebrows.”

“Toast!” Mary bristled.

“Adam, Seolh’s records.” Steve stepped into the forefront, back straight and uniform crisp, interrupting their spat. “Have you itemised a selection of film cartridges from my mother’s estate? They contained undeveloped film and one canister held old Chinese coins.”

“Errrrrr.” Toast scratched the side of his neck. “Doesn’t ring a bell. I like the new furry attachment to your uniform.”

Steve still had the fox stole around his neck, tucked up comfortingly around his ears. He cast it aside as if burnt. The stole draped over an old boxy Mac monitor like it belonged.

“Chinese coins and undeveloped film, presumably that was an unusual selection of items,” Steve persisted.

“You’ve been in the reception rooms, haven’t you?” Toast said, sardonically.

“Can you check the database?” Chin asked.

“I’ve catalogued a lot of stuff over the years.” Toast swung around in his chair, fingers flying over the keyboard on his left. His third computer monitor switched from frozen gamer-fighting action to a black screen with white, dot-matrix flashing text. “The obvious thing to look for are the coins.”

Some low key, ancient version of Windows Explorer -- assuming it was Windows Explorer since the folders didn’t actually look like folders to Danny -- opened up on the monitor. A notepad opened in the corner of the screen. Toast typed in the dollar sign and a string of letters. Another window popped up.

“Okay.” He leaned back in his seat. “I’ve got two coin collections from China. One is a collection of miscellaneous coins, and the other collection is coins from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. I think that the first one might be the one you’re looking for. It was in a box of Audrey’s things. The other has been in the House collection since the 1920s.”

“Details?” Steve asked.

Toast, still lolling, tapped the keyboard and a record of the coins with jpegs rose to the forefront of the screen. A new window opened:


The coins were of various sizes -- and all had a central square hole.

“Value?” Steve said pragmatically.


“Do they look familiar, Mary?”

“I dunno, they look like Chinese coins.” Mary matched Toast’s shrug. “If you stack them up, will
they fit in a canister? The canister closed easy.”

“I guess we should go look at them,” Danny added his ten cents to the discussion.

“Do you have a metal film cartridge canister, Danny?” Chin asked.

“Yeah, sure. But it’s not the coins that we’re interested in, is it? What about the films?”

“You catalogued these coins, Adam. Do you remember if they were in a box with films?” Steve asked.

“I honestly don’t remember,” Toast said dolefully. He tapped his keyboard again. “I created this record in 2008, dude. There are boxes of your grandfather’s old camera equipment. And I know that there’s old microfiches and unused 35mm film and bits of bits in the museum office.”

“Okay.” Steve clicked his fingers. “Toast, continue interrogating your database. Chin, Mary, go back to the room where we stored Grandmother’s belongings. Danny, with me, we’ll check out the museum office.”

He didn’t wait to see if they were following their orders, striding away. Danny contemplated Chin, because Mary was already bristling.

“It’s probably a good idea to split up,” Danny said neutrally. “Mary knows what she’s looking for. I kinda know what I’m looking for. I guess, Toast, you’re the only one that can figure out your database.”

“Yeah, good idea. Mary?” Chin courteously gestured to the door.

“Danny!” Steve hollered.

Danny rolled his eyes, because yeah, Lieutenant Commander Steven McGarrett was a bit of an ass.

~*~

“Babe,” Danny opened with.

Steve was already in über-focussed search mode. Kneeling by one of the banks of shelving in the windowless museum office, he paused in pulling out a battered cardboard box from the lowest level.

“Yes?” He eyed Danny. “What’s that face for?”

“This is my ‘I’m not your subordinate’--” Danny pointed at his own face, “--with a fraction of ‘I don’t mind you being a little bossy’ but ‘Mary’s gonna get annoyed’ expression.”

“What?”

“Look, Steve, we’re not your subordinates.” Danny could see that Steve really wasn’t following, and it wasn’t because of his hearing. “‘Please’ and ‘thank you’ go a long way.”

Danny thought that he phrased that very well. He waited patiently for Steve to connect the dots.

“Right.” Steve rubbed his temple as pink flushed further over his high cheekbones. “You’re entirely correct. I apologise.”

Danny just had to kiss the overly well-mannered ass, even if it was just on his forehead, because he was kneeling. The skin under his lips was overly warm. Danny straightened, hand automatically
going for Steve’s forehead.

“Babe, you’re sick.” Danny stroked down the side of his face. Steve leaned into his caress.

“I’m okay, honest. Just a bit of an infection.”

“We gotta call your doctor. Magnus. You know what he said about infections.”

Steve caught his hand, and interlaced their fingers, squeezing.

“I didn’t make it to JOIC. As I was driving in, I realised I felt off. I went into Tripler. They fit me in. I saw Dr. Magnus. I got an antibiotic shot and a stronger prescription.” He held up his right arm.

Belatedly, Danny realised that the dressing on his right arm was fresh.

“That’s why it only took you half the time to get here when I sent the text,” Danny said. “Pearl Harbour-Hickam’s about an hour away with traffic.”

“You’re like a detective,” Steve said, with a fond smile.

“So what did Magnus say?”

“Minor infection. Keep an eye on it. Email my temperature check to him morning, midday, and evening. They cleaned up the wound. Thoroughly.”

Danny winced, because that sounded a little grim. “And you need to rest, I bet.”

Steve shrugged, not denying the recommendation.

“Do you trust me?” Still holding his hand, Danny caught him under the armpit and levered him up. And, Danny noted, Steve let it happen.

“Of course, I do, D. You know that.”

“Okay, I want you to go an’ lie down. Drink some juice.” Danny pointed at the secret door to Steve’s apartment. “And take some ibuprofen, I’m betting you have a headache.”

“Danny.”

“Hey, you get to be bossy. I get to be bossy. Turnabout is fair play, Babe.”

~*~

#75#

Carefully, Danny manoeuvred his way up the spiral staircase, working on not slopping the contents of the tray. Steve had not been, as Danny guessed, ensconced on the sofa watching DVDs. His bedroom was the next place to try. Steve’s easy capitulation had spoken loudly of a headache and feeling under the weather.

The tray held comfort food. More accurately, it held Danny’s idea of comfort food, albeit Chin had confirmed that Steve did like grilled cheese sandwiches, with some ghastly substance called Marmite, which he had developed a fondness for when in the UK.

Danny turned up the final twist into Steve’s bedroom.
“Hey, Steve,” he said pitching his voice to carry. He paused, taking in the sight.

Steve had changed into t-shirt and shorts, and had propped himself up on his mound of pillows. The book on his lap pointed towards an attempt to read, but he was sound asleep. Half-sagged onto his right side, a thin line of drool stretched from the corner of his mouth to the pillow. It shouldn’t have appeared endearing, but Danny could only sigh fondly, and mock himself for being a sap.

“Steve? Steve! I brought food.”

Steve started, arms wind-milling as he came abruptly awake. Danny was glad he was still by the stairs. The glower on Steve’s face was incendiary. But it smoothed the millisecond he recognised Danny.

“D?” Steve brushed at his cheek and pulled a face at the saliva coating his fingers. Sticking his tongue out, he wiped his hand on his t-shirt. “Ugh.”

“You awake?” Danny double checked, and came over to the bed. He sat, twisting to put the tray down between them. “How are you feeling?”

Steve rubbed at the dint between his eyebrows, and then held up two fingers.

Danny knew what he meant. Steve’s ITE case was on the bedside table. Keeping one finger on the tray to keep it steady, Danny retrieved the case with the remote and handed it over.

“Thanks,” Steve said, surly, as he plugged them in.

“Oh, it’s like that is it?” Danny observed. A little prematurely, since Steve hadn’t switched his aids on.

“What?” Steve asked, and he flicked the iPod-like control with his thumb.

“I’ve got soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. Yours was made with this viscous, black tar called Marmite, which smells disgusting.” Danny pointed at the left-hand plate, because his grilled cheese was Marmite free. He leaned over and planted his hand on Steve’s forehead. “You feel cooler.”

Steve endured the touch.

“Aw, come on, Babe. What’s the matter?” Danny asked.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing,” Danny echoed. He studied Steve’s part-belligerent and part-brittle expression. “Look, I get it. You thought that you were getting better, and this is a setback. But you are getting better. If you’d picked up an infection a month ago, or two months ago, where would you be?”

“Thank you for the soup,” Steve growled.

“Oh, you special snowflake.” Danny chuckled fondly.

“Yes, Danny, you’re right,” Steve snapped. “Two months ago, this would have been completely FUBAR.”

“So do you feel better after your nap?” Danny cooed. He stayed in the teasing zone, because his gut told him that comfort was not the way to go.

The glower was perfect. Danny wished he had his camera.
“It’s evening now--” Danny moved into pragmatic, “-- aren’t you supposed to take your temperature and email the results to Dr. Magnus?”

Steve’s gaze slid to the thermometer on the bedside table, with a six pack of Gatorade and a bottle of Tylenol, plus what looked like his new antibiotic prescription. It was a little nest of concentrated care. An old hand at taking temperatures, Danny picked up the thermometer, switching it on.

“Which ear?” Danny asked.

Steve plucked the left ear hearing aid out, and took the thermometer from Danny’s hand. Determinedly, he set it in his ear, and sat staring out of the window over the peninsula until the thermometer beeped. Steve, Danny noted, counted under his breath and took the device out of his ear, a couple of beats after the signal.

He handed it over to Danny without looking at the results.

“100.8°F,” Danny reported. “What was it when you were at the doc’s?”

“101.9°F.”

“Do you still have a headache?”

Steve masticated his jaw, as if chewing. In answer, he leaned over, forcing Danny to pick up the tray, and grabbed the Tylenol from the bedside table. He shook out two, and dry swallowed.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Danny set the tray back on Steve’s lap, and offered him a glass of juice.

As sulky Steve drank, Danny clambered over his legs to sag by his side. Steve had to grab the tray one handed to support it, balancing soup and sandwiches. Fighting with the pillows, Danny set two behind his back, and stretched his legs out.

“Gimme my soup.” Danny held his hands out.

Steve contemplated Danny for a long moment, and then two-handed, he passed over a bowl. Mission accomplished -- Danny hadn’t been thrown out of the bedroom nor had the bowl dumped on his head, therefore Steve was comfortable with his presence -- Danny shuffled against the pillows.

Steve had his phone out, and was tapping away faster than Danny had ever texted. Unselfconsciously, Danny peered over Steve’s shoulder reading the text. Like a good little soldier, Steve was obeying his doctor’s dictates.

Two-handed, Danny picked up his own bowl, and slurped down the broth. As chicken soup went, he usually preferred cream of chicken with chunky pieces of chicken. But knowing Steve’s avoidance of meat that looked like meat, he and Chin had created a sort of pseudo-chicken soup with a chicken stock base with sweet corn, snow peas and lemongrass of all things. It wasn’t bad, although it needed a little more salt in Danny’s opinion.

It was impressive the way that Steve could even eat offensively. Danny let him simmer, thinking that some food in his stomach would probably improve his mood.

“Have you found anything?” Steve asked, as Danny contemplated the vegetables in the bottom of his bowl. Slurp or use a spoon? That was the question.

*Feeling better,* Danny noted.
“I checked the coins in the museum, and they do fit neatly in a film spool cartridge.” Danny wiggled his toes in their socks. “It doesn’t prove that they’re Mary’s coins, though. That box you were looking in the office had used and unused 35 mm film in it.”

“How can you tell?”

Danny positioned the bowl between his knees. Cupping his left hand, he held it out as if holding a tube, and twirled his right forefinger rapidly over the imaginary spool.

“When you retract the roll back in the cartridge, especially with an old manual camera, you spin it until the entire roll retracts. A used film roll doesn’t have the film leader; it’s retracted into the housing of the cartridge.”

“Wow.” Steve elbowed him. “It’s like you’re a professional photographer, or something.”

“Hah! It’s possible that some of the films with the leader have been used. But as a starting point, if we develop the definitely used films we’ve found, we’re looking at nineteen rolls of old film.”

“And that’s going to take special equipment?”

“Equipment and knowledge of how film develops. You’ve gotta give close attention to the colour analyzer and compensate for any fading as the negative develops. It would probably be better to use a high contrast aerial film process.”

“I knew that I should have built you a dark room,” Steve said darkly.

Danny laughed. He curled an arm around Steve’s neck and gently pulled him over to mash a kiss on his temple. Steve allowed the manhandling.

“I figure that you’d be able to take them to Pearl and get a NCIS specialist to look at them or something,” Danny said.

“You do realise that the Goth from NCIS on television isn’t real.”

“Yes, Steven.”

Steve gently batted his head against Danny’s jaw.

“There will be someone that can develop film at the base?” Danny asked.

“Should be. I’ll make some phonecalls.” Steve shuffled down a fraction under Danny’s arm, and got comfortable. “So, progress.”

“It’s about time we’ve got a break, don’t you think?” Danny swapped his empty bowl for his grilled cheese on the tray, and munched down.

“Lucky break. If you hadn’t gone to help Mamo, and taken Mare along, none of this would have happened,” Steve observed.

“Ah, Mamo,” Danny remembered. “I forgot to ask him about Wo Yongfu.”

“What time is it?”

Danny checked his wristwatch over Steve’s shoulder. “After seven o’clock.”

“He’ll be at his history society meeting. We’ll catch up with him tomorrow.”
“History Society?”

“Re-enactment thing. Does a lot of battles, like The Battle of Nu’uanu -- or Kaleleka’anae -- you should try and get an invite,” Steve said. “They’re spectacular.”

Steve swallowed another mouthful of soup. If Danny had lain back, like Steve, and eaten anything, he would have got indigestion. But, as relaxed as a Roman Emperor, Steve seemed comfortable reclining.

“Good soup. Like Mamo’s,” Steve mumbled.

Ah, Chin had called it correctly. Family comfort food.

It was kind of inevitable. Steve was pretty much supine, and whenever he lay down, he was normally asleep within ten minutes. He had managed a couple of bites of grilled cheese. Danny carefully lifted the tray off Steve’s lap one handed, and set it aside. He pushed it further across the wide mattress with his toes. Steve slept on, undisturbed.

The view was pretty impressive, but perhaps, they needed a television in the lighthouse bedroom.

Reaching carefully, he picked up Steve’s discarded book. *Blood Rites*. It was a macabre title, in Danny’s opinion. But needs must -- Steve was comfortable, head pillowed heavily on Danny’s shoulder -- Danny settled down to read.

~*~

Danny woke. It was well past dusk, and the bedroom was wreathed in darkness. Rubbing at his face with his free hand -- the other was curled around Steve’s shoulders -- Danny blinked away a dream of plague demons and barking dogs. Steve’s taste in books did not match the man. If asked, Danny would have said that Steve read autobiographies and technical manuals, rather than urban fantasy novels about wizards in Chicago.

Absently, he kissed Steve’s temple. And immediately, shifted around. “Babe? You wanna wake up?”

Steve’s temperature was up, sweat beading his brow. Judging by the depth of night, it was easily time for his prescribed round of antibiotics. And if late enough, Steve could have some more Tylenol, or some ibuprofen.

“Nick? No?” Steve said querulously. He jabbed his pointy elbow in Danny’s ribs, as he pushed upwards into a sitting position. “Don’t.”

“Hey, Steve. Come on.” Danny got onto his knees. Shit. Was this fever, flashback, dream, or a combination of all three?

“Freddie!” Steve flinched back from horror, slamming into the headboard, hands flung out, wardingly. He was panting, harder than a stressed horse. “No. It didn’t happen. No. It didn’t. Bullfrog! You bastard!”

“Steve?” Danny got his hands on him.

Sinuously, Steve’s arms came up, moving inside of Danny’s forearms, batting him away, and following the motion his hands came down. An iron grip rotated the very bones of Danny’s forearms outwards -- almost dislocating his shoulders and elbows. Danny was pinned as if impaled on a spike. He couldn’t move. Steve’s thumbs dug into Danny’s flesh like knives.
“Steve! Fuck it.”

Steve’s eyes were open, but recognition was somewhere up the Amazon, or in Afghanistan.


“Freddie’s dead,” Steve said, his voice a dry rasp. “He died on me.”

“You’re not in the desert! Or whatever Hell you’re in,” Danny grated.

Steve had restrained him with such unconscious ease. Thought was barely involved; it was all reflex. Nostrils flared as Steve exhaled and inhaled, fast and shallow.

“Steve, smell the sea air. You’re not in the desert. For God’s sake, try me -- smell me. You’re home!”

“Home?” Steve said, with an unbearable hint of hope. “Really?!”

Thankfully, Steve had fallen asleep with his aids in.

“Yeah, you’re home, Babe. With Chin, and Mamo, and Kono, and Toast. Even Mary’s here.”

Steve’s eyes slid shut, the iron grip on Danny’s forearms relaxed just a tiny fraction.

“Steve, it’s Danny. Look at me. Come on,” he cajoled.

Steve opened his eyes. In the moonlit shadows, Danny could only make out fathomless depths.

“Steve, talk to me. Where are you?”

“Chashmeh-e-Dalkhak?” Steve said with a hint of uncertainty. “It shouldn’t be dark. This isn’t Chashmeh-e-Dalkhak.”

“You’re at home at Seolh. On Hawaii. Oahu. Steve, let me go, and I’ll put the lights on.”

“Seolh?” Steve inhaled, nostrils flaring.

“Steve, you wanna let me go? You’re gripping kinda tight.”

“What?” Steve looked down, and then heaved in a breath, and gulped.

“Steve. Tell me where you’re at? Come on, Babe. It’s Seolh.”

“Am gonna puke.” Abruptly, Steve was hanging over the side of the bed, retching. Danny sat, bruises rising on his forearms, as Steve heaved up his breakfast, lunch and dinner onto the floor. Danny’s stomach twisted in sympathy.

Shaking himself in to action, Danny shuffled over and switched on the bedside lamp on his side of the bed. Steve flinched, violently.

“Steve, I’m gonna touch you, okay?” Danny warned as he crawled back over the mattress to Steve’s side. “Okay?”

Carefully, Danny gently placed his hand between Steve’s heaving, sweat-stained shoulders. He didn’t stroke, he didn’t pat, he just left his hand on Steve’s back, letting him know that he was there.
“Jesus, Danny,” Steve said, and Danny was so pleased to hear his name. “Where’s Freddie? Bullfrog shouldn’t be here.”

“Hey, it’s okay.” Danny slid off the bed, on Steve’s side, avoiding the pool of sour smelling, chunky vomit. Crouching, he kept his hand on Steve’s back. “There’s no Bullfrog. It’s just you and me in your bedroom.”

“My head.”

“Come, Steve, buddy, can you sit up for me?”

“No,” Steve said nonsensically, as he did just that. “This is my bedroom?”


“Nothing makes sense. Danny? Why are you on the A1?” Steve rubbed his face messing up tears and snot and dribble. “It’s so hot. I need a shower.”

That sounded like a remarkably good idea. A cool shower would wake him up and help reduce his fever.

“Come on, then.” Gingerly, Danny tugged his wrist, guiding him off the bed, avoiding the puddle of vomit spreading over the floor.

“Someone should do something about that,” Steve said, “it’s not hygienic.”

Danny got Steve into his stupidly ostentatious shower through cajoling and at one point outright pretending to be his superior officer, ordering him to strip down to his birthday suit.

Danny clambered in with him, dropping pants and shirt on the floor outside. Taking a deep breath, Danny got in close, ready to grab as he switched on the water.

“Cold!” Steve protested.

“It’s not; you’re just overheated.” Extending his arms, Danny kept Steve in the region, if not under the lukewarm water. “Come on, kneel.”

“What?”

But despite his protests, as Danny knelt, Steve sat with him on the anti-slip mat on the base of the shower. Steve tucked his knees under his chin, folding impossibly tightly.

“My ear hurts,” Steve whined, actually whined like a seven year old.

“Let me see,” Danny said, automatically reaching.

It was difficult to see in the half light of the moon and the single strip of illumination over the vanity unit, but the skin behind his right ear looked red and puffy.

“I don’t think it’s your arm, Babe. You’ve got an ear infection. Shit.” Using his fingernails, he got the hearing aid out of Steve’s ear. “It must be from our hike.”

“Ow,” Steve protested. And fingers weaving through Steve’s hair, Danny turned his head and pinched out his left aid.
“You don’t want to ruin these.” Danny held them behind him, trying to keep them away from the spray. He guessed that they had to be slightly waterproof or at least water-resistant. “Stay still, I’m going to put these somewhere safe.”

Danny clambered out of the shower, holding the aids with just the tips of his fingers, trying to keep them dry. Facing Steve, he said loudly, “Turn the temperature down a notch. That’s an order, McGarrett. Steve.”

“You’re not the boss -- Shit, that’s cold.”

Danny stood dripping on the bathroom floor. Steve sounded a lot more present. Danny heard him take a deep, even breath, and then inhale, and again. Deliberate, he stepped over to the vanity unit, and set the aids into one of Steve’s ubiquitous bowls.

“Steve, you with me?”

Steve was still curled, arms tightly gripping his knees to his chest, with his back to the jet of water. He let the shower of water play over the back of his neck, draining over his neck and down his legs as his head hung low.

Shaking his head at himself, Danny moved back over to the shower. “Steve?”

Steve lifted his head.

“Where are you?”

“Seolh.”

“Who am I?”


Steve shook his head, but confusingly, he stayed still.

Danny had some puke to clean up.

~*~

Danny got the vomit cleaned up, and the rags and towels, never to be used again, double-bagged. He disposed of them by simply throwing them out of the window of Steve’s bedroom. They rolled down the angled roof over his studio below, to fall onto the balcony, which was accessible through the half-circle window. The towels could marinate on the balcony until the morning.

Any minuscule residual gook on the floor had been Lysoled to death.

Holding his hands before him like a ghoul or a zombie, Danny picked his way, nude, back to the shower.

Steve was still folded up under the spray. He appeared half-asleep, head hanging low on his knees.

“Babe? You winning?” Danny asked as he stepped into the shower. He grabbed Steve’s minty shower gel and quickly soaped his hands under the spray. It occurred to him as he scrubbed his hands together that having a full shower was a good idea. The gel was perfect; mint’s cooling properties could only help.
Danny knelt opposite him. “Steve? Talk to me.”

Steve lifted his head. It could have been tears on his bright red face or it could be water from the shower.

“I’m at Seolh. You’re my Danny,” Steve said without prompting. “Sorry.”

“Nothing to apologise for, Steve.” He squeezed a dollop of gel on a sponge. Telegraphing every motion through slowness, he circled the soapy sponge over Steve’s shoulders. He kept the motion soothing, and Steve unfolded under his care, letting Danny draw the sponge down his arm.

“Who looks after you?” Steve said surprisingly.

“What do you mean, Babe?” Danny stroked the sponge back up his arm, and Steve shifted into an open, cross-legged position, as Danny passed the sponge over his chest.

“You help. You do stuff. It’s all one sided.”

Danny leaned forward and kissed Steve’s wet forehead. Water trickled down the side of Steve’s long nose, and dripped off his chin.

“It’s not all one sided, Steve. And there isn’t any scale where we’re weighing one thing against the other. Okay?” He double checked that Steve was following this sans hearing aids because it was important. Danny had a home. He had his Grace. And he had a growing family, an ‘Ohana. There was no scale.

Steve sagged a little, setting his forehead on Danny’s collarbone. Danny moved the sponge over his bowed back, soothingly. A little shiver walked up Steve’s spine; finally he was cooling.

“Sit up, Steve.” Gently, he set Steve back. “Let’s stand up. Okay?”

Danny stood. Holding both his hands, Danny made sure that Steve stood without slipping. Steve regarded him, expression profoundly sad.

“Hey, what’s the matter?”

Steve only answered by leaning in to briefly kiss Danny’s lips, and then moving back.

“Okay,” Danny said slowly, his lips tingling. “Let’s get you clean.”

Steve stood still, hands braced on either side of the shower, as Danny re-soaped the sponge and drew it over his long flanks. Efficiently and carefully, Danny worked on getting him clean. Steve was pliable, a hundred million miles away. Danny was feeling his way through this dream-flashback, but he knew that he didn’t want Steve to shift away from him mentally and physically.

“You, Steve. Come on, I think it’s time to get you out of here.”

Circling his hand around Steve’s broad wrist, he drew Steve out of the shower. Naked they dripped on the tiled floor. Danny got a towel and wrapped it around Steve’s narrow hips, knocked the toilet lid down, and sat him on the closed seat.

“Am just gonna finish my shower. I’ll be two seconds.”

Danny was quick, scrubbing head to toe, and rinsing off using the closely held shower head to blast the suds away. Wincing, he inspected his forearms, there were matching neat, bloody half-moon centred marks that he guessed by morning would be blue-black bruises.
By the time that he got out of the shower, grabbing his own towel, Steve had found the energy to stand and was working on drying off.

“Winning?” Danny got directly in front of Steve, and said clearly. “First aid kit?”

“First aid kit?” Steve checked. “Cupboard -- vanity.”

“We have to re-dress your arm.”

Clearly, Steve didn’t follow the words. Danny guessed that he would figure it out, when Danny took the wet dressing off his forearm.

The kit stored in the unit was first-class. It was practically a paramedic’s kit, fitting in a large carry-all. It was set out in organised splendour, everything with its own compartment. He got out a fresh dressing, roll of bandages and antibiotic ointment.

By the time Danny had laid out the supplies, Steve had picked free the bandage on his arm and dropped it on the floor in a soggy pile. The road rash didn’t look too bad. Cuts and grazes, and three deeper scratches. Steve stoically endured Danny cleaning and bandaging. Biting his lip, Danny managed not to kiss it better -- Grace had him well trained. He dumped the supplies back in the pack, resolving to sort them out later, and tossed the bag back in the vanity unit.

Steve was back to sitting on the closed toilet seat.

“Can I check your ear?” Danny pointed at his own ear.

In answer, Steve canted his head to the side. In the better light nearer the vanity unit, the puffy redness was clear. Definitely, Steve was brewing an ear infection. Hopefully, the prescribed antibiotics would help. Steve felt cooler under Danny’s hands.

“Do you have a hairdryer?” Danny asked.

“Hairdryer?” Steve echoed. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. “There’s one in the other bedroom. Top drawer.”

“Come on.” Danny towed Steve after him. He knew a good trick to help with ear infections. The gentle pulse of a hairdryer over a sore ear could work wonders.

Biddable, which sent all sorts of warnings screaming up Danny’s back, Steve let himself be towed. Danny got spare boxers out of Steve’s underwear drawer, and passed them over. He selected a black silky pair for himself. Steve sat on the bed, to pull them on. He was definitely struggling for balance.

Danny got the hairdryer, blasted his own hair for a minute or two, and then turned it on Steve. Sleeping in wet hair with an ear infection could not be a good idea. He lowered the setting and let just-warm air play over Steve’s ear. Steve’s shoulders drooped.

“Nice, eh?” Danny let it run a little longer, but he didn’t want to overheat him. Steve sighed when he switched it off, but didn’t protest.

Danny put the hairdryer back. He rooted through the wardrobes, searching for and finding clean sheets and pillowcases so he could change the bedding. Mimicking a Roman emperor, he draped them over his shoulder.

“Steve.” Danny positioned himself carefully before Steve. “Back to bed.”
Steve nodded. Danny offered him a hand, helping him to his feet.

“Talk to me, Steve,” Danny prompted. “I need to know that you’re tracking.”

“What?”

“Talk to me, Steve,” Danny said simply, without any other explanation. He curled an arm around Steve’s waist, and together they made their way back to the lighthouse bedroom.

“What about?” Steve finally asked, as Danny pushed him ahead on the spiral staircase.

“Anything,” Danny said, even though he knew that Steve couldn’t hear him.

Steve turned on the stair, wobbling just a fraction. Danny shored him up. Jerking his chin, Danny indicated upwards. Nodding, Steve worked on getting up the twists to his bedroom hand over hand.

Danny got him plonked down on the windowsill by the open window, and worked on stripping and changing the bed as quickly as possible. The foot long, silver, serrated knife under Steve’s pillow leered at Danny. It was a seriously impressive blade. Danny tossed it on their dinner tray, and deftly pushed the tray under the bed with his foot. The old sheets and pillowcases he balled up and threw off to the side. He snapped out the clean sheet over the bare mattress.

“It was my last mission. We were on the A1 highway near Chashmeh-e-Dalkhak. It’s hot, arid, open -- a desert. I can’t tell you what we were doing. My team approached a column of trucks.”

Danny froze, hands tucking in the sheet under the mattress. Holy Shit.

“They should have just been transporting medical and food supplies.” Steve snorted.

Danny stood. Rubbing his hand over his face, he wondered what he could say -- what he should say? Steve was a shrouded silhouette against the night sky beyond.

“There were urgently needed medical and food supplies in the column. Supplies that people needed. The terrorists didn’t care. They were just using the trucks to hide their stuff.” Clearly ‘stuff’ was a euphemism.

“And?” Danny prompted, low and breathless. Probably, Steve didn’t hear him, but he continued.

“Nick, Bullfrog, forged ahead. He was tired and bored…. I should have got him to stand down. We’d been out too long -- weeks. The column had stopped the night before, ostensibly because one of the trucks had broken down. They wanted the trucks to stay together. They worked on repairs overnight.”

Danny held his breath.

“We got a visual on Anton Hesse. Confirmed. Satellite imagery over the OS-D. Bullfrog forged ahead,” Steve repeated. “Me and Freddie went after him. It was a trap. We knew it was a trap. It had to be a trap. Confident. Over-confidence more like. I knew that the Hesse Brothers were ruthless. If you saw Anton, Victor had to be just around the corner. Bullfrog guessed that they would value their contraband in the trucks over everything else.”

Steve sagged, and pillowed his face in his hands.

“They had sabotaged the trucks. If they couldn’t have the contraband, no one else could. Taking out me and my team was just icing on the cake.”
Steve sobbed.

Danny couldn’t just stand by the bed, listening.

“Steve.” Danny made a step forward.

Steve reached for Danny in the darkness, and Danny moved into Steve’s orbit. Steve clutched at him tightly, and pressed his face hard into Danny’s stomach. He sobbed my team into Danny’s guts.

“Oh, Babe.” Danny curled over Steve -- shielding Steve with his body, as he gave in to wracking tears.

Feet apart, Danny stood firm, braced, as Steve grieved. The release had to be cathartic, it had to help, Danny hoped. He stroked his hand down Steve’s neck. Hot tears trickled down his stomach.

“Freddie died on me. He got between me and the daisy chain. He protected me with his body.”

He died on me -- was literal, Danny realised. He closed his eyes against the pain. Thank you, Freddie, he thought, and hoped somehow, that Freddie heard him.

Danny stood there holding Steve until his back started to ache. The tears had dried. The sobs ebbed. The fingers clutching his waist released their grip. Carefully, cautiously, Danny reached around Steve to draw him upright. Steve’s eyes were hollowed and his face was puffy. Danny brushed his fingers against the spiral swirl in the stubble of his nascent beard.

“Bed,” Danny said simply. Wrung-out, Steve let Danny guide him to the bed. It was half-done -- one night without pillowcases wouldn’t hurt them.

Danny got them down on the bed in a tangle of limbs. Keeping Steve close, Danny managed to reach for one of the bottles of Gatorade and the box of antibiotics.

“You need these.” Danny pushed out two capsules from the blister pack and held them before Steve. Squinting at them in the moonlight, Steve regarded them before opening his hand. Danny dropped them on his palm.

“Gatorade.” Danny cracked the bottle for him, as Steve tossed the capsules in his mouth. He drank deeply, draining the bottle dry; Danny guessed that he was very, very thirsty.

“Have you got a tissue?” Steve asked thickly.

“Uhm.” Danny looked about. Normally, he had tissues, but not when he was wearing borrowed shorts after midnight. “Ahah.”

Danny snagged one of the clean pillowcases off the edge of the bed. Steve regarded it dubiously, and then snorted a sad little laugh, but it was the beginnings of a laugh.

Steve blew his nose snottily in the folds of the pillowcase. Balling it up, he tossed it after the dirty sheets on the floor and then regarded Danny.

“Come here,” Danny said, drawing him down when it was apparent that Steve had used up all his words.

Steve shuffled in tightly. He closed his eyes and rested his head on Danny’s shoulder. He felt a little chilled now against Danny’s skin. Trying not to disturb Steve too much, Danny managed to grab the blanket, and half toss it over them. Steve burrowed further into Danny’s warmth.
Danny looked at the ceiling watching the idly turning fan. He felt like he had been tumbled in a tumble dryer. He was exhausted.

“Thank you,” Steve said softly, “thank you for being you.”

~*~

Tbc
A creak on the second step of the staircase leading up to Steve’s bedroom woke Danny. He cracked open an eye, and regarded the staircase opening in the hardwood floor. A measured tip-toe tread came slowly up the stairs. Last night, Danny had locked the door to the apartment behind him when he had brought up their tray. The only other person who had a key was Chin. Why would Chin come in? Emergency?

Steve was a heavy lump, tucked firmly against Danny’s right side. His head was pillowed on Danny’s chest, and he was fast asleep, despite the fact that the sun was high enough for the time to be well after eight.

A blonde head appeared, turning that final twist of the staircase.

Mary, Danny realised.

She smiled at him, and then froze. Danny knew that he was glowering. Siblings -- the most aggravating people in the world.

*Leave*, Danny mouthed. *Now!*

Steve would go ballistic if someone crept up on him. Even now, he stirred, muttering abstrusely.

Wide-eyed, she retreated, moving backwards down the stairs, like a film running in reverse. Danny willed his heart to slow. Chin was the only one that had a key. Chin would not have given Mary the key; he knew how volatile Steve was when surprised. Chin also knew that Danny was with him.

Danny listened. He heard the creak of the second step. Ears cocked, he thought that she continued down the stairs. He guessed that he could hear stomping across a hardwood floor, but it might have been his imagination. Far away a door definitely slammed angrily, but Danny didn’t care. You didn’t come into someone’s home uninvited. Mary absolutely hadn’t been invited. You emphatically did not come into their bedroom uninvited.

Steve mumbled.

If Steve had threatened Mary when befuddled by sleep, he would have been beside himself.

“Ssssh, it’s okay,” Danny soothed. He kissed the crown of Steve’s head, and lingered, testing his temperature with his lips. He didn’t think that Steve was warmer. Antibiotics or more sleep -- that was the question.

Steve was comfortable being held; it was a gift that Danny valued. The warmth of his skin, his unconscious trust, soothed Danny. A light, even breath brushed over Danny’s chest hair, in and out, in and out, deeply relaxed.

It was nice to just laze. Danny wasn’t too hot, he wasn’t too cool. Dr. Magnus expected a temperature update in the morning. Steve was due his next round of antibiotics. But they could laze for just a little longer.

~*~
“Hey?” Danny snuffled against Steve’s hair. “Come on, Babe, you need to wake up.”

Steve was heavy and warm -- still deeply and comfortably asleep cradled under Danny’s arm. Danny was happy to let him sleep, but after he had taken his dose of antibiotics. Danny carefully dabbled his fingers against Steve’s bare ribs, on his good side.

“It’s gotta be after nine, Steve. Time to wake.” Danny stroked his flank.

“Get back inside,” Steve muttered.

Okay, Danny thought, random is random. He flexed his shoulders, the movement disturbing Steve. But Danny kept moving his hand, stroking and soothing, hoping for a gentle awakening. Steve smacked his lips, and his eyes opened a sliver, assessing the world around him.

“Uh?” he sort of asked.

“Morning?” Danny kept stroking, soothing, calming.

Steve scraped his bristly chin over Danny’s skin craning his neck to look directly at him. Danny could make out each individual dark amber fleck that painted a corona around his pupils.

“I?” Steve started. He regarded Danny over the plane of his chest, expression contemplative. “I?”

“You had a rough night, babe.” Danny slid his hand up Steve’s back, lacing his fingers through the short, sweaty curls at the base of Steve’s skull.

“I,” Steve said again. Suddenly, he sat up, pushing up off the mattress and turning away. His back was bowed. “Sorry.”

“What are you apologising for?” Danny sat up with him, keeping a hold. He slid his grip over Steve’s neck and guided him to turn, so Steve could see him speak.

“I--”

“Nothing you told me will go any further,” Danny said slowly. “Fuck it. If you told me State Secrets, I wouldn’t share. Think of me as your Fort Knox. Fort Knox.”

Steve craned his head further and smiled bright and sharp. “Fort Knox, eh?”

“Unassailable. A veritable castle complete with towers.” Danny held his other hand over his head. “Towers, Babe.”

“Tower?” Steve echoed. “Did you say tower? You’re a castle?”

“Codpiece.”

Steve covered his mouth with his hand and laughed, softly.

“How are you feeling?” Danny asked carefully, even as he slid his hand further to turn Steve’s head. Obediently, Steve let him look his fill. Danny thought that the skin behind Steve’s ear was less puffy, but it was still red and sore looking.

Steve blew out an aggrieved sigh.

“We’re going to have to go in an’ see Dr. Magnus. We don’t want an infection fucking up your good ear.” Danny palmed Steve’s forehead. He felt warm but not too feverish.
“What?”

It would be much nicer to laze. But needs must; Danny shuffled over the expanse of the mattress, stretching to retrieve the box of antibiotics and a half-empty bottle of Gatorade. Rolling on to his back, he held both items out to Steve, who paused a beat before accepting them. Pressing out two capsules from the blister pack, Steve popped them into his mouth, holding them between his teeth, sort of like Bugs Bunny teeth.

“Very attractive,” Danny said.

Steve closed his lips over the antibiotics and swallowed. He contemplated a moment, swallowing hard.

Danny knew that the coating on any capsules made them a bitch to swallow despite the writing on the box.

“You gonna throw up?” Danny asked.

Steve cracked open the lid of the Gatorade and sipped from the bottle.

“Steve?”

Steve folded his legs in a lotus position and watched Danny hawk-like. He twisted the cap of the Gatorade bottle back and forth around the neck -- loosening, tightening, loosening, and tightening.

“How are you feeling?” Danny pointed at his ear.

Steve shrugged.

“Doctor Magnus, okay?”

Steve shrugged again. Danny batted his knee.

“Come here.” Danny dispensed with words, hauling Steve in against him. Steve let it happen, unfolding his limbs and sagging down on the mattress. Danny wriggled around, making sure that they faced each other, heads pillowed on the same cover-free pillow. “How are you feeling?”

Steve parsed the words, and then shrugged.

Their noses were almost touching; it wasn’t like Steve couldn’t read Danny’s expression.

“You can’t tell anyone about Chashmeh-e-Dalkhak,” Steve said with an edge of authority.

“Steve, Fort Knox. I’m not going to tell anyone on the planet about last night. It’s between you and me.” And Danny wasn’t just talking about classified SEAL missions in middle-of-nowhere Afghanistan.

Steve sighed, and moved in a little closer, practically into Danny’s skin. Steve’s angles fitted into Danny as he pulled Steve in with a possessive hand across his back.

“Freddie?” Danny asked.

“A good friend. My best friend.” Steve swallowed. “My comrade-in-arms. He’d just got married. His wife is expecting… actually, the baby might be born. Shit. She’s with Freddie’s mom.”

Danny tightened his grip, stopping him jumping up and trying to find out if Mrs. Freddie had had her
“They on the mainland?”

“Excuse me?”

“Is Freddie’s family on the mainland?”

Steve shook his head. “Ireland.”

“Ireland? She’s going to be asleep.” Danny pointed out. He didn’t know exactly when Steve had been hurt, but it was about seven months ago; if she was awake or asleep she was either heavily pregnant or a new mom with a new baby. A very early morning phone call would not be appreciated.

“I can’t believe, I--”

“You were seriously hurt, Steve.”

“I shouldn’t be. I should be dead, and Freddie would be alive.”

“Shut up!” Danny snapped.

Steve stiffened under Danny’s arms.

“Would you have done the same thing? Would you have thrown yourself over Freddie to protect him from the IEDs, if you could have?” Danny dug his fingers into Steve’s skin. Danny answered for him, slow and sure, “Yes, you would have saved Freddie if you could.”

Steve regarded him for the longest time, and then nodded.

“The next thing I knew I was in Tripler, staring up at the ceiling. So sick to my stomach, I couldn’t move. I think it had been five weeks since the attack,” Steve said hollowly. “I missed the funerals, and Singh and Pescovitz had been assigned to another team.”

“Singh and Pescovitz were on your team? They got you out of there?”

Steve watched Danny’s lips.

Danny rephrased the question. “Singh and Pescovitz rescued you.”

Steve nodded, short and sharp. “They weren’t on my team per se. They were part of the Marine Fire Team we worked closely with. They were -- are -- good guys. When Freddie and me went after Nick, they had our six. They pulled me out.”

Danny’s imagination supplied graphic imagery. Steve had been close enough to be permanently deafened, and had been protected by his friend’s body. He was kind of glad that Steve had lost five weeks.

But didn’t Steve say that Freddie had died on him? He had been conscious. He had been awake through the attack. Danny smoothed the wrinkle between Steve’s eyebrows with his thumb.

Danny didn’t really know what to say. As he traced the angles of Steve’s cheekbone, he wondered what Steve had been like before traversing the long road of ill-health and recovery. Louder, he guessed, more present. More energy, for sure -- Danny thought watching the tired sweep of his eyelashes. More confident -- which was kind of a scary prospect in Danny’s opinion.

“Steve,” Danny began, hoping that he was going to say the right thing. “I can’t tell you not to feel
guilty, because you do feel guilty. What would Freddie say? Would he yell at you for being alive?“

Steve snorted. “He’d yell at me for being an idiot.”

“There you go,” Danny said simply.

Steve absorbed his words. A rueful smile crossed his face.

“You’re right,” he said.

“Told you,” Danny said, smiling, “I’m always right.”

“Freddie would like you,” Steve said like a benediction.

“I would hope so,” Danny drew Steve’s head into the crook of his neck and stroked the back of his neck. He could soothe Steve here and now. The man was like a cat, not a domesticated cat, but a prickly feral cat that had made his choice. Chin had said that Steve didn’t let people get in close. From Danny’s perspective that wasn’t accurate. He had immediately slid under Steve’s radar and felt Steve’s skin hunger. Lock and key, he was glad that they had worked -- he almost didn’t want to analyse it, but man it was like picking his way through a mindfield at times.

Steve muttered something, and nuzzled Danny’s collarbone.

“Sure, Steve,” he replied, stroking his fingers over loosening muscles.

Napping didn’t come to Danny. But Steve was relaxing in between each breath. Danny contemplated the ceiling. He was totally awake -- sleep was not on the agenda. He carefully lifted his arm and inspected the quite frankly lurid bruise marring his forearm. Judging from the throb of his other arm, trapped along Steve, there was a matching bruise. Danny was just lucky that Steve hadn’t pulled out his knife. The knife was definitely going to be put somewhere else. Steve had been out of his head caught in dreams and fever. In all honesty, grabbing Steve probably had been a mistake. Maybe, he needed to talk to Steve’s doctor, and get some advice about how to talk down someone who was freaking out? Chin had said when Steve had had a flashback to get him to the sea. The desert and heat definitely seemed to be a trigger. Danny grinned against Steve’s hair. He could get one of those plant sprayers and spritz Steve like a misbehaving cat.

Steve’s grip loosened, his knuckles slid down Danny’s tummy. His weight seemed to increase a thousand fold. Boneless, he slid off Danny, and rolled onto his back, limbs splaying out.

“Goof, Danny thought affectionately. My goof.

Quietly, Danny slid out from under Steve’s ridiculously long leg, cast unceremoniously over his own. An empty Gatorade bottle crunched under Danny’s thigh as he rolled off the bed.

“Come back,” Steve mumbled.

“It’s okay,” Danny said, tone comforting, although he doubted that Steve could make out the words. The bed was a mess, Danny picked up the Gatorade bottles, antibiotics box, crumbs, a sock -- where had that come from? The sheets were all rucked up, but despite the wrinkles and creases, Steve appeared comfortable in his sprawl.

Breakfast? Danny could eat. He rocked his head to the side, wincing at the crack in his neck. He felt like he had gone three rounds with Mike Tyson, and the bruises on his arms certainly spoke of battles. He contemplated them ruefully, with their bloody half-moon welts. One look at them and Chin and Kono would know that Steve had inflicted them. He could wear a long sleeved shirt for
two weeks? More importantly, Steve was going to be gutted.

Whatever, he would just explain.

He dumped the pills back on the bedside table with the half-full bottle of Gatorade. Picking up Steve’s BlackBerry, he took the phone and the empties with him.

The sock, he dropped on the floor.

Mooching around Steve’s open plan living room kitchenette, he left the bottles on the draining board to be recycled later. Kitchenette cupboards clicked shut behind him as he hunted for victuals. Old Mother Hubbard’s cupboards were practically bare. Steve did not eat in his eyrie. There were no snacks -- reprehensible, in Danny’s opinion. Would a bag of chips go amiss? There was a small French press, but no coffee. A couple of jars of honey and a packet of Scottish Oatcakes. Curious, Danny looked in the small bar-fridge under the bench.

“Halleluia.” There was a bottle of cloudy apple juice, two cans of V8, and four bottles of Abbey ale. As halleluihas went it was a little low key, but at least Steve had some food.

Steve ate in the main kitchen. Danny really wasn’t surprised. He would have to get their breakfast from downstairs. Danny contemplated his borrowed silk shorts, bruises and he knew that his hair was a bird’s nest. Steve’s bathrobe was still in Danny’s studio.

He was going to have to make the dash to his bedroom, and hope that Kono or Mary didn’t intercept him. But first -- he studied Steve’s BlackBerry -- they needed to make an appointment with Dr. Magnus, and maybe even Steve’s audiologist, Messel. He hoped that Dr. Magnus would be available on a Saturday morning, but since he had instructed Steve to text him temperature updates, the guy had to be at least checking his phone.

~*~

“Hey, Danny, how’s Steve?” Chin greeted as Danny slunk into the kitchen in search of breakfast.

“Ear infection,” Danny said succinctly.

“Oh, that’s not good.” Chin winced in empathy. “You want me to get Malia?”

“Is she here?”

“Yeah. In my studio.” Chin pushed away from the kitchen table, half-standing.

Danny considered the offer. “Nah. I’ve made an appointment with his doc at 12:30.” He glanced at the kitchen clock and they had just under two hours. “He’s got antibiotics. I just want to make sure that—”

“Can’t be too careful.” Chin dropped back in his seat.

“He’s better this morning.” On auto-pilot Danny started the coffee machine. “His temperature is down. He got water trapped in his ear when we were hiking in the Kaaaa’ah’awaha valley. I figure that was it. I told him hiking is bad for you.”

“Are you all right?” Chin said solicitously.

“Yeah.” Danny contemplated the long sleeves of his shirt. The coffee machine hissed and slurped. “It was a rough night.”
Danny stared at Chin on the heels of that admission. He hadn’t meant to say that. Steve’s stories were Steve’s stories. He couldn’t break confidence. He had promised that anything that Steve said was private. To say anything else was unconscionable.

“You understand,” Danny said, ending that part of the conversation.

Chin stood, jack-in-the-box. “Mrs. Keawe brought some croissants around this morning. You get some coffee in you. And I’ll warm up the croissants. You like strawberry jelly, don’t you?”

Somehow Danny found himself sitting at the kitchen table nursing a cup of coffee, as Chin took over breakfast preparation.

“You think Steve will eat something?” Chin asked.

“He should. He likes Mrs. K’s croissants.”

Chin added the butter dish to the tray that he was preparing.

“So the key to Steve’s apartment, you keep it in your studio, right?” Danny asked.

“Yes.” Chin paused mid-setting the jelly on the tray.

“Mary was in the apartment this morning. I locked the door last night.” Danny brushed a finger over his left forearm feeling the heat. “Does she have a key?”

“That I don’t know, but she doesn’t have mine. It’s on my key chain.” Chin set the jar down. “Did Steve… freak?”

“No. But…” Danny refrained from saying that it could happen. It occurred to him that he didn’t know the history of Chin’s knowledge of Steve’s freak outs. They must have happened early on in his recovery.

“I’ll talk to her,” Chin said stalwart.

“Okay,” Danny said spinelessly. That might come better from Uncle Chin, rather than the interloper.

Chin laughed. There was no other way to describe it. Danny waved his hand at the man, accepting Chin’s wry humour at his expense.

“I’ve known Mary since she was about seven,” Chin said by way of explanation.

“Seven?”

“I moved into Seolh when I was nineteen. Steven and Mary were fixtures long before they moved in.”

“What was Audrey like?” Danny asked before he had even thought about it. He should have asked about Steve as a kid. But Audrey was a mystery. He didn’t realise how much he wanted to know.

“A lot like Steve actually.” Chin puttered, setting up a tray as he spoke. “Privileged.”

“Privileged?”

“I mean. Kind of believes that the world is essentially good, people are reasonable. Intellectually understands that people can be bastards. But emotionally expects people to be nice. Doesn’t really understand that water is finite. Education is a luxury.”
"Huh," Danny mused. He would have to think about that for a long time.

“You would have liked Audrey. She had a dry sense of humour. Fond of practical jokes. Drove Steve up the wall.”

Danny contemplated that because Steve and practical jokes didn’t go together.

“Okay, Audrey’s surname was McGarrett, so she married Steve’s Granddad, so Steve’s dad was brought up in Seolh?” Somehow Danny had got the impression that Steve’s mom had been brought up in Seolh.

“Yes.” Chin nodded, a tad confused by the segue.

“Audrey knew Doris McGarrett as her daughter-in-law? They got on well?”

That made Chin pause. He scratched his smooth jaw.

“I think that they agreed to differ,” Chin echoed. “Audrey loved Steve… and Mary.”

“So,” Danny said, thinking on a few things at once, “do you think that Audrey knew that Doris worked for the CIA?”

“Okay.” Chin thumped the tray in front of Danny. “I think that you need to remember that I’m only getting filtered information, and I’m a little out of the loop. How about giving me the full story?”

“Okay.” Danny took a fortifying gulp of coffee. “This is where I think that we’re at.”

~*~

For the second time in just over twelve hours, Danny let himself into Steve’s eyrie with a tray.

As he turned onto the second floor, Steve was carefully closing the bathroom door behind him. The whirr of the extractor fan sounded loudly. He was freshly showered, hair wild and spiky, with a Navy blue shorts and wife-beater top hanging off his lithe frame. He hadn’t shaved, and bristles were dark on his cheeks emphasising the draw of the shadowy smudges under his eyes.

“Hey, you’re up,” Danny said. “I’ve got breakfast. You want it in bed, or how about downstairs?”

Steve glanced at Danny, at the full tray and around the studio.

“Didn’t get that. Breakfast?”

Danny jerked his head indicating downstairs, and trooped back down the twists and turns. Steve didn’t follow immediately on his heels, appearing only after Danny had dumped stuff on the high kitchenette table and hauled himself on to a stool.

“Ears?” Danny asked, cupping his ear, and then pointing at Steve.

Deliberately, Steve held out his hand and brought his fore and index finger together with his thumb, as he shook his head: no.

The dude had been checking out the internets. Danny grinned. Steve rolled his eyes and contemplated the offerings. Chin had warmed the croissants, and there were a selection of jams and jellies, but there was also a small bowl of yogurt with chopped up banana. Steve snagged the bowl. He hauled ass onto the stool, and carefully picked a slice of banana out of the bowl with his fingers and munched.
“So you see a little bit of sign language is a good thing,” Danny said into the ether. Steve wasn’t listening.

“I need to make a couple of phone calls—” Abruptly, Steve stood up and trotted, with a little bit of a weave, around the mock wall of the diamond-shaped bookcase, and across the open plan living area to the lower-level bathroom.

“Steve?” Danny peered through the spaces in the bookcase, between the haphazardly placed books and ornaments.

The bathroom door closed firmly behind him. There were no immediate sounds of retching. Steve hadn’t looked sick. Slowly, Danny slipped off the stool and padded towards the bathroom. Outside the room, he paused, listening hard.

“You okay, Babe?” he asked loudly, but Steve was behind a closed door and he didn’t have his aids in. Carefully, he turned the handle. Decorum warred with practicalities. He opened the door a crack.

“Piss off, Danny,” Steve yelled. “I’m having a crap. Fucking antibiotics.”

Wincing, Danny closed the door.

Judging by the smell, explosive diarrhoea was a more accurate summation.

Suddenly not hungry Danny went to check out Steve’s copious medical supplies, figuring that he would probably have some meds to stop diarrhoea in its tracks. And, he remembered, he should put away the stuff that they had used during the night.

The medical kit was like something from out of space. Every compartment was used and Danny didn’t recognise more than half the gadgets and meds.

There wasn’t any Imodium.

Danny kind of guessed that Steve had acquired this paramedic carry-all from the Navy and forgotten to return it.

Carefully replacing the gauze, tape and scissors to their respective compartments, Danny zipped shut the pack and rooted through the vanity unit for Steve’s common, over-the-counter, first aid kit. Steve took low-dose antibiotics everyday and had to use special creams. He had to have got his Tylenol from somewhere.

A drawer yielded more familiar over-the-counter meds, including the largest box of antibiotics that Danny had ever seen. He guessed if you were taking antibiotics for a year or two you got a big box.

There was also -- Danny picked it up -- a blue inhaler. He had never seen Steve use one. But the way that Danny understood it, if you needed one of these you had to carry it around with you. He shook it and didn’t hear any sloshing. Experimentally, he pressed the canister and jerked as a cloud of fine aerosol spray puffed out.

“Hmmm.”

Steve wasn’t doing the huffing thing anymore. Maybe he didn’t need it? Danny tossed it back in the drawer.

There was Tylenol, ibuprofen, and meds that Danny didn’t recognise -- possibly vertigo medication - but nothing for the shits.
“Whatcha looking for?” Steve asked, a little too nonchalantly.

Danny rocked back on his heels and scowled. Steve stood in the bathroom doorway. Danny refused to be embarrassed; he wasn’t spying.

“Where are your diarrhoea meds?” he asked.

Steve scratched his temple as he figured out that terse sentence. “Rehydration salts?”

“No. Imodium, Pepto -- diarrhoea meds. Something to stop it?”

“No way,” Steve shuddered, actively shuddered. “Not if I don’t have to take any.”

There was a story there, Danny noted.

“It’s just the shits. The yoghurt will help. I’ll drink some more Gatorade.” Steve snatched a sachet out of the drawer like a velociraptor on speed. “In fact, I’ll take some of this stuff.”

“Steve.”

“I’m not discussing shitting with you.” Steve ducked back out of the bathroom shaking the sachet.

Danny slapped the drawer shut and moved after him. “You’ve got an appointment with Magnus at 12:30.”

Steve turned on his heel, head cocked.

“You’ve got an appointment with Dr. Magnus at 12:30,” Danny repeated.

“I’m capable of making my own appointments, Danny.”

Danny set his hands on his hips. “I’m just helping, Steve.”

“I’m not a kid,” Steve said mulishly.

“I know that you’re not a kid, Steve,” Danny said intently. “But there’s nothing wrong with accepting some help. We needed to make the appointment sooner instead of later. Do you want to lose your hearing completely?”

Steve pointed at his ear. “Did you say that I could lose my hearing?”

“I don’t want to risk anything,” Danny couldn’t stop his voice rising.

“You’re being melodramatic.” Steve’s eyes narrowed. “And you’re overstepping your bounds.”

Danny jerked back. “‘Overstepping my bounds’, really?” he said with an edge of pointed mocking. “Pot, kettle, black, Mr. Benevolent Dictator Ass. You were asleep. I made an appointment. Get over yourself.”

Steve glowered, frustrated.

Too fast, too sharp, too high -- Danny realised that Steve was only getting forty-to-fifty percent of their shouting. His rising anger was abruptly squashed. Danny blew out a slow breath, striving for calm.

“Steve.” Danny made five measured steps deep into Steve’s personal space. “‘Ohana. Team.
Partners. Codpiece?"

Steve clenched his fists by his hips and closed his eyes.

Danny waited in the eye of the storm. Steve breathed in slowly, nostrils flaring, and then out through his mouth.

Danny waited. He could empathise. He was good at empathising. Steve was not a kid. And it wasn’t the first time that Steve had railed against what he thought was being treated as a kid. He was a competent, professional, highly-trained, intelligent adult -- who now couldn’t use a phone without technical help, and wasn’t feeling very well.

Steve opened his eyes.

“I don’t like being dependent,” he said tightly.

“I get that.” Danny patted his arm, softening his words. “If you were on a mission… And, I dunno, you’d sprained your ankle, you’d let me help you.”

Steve set his hand over Danny’s holding it against his warm skin.

“This is different. And you know that, Danny.” He squeezed Danny’s fingers.

“No, not really. It’s about family, Steve. You were asleep. You need to see your doc. I made an appointment. We kind of talked about it. I want you to see Magnus today, not tomorrow. Okay?”

“Okay,” Steve said, but his expression said otherwise.

Danny knew that this wouldn’t be the last time battle lines would be drawn over this argument.

Such was life.

~*~

#77#

Danny got to drive, which rankled Steve to the point where it was like sitting next to a metal porcupine. However, based on Steve’s little weaving sidestep every now and again his balance was very much fucked -- he could not drive. Monosyllabic Steve had been very much in attendance on the way to Tripler and visiting Dr. Magnus. The only words out of his mouth had been when they had made their way through the checkpoint at Tripler. Steve had handed over his credentials, and explained, through gritted teeth, that Danny had to come with him.

Danny had not come into the exam room with him, and had been confined to the waiting room with some dog-eared magazines. Danny knew he was a pain in the nosey ass, but he really wanted to know what Dr. Magnus said.

They had got Steve’s prescriptions filled at the hospital’s pharmacy. Steve had returned with a small bag, so Danny had guessed ear drops, and possibly a new antibiotic that did not screw up his guts. There had been another couple of rushed trips to the bathroom.

Now, on their way home, conversation was difficult because of Steve’s abiding mood, and because his aids were not in place.

The atmosphere was kind of toxic and coloured with frustration. But the air was difficult to resolve. Danny was a talker, and his boyfriend, lover, partner simply was not. And he was also deaf and not
wearing his hearing aids. Adapting required a new headspace. If Danny hadn’t had gone through failed couples’ counselling and an acrimonious divorce, in all honesty, he didn’t think he would have the patience and -- dare he say it -- empathy to put himself in Steve’s place. It was a hard learned lesson.

He glanced sideways.

Steve’s eyes were so blue-grey this morning. Blue generally meant stormy or hurt, although in this case it was stormy and hurt.

Steve regarded him, lips pursed.

Danny smiled, and then had to respond to changing lights on the road ahead.

“Harbour Hickam.” Steve indicated the left hand turn onto the Moanalua Freeway rather than taking the right to head back home.

Danny gripped the steering wheel. And in that millisecond of decision, turned left. Oh, he was tempted to head back home, but Steve needed an order to be followed.

“Okay,” Danny said slow and low, because there was following orders and following orders. “Why?”

Sullenly, Steve kicked the backpack at his feet.

“Brought one film with me. I want to see what the NCIS lab does with it. Your input would be valuable.”

You’re such an adorable ass, Danny thought fondly.

~*~

Joint Base Pearl Harbour-Hickam was a town within the city of Honolulu, Danny marvelled. He hadn’t visited the base. It hadn’t even occurred to him that visiting the base was something that people could do. There was a long line of tourists waiting beside the fifth booth, in the row of security booths that broke the entry road into five barrier-barred bays. Peering through the windscreen, at the lines of traffic and people, he guessed that maybe it was a Saturday thing -- maybe there was an event on at the base?

They sailed -- relatively quickly -- through the first security bay, watched balefully by tourists waiting, and entered the site with careful and detailed instructions as to where Danny could and couldn’t go.

Danny assumed that Steve knew this, but the security guys took process and pedantic to a new level, and Steve, surprisingly, seemed okay with their detailed attention.

The respect that Steve drew both surprised and charmed Danny, even when he knew that he should be neither surprised nor charmed. Lieutenant Commander Steven J. McGarrett was very much at home. Following Steve’s directions, Danny turned left and right along wide open roads through a spaghetti snarl of streets. The uninitiated would get lost. Static displays of airplanes provided some method of navigating what Danny realised was an absolutely enormous site.

Steve directed Danny towards a blocky, white-dressed building and to a parking spot close to dark glass double doors. The notice board by the doors identified the building as Naval Criminal Investigative Services Joint Base Pearl Harbour Hickam.
“Keep your visitor pass on display at all times,” Steve said tersely.

There was another round of security inside the double doors complete with an airport-esque metal detectors and x-ray set up on a conveyor-belt. The armed guard on duty straightened on seeing Steve.

“Commander,” the woman greeted.

“Petty Officer Galbraith,” Steve returned.

“Do you have your ceramic knife on you, sir?” she said neutrally.

A fleeting smile crossed Steve’s chiselled face.

“I’ll take that as a yes, sir. If you would please add it to your tray when you move through security, it will be returned when your business has concluded.”

“Steve.” Danny stepped out from behind him, moving out of his protective shadow to gather his attention.

Steve furrowed his brow at him.

“The film,” Danny said, low and slow, “should not go through the x-ray. It could fog any residual images. The film is probably already compromised.”

Steve plucked the old film roll from his cargo pants pocket and held it before Petty Officer Galbraith.

“This contains images that may be important evidence. It cannot go through the x-ray.” He placed it on her outstretched hand.

She examined it minutely. “Understood, sir. I’ll pass it over to you, once you’ve passed through the metal detector.”

“Yeah, thanks.” Danny gave her an expansive thumbs up so Steve could also see it. “Come on, Steve.”

Danny trotted over to the staff manning the x-ray, who were eminently more scary than any that he had encountered on public transport, and decanted the contents of his pockets into a black tray on the edge of the belt.

Steve followed on his heels. His pockets were a treasure trove of unimaginable bits and pieces. The aforementioned ceramic knife was tucked in a sheaf strapped to his calf. The black knife appeared from his right pants pocket. Wallet, sheaf of coiled thin wire, credit card with duct tape wrapped around it, two sets of keys -- albeit one looked like a ring of thin files.

Danny looked at Steve’s filled tray and then at the über attentive guard sitting by the x-ray machine consol, and the equally attentive young man standing directly opposite Steve.

“Commander McGarrett, is that everything?” he asked, with the same totally neutral tone that Petty Officer Galbraith had used, which spoke absolute volumes.

“Yes,” Steve said, “you have my word.”

Danny moved through the metal detector as his tray of wallet and keys passed through the x-ray scanner. The attention that was bestowed on him, from the staff on the other side of the barrier was unnerving. The detector did not bleep. Danny accepted his tray from a silent guard on the far side of
the conveyer belt.

The x-ray operator scrutinised Steve’s tray for a good minute after he had passed through the silent metal detector and retrieved his roll of film. Steve waited patiently, until finally, only his wallet and a chit were handed back. The rest of the contents of his tray were stored in a nook in the bank of shelves behind the officer.

“This way, Danny.” Steve conducted him to an elevator, and pressed the button for the basement.

As the doors started to close, there was a mess of hissed words flashing back and forth before Petty Officer Galbraith stopped the chatting dead in the water.

“So I’m guessing—” Danny turned to face Steve, “—you got through that security with an Uzi, or something, maybe a bomb?”

Steve grinned happily. “Had my ceramic knife, and I got through without them noticing. So I went back, visited the armoury and got a glass grenade, and got through again. There’s a different team on the door now. The other team is back in training.”

“Jesus.”

Steve smiled, unrepentant. “They should have searched me today. And they have several times. But we had to agree that I wouldn’t test their procedures for the next few months at least, because of the time that it was taking each time I visited the forensics labs. I’m not going to catch them out, though. I’m surprised that you weren’t conducted to the body search booth.”

Danny stopped dead. “And if that had happened. I would have had you roasted on a spit.”

“Really?” Steve said cockily.

“With a barbeque glaze and a pineapple stuffed in your mouth.”

“Kinky.”

~*~

Amazingly, the session with the guards had improved Steve’s mood. Danny didn’t analyse it much, but figured it was because of the innate respect from personnel on the base and teasing junior officers.

The NCIS labs were enormous. Danny didn’t really have a frame of reference apart from television programmes. But there were three open plan inter-linked labs. Two of which were reminiscent of high school chemistry labs but with significantly more shiny equipment. The third was like Toast’s computer palace on steroids. All the labs were busy with people. Small glass-walled offices lined the southern wall. Steve tapped on the window of the noticeably bigger office, and entered as the occupant, a middle-aged white woman, wearing narrow European framed glasses, waved him in.

“You look like Hell,” she greeted as she stood, and moved from behind her large desk.

“I’m fine,” Steve said after a beat.

“Liar.” She leaned over to the left, the tail of her long plaited braid swinging. Clearly, she was checking to see if Steve was wearing his hearing aids.

“This is Danny Williams,” Steve introduced him. “Danny, this is Dr. Elizabeth Hewson.”
She had a firm, broad handshake. “Pleased to meet you. So is this about the film?”

Her accent had a lilt of foreign climes, but Danny couldn’t place it.

Steve held up the Kodak film roll. “Yes, I need this old film developed. Possibly relevant to the P-One case. Commander Archer gave clearance.”

“I recall,” she said easily. “And your email this morning said: one of nineteen. The thing is, Lieutenant Commander, yes we have processing capabilities. But it’s an old film, and I’m not entirely sure that my technicians will be able to pull a decent image off the film. The lieutenant who I would have assigned this work to has been transferred. This may require a degree of finesse that I’m not entirely sure that Corporal Oh has. It might be better to send it to the specialist labs in CU-port.”

“Hence the reason for me bringing Daniel Williams, professional photographer, and adherent of old school technology.” Steve patted Danny’s shoulder. “We’re using this roll as something of an experiment. If we can’t get any images off of this film, we’ll send the batch to CU-port. But I’d be happier if we could do the analyses in-house.”

~*~

It proved to be an interesting, albeit long, afternoon. Corporal Oh was an intent young man, and willing to learn. His interest in imagery was encompassing, but had been, of necessity, focused on the digital reconstruction of poorly pixellated images, rather than chemically processed film. However, between the two of them, they had the skill sets required to get the best out of the old film.

Steve had watched for awhile, and then -- antsy and bored -- had informed them that he was going to his office. Danny had hoped that his office had a long couch to laze on and that he was going to take his antibiotics, but he didn’t recommend either activity, no matter how much he wanted to.

“I’ve learned a lot.” Oh pushed his gold-rimmed glasses up his nose as he studied the digital image of Steve and Mary flying down a slide, grinning at the photographer. The black and white tones faded into sepia and there was a residual blur along the right-hand side that could not be corrected, but they had an image. In fact, they had a series of images.

“You’re a wizard at this.” Danny tapped the side of the enormous flat-screen monitor.

“Couldn’t have done it without you.” Oh smiled a gap-toothed smile, eyes crinkling. “We had to get the images before we could tweak ‘em.”

“Partners.” Danny extended his hand, and they shook on it, grinning.

“So we’ve just got family photos here. Should I burn them onto a disc for Commander McGarrett?” Oh asked.

“Yeah, sure.” Danny pondered a second. “You should keep them on the computer. We’re not sure what we’re looking for to be honest.”

“They’re backed up on the servers. I just thought that the commander might like copies,” Oh said. “So you’ll bring the other films? And we’ll process them?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Danny hauled out his cell phone and started to pick out a message to Steve. “I guess each film is going to be different.”

~*~
Steve returned a scant fifteen minutes after getting Danny’s text. He had to have crossed his heart, hope to die, never tell a dirty lie, promised the security team that he did not have any illicit items.

“Anything of any interest?” he rapped out as he strode across the computing lab toward them.

“Just family photographs.” Danny held up the disc between two fingers.

Steve accepted the disc and gave Danny a clipboard in return.

“What’s this?” Danny turned it over in his hands. His name was printed at the top, with what looked like details of a short-term contract arrangement.

“You need to fill in your bank details.” Steve turned the disc back and forth, examining Danny’s writing. “Just family photographs?”

“Bank details?” Danny waved the clipboard under Steve’s nose. “What is this?”

“The US Navy cannot expect you to spend time on this case without recompense.”

Danny chewed the inside of his cheek. He scanned the front page of six. “By the hour?”

“I assume--” Steve was eyeing him closely, “--that each film will take a different amount of time. It seemed the most appropriate method. Keep a record of your hours.”

“You got me a job?”

Corporal Oh started to creep away. Always hyper-aware of movement around him, Steve watched him move cautiously along the length of the bench. Danny briefly marked the corporal’s surreptitious retreat and then looked back to Steve, who now, chin lowered, contemplated Danny.

“I thought that this was a good idea?” Steve said, momentarily smacking his lips together. “I don’t want the films sent to the mainland. And you’ve got the appropriate skill set. Your expertise is required.”

The bossy ass wasn’t manufacturing a reason to pay Danny an inflated consultancy fee because he was a pauper, Danny realised. Steve was paying him for services rendered.

“Why didn’t you mention this before?”

Steve cocked his head to the side, contemplating. “It only occurred to me when I was in my office. I should have thought of it earlier. The back form is a confidentiality agreement. I should have got you to sign it before you looked at the first set of films. But you’re pretty embedded in this case. And you’ve passed security checks.”

Danny plastered his hand over his face.

“Security checks?” he asked faux patiently.

“What? You’ve got your hand over your face. Danny?”

Danny jerked his hand down, fingers splayed wide. Steve stepped back a fraction.

“I’ve annoyed you?” he ventured. “Ah. I did not order the security checks. Commander White investigated all members of the House after Hesse’s attack.”

“Me, especially.” Danny stabbed at his own chest. He was the new one. The interloper. The one
with the credit problems.

“No,” Steve said simply. “Toast was subject to the most stringent checks.”

“What the flying fuck!” Danny yelled. “You people had us investigated?”

Steve straightened fractionally taller, parsed and spoke. “No, not personally. But I understand why. An international terrorist group invaded our home. Commander Joe White initiated the investigation. You’re here today because you’re clear.”

“And you and I?” Danny jabbed towards Steve’s chest -- he was furious at the invasion of his privacy.

“What?” Steve asked, perplexed.

“You and I -- if I was a criminal!”

Steve looked around the lab, looking vainly for a clue to what Danny was saying. Pipettes, spectrophotometers, trays of test tubes, startlingly, didn’t provide any help. Danny knew that he was being ludicrously sensitive, and he was in the right.

“You’re not a criminal?” Steve said. “I don’t understand. If you’re objecting to the --”

“Hell yes, I’m objecting to the check.”

“Why?” Steve asked. He rubbed tiredly at his temple.

“It’s an invasion of privacy: Innocent until proven guilty.”

“No. Not in this world. Not in the current climate,” Steve said loudly -- too loudly -- lack of knowledge of his volume or the ire fuelling his words. “We were all investigated. All of us.”

“You?” Danny pointed again at Steve, with a scathing tilt of his finger.

Steve nodded once.

Stunned, Danny was momentarily silenced.

“Why?” Danny asked. For what reason, he wondered. Steve embodied the US Navy, and dedication to duty.

“I could be disaffected since my disability.” He lifted his chin, expression segueing into impassive.

“Pah,” Danny said derisively with a gust of breath.

“They still checked,” Steve said neutrally. “Everyone in the House was checked.”

The fact that Steve had also been investigated took the wind out of Danny’s sails. Steve was standing at attention and had retreated deep into the mien of studied unconcern. And Danny kind of thought that Joe White might have said something to him about checks when he had been debriefed for hours on end after he had remembered that Jenna Kaye had stopped Hesse from killing them because an unknown -- Wo Fat -- had ordered it.

“It had to be done,” Steve stated. “We’re dealing with terrorists, Danny. It had to be done.”

“I don’t like it,” Danny grumbled.
“What?” Steve broke his stance, cocking his head to the side. “Yell at me, but don’t talk without moving your lips.”

Danny sagged, his ire finally spent. Steve looked like reconstituted shit. The skin under his eyes was drawn taut, and darkened with exhaustion.

“Let’s go home,” Danny said, he felt as tired as Steve looked. They shouldn’t be fighting; he should have taken Steve straight back to Seolh after his doctor’s appointment.

~*~

“Steve?” Danny stopped dead beside the truck parked outside the NCIS offices. He had to say it, and hated to say it because they had just reached an uncomfortable détente. “Your cell phone just announced a text.”

“What? Oh, for crying out--” Steve swung his backpack off his shoulder.

“Phone.” Danny said unnecessarily, and then shut up.

Steve hauled out his BlackBerry from a side pocket on his backpack and scrutinised the screen, he said, “Chin.”

The downturned scowl curling his lips deepened.

“Babe?” Danny could only keep quiet for a little while, otherwise the world was coming to the end.

“Auntie… Governor Jameson’s funeral has been scheduled.”

“We’re going?” Danny pointed at his chest and then at Steve’s.

Steve regarded him for a heartbeat, and then brightened fractionally.

“Yeah, we are going.”

The thrum of fondness in Danny’s guts surprised him. Steve was happier that they were going together. Exhilarating.

“Of course.” Danny rattled the truck’s keys. “Come on, time to go home.”

Getting out of the base was as security driven as entering the base.

Danny had time to ponder a hundred different things at once as he waited in the line of traffic to get past the security barrier. Steve slumped in the passenger seat -- a loose curl of disconnected bones and tendons, muscles and ligaments. He had to have taken a painkiller, because normally his posture was impressive.

The hundred different things all boiled down to: Steve. Getting him paid for professional, photographic services rendered was actually thoughtful -- even if the dork should have said something first.

Danny’s bank balance was going to appreciate the input.

The guard waved then forward, looked at Steve’s credentials, took Danny’s visitor’s pass, carried out a rapid, but thorough, search of the truck, and then and only then saluted and waved them into the outside sprawl of suburbia, under the lifted barrier.
As soon as they passed the barrier, Steve slumped again, cushioning his head on the headrest to regard Danny.

“Did you take your antibiotics?” Danny asked, briefly looking at him -- to Hell with politeness and babying Steve’s current strop. Danny wanted to know.

Steve glanced at his bulky wristwatch.

“Ear drops at 19:00 hours, antibiotics after food.” Steve’s stomach gurgled -- and he glanced down at his abdomen.

“Have you eaten today?” Danny kind of doubted it, given the upsets of the morning.

“Mashed banana,” Steve said with a voice rich in experience. “Yoghurt.”

“Do you actually like yoghurt, or do you eat it out a necessity?” Danny asked.

Steve blew out a sigh like a lathered horse.

“We’re talking about my guts or my eating habits?” he finished perceptively.

And yeah, Danny guessed that they were. Steve shied away from meat, had the appetite of a gnat and seemed largely to favour bland food. It hadn’t occurred to Danny that it was because of an ongoing upset stomach.

“I’m just not hungry, Danny.”

His stomach growled.

“Yeah, right.”

Steve shrugged, disavowing any connection to his stomach’s opinion on the matter.

“Whose turn is it to cook tonight?” Danny wondered, thinking on what would be tempting.

“I don’t have a problem, Danny. I’m within the healthy weight BMI range,” Steve answered an entirely different question -- and boy there was a can of worms.

“I always think those things are crap,” Danny grumbled.

“Grumble. Grumble. Mumble. Mumble,” Steve said peevishly. “I can’t believe we’re doing the food discussion. Are we just going to fight all day? Because you know, darling, I have a headache,” he deliberately lightened his tone to a mocking, feminine lilt.

“You were the doofus,” Danny shot back, “who insisted on going into work when you’re ill.”

“This is pointless, I can’t actually follow what you’re saying when you’re driving since I can only see your profile. I do not have an eating disorder! I’ve got no appetite. I eat what my body needs and can tolerate. I’ve put on 3lbs in the last four weeks.”

It sounded like Magnus or Steve’s unnamed psychologist had broached his eating habits. Danny couldn’t believe that their discussion had morphed into this spat.

“You’ve got an ear infection, Babe, I understand not being hungry.” How the Hell could they have this discussion sans hearing aids? “I’ve only had a cup of coffee and a chocolate bar from the vendor machine in the NCIS foyer. And not eating makes me as grumpy as fuck. It seems to do the same
thing to you.”

Steve growled, actually growled like a revving tractor.

Danny was temped to hit the hazards and pull over, so he did. There was a wide verge ahead.

“Not again!” Steve protested. “You’ll get us killed.”

Steve lifted up on his seat and peered out the back window.

“We’re not on the freeway yet.” Danny parked safely, well out of the traffic. He shifted around so Steve could see him straight on.

“Babe, you’re sick and grouchy. You’re a pain in the ass. I don’t think you have an eating disorder. I’ve never thought that you had an eating disorder for a millisecond. I think you have an ear infection. And I think you need to take your antibiotics, eat some oatmeal, and go to bed early. Pushing yourself because you want to feel better isn’t doing yourself any favours. Okay? Okay?”

Steve’s concentration was like a palpable weight.

“Okay,” Steve finally said, with a soupçon of sullen and a nip of you’re an ass.

Danny leaned over the handbrake and kissed Steve’s forehead. The skin was overly warm under his lips. He flopped back in the driver’s seat. Steve’s cheekbones were sharply delineated, and his eyes were bright, with a touch of recurring fever.

“Thank you for thinking, and getting me a contract,” Danny said, ‘cause he possibly… maybe… had, not that he would admit it under pain of death, overreacted. “You should have said… No, let’s not go there. Thanks, it was a good idea.”

The smile that blossomed over Steve’s features transformed his sullen demeanour to incandescent.

“You’re welcome, Danno.”

Waters smoothed, oil poured, whatever trite phrase you wanted to use -- Danny shifted back in his seat. He indicated and pulled back into the evening traffic, ignoring the young woman gesturing at him – because, you know, pulling over wasn’t a crime.

~*~

#78#

Steve weeble-wobbled ahead of Danny heading straight towards the familiar warmth of the kitchen. The door was open, ready for them, as they crossed over the grass instead of taking the curved path from the pottery workshop to the kitchen door. Golden lights within the kitchen were welcoming, and familiar shapes moved back and forth, behind windows and the door screen.

“Hey!” All heads turned as they entered together. The whole House crew was present, including Mary. Danny wasn’t too sure of the catalyst, but maybe it was in celebration of Mary’s return to Oahu.

Steve baulked for a fraction of a second on the doorstep, and Danny, tight on his heels, pressed a hand on the small of his back.

“Full house,” Danny observed. Even Mamo and Maru were there, and ready for dinner.
“Where the Hell have you been?” Mary asked. “You went to the doctor’s hours ago.”

Steve ignored or didn’t register the question, arrowing to his seat. As he sat, he pulled out Danny’s chair. Danny closed the mosquito screen door, leaving the outer door open for ventilation.

“We went into the Base.” Danny laughed inwardly because now he thought of it as *The Base*. “And started developing the photographs.”

“Anything interesting?” Chin asked from beside the oven. It appeared to be filled to capacity with dishes keeping warm.

“Nice photo of Steve and Mary on a slide.” Danny grinned at Mary, as he sat opposite her on the large dark table. “What are we having?”

“Tapas!” Kono jumped to her feet to help Chin carry the dishes from the industrial sized oven.

“It’s been like a factory production,” Toast said from the other head of the table opposite Mamo. “Lots of little dishes. You can pick what you want to eat.”

“Tortilla Española.” Chin set a sliced Spanish omelette before Steve.

Plain, easily digestible and tasty, Danny noted; Chin was perceptive and understanding.

Salad dishes, dominated with the ever-present garden plot tomatoes, were already dotted across the table. Toast stood, moving to help Kono, and brought a couple of bread baskets from the counter. The table rapidly filled with what felt like hundreds of little dishes, but was closer to fifteen, including the salads and breads.

Chin sat, and pointed out all the combinations. There were juicy shrimps sautéed with chilli pepper and garlic, a selection of hams, rice with pork in white wine, meatballs in tomato sauce, chickpeas with vegetable and cumin, mushrooms with olive oil and parsley, roasted eggplant with a drizzle of honey. It was a grazer’s paradise of small dishes to pick at. Appetising and tempting.

Mary was humming under her breath. It took Danny a moment to place the theme tune from *The Waltons*. Danny couldn’t help grinning and she smiled at him impishly.

“How are you feeling, Steve?” Maru asked.

Danny deftly tapped Steve’s ankle with his foot.

“What? Excuse me?” Steve lifted his head from contemplating his plate.

Maru smiled. “How are you feeling, Steve?”

“I’m fine, Auntie Maru, just an ear infection. The antibiotics are working.”

“Good,” she said succinctly.

Steve effectively ended the discussion by pushing a forkful of omelette into his mouth. Conversation ranged around the table. Danny got into a chat about university scholarships with Toast at his side. Red wine flowed, and frankly tasty food was consumed. Maru chatted smoothly and easily with Mary, drawing what Danny guessed were tall tales. Danny did not keep an eye on Steve, only noting that he did eat a portion of omelette and some of the chickpea dish, and drank a glass of water. No, he wasn’t keeping an eye on Steve.

“Dessert?” Kono asked, hopefully, regarding the scavenged remains of the tapas.
Mamo laughed, rolling back in his chair and patting his ample tummy. “Keiki, where do you put it and keep so thin?”

“I’m a professional athlete, Uncle.”

“There’s ice cream in the freezer.” Chin pointed at the bottom half of the fridge-freezer set up, but didn’t move an inch -- suddenly replete.

Kono bounced energetically to her feet, and rooted in the freezer, hauling out Lappert’s Hawaiian Chocolate Macadamia Nut and Kauai Pie ice cream. Hunting further back into the top drawer, she emerged with a small tub of old school vanilla.

“I’ll get the bowls,” Mary said, and suited actions to words.

“I think I’ll have coffee.” Chin stood. “Anyone else?”

Chin and Mamo were the only ones that were interested. Danny contemplated the Chocolate Macadamia Nut ice cream, and decided a scoop would complement the meal. He grabbed the tub.

“You want some?” Danny asked Steve as he scooped a lump into his bowl. He licked his lips.

Steve regarded tub and bowl. “No. Kauai Pie, maybe.”

“Here you are.” Smiling, Maru passed over the tub.

“Vanilla, maybe,” Steve prevaricated. “Yeah, vanilla.”

“Voila.” Mary thrust the smaller container across the table, eyes intent.

“Oh, thanks,” Steve said, almost as if seeing her for the first time. He did take a scoop of the seed-dotted vanilla ice cream.

It had been a long time since Danny had had ice cream and -- typical of Seolh -- the brand that they had chosen on the shopping run was top quality. The rich creamy dessert was perfect.

The coffee smelt delicious. But while tempted, Danny was tired and he wanted a good night’s sleep. Long gone were the days when he’d been used to being disturbed by a tiny baby during the night.

Chin must have prepped the espresso machine, drawing two tiny cups as Danny pondered on whether or not to have a cup.

“Ah, coffee.” Mamo inhaled deeply, enjoying the scent, as he accepted his cup.

“Only one,” Maru instructed.

“It’s a tiny little cup.” He held his fingers a microscopic fraction apart.

“It’s the caffeine not the size of the cup,” she said authoritatively.

Mamo nodded. “Yes, dear.”

Mary was beaming at them. It was hard not to. Danny had a bunch of names and roles for the members of Seolh that lived in the House, but he hadn’t assigned any for Mamo and Maru. He would have to sleep on it.

“That was delicious. Thank you, Chin, Kono, Mary, Toast.” Picking up her empty bowl, Maru stood
and started clearing the table, moving the dishes to be rinsed and stacked in the dishwasher.

“Hey, I’ll help.” Danny rushed down the final mouthful of ice cream. He hadn’t had anything to do with the preparation of the feast; it behooved him to help clean up.

“Tutu?” Steve said off to the side, addressing Mamo.

“Danny,” Maru said, shaking a cardboard box that she had pulled out from under the sink, “can you get the dishwasher detergent from the pantry, please? This box is empty.”

“Of course.” They actually kept the detergents, bleaches, mops and other cleaning utensils and liquids in a cupboard in the mudroom. He ducked out the kitchen side door, rather than going through the hall and pantry.

Working together, the cleanup didn’t take them much time at all. Danny turned with a cloth to wipe off the table, and realised that Steve was conspicuous by his absence. He had made his escape when all hands had been on deck.

A car horn outside beeped twice, and Mamo clapped his hands together.

“That’s our lift. Mother?”

“Coming, dear.” Maru finished folding a dish towel, and draped it on a cabinet door handle.

There was a round of hugs before Mamo shepherded his wife to the kitchen door.

“Say good night to Steven, please,” Maru asked Danny in particular.

“Sure.” Danny grinned, because there were no secrets in this family.

Massed by the door, vying to see, the group waved Mamo and Maru off. They watched until the tail lights turned around the side of the House to disappear down the wide drive.

“You going to check on Steve?” Kono asked.

“Nah,” Danny decided, at least not yet. “He probably needs some ‘me time’.”

Toast laughed and ambled away. “I’ve got some data to analyse. See you laters, guys and gals. Oh hey, Kono, you remember that video that you asked me to analyse?”

“The wave form?” Kono slid her hand through the air describing a cresting wave.

“Yeah, I broke down the video. You want?”

“Bodacious.” She spun on her heel. “Chin, can I borrow your laptop?”

“Of course. It’s in my studio. You know where.” Chin pointed helpfully upstairs.

“Race you?” Toast was off before he finished speaking, Kono quick on his heels.

“They make me feel so old,” Danny said, hunching over and waving an imaginary cane.

“How ill is Steve?” Mary said abruptly to Chin and Danny, breaking through the humour. “He looks like shit! Fuck, what is the matter with him?”

Her eyes were familiarly bright with barely held back tears. Automatically, Danny stepped forwards,
and she moved away in a stressed mirror dance.

“Mary,” Chin said calmly, “you know what happened.”

“I don’t!” She stamped her foot. “I just know that he was hurt. Now I see him, and he’s a ghost of himself.”

“He survived a horrendous attack, and he is getting better,” Chin said.

“That’s not getting better.” Mary gestured blindly behind her. “He’s a ghost.”

“He is getting better,” Danny interjected. “Six weeks ago, he did look like a ghost. I didn’t know any different. But today -- yeah, okay, the ear infection is dragging him down -- but he’s fitter and healthier.”


“It’s not our story to tell,” Chin said, and caught her shirt sleeve the very instant she turned away.

She shrugged him off with a violent twist of her shoulder and glowered. “I am going to check on my brother.”

“No,” Chin and Danny said simultaneously. They glanced at each other.

Their immediate response and firm agreement stopped Mary dead.

“Why?” she asked.

“He’s probably gone to lie down,” Chin explained. “Creeping up on him--”

“I wouldn’t creep up on him,” Mary interrupted.

“We’ve had this conversation already this morning, Mary. I’ll tell you again. He’s deaf,” Chin said bluntly. “You would be creeping up on him. And he’d probably put you down before he realised that you were you. You have to treat him with care. It might not have been wanted or necessary at any other time in his life, but now, at this moment, yesterday, today, tomorrow -- for the foreseeable future it is.”

The protector needed protecting. Steve wasn’t happy about the necessity. But he had an ‘Ohana to protect him. The question was, would Mary agree or fight their direction.

“He’s my brother,” she said petulantly.

“He’s my best friend,” Chin responded.

“He’s my,” Danny said, and paused a beat, “partner.”

“And,” Chin said woodenly, “we know him. He needs this space to heal. I’ll fight you on this, Mary. I will pack your bags myself and take you to Mamo and Maru’s place. You don’t know what’s happening, and I’m telling you: handle with care.”

Mary shrunk in on herself, but the glower didn’t change. Danny saw a lot of Steve in her downturned bottom lip. She glanced between them. Danny crossed his arms. He would help Chin bundle her off to Mamo’s if needed.

“Okay! Okay! I’ll give Steve his space, if you insist,” she drawled out the last word. “God, Seolh.
Always fucking ultimatums.”

She stomped out of the kitchen.

Chin let out a low, long breath. Momentarily, he pressed at the bridge of his nose.

“Would you like a glass of wine, Danny?”

“Yes.” Danny cricked his neck to the side. “Red?”

“Of course.” Chin breathed out slowly and evenly, hardly disturbing the air around him.

It was meditative in its weight. Danny tried to match Chin’s mien.

“What was it like when Steve first came home?” Danny blurted, breaking the second’s heartbeat of quiet.

Chin paused in selecting a bottle from the kitchen wine rack. Deliberately, he consulted the label, and then put the bottle back.

“We need Amarone della Valpolicella Classico. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Well trained after six weeks living in the House, Danny got freshly washed deep bowled glasses and set them on the cleared kitchen table. He’d asked a question that he had wanted answered for a while. He hadn’t meant to ask. But he needed to know. Chin returned with a dusty bottle that he cursorily wiped off with Maru’s damp dish towel. Sommelier that he was, Chin professionally cracked the seal, and drew out the cork with a little silver knife-thing that he just happened to have on his person. A little like Steve and his jet black knife.

“Don’t we need to let this breathe?” Danny asked as Chin poured two generous glasses, letting the wine flow from shoulder height into the large glasses.

“That’s what I’m doing. We could have decanted the wine into a decanter. But this works if your wine is of the right age.” He picked up the closest glass. “Salute.”

“Salute.” Danny clinked their glasses together.

“You asked what Steve was like when he first came home? So I’m guessing that Steve is a bear with a sore head?” Chin said.


His answer was absurd, but Chin understood.

“The physical limitations were much worse when he was released from Tripler. His ribs and sternum were just starting to heal. The ribs and lingering pneumonia pretty much meant bed rest and driving him to doctors’ appointments was the name of the game.” Chin pondered a moment. “His focus was on getting better.”

“Bad tempered?”

“Fraid so,” Chin said commiserating. “Although he was mostly sleepy and depressed. He dragged around the House. We were—”

“Worried?” Danny supplied.
“I know that I’ve said it. But you were the best thing to happen to Seolh in an age. You’ve brought him back.”

Danny rotated the glass stem between his palms, watching the ruby-blackcurrant wine slosh back and forth.

“I guess I was lucky I didn’t know the whole story. Does that make sense?”

“You seem to—” Chin took a sip of wine, “—work on instinct. You’ve made the right calls.”

“Mindfield.”

“Mindfield?”

“Something Grace said once. She meant minefield, but said mindfield, when we were tiptoeing around Rachel when she had a migraine.” Migraine was a euphemism for bad tempered pre-, mid- and post-divorce. Not that he had embodied even-tempered and reasonable. Danny took a healthy swig of wine.

“I think that the important thing to remember is that he’s not used to limitations,” Chin said slowly. “It’s a hard lesson to learn. He is getting better, though.”

“This has been a kick in the teeth,” Danny laid it on the table. “He thought that he had gotten over a hurdle. He was feeling better, starting to hike, run, and then an ear infection knocks him on his ass. Today, he forced himself to do stuff, when he should have lazed around. It’s gonna take longer to get better.”

“I think we would all do the same thing,” Chin said perceptively.

“Yeah—” Danny pushed his now empty glass across the table for a refill, “—you’re right.”

~*~

“Goodnight, Monkey,” Danny said.

“Night, night, Danno. I love you.”

“Danno, loves you,” he said softly.

The call ended with a soft click, and he contemplated his phone for a long moment before clicking it off.

He leaned back in his cushioned, old-fashioned chair, turning his phone over in his hand. It had been a long day, after a disturbed night. The moon was rising behind him, even though it wasn’t that late.

It was after nine o’clock according to his phone. It had been late to be calling his seven year old daughter; but he had needed to hear her voice. Standing, he stretched, reaching high. The question was should he go to Steve’s room? They hadn’t spent every night together. Steve needed his space.

Nah. He was going to check up on him.

Tap. Tap.

His door opened. Steve stood in the doorway. Barefooted, he wore his sleepwear, old, well-washed baggy shorts and t-shirt — not that different from his daywear around the House. His fluffy hair bespoke of a shower.
“Hey,” Danny said, “how are you feeling?”

“I took my antibiotics,” Steve half-answered.

“Good.” Danny nodded.

Steve shifted from foot to foot.

“Yes, Steven?” Danny asked into the uncharacteristic indecision.

“Will you come to bed?” Steve said softly. “Please.”

~*~

Steve was doing his missile-on-target thing, intent on hitting his pillow and falling asleep a millisecond later. Danny allowed himself to be towed behind Steve. The covers had been changed for the third time in less than twenty-four hours. It was perfect and waiting to be mussed. While Steve’s exhaustion was evident, they needed to brooch one important topic first.

“Steve?” Danny dug his heels in before Steve could face plant in the covers.

“Hmm?” Wide eyed, Steve peered at him. He squeezed their interlaced fingers, tugging.

“Where’s your scary foot-long knife?” Danny slid in close.

“K-bar?” Steve checked.

“I dunno. It’s silver and has a jagged edge.” Danny shrugged.

“Yeah,” Steve said slowly. “I found it under the bed on the dinner tray.”

The look of disgust on Steve’s face was hilarious. Danny guessed that Steve had taken the tray downstairs and scrubbed the dishes clean.

“And is the massively long knife now under your pillow? Well, one of the six or so pillows that you seem to need?”

Steve puffed out his cheeks. “Uhm, yes?”

Danny shook his head slowly from side to side, emphasising that no way in Hell on this planet was he sharing their bed with a foot-long silver knife capable of disembowelling him.

“Steve--” Danny had thought it, now he was going to say it, “--there is no way in Hell that I’m sleeping in that bed with a foot-long silver knife that could easily disembowel me, until the knife is either under it or, preferably, in the bedside drawer on your side of the bed.”

Steve stared at him.

“Steve, this is non-negotiable.” Danny freed his fingers from Steve’s long-handed grip. “The knife has to go. I’m not into threesomes.”

Steve bit his bottom lip, containing a glimmer of humour.

Slowly, Danny unbuttoned the cuff on his shirt, and rolled his left sleeve up. He angled his forearm
so that Steve could see the starkly purple and scarlet bruises livid against his pale, lightly freckled skin.

Steve froze. He was a statue made from ice. Meditatively, Danny slowly rolled up his right sleeve. Danny presented both forearms, angling them towards Steve. Imprints of purple-blue fingerprints belonging to large hands, which easily spanned the width of his arms, had risen in the wake of the freshly scabbed nail imprints.

“I did that,” Steve said. It wasn’t a question.

Danny nodded.

Steve clasped his fingers together, corralling them. “Maybe--”

“Nuh nuh, no.” Danny slid forward, further into Steve’s space. “Don’t go there. And don’t go off on a guilt trip. The knife goes. And I expect you could tell me that you could kill me with a paperclip. Or smother me with a pillow. But you’re not going to, are you? However, the weapons need to be out of reach.”

Steve nodded tersely, and with his customary alacrity, he turned and burrowed into the pillows, pulling out the, quite frankly, terrifying knife. As comfort blankets went, it was a surprisingly effective one. But Danny still wasn’t going to have it in their bed.

“Okay, Babe.” Danny stretched up on his tiptoes and kissed Steve’s cheek even as he held the blade. “I’m going to grab a quick shower. Steal some more of your shorts. Then I’ll be right up.”

Danny fully expected Steve to be fast asleep when he returned to the bedroom.

It was close. The only reason Steve wasn’t asleep was because he was sitting on the edge of the bed, clutching a mangled tube of antibiotic cream.

“Is that for me?” Danny said unnecessarily.

Steve nodded.

Danny sat beside Steve, twisting around to face him. Automatically, Steve mirrored him, right knee bent, and left foot on the floor. Face-to-face made it much easier to talk.

Mutely, Steve captured Danny’s left forearm. The main bruise was about the size of an old fashioned silver dollar piece centred with a scabby half-moon. Steve lightly smoothed his thumb over the tendons of Danny’s wrist, back and forth. He didn’t touch the bruise.

“Sorry,” Steve said softly.

“I shouldn’t have grabbed you,” Danny said.

Steve scowled. “True. But that doesn’t make it okay, Danny.”

Danny agreed with Steve one hundred percent, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t understand.

“There were extenuating circumstances; you were half asleep.”

“I could have killed you,” Steve said. “I could have broken your neck just as easily.”
Danny shivered. “Yeah, but look on the bright side,” he said flippantly, “You didn’t.”

Steve rocked back on his butt, but he still kept a hold of Danny’s wrist.

“That’s not funny.”

“Yes, Steve, you could have. Yeah, you’ve been trained up the wazoo -- but despite being feverish, half-asleep, and really confused, you just contained me.”

“You want the knife moved.”

“Of course I want the knife moved! I’m not stupid. Where did you put it?”

Steve gestured with the hand holding the cream at the bedside table -- which was still an altar to physical care, with boxes of painkillers and antibiotics, bottles of Gatorade, a sheaf of files that were probably from the museum office, a box of tissues, and a thermometer strewn over the top.

“You going to do something with the cream?” Danny asked, tugging on Steve’s large hand.

Immediately, Steve shifted back to face Danny with enviable fluidity.

Steve was infinitely careful using the tip of his fingertip to gently rub the cream over the bruise. Danny’s cock twitched, and he firmly thought, calm down, because, yeah, he doubted that they were going there tonight. Steve was clinging to wakefulness with gritted teeth and guilt.

“Thanks, Steve,” Danny said, as Steve moved on to his right forearm. Danny shivered at the sensuous combination of rich cream smoothing over sensitive flesh.

“If you head butted me in the nose, I would probably let go,” Steve offered.

“Yeah, right,” Danny said dubiously, “because you don’t know how to counter that move, right?”

Steve nodded fractionally.

“I could show you other moves,” he said.

“Yeah, right. Honestly, I’ll use the skills that I was born with. You listened to me, Babe. You listened to me this time, and last time. But…. ”

“But what?” Steve didn’t let the question lie a second.

“Can I talk to someone,” Danny asked, “and get proper advice on what to do when you’re having a flashback?”

Steve stopped smoothing cream onto Danny’s skin. He regarded him with bleached out blue-grey eyes.

Danny waggled his eyebrows as Steve cogitated on his words. It was a serious request, and he was not going to stand down.

Steve jerked his chin in a tiny affirmative.

“I’ll talk to Dr. Chowdhry, she’ll have some advice.”

“Maybe there’s pamphlets or something,” Danny said brightly. He guessed that Dr. Chowdhry was Steve’s therapist, maybe even his psychologist.
“Maybe,” Steve said dourly. “I know that there is a clinic for friends... and family.”

“Okay, sounds perfect.” Danny said.

“I’ll call her tomorrow,” Steve decided firmly.

“It’s Sunday tomorrow, Babe.”

“Oh.”

“You finished?” Danny wiggled his arm. Steve answered by screwing the top back on the tube of cream.

“Danny?” Steve said, a wealth of remorse in his voice.

“Hey, you’ve apologised.” Danny clambered right over the top of him, pushing him back to the pillows.

Steve fell back with a huff of surprise.

“Where’s your infamous moves?” Danny cackled.

Pushed back into the mess of pillows, Steve contemplated him. “You really want to go there?” The glint in his eye promised wrestling.

“Not tonight.” Danny dropped down, pinning Steve along his good right side, and flinging an arm over his narrow chest. Steve could probably bring it on, but he was almost cross-eyed with exhaustion.

Steve’s arm came around, cupping Danny’s shoulders. It was a mirror of their positioning of the morning, but this time it was Danny that was held. Reaching, blindly down, Danny snagged the corner of the quilt and hauled it over their hips. It was warm enough, even in January, that only a sheet and a thin patchwork quilt were all the covers that they needed.

The sparsely haired skin under his cheek was still warm, but not overly warm.

“We could have sex,” Steve said.

Danny craned his head around. He shuffled up Steve’s long body and planted a kiss half on his cheek and half on the corner of his mouth.

“Sure, Babe. Tomorrow,” he said generously because, yeah, with sufficient foreplay, sex could be definitely on the agenda, but hair-trigger Steve wasn’t with the programme. Danny rubbed a smooth, large circle over Steve’s chest, soothingly.

“Nice,” Steve rumbled.

“How’s the headache?” Danny asked.

“Ibuprofen’s kicking in.”

Everything that you do is written into your bones at the end of the day, Danny thought.

“What?” Steve asked, his eyes heavy lidded.

“Nothin’,” Danny said, stroking and comforting. The little discreet brass lights over the headboard
set soft golden shadows over them. He would wait until inevitable sleep cast its cloak over Steve before reaching up to switch off the lights.

“I was thinking—”

Between one breath and the next Steve was asleep, long form sagging infinitesimally in relaxation. Danny kept soothing. He would switch off the lights soon.

The lights stayed on.

~*~

Danny slept lightly. He wanted to sleep the sleep of the just, but he just stayed in the twilight zone, hyper-alert to any noise or movement. Steve snuffled and Danny awoke. Steve shifted and Danny woke up. It was ridiculous. He trusted Steve. Settled on his stomach, hand tucked under his knife-free pillow, snuffle-breathing through his mouth, Steve was a six-foot one unthreatening lump.

Danny watched the ceiling fan, imagining little woolly sheep jumping from blade to blade as it idly spun. Insomnia dogged him at times, and this appeared to be a time, even though nothing really was preying on his mind.

Steve seemed much better. The infection still cast pink flushed spots on his cheekbones and set a headache beating between his ears, but he wasn’t sweating feverishly or squinting in the light. Danny’s Monkey was happy, and looking forward to visiting Seolh next weekend. The mystery bugged him, but he didn’t dwell on it.

The logical thing would be to get up and grab a glass of warm milk or something, but it was a long hike all the way down to the kitchen. And he would probably disturb Steve.

Danny rolled to the side, and found Steve’s weird fantasy book on his side of the bed. There were two bookmarks in it, one where Danny had reached last night (the corner he had turned over, carefully smoothed back), and another further in.

Apparently, they were sharing the book.

The book didn’t grab him. It was too fantastical for his tastes. He wanted…. He wanted to sleep. Danny abandoned book and bed, and slipped away.

He grabbed one of Steve’s SEAL-approved stamped hooded sweatshirts from his second bedroom, and pulled it on against the relative night’s chill. Bored and over stimulated, he headed for the museum’s office. He couldn’t sleep, so he would use the time productively.

The shoebox of undeveloped film, minus the one that they had developed, was sitting on the office table. Danny sorted through them, belatedly realising that he could possibly figure out the age of the films based on the film label on the cartridge. He booted up the old desktop and hunted up various film types. By dint of researching Kodak, Agfa, Ilford and the single Polaroid film, he got them roughly lined up from 1966 to 2009, mostly grouped in age classes: 1970s, 80s and 90s.

The question was when was the film that they were interested in taken -- assuming that it was a film.

“What?” Danny asked himself, because that came out of the blue. “Mary said films, plural.”

There was a Kodachrome II 135 slide film in the mix of 80s films. It was different. It might be the next film to develop? Slides, especially Kodak slides, were noted for their archival stability. The age bracket from kodachrome II 135 was wide, but the canister was worn and well handled, so it was
probably old.

One film canister had contained coins, they had assumed that the other canisters had contained film cartridges, based on what Mary said, but they didn’t all have to have film in them. Doris McGarrett’s metal box was also on the table. Danny pulled out the old passports and paste jewellery.

They were going to have to keep looking, looking for films and film canisters. They could decide which should be developed first but logically process the films from the 1970s and 80’s first.

The date of issue for Steve’s false passport was 1988. Something had prompted Doris McGarrett to get him his own passport that year. Danny leafed through the other passports to find Elisabeth Shelburne’s passport, which was also issued in 1988. Steve, at eleven years of age, had his own passport, and would have been able to travel independently of his mother.

Where was Mary’s passport?

And where was John McGarrett’s false passport?

Were they stored elsewhere, or had Doris planned on moving without her husband and daughter?

Danny pushed out of the computer chair and headed over to Doris McGarrett’s collection of photo albums. They stopped in 1988, two years before her death.

“Hey? You all right?” Steve asked from the hidden doorway.

“Geez.” Danny clasped his hands over his thrumming heart. “Geez.”

Steve rested against the doorframe, arms crossed.

“I woke up, and you weren’t there,” Steve said testily.

“I couldn’t sleep.” Danny pointed at the films. “I’ve sorted them by age. Trying to figure out which are the best ones to develop first. And also, your fake passport is dated 1988. Your mom stopped making up photo albums in 1988, do you know why?”

“1988?” It took Steve a moment to break that rushed mess of sentences down. He rubbed his face sleepily. “She went back to work full time. Ostensibly teaching. I doubt she had time to make family photo albums.”

“Teaching is a euphemism?” Danny asked.

“Community college. She taught in kindergarten at the school me and Mary went to. When Mary moved into first grade, mom got a job at the community college. Although it was probably a front,” Steve said bitterly. “I’ll know more when the files from the Mainland arrive.”

“You think that she went back to the CIA?”

“I don’t think that she ever left the CIA.” Steve padded barefoot into the office. “We know that she was active in the early 1980s when Mary was just a baby, and I was a toddler playing with Marie Noshimuri. And then Dad came back from the service and they fought over her ‘job’. I think that she took a sabbatical from the CIA, but I don’t think that she ever left. I wish Joe would come back from wherever he’s hiding.”

“Why?” Danny asked, wondering about the tangent.

“Because I asked Uncle Joe,” Steve said a tad sarcastically, “if my dad knew Wo Fat. And
Commander White very carefully answered why would my father, a mere Honolulu detective, know twenty year old Wo Fat? I must have been really off that day. I wonder if I would have got another answer if I had asked if my mom could have known Wo Fat and Wo Yongfu?"

“We didn’t actually know the players back then,” Danny pointed out. “We hadn’t seen the photos of him socialising with Noshimuri at your mom’s shindigs.”

“Yeah, well, Joe knows more than he’s saying, and he’s taken himself out of the equation, but I’m still getting help from Naval Intelligence -- access to files, lab time -- so he’s pulling some strings. Whatever the Hell it is that we’re looking for, people are interested, but they’re willing to let it play out.”

“What do you mean?”

“You said it yourself, Wo Fat -- international terrorist -- hasn’t left the Islands, which is a bad play for a man wanted by numerous intelligence organisations. Whatever he’s after is personal -- enough to keep him here. We’re under surveillance to protect us, but also because Naval Intelligence, CIA, the National Security Agency, all want to capture him and, probably, grab what he’s looking for.”

“We’re bait?”

“Essentially, yes.”

Danny was never getting back to sleep.

“Look we’re going to win. We’ve got the clues,” Steve said, resolute. “We’re closer than we’ve been so far. When the papers come, we can concentrate on 1988 first. You’ve got films to process.”

As often as Danny pondered on the mystery, Steve was pondering just as hard.

“What have you found out about Wo Yongfu?” Danny asked abruptly. “You collared Mamo straight after dinner. Did he have any info for you from Kavika or Koa Keawe?”

“He had some files for me.”

“The ones on your bedside table?”

Steve nodded.

“And you started reading them?” Danny said, realising that he didn’t phrase that carefully, and his questioning lilt was too quiet. “Have you read them?”

“Started. Fell asleep.” Steve scrubbed at his bristly cheeks with the palms of his hands. “So you can’t sleep? Do we need to go for a walk or something? I mean, as much as this is productive, it’s also three o’clock in the morning.”

“You got any milk up here?” Danny asked; Steve liked milk, it was possible that he had brought some up.

“Milk?” Mrs. K. put some milk in the fridge for me. You want a hot toddy?”

“Hot toddy?” Danny echoed.

“Come on.” Steve trotted off.

Danny left the box, films, and files where he had set them (knowing that it would drive Steve up the
Steve got the milk from the little fridge in the kitchenette, decanted a mug measure into a pan, and set it on the burner to warm. Man on a mission, he disappeared briefly into his office, and returned with a three-quarter filled bottle of amber single malt.

“You having one?” Danny asked, thinking not, based on the volume of milk.

“What?”

“Are you having a hot toddy?”

“No, I don’t need any help trying to get to sleep.” He pointed at the middle cupboard. “Can you get the honey?”

Old Mother McGarrett’s cupboards were pretty bare, but there were a couple of jars of honey.

“Manuka? What’s Manuka honey?” Danny asked as he passed it over.

“Chin got it. Supposed to be good for you,” Steve said just a little cagily.

“Twenty five plus?” Danny made a mental note to Google it.

“It means it’s good quality.” Steve dolloped a spoonful into the warming milk, and then scooped out another spoonful, to suck happily on the spoon, effectively ending the conversation. One handed, Steve poured in a generous measure of whisky. It seemed a waste of good quality whisky, but Danny would try most things once.

Danny leaned back against the counter and watched the entertainment.

~*~

Hot toddies were awesome.

Danny snuggled down on his pillow flexing his toes happily under the quilt.

“I think that I’ve found my new favourite night time drink, Steve,” he announced.

“Huh?” Steve rolled over onto his side.

“Shut up,” Danny said fondly. In the night’s darkness and heavy lidded with encroaching sleep, Steve was not listening. Danny palmed Steve’s forehead, and Steve let it happen.

“You’re still warm.”

Steve snuffled.

“Go to sleep, Steven.”

“I was thinkin’,” Steve mumbled, “all hands on deck tomorrow. Search the House. Find all the films.”

“Sure, Steve.” Danny stroked the tufty curls off Steve’s forehead.

“You and me would be one team.”

“Of course.”
“Chin and Mar-ry.”

“Lucky Chin.”

“Kono and Toast. It’s Sunday so Mamo will come for Chore Wrangling. If Auntie Maru comes that’s another—”

Steve fell asleep in the middle of his diabolical machinations, but ninety percent of the plan was in place.

“Sounds like a plan, Steve.” Danny snuggled down, curving into Steve’s angles. His tummy was happy, he was comfortable; hot toddies were awesome.

Steve nuzzled into Danny’s collar bone, humming contentedly. Danny rested his cheek against the crown of Steve’s head. Yawning, Danny knew that now he could and would sleep.

“Tryptophan,” Steve sleep-mumbled.

“Try-tophan? Some sort of secret code word, Babe?” Danny asked, as his own eyes slid shut.

“Mmmmmm.”

There were no answers from the goofy side of their partnership.

And Danny was asleep.

~*~

#80#

The beep, beep, beep of an annoying alarm penetrated Danny’s consciousness. Blearily, he cracked open an eye, trying to take stock as he lolled in that confusing moment between sleeping comfort and the waking world.

The sound was muffled.

Scrubbing at his face, Danny levered up on one elbow. Steve slept half on his stomach. Only the span of his narrow shoulders were visible under the covers and pillows. He had nested in deeply into his pillows: tucking a pile along on his left side; head stuffed under another pillow, as he hugged yet another pillow. He was deeply asleep, judging by the muffled, raspy mouth breathing.

The beeping continued. It was Steve’s wristwatch on the bedside table announcing some event. Danny guessed it was time for another round of antibiotics.

“Yo, Steve?” he tried, knowing the pillow fort and lack of aids meant that that wasn’t going to work.

Shifting back a fraction so he wouldn’t be hit by any flailing, Danny reached out and, with the tips of his fingers, pulled the pillow off Steve’s head. It was tempting to lob it at him, but Danny refrained.

The movement worked. Steve rolled onto his back and regarded him through a veil of long eyelashes.

“Huh?”

“You awake?” Danny said carefully.
Steve studied him suspiciously. Danny waggled his fingers and smiled.

Steve rolled his eyes. “Wh-t?”

“Ha.” Danny slid right over the top of him, needing to introduce Steve to the entire length of his body so that he could reach the heavy wristwatch and the small bottle of antibiotic drops on the other side of the bed. It was under one of Mamo’s thick files -- hence the muffling. They probably had to sort out a better alarm for Steve.

“What are you doing?” Steve protested, but didn’t move a muscle as Danny wriggled back over him.

Danny dropped back beside him, and presented the wristwatch in front of his nose. Cross-eyed, Steve contemplated, and stayed very still.

“Seven a.m., Steve. You took your meds at seven last night. I’m guessing, it is time for your next dose?”

“Yeah--” Around a sudden yawn, Steve nodded. “Ear drops, yeah. Four times a day. Seven hundred. Fourteen hundred and nineteen hundred. And before bed.”

He looked loathe to move -- cocooned in his nest, blankets tucked around his neck.

“Come on, child, roll over.” Danny slid in, and pushed. Obediently, Steve rolled onto his side, back to Danny, bad ear uppermost.

Infinitely gentle, Danny smoothed back the curls behind Steve’s ear. The scarlet redness had faded to a dull pink. The skin was no longer puffy; twenty four hours and the antibiotics were doing their job. Carefully, Danny squeezed three drops into the vulnerable well of Steve’s ear.

Steve shivered down the length of his spine.

“Hey, you’re okay,” Danny soothed. Although he doubted Steve could make out anything other than tone. Flipping the cap shut with his thumb, Danny set the vial on the headboard above him and then slid his hand over Steve’s jaw following the grain. Twenty four hours without shaving, and Steve’s beard was coming in dark and heavy. Steve sighed under his stroking.

“Mmmm?”

“Go back to sleep, Steve.”

Danny settled his weight into Steve, spooning his body. He wasn’t adverse to another hour or so of sleep; he had had a couple of disturbed nights. Steve had barely emerged from sleep; he was unlikely to wake all the way up. Danny much preferred being the big spoon. The disparity in their heights was really down to Steve’s giraffe legs. Their torsos were of similar lengths but somewhat different breadths; Danny was slightly wider and more muscular (he smiled). The result was that Danny could be the big spoon. He slid his hand over Steve’s ribs, under the soft cotton of his t-shirt, splaying his hand over Steve’s heart, gently rubbing. Steve arched slowly and leisurely, like a cat, and then settled with a slow exhale of breath.

~*~

It was a French Toast kind of day. It was also a Sunday tradition in the Williams’ family household back in New Jersey. Danny even made it the weird way that Steve liked it, with a twist of salt and pepper instead of sugar and cinnamon, and lashings of maple syrup.
“Wakey. Wakey,” Danny carolled loudly as he turned up the spiral staircase.

Danny had slept for another hour or so, until pins and needles in his trapped arm had woken him up. The perils of partnership. He was also very, very comfortable nestled into the long flanks of Steve’s body.

Danny had taken himself off for a long hot shower before he had awoken the soundly sleeping Steve.

“Yo, babe?” Danny thumped the mattress with his knee, jiggling it.

And then he waited for the aroma of coffee and fried eggs to permeate a sleeping Steve’s consciousness. There was a perceptible shift, a slow long stretch, and Steve pushed into a sitting position rubbing his sleepy face.

“Morning, Steve.”

“Danny? I was sleeping like a log.”

“Breakfast,” Danny said unnecessarily, lifting the tray high. “I made French Toast.”

“French Toast?” Steve sniffed appreciatively.

“I even brought the ketchup.”

Steve smacked his lips. “I--” he looked about.

“What are you after?” Danny set the tray on Steve’s lap, letting him support it.

Danny grabbed Steve’s breakfast antibiotics from the bedside table, thinking that was what he was hunting. He dropped them on the tray, before clambering over and retaking his position at Steve’s side.

“What time is it, Danny? I have to put the ear drops in at seven hundred.”

“We did that already.” Danny dug out Steve’s heavy watch from the folds of the quilt, and passed it over.

Steve cocked his head to the side, clearly questioning.

“What? Really? I don’t remember,” he said, glancing left and right.

Okay, that was kind of cute, but yeah, it was probably pretty weird to sleepwalk your way through getting a dose of antibiotics.

“Yeah,” Danny said easily, and nodded, since Steve still wasn’t reaching for his hearing aids. “How are you feeling?”

“Hmm?” Steve queried.

“Ear?”

Steve shifted the tray off his lap, setting it between them. Grabbing pillows from the pile strewn about, he set them at his back. As he fought, Danny took the tray onto his own lap. He had made damn fine coffee and French Toast and he wasn’t letting breakfast end up all over the bed. Positioned to his satisfaction, Steve faced Danny.
“What?”

“Ear?”

Steve snagged a slice of toast off the tray. “Doesn’t hurt.”

“Good.” Danny started on his own -- thankfully sweet -- French Toast. “So we gonna search?”

“Huh?”

Danny mentally revised the question, but then decided to move onto a different topic.

“Are you going to put your aids in today?” Danny cupped his ear and then pointed at Steve.

“Maybe. Left one.”

Even though he had previously said that listening with one aid in his poorer ear was disconcerting.

“It never occurred to me that hearing aids could hurt,” Danny said.

“I don’t think it helps if you’ve got an ear infection.” Steve shrugged. “They’re normally okay; they’re moulded for me. I guess that it’s a little like contact lenses. It takes time to get used to them.”

“How much do they help?” Danny asked curiously, because Steve seemed to manage reasonably well without them.

“A lot,” Steve summarised.

Danny raised an eyebrow. He hadn’t asked before, but he was interested, and not out of prurient or intrusive interest but to better understand. The question was, would Steve volunteer any insight?

“Okay,” Steve said, and drank from his coffee mug.

“Okay?” Danny prodded.

“There’s some stuff that they can’t help with. But they modulate some frequencies into a range that I can hear, add clarity, make it easier to fill in the blanks.” Steve reached out and tapped Danny’s shoulder. “There’s an optimal distance. They’re largely ornamental in crowded or noisy situations.”

Danny had noted previously that Steve was better one-on-one.

“That’s not really fair,” Steve revised. “There’s programmes for noisy situations like a bar or a restaurant. I can filter, focus, and attenuate sounds with the control. They’re top of the range ITEs, but you know, they’re not perfect.”

“Perfect?”

“It helps that mostly, you,” Steve continued uncharacteristically open, “make a point of speaking clearly and remember to face me. You’re kind of a visual talker.”


Steve screwed up his nose, and offered, “You gesture. You emphasise. Your whole body talks. Toast’s moustache makes things difficult. Mary mumbles in the back of her throat. Kono talks really fast and uses a lot of dialect words. Chin’s like you without the gesticulation.”
“Why don’t you say something?”

“I do if it’s important. People relax, though.” Steve looked a little furtive. “And sometimes I just stop listening.”

“We all do that, Babe.” Danny smiled fondly.

Steve munched on another mouthful of toast before volunteering.

“It’s a little like cramming for an exam. Or being in a really intense lecture, you concentrate, and concentrate—”

“An’ you gotta take a break?” Danny said around his own toast.

“What?”

He swallowed. “And you need a break?”

“Exactly.” Steve regarded him. “Have you not noticed that the radio is never on, and no one plays music around the House unless they’re in their studios?”

“Uhm… yes. No?”

“That’s for me, because it makes it more difficult to hear what’s going on if there is extraneous noise.”

“That’s amazing. Conscientious. Thoughtful. Oh, perhaps it’s… family.”

“Yes. They—” Steve lapsed into silence. “Yeah, ‘ohana.”

“You big fat goof,” Danny said.

“Fat?”

“That’s the part you bumped on, Goofy?”

“Patently, it’s untrue,” Steve said, with an edge of humour.

“True. You want to try a piece of French Toast with maple syrup?” Danny speared a forkful of toast and offered it to Steve.

Steve looked at it, before leaning forward and delicately lipping the mouthful off Danny’s fork.

“It’s too sweet,” Steve said. He sniffed and brushed at his nose.

“I dunno how you can put ketchup on French Toast. It’s a crime.”

“Different strokes, for different folks.” Steve shrugged.

~*~

The kitchen table held an array of supplies: pens; notepads, and small sticky round labels. The inhabitants of the House had responded to Steve’s Morse Code SOS via the flickering light system.

“So, teams: Kono and Toast; Chin and Mary; Danny and me,” Steve said.

“What?” Mary asked, arms crossed over her chest. “You’re not the boss of me.”
“It’s teamwork. We need to find--”

“I thought that we had done this already,” Mary protested. “You know, I seem to recall hunting through Grandmother’s stuff.”

“That was not a structured search. We’re going to break into teams of two, methodically search our assigned rooms for photographic films. The labels are for the canisters and cartridges that you find. Note where you found the film and what it was associated with.”

“Why?” Mary asked.

Steve carefully answered. “It is possible that other items may be of interest.”

“I think that I want to partner with Toast. No offense, Chin.”

“None taken.” Chin was equanimity personified.

“I’m cool.” Toast shrugged and grabbed a notepad, purple labels and pen.


Chin only smiled and selected the yellow labels with a pen and notebook, leaving the blue labels for Danny and Steve.

“So,” Mary said, “what’s our assignment, Lieutenant Commander Steve?”

Steve stared at her, stoically. “You and Toast look over the two and a half reception rooms on the left. Chin, Kono, right hand reception rooms. Danny and I will take the museum.”

“Why?” Mary asked. “We’ve practically done Grandmother’s stuff. And there’s hardly anything in the fountain room.”

“I figure you’ll get bored and move on,” Steve snapped. “And Toast has to go into the University at 15:00 to monitor his telescope programme. So, yeah, short day for you.”

“Children,” Danny chastised. They both looked at him. “Mamo will be around, I guess, about five-ish, Mary can help him. And we will be taking breaks.”

“Why just those rooms? There’s the main office? There’s your office,” Mary said. “What about the fuckin’ catacombs?”

“Good point.” Steve lifted his chin. “They’re on the list. I don’t expect the search to be finished today. There’s a logical order, where items are mainly stored. At one point we will also search the Hall.”

“It might be sensible to quickly look at the Hall, before the students start tomorrow,” Chin said.

“Tomorrow?” Steve echoed. “I thought that they were coming next week?”

“Addison is coming with two of his students from the advanced class. They’re eager to go, especially with the part-scholarship. Addison’s making them foremen, fore-people.”

“Okay,” Steve pondered. “Danny and I will cover the Hall, before we head up to the museum.” He checked his watch. “Lunch at 13:00.”

Danny saw him bite down on the word: dismissed.
The redolent smell of smoke was still present. It was a travesty. The tapestry hangings had been removed. Danny didn’t know what had happened to them, or if they could have been repaired. He looked at the space where the Legend of Seolh had hung.

Odum Construction had inserted metal framework in the walls bracing the supporting beams that took some of the weight of the roof and Steve’s eyrie above. The repairs were visible in the skeleton of the woodwork. A new panel façade of dark mahogany-like wood needed to be constructed. MacDonald and his crew were emergency guys. The floor to ceiling windows and frames had been replaced, but the frames still needed to be stained to match the rest of the Hall fixtures. The double doors into the gardens were simply boarded up, with a smaller, inset lockable door. Danny couldn’t remember what the doors had looked like, but guessed that they were ornate and difficult to replace.

“Is there going to be anything here?” Danny asked.

“That’s why it was low down on the list. But--” Steve pointed towards the back of the Hall, “there’s a cloakroom and the bar-kitchen.”

“Bar-kitchen?” Danny marvelled. “Do you have any idea where you live?”

Steve regarded him down his long nose. “Seolh.”

“Why have a bar-kitchen?” Danny demanded.

“It’s a Hall, Danny. They had dances back in the day. It was a society thing. Ball room dances. Check out the photos.” He scratched the side of his head. “I wonder, when it’s repaired….”

“You thinking a charity ball or something?” Danny asked, reading his mind.

“Yeah. Maybe. The Navy SEAL Foundation is a respected charity. It would also be good for the college. Show off the kids’ work.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Danny pushed opened the recessed door into the service area of the Hall.

There were rank and file of utilitarian fridges and freezers, evidently offline, with their doors standing open. A central large table was protected by a large dust cloth. There were a bunch of cupboards. Randomly, Danny opened one. It was filled with fine china plates. The cupboard beside it held crystal decanters and tarnished silver tureens.

“Where’s the table?”

“Excuse me?” Steve cocked his head to the side.

“The long table for the massive dinner parties in the Hall?”

Steve pressed the pads of his fingers against his mouth and pondered. “I honestly don’t know. Workshops? I’ll ask Mamo. I guess, it’s a sectioned table? How many plates are there?”

“I think--” Danny ran his finger over the stack, “--a setting for over forty people! It’s got gold leaf edges.”

“I wonder if that’s sanitary?” Steve peered over his shoulder.

“I think some people take gold as a supplement?”
“They’re probably painted with lead paint.” Steve randomly pulled open a drawer above Danny’s head. “Cutlery.”

“This is going to take forever.” Danny sighed.

~*_~

The lights flickered: lunch.

“Food!” Danny raised his arms heavenward in jubilation. “Food.”

They had only been searching for a couple of hours, but he was bored with a capital B. The amount of shit stored in Seolh defied imagination. It was time for a break. Whether Steve liked it or not, he was ill -- albeit on a recovering trajectory -- but if the obstreperous idiot had spent a day in bed, he would have felt better.

~*_~

Steve dragged at Danny’s heels, a silent, looming figure as they headed up to the museum office after a quick lunch of ham and cheese sandwiches, and salad. A single film cartridge had been unearthed by Team Kalakaua-Kelly. Team Toast-Mary were now determined to find one. Steve was actually quite adept at the manipulation of his teams to ensure the best possible outcome.

“1988, Babe,” Danny said deliberately vague, as he pressed against the recessed lock to open the door from Steve’s living room to the office.

“Hmmm?” Steve tilted his head.

“You wanna check out Mamo’s folder of stuff?” Danny jerked his thumb in the direction of Steve’s bedroom.

“We’re searching today,” Steve said dogmatically.

“It’s not the biggest office in the world. Go check on 1988, figure out what’s special about that date.”

Steve contemplated him. “Say what you mean, Danny.”

“Go lay down, Steve. Have an afternoon siesta. Twenty minutes and then you’ll feel a hundred percent better.”

“I’m not-- We’re a team.”

“I get that, doofus.” Danny sighed, fondly. He reached up, curling his hand around the nape of Steve’s neck, and pulled him down. Steve’s lips were a little dry, Danny moistened them. The thrum of fondness warmed Danny’s guts. He liked kissing, the shiver, the feeling of closeness. Bristles rubbed against his clean shaven cheeks. Steve’s new beard added some interesting sensations to the mix. A large hand slid around the small of Danny’s back, and pulled him in possessively.

“Uhm, Danny,” Steve mouthed against his jaw.

“Oh, okay, Babe.” Danny squeezed him tightly. “Listen to me.”

Steve leaned back slightly in the circle of his arms, so that he could see him straight on.

“Yes, Danny,” he said politely.
“Go lay down, read some files, have a nap, and when you wake up I’ll give you a blow job.”

Steve blinked in surprise, and then bit his bottom lip to contain a crazy smile. His eyes brightened, and not with fever.

“A supercalifragilisticexpialidocious blow job,” Danny emphasised.

“Did you just say what I thought you said?”

Danny slid his hand down Steve’s ass and pinched. “You bet your ass I did.”

“A supercalifragilisticexpialidocious blow job?” Steve echoed.

“It will make your toes curl.” Danny kissed and released, a bit like fishing -- he would recapture Steve later. “Go on then.”

Kissing and grinning made for an interesting mash. Steve leaned over and smacked a slobbery kiss on Danny’s cheek.

“Deal,” Steve said.

Danny slapped Steve’s ass as he tottered off to follow orders. Danny wished that he had his camera to capture Steve’s astounded expression.

~*~

“Anticipation, anticipation. Is making me late. Is keeping me waiting,” Danny sang under his breath as he tucked the last box on the shelf by the door back into position. He had poked his head into the amazingness that was the actual museum, and figured searching it would be last on the list, since everything that was in there was supposedly catalogued. A slow, warm coil of arousal egged him on. He had been searching for easily over an hour.

“And I tell you how easy it feels to be with you. And how right your arms feel around me.” Danny shimmied to the left, to the rank of bookshelves that masked the secret door.

Danny balanced on his tiptoes and pulled down a box from the top shelf and settled it on the floor.

“I can see clearly now the rain is gone,” he hummed under his breath. “I can see all obstacles in my way.”

The box was filled with paperwork -- old envelopes. Bank statements from decades past. They were Audrey McGarrett’s personal accounts. A spindly hand had written the date of each statement on the envelope. Nosey, Danny opened one and the figures even in the 1960s made him boggle. He slid the envelope back into the pile, and bench-pressed the box into its position. Selecting the next one along, he found it contained books and a screw-topped jar filled with stones, nuts and bolts, and knickknacks. Danny rattled the jar and an old, ornate copper green filigree brooch slid to the top of the bits as the smaller odds and ends resituated beneath.

“Gone all the dark clouds that made me blind. It’s gonna be a bright, bright, bright, sun shiny day.”

The brooch looked too fine to be squirreled away in a jar of dross. Unscrewing it, he pulled out the piece of jewellery. The McGarretts were hoarders, although Steve’s apartment was an empty, echoing, ode to solitude, or loneliness. Danny held the brooch up against the fluorescent ceiling light. The central stone was flecked and marred, but not in a bad way; it looked as if a nebula was contained within.
Man, searching Seolh was a recipe for distraction.

Setting the brooch on the office table, he put the box back. The next box held a GI Joe lying in state, arms actually folded across his chest, with his tools and equipment arranged around him.

“Can you feel the love tonight? It is where we are. It's enough for this wide-eyed wanderer. That we got this far,” Danny continued his medley of meandering music. “There's a calm surrender to the something – something. When the heat of a rolling wind can be turned away. An enchanted moment, and it sees me through. It's enough for this restless warrior just to be with you.”

Carefully, Danny returned the GI Joe to his rest. His warrior was probably getting restless. He gagged merrily at the notion.

Time for fun, he thought, rubbing his hands together.

With another little shimmy, this time through the concealed entry into Steve’s apartment, Danny left his search part-way done. He took the time to fire off a text to Chin, telling him that he and Steve were having a little break. First checking that the front door was locked, he stood a moment, egging the anticipation a little further. Premeditated fun was as good in its own way as spontaneous fun.

Conscientiously, he ducked into the bathroom, and washed up.

“I’m a-coming,” he yelled up the stairs.

Steve was sprawled in his nest of pillows and blankets. He had shucked off his cargos, and dozed in his boxers and t-shirt. A file was tipped off to the side, pages spread over Danny’s side of the bed. Relaxed and open, he looked edible. The line of his quiescent cock curled over towards his left hip, shrouded with thin cotton.

Danny shimmied across the hardwood floor with a little bit of a reverse moonwalk. Leaning over the bed, he set his hand over the knobbles and tendons of Steve’s bony foot and waited. Steve stirred. He scrunched up a fraction and then relaxed.

“Hey,” Danny said quietly. Straightening, he slowly drew the tongue of his leather belt through the buckle. “How are you feeling?”

Steve stretched lackadaisically, even as he watched Danny through hooded eyes.

“Fine,” he drawled.

Danny dropped his trousers to the floor and, kneeling on the edge of the bed, started a slow, deliberate crawl towards Steve.

“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” Steve sang, badly, under his breath.

Danny had to laugh. “Oh, Babe, you sing like Grace.”

Steve bristled, mock-affronted. Danny slid his hands up Steve’s shins. As Danny pushed gently at his knees, Steve obediently sprawled a little bit more open. His cock was already starting to rise.

“Shush,” Danny soothed. He stroked the vulnerable skin on the inside of Steve’s thighs. “Relax. Let’s take our time.”

“I-- Uhm,” Steve swallowed.

“Focus.” Danny knelt back on his heels, and twisted the top button of his shirt free. Deliberately, he
exhaled, slowly unbuttoning each button with care, and then inhaled. Steve matched his breathing. “I--” Steve pushed up on an elbow.

“No. My turn.” Danny chucked his shirt to the floor. Time to up the ante, show Steve the pleasure of an expert blow job -- not that they hadn’t been enjoying the mutual handjobs and humping each other.

Danny tip-toed his fingers over Steve’s lightly haired skin, edging towards his goal with intent. There was a line of tan. He hadn’t thought that Steve had a tan, but the skin displayed as he stroked under the thin cotton boxers was the palest of pale white. There was a lot of Celtic colouring in Steve’s complexion. He hadn’t realised before, until they were illuminated in Steve’s sunlit fishbowl with all the curtains drawn back.

“Danny?” Steve asked.

Danny dismissed the curtains.

“The trick with a blow job is gentle.” Danny scraped his fingernails over Steve’s cotton covered cock. It twitched, the head peeking over the waistband. It was still lax but rising. Danny twisted his fingers in the cotton waistband, coralling the cock. “Now. Now. Count to ten. In French.”

“What? You’re not serious?”

Danny stared him down, accepting no refusal. “Count to ten in French.”

“Une.”

“Backwards.”

“Dix. Nuef… uhm.”

Danny curled his fingers over the cotton fabric.

“Huit.”

Gently, he blew a puff of air over the tip. A bead of liquid pearled in the slit.

“Sept,” Steve said, voice a little high.

Danny leaned over Steve’s hips and kissed the wrinkled skin. Steve was a grower and actually also a bit of a shower. He extended beyond the confines of his shorts as his cock engorged.

“God, Danny.”

“French, Babe.”

“Sex.” Steve chuckled.

Danny eyed him over the dips and wells of his stomach and abs.

“Six,” Steve corrected.

He can be taught, Danny acknowledged, and tenderly nipped at Steve’s foreskin, goading it to draw back. It stretched under his touch, revealing the mushroom head.
“Jesus,” Steve blasphemed. He fisted the sheets almost tearing at them. “Cinq.”

Danny mouthed the head, trusting Steve to obey, because you know, he was trained to obey. Rising up on his knees, freeing his fingers from the waistband and drawing the baggy shorts down, he followed Steve’s engorged, erect cock as it rose proud.

“Cinq. Danny, Danny, can I-- can I-- can I move?!!”

Danny sucked the head, drawing his tongue over the delicate slit. Steve arched.

“Qu—quatre,” Steve managed.

As he kissed Steve’s cock, Danny smoothed ever decreasing circles over the inside of Steve’s thighs, moving towards the crease of his pelvis. Breathing through his nose, Danny delved down Steve’s length.

Steve’s hips jerked, “Trois.”

Danny loved doing this, he liked the smell, he liked the taste and he loved the warm skin. Cupping, Steve’s tight balls, he knew that release was imminent.

“Uhm… merde! Deux!”

Danny hummed.

“One!” Steve grated, and came.

~*~

#81#

“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. Even though the sound of it is something quite atrocious,” Steve mumbled under his breath as he dozed.

Danny lazed in post-coital bliss, even if he had had to take his own matters in hand. Steve was a hilarious puddle of relaxation singing to himself.

It was nice to lie in the centre of a perfect Sunday afternoon. The heavy warmth was lulling him into a nice nap.

Steve rolled onto his side and smiled dopily.

“On a scale of one to ten?” Danny asked.

Steve pursed his lips out, like a duck. “Hmmm, gotta give you--”

Danny rolled his eyes, because if he didn’t get a ten, there was going to be a lot of tickling in Steve’s future.

“A ten. Definitely a ten,” Steve said, satisfied.

Danny laughed, because Steve was indeed hilarious. As he chortled, Steve flipped around, so his feet were in his pillow nest. His goal was Danny’s boxers.

“Nothing’s going to happen down there,” Danny pointed out, as Steve drew his flaccid cock out of his damp boxers.
Steve pouted. “But I wanted to -- I dunno--”

“Return the favour?” Danny folded his hands behind his head and settled down to watch. “Knock yourself out, but I’m not sixteen.”

A little bit of exploration could be fun. Steve was fireworks and incendiary devices. They hadn’t properly explored each other. There were a lot of lessons for Steve to learn. Steve chanced a lick, and flashed a glance up at Danny, checking. His nose was wrinkled. It was ridiculous, but the six foot goof was actually cute.

“I thought that it would taste like mine?” Steve wondered out loud.

“I read it depends on what you eat. You taste your come a lot?”

“I was curious. It was an experiment,” Steve said absently, more focused on exploring Danny’s cock. And Danny wasn’t complaining; each touch sent tiny frissons along his nerves. Steve was gentle, which was needed, because Danny was still in that sensitive post-coital phase. You never know, there might be some bigger sparks on the agenda.

He was rising to the occasion, but a little like the Leaning Tower of Collapsed Pisa. Experimentally, Steve closed his lips over the head and sucked. Danny liked it. Danny enjoyed it. But in a distant, relaxed sort of way. Danny stretched his back, happily. Every time they played, it was apparent that Steve had not explored his inherent gayness, as Mary put it, in that he hadn’t experimented with friends or fuck-buddies.

It was kind of sad that he had felt so vulnerable and reluctant to be exposed. Sad, but understandable.

“Teeth are not your friend,” Danny advised.

Mouth still occupied, Steve managed to crane his head to look at Danny. What a sight, Danny thought.

“No teeth,” Danny stated clearly.

Steve added a little bit of tongue, and Danny’s toes curled. Abruptly, Steve pulled off, and Danny mewed.

“What’s that?” Steve peered at the underside of Danny’s cock.

“If you don’t know, I’m not going to tell you,” Danny said, singsong, even though he thought he knew what had gathered Steve’s interest.

Danny lifted his hips up helpfully, as Steve wrestled his boxers down. Steve got in tight, resting his head on Danny’s thighs, bristly chin almost brushing Danny’s balls. He wiggled his little finger in the dip on the underside of Danny’s cock, just under the head. That really made Danny’s toes curl.

“I used to have a piercing,” Danny explained.

Steve came up, jack-in-the-box. “What?”

“I had a Prince Albert.”

“No way!” Steve dipped back down, and marvelled at Danny’s magnificent cock. Danny couldn’t help himself with his own internal monologue at times. “Why did you take it out?”

“Rachel decided that she didn’t like it. Back when we were trying counselling and stuff, it was one
of our give and takes.”

“Is it? I mean, can you? Hmmm?” Steve couldn’t phrase the question.

“Put my barbell back in? It’s pretty closed up, I think. It’s been well over a year. I’d probably have to get it re-pierced.”

“I’ve got a gift token for Castle’s Tattoos,” Steve offered brightly.

“Oh, it’s something that you like, isn’t it,” Danny noted, grinning. Steve did actually have a closed up ear piercing that was large enough to have held a plug rather than a discrete ring. Danny guessed that he had had to remove it when he had joined the Navy.

Steve bit his bottom lip; it did nothing to contain his grin.

“Yeah, maybe. It can take a month or so to heal.” Danny was game. He had got a lot of pleasure out of his piercing, and so had Rachel, even if she didn’t want to admit to the fact. It kind of went without saying -- and Danny wasn’t going to go there apart from stopping any burgeoning plans in their tracks -- that Steve, with his vulnerability to infections, was not going to be getting any piercings.

“That would mean no…” Steve ventured.

“No sex,” Danny filled in for him. “Depends on how sore it is, but we could be creative. There’s other ways to have fun, as you know.”

In all honesty, they would probably be doing what they had been doing so far, which was still a lot of fun.

“We’d definitely need to get some condoms and dental dams,” Danny continued. “We should at any rate.”

Adorably, Steve blushed.

“Babe.” Danny pushed up on his elbows. “There are a few things that we’re probably gonna be doing at some point that need condoms.”

Steve sat up, and crossed his long legs. “I’m clean. Actually, shouldn’t we have had this conversation before?” He glanced down at his cock nestled in damp curls.

“Probably, but I know I’m clean. I got myself tested after I realised that Rachel had been cheating on me with Stan. And I know you wouldn’t have gone there if you weren’t clean.” Danny didn’t say that despite being God’s Gift to Mankind, Steve was startlingly naïve at the sex stuff. He had probably just got by on his good looks.

“Why do we need condoms, then?” Steve asked, proving Danny’s point.

“Anal sex.”

“Oh,” Steve looked furtive, and then dared to ask the question, “Why? We’re clean.”

“It’s not just about STDs.” Danny hadn’t limited his Googling to learning Sign Language. He had also explored what happened if you had your spleen removed. “Cause there’s still a chance of infections. UTIs. Urinary Tract Infections, for one. Condoms are a sensible precaution.”

“Oh, okay.” Steve accepted that with a phlegmatic shrug.
“Come here.” Danny crooked a finger. Obediently, Steve unfolded his long legs and crawled over Danny.

~*~

“Okay, Steve, I’m definitely going to move my shampoo and conditioner in here. And maybe my shower gel that doesn’t give me goosebumps.”

“What?” Steve turned from the vanity unit where he was applying a strip of adhesive tape to the protective dressing covering the scrapes on his arm.

“I want my shampoo and conditioner.”

“Okay. Sure. You want me to go and get it from your studio?” Steve glanced down the length of his nude body. He probably would be game, Danny thought.

“No, but I’m gonna move some of my toiletries into your space shower.”

“Why don’t you just move--”

“Ah, ah, ah.” Danny waggled his finger. “We’re not there yet, Babe.”

Steve studied him. “Okay,” he said surprisingly, because it wasn’t like they didn’t live in the same House. “Camel’s nose.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“I might have some conditioner.” Steve rubbed at his freshly shaven jaw. “Samples from hotels.”

He rooted through the drawers, presenting his dimpled butt for Danny’s delectation.

“Here.” He turned and flipped the sample across the length of the bathroom like a Frisbee. His aim was wickedly accurate.

“Thanks.”

“I’ll get your shirt and pants from the bedroom.” Steve wandered away.

My nudist, Danny thought fondly, as he applied his teeth to the slippery sample.

The shriek came as a complete surprise. Danny was out of the shower and skidding across the tiled floor before he registered that Steve in no way would ever shriek.

Mary stood opposite Steve, hands over her eyes. “It burns. It burns. My God, you should never see your brother naked.”

“You shouldn’t let yourself into a private apartment!” Danny shouted. “How the fuck do you keep getting in here? I know I locked the door.”

Surprised, Mary dropped her hands. “Danny. Wow.”

Danny covered his cock with his hands. Holy shit. Water puddled at his feet. He couldn’t believe that she had let herself into the apartment again.

“When did that happen?” Steve asked. He, Danny noted, did not shield his jewels from family view.
“How the fuck do you get in here?” Danny repeated.

But Mary wasn’t listening to him; she was focused on her brother. A little too focussed; Danny’s sisters had never looked at him like that. What the Hell was she staring at?

“Those scars are horrible,” Mary said, aghast.

Steve jerked.

“Not horrible.” Mary waved her hands, like she was trying to scrub the words out of existence. “Not horrible to look at. To have. Steve!”

“Jesus, Mare, what part of injured and medically retired, didn’t you get? IEDs and people’s bodies don’t mix well.” Steve stalked past her, back ramrod straight, to his dressing room.

Mary watched him go, momentarily silenced, before shooting a glance at Danny, and stopping to regard him. He met her new gaze with a raised eyebrow.

“Danny.” Mary contemplated him with a frankly appreciative gleam in her eyes. “You’re really hairy. Mmmm.”

“I don’t share, Mare. Not now or ever,” Steve hollered from the dressing room. He couldn’t have heard her -- it had to be the pure knowing of your baby sister’s proclivities.

“How did you get in here? I thought -- I know Chin spoke to you.” Danny set his hands on his hips. Fuck it, if she looked her fill, it wasn’t like she could ever touch. “Do you just like to aggravate people?”

Steve came back wearing only a pair of shorts, the crisscross of scars prominently on display.

“She’s getting in through the museum office, Danny.”

“Oh,” Danny said. Man -- that had been really slow of him. He thought that she had her own key or had pick-pocketed Chin’s key.

“The question is why?” Danny wondered.

“Yeah, right, Mare. Stop with the deflecting. What are you really after?” Steve said.

“What do you mean?” she said defensively, and, boy, Steve had called that right. She glanced at Steve and then to Danny. “I was curious, you know. Danny and Chin are being really protective of you, Steve.”

That had a hint of truth to it. But, Danny thought, it wasn’t the whole story.

“Man, you’ve never known where the boundaries are, have you.” Steve sighed.

“You never tell me anything!”

“Because I don’t like my personal business being shared with all your girlfriends and boyfriends. You wouldn’t know discreet if it limboed up to you wearing a lei.” Steve breathed heavily, then spat, “How many of your friends are you going to laugh with as you tell them about this fiasco? ‘I saw my brother’s boyfriend’s cock.’”
“That’s not fair. You’re just assuming the sort of stuff that I did when I was a teenager is going to be repeated. I’m an adult.”

“You’ve just broke into my apartment,” Steve said, “and you can’t give me the truth. Doesn’t sound very adult to me. What’s the truth, Mare?”

“I wanted to talk to you without Danny,” Mary snapped. “He’s always with you.”

That rocked Danny back. It was unfounded and founded.

“Anything that you can say to me, you can say in front of Danny.”

“Well, I don’t want to.” She turned on her heel and stomped off.

The vacuum that she left was cold and empty.

“You should talk to her, Babe,” Danny finally said.

Steve absorbed that. “I don’t want to,” he said with all the sullenness of a five year old.

Jesus, siblings.

“Might be important,” Danny pointed out.

“I’m sure it is, to Mare,” Steve said dismissively.

“Steve,” Danny said chidingly, his authority not undermined by the fact that he was naked, dripping water all over the floor. “Think about it.”

Steve froze, thinking so hard that Danny expected to see smoke coming out of his ears. It was kind of flattering that he had responded so unquestioningly to Danny’s suggestion.

“I suppose I better go after her,” he finally said.

“You think?”

“You’re so,” Steve glowered, “reasonable.”

“It’s not reasonable, it’s sensible,” Danny hollered at Steve’s retreating back.

~*~

Did he monopolise Steve’s time? Danny wondered. As soon as he formulated the thought, he knew that he didn’t; or, more accurately, he knew that he didn’t dominate Steve’s time. They enjoyed each others’ company, so they were together a lot.

Closing the kitchen door, he checked the night’s dinner schedule, because he thought that it might be Steve’s turn. Chore Wrangling last Sunday hadn’t factored Steve’s ear infection into the mix. And, yes, Steve’s name was on the board. The writing wasn’t Chin’s, and Danny guessed that Kono or someone else had rubbed Steve’s name out planning to take over the duty, but then had realised that would have aggravated Steve.

“Danny--” Steve pushed open the door forcing Danny back, “--Mary’s left.”

“Er? For good?” Danny blurted.
“No.” Steve shook his head sharply. “Her bags are in the blue studio. Chin saw her leaving with Trish and Toast.”

“She’s not a prisoner, Steve.”

“Yeah, but she doesn’t have a signalling device or a GPS. I never thought.” Steve pulled out his phone and ITE remote.

“She’s probably going to be okay,” Danny hedged. What could happen? He winced, because why not just tempt fate.

“Toast,” Steve said loudly into his phone, holding it so Danny could see the screen, “is Mary with you?”

“Uhm,” Toast said, which translated as ‘hum’ on Steve’s phone display. “I… uhm… you know. Mary!”

Toast was possibly one of the most transparent people that Danny had ever met, after Steve, Danny thought. And that was really transparent.

“Toast, where is Mary?” Steve asked forthrightly into that vacillation. “Toast!”

“I dropped her off downtown,” Toast blurted.

“Whereabouts downtown?” Steve said.

“Waterfront.”

Steve rolled his eyes at Danny. “Where specifically?”

Toast went silent and Steve’s exasperation morphed into glowering.


“I dunno, man. I dunno where exactly,” Toast admitted. “She jumped out at the lights near the Aloha Tower. She said she wanted a drink.”

“It’s only three o’clock in the afternoon,” Steve protested.


“I don’t believe it.” Steve slapped his phone off, and rammed it in a side pocket of his cargoes.

“Look, Steve—” Danny began.

“Meet me round front with my truck.” Steve grabbed the keys out of the woven bowl on the top of the fridge and tossed them to Danny.

“Fine.” Danny snatched them out of the air. “And where are we going?”

Steve was already out the kitchen door. Danny looked heavenward, didn’t find any answers, so he trotted after Steve, who was already jogging half-way down the winding path to the main gates. Shaking his head, Danny twisted right to head to the truck parked beside the pottery workshop.

Danny got into the truck. He slipped easily into the seat; there was no need to change seat position and mirrors since he had been the designated driver for the past couple of days. Perhaps, he could do
most of the driving? Driving while deaf had to be a pain in the ass. Had Steve taken a test or something? Danny didn’t know.

“Maybe,” Danny addressed his reflection in the wing mirror as he reversed, “that’s a really crass thing to think?”

By the time Danny had reversed out of the parking space and turned down the drive, Steve was through the open wrought iron gates, and was standing by a blue pickup parked opposite the estate.

Danny simply stopped, blocking the gates to the House, jumped out of the truck, and looking right and left (always a dad), he crossed the road.

Paulo and another guy -- Danny assumed he was also Kapu based on the collar of intricate tattoos around his bare neck -- were both speaking to Steve. The tattooed man was texting as he spoke.

“Paulo,” Steve held his index finger out straight. “One at a time. You’re talking too fast.”

Paulo dropped back in his seat with a huff. “Haole,” he said dismissively.

“The wahine, man!” Tattooed-Collar guy curled over his phone. He had a curiously pointy head, Danny noted. But given that the guy looked like he could bench press a truck, Danny wasn’t going to share the observation. “Risso’s? That dive? She looked like she had taste.”

Paulo screwed up his nose in disgust.

“What?” Steve splayed his hands in question.

“Maika'i'ole,” Paulo’s companion rumbled, “It’s a shit hole.”

Steve glanced at Danny for a translation. Danny had struggled to figure out what the guy had said, and shrugged.

“Paulo, speak slowly,” Steve ordered.

“Risso’s a club downtown, man. It’s a dive,” Paulo explained.

“My sister is at Risso’s?” Steve clarified, focussed on Paulo. “And it’s near the Aloha Tower?”

“Not really, no, sort of, man.” Paulo nodded expansively, and almost manically, communicating with I’m talking to a deaf person emphasis.

Information received, dismissal instantaneous, Steve turned away and had his phone out and was tapping away on the screen selecting the Google app and surfing to the maps. Kind of rude, Danny thought, but Steve’s focus could be diamond hard.

“So what? You’ve still got teams watching the House?” Danny leaned against the truck by the side window. “And you guys follow us? Someone followed Mary?”


“Hey, I’m Danny, and you are?” Danny asked, because he couldn’t keep thinking of him as tattooed-collar-pointy-headed guy.

“Talmai.” He offered Danny his fist.

Danny was more of a hand shake sort of person. But matter-of-fact, he reached past Paulo, ignoring
the man’s attempt to shy back into his seat, and fist-bumped Talmai.

“Thanks for helping us,” Danny said.

“Kavika says.” Talmai shrugged. “And Uncle Mamo would, you know, be all disappointed and shit.”

“You’re a relative?”

Talmai shrugged. “Well, yeah, no, kinda -- second cousin once removed or something. It’s a term of respect, dude.”

“Okay, makes sense.” There were friends of his mom and pop that Danny still called aunt and uncle.

“So are you guys going to Risso’s?” Paulo asked.

“I guess so,” Danny said, actually he was a hundred percent sure that they were going to Risso’s.

“Okay.” Talmai turned to his phone. “Stevie and the haole are coming down to Risso’s.”

“Really?” Danny said. “The name’s Danny, we just introduced ourselves, Tally.”

“Danny and little Stevie are coming down to Risso’s,” Talmai corrected.

Danny didn’t correct Talmai on the use of Steve’s name, because that was hilarious -- Little Stevie. Mamo had definitely changed Little Steve’s diapers and bandaged cut knees in his day.

“Okay, guys, thanks for your help. We’ll be heading downtown.” Danny vaguely pointed down the wide semi-suburban street, and then moseyed over to Steve, who stood in the middle of the road like he owned it.

Steve merely presented his phone, the screen showing the map app with the bar illustrated with a red, upside down teardrop. Danny squinted. He knew where the Aloha Tower was, in all its white clock dressed awesomeness, so he could figure out where the aforementioned bar was, further south and down a little side street.

“So, you really want to do this?”

“She wants to talk to me? She can talk to me,” Steve grated.

“So why am I coming?” Danny asked, because Steve’s wobbling was a little less pronounced today; he could theoretically drive. It was a nonsensical question, since he was going, but Mary didn’t want him there, and he kind of wanted to hammer that home to Little Stevie.


~*~

Risso’s was the sort of place that Danny would have enjoyed ten years ago. Tacky was the word that sprung to mind. The bar had a patently mock-stone false front that stood garishly between two modern-appearing buildings with pristine façades. The bar probably brought down the value of the whole street. Once upon a time, the illuminated sign might have lit up. They deliberately parked the truck on the opposite side of the street and got out to fully appreciate its grottiness.

“So, I guess that I’m waiting outside?” Danny was fully prepared to prop up the truck, and wait for Steve.
In answer, Steve caught Danny’s elbow and dragged him across the road and into the dark and crusty bar.

Danny was momentarily blinded by the contrast between bright Hawaiian sunlight and cavern-enshrouded gloom. Releasing Danny, Steve ranged forwards like a hunting dog, scanning the empty tables and heading to the booths at the back.

Abruptly, he sped up, moving directly to a shadowed booth.

Danny chased after him, hoping, albeit vainly, to head off some of the inevitable fireworks.

“Mary, I told you that it was dangero -- Jenna Kaye!”

~*~

#82#. 

“Freeze,” Steve ordered flatly.

Jenna Kaye froze. Danny expected everyone in a three mile radius froze at the command.

“Put your hands on the tabletop, fingers spread. Now!”

Jenna obeyed.

Steve could, and did, move like lightening when focussed. He snatched up her voluminous handbag and thrust it backwards into Danny’s hands. Dipping into the pocket of her jacket, without her uttering a word of protest, Steve pulled out a snub-nosed grey revolver. Checking the safety, he tucked it into the back of his cargoes.

“Danny, sit.” Steve pointed to the bench seat on which Mary sat. If Danny sat there she would be effectively pinned in. “Sit.”

“Excuse me,” Danny said to Mary as he sat. Part of him wanted to rail at the order, but it wasn’t the time.

The movement woke Mary up from her stunned zone.

“Steve, you can’t. Jenny--” she protested.

“Jenna,” Steve emphasised, “works for an international terrorist responsible for multiple acts of violence on US soil. You are aiding and abetting her. Shut up and listen.”

Mary slumped back in her seat, arms crossed defiantly over her chest.

“Bossy,” she grumbled.

“Mary,” he snapped.

Jenna Kaye was the total opposite to Mary. Only her hands splayed on the tabletop seemed to be stopping her eeling under the table in a puddle of misery.

Steve swung a chair around from another table and set it, long backrest facing forward, at the end of the booth to carefully hem her in.

He sat astride it with a solid thump.
“Right, Kaye.” He leaned his bandaged forearm across the back of the chair. “Why are you meeting with my sister?”

“Steve,” Mary interrupted again, relentlessly.

“I’m talking to the terrorist, Mary,” Steve said bluntly.

“I’m not a terrorist,” Jenna said to the tabletop.

“Look at me when you’re talking to me,” Steve rapped.

Jenna swallowed, throat working furiously. Her large eyes were bright with unshed tears.

“I’m not a terrorist,” she said timidly. “I just have to work for one.”

“No, you do not,” Steve said.

“I do. I do. He’s got Josh.” She sniffed loudly, drawing back mucous.

“Your fiancé, yes?” Steve said almost dismissively. “What the Hell does P-One need you for? You’re a data analyst.”

“The best data analyst you’ve met!” Jenna said with a true hint of spark.

Danny couldn’t figure her out. She effectively came off as meek and mild, but he had seen her pull a gun in a heartbeat.

“So you use your skills to enable P-One to evade capture, and continue his activities against US interests, and its citizens.” Steve raised an eyebrow.

“Yes.” Her throat was working ten to the dozen.

“How many deaths are on your conscience?” Steve asked brutally.

“Too many,” she said quietly.

“Repeat that,” Steve said uncompromisingly.

“Too many.” Her eyes brimmed with unshed tears.

Danny heard Mary gasp.

“Unless you’re looking directly at me, I have a better than fifty percent chance of not understanding
what you’re saying. Do you, Dr. Jenna Kaye, Harvard Graduate of the School of Engineering and Applied Science, CIA trained analyst, know what P-One is looking for?”

“It’s hidden at Seolh.” Breathing out hard, Jenna lifted her head, and stared at Steve. “I don’t know if it’s in your house or elsewhere. Wo… P-One decapitated Sang Min for attempting to burn down the house. I suspect it’s portable.”

“Does he know what it is?” Steve asked.

Danny thought that was a weird question, but also a really insightful one.

Kaye’s entire demeanour changed from cowed to intrigued in an instant.

“You know that’s really quite interesting.” She clasped her hands together as she thought hard.

“I try,” Steve said dryly.

Jenna stared directly at Steve, mouth slightly open, her expression totally contemplative. Danny didn’t even need a camera to capture it.

“No, I’m pretty sure that he doesn’t.” Jenna shook her head. “It was stolen a long time ago. In the 1980s.”

Steve glanced at Danny. Reading his mind, Danny bet that it was acquired in 1988 by one Doris McGarrett.

“Why does Wo Fat,” Danny asked, “think Steve can find this thing?”

“He’s a Naval Intelligence Officer. It’s not like Commander McGarrett is an idiot. P-One’s getting frustrated. He’s going to try and force the issue soon,” Jenna said candidly.

Steve snorted.

Jenna winced. “What are you going to do with me?” she asked softly.

“What?” But Steve twisted away in his seat and hauled out his phone.

“Please you’ve got to let me go.” Jenna shook her head violently. “Don’t call anyone.”

“You need to be debriefed.” Steve’s long fingers stroked across his BlackBerry.

“I’ve got to be available to Wo Fat whenever he needs me,” Jenna said.

Steve regarded her, a predatory mongoose contemplating a nervy viper. He laughed without humour.

“The leash that Wo Fat keeps you on is long enough for you to contact and inveigle my sister to live with you, ostensibly--” Steve’s eyes narrowed, “--without him knowing. I’m betting that we can interrogate you for a couple of days before he notices.”

“Hey, are you guys going to order drinks?” The barman came up beside them, slapping a mangy towel against his palm.

Reflexively, Steve jerked.

“Rape!” Jenna screamed. She erupted out the booth. There was no finesse in her attack. She simply ploughed into Steve, fear-fuelled adrenaline likely driving her as she hit the back of his chair and
forced it over. Steve toppled right into the barman.

Danny lurched to his feet, and promptly fell back on his ass as Mary tugged him down.

“Sorry!” Mary immediately apologised, holding her hands high. “Reflex!”

Danny wriggled violently off the bench seat, half leaped over Steve, stumbled, and then hared off after Jenna. He dodged around the chairs and table like a football player intent on scoring a goal.

Danny was going to catch her. Jenna had answers.

She could end this mystery.

Danny blew out of the double doors and onto the sunlit sidewalk.

“Danny. No!” Steve yelled.

Sunday after four o’clock, practically in a back alley, and Danny had an empty sidewalk before him. He scanned left and then right, trying to find her, and caught the tail end of her flowing skirt as she turned down a far street on the right. Galvanised, Danny raced after her. He sped up -- as fast as a whippet over short distances. He was going to catch her. He swung around a corner using a drain pipe like a fulcrum. Jenna ran ahead, the slap-slap of her running feet echoing loudly across the empty road.

A couple of guys -- tall, and stout -- turned the corner at the end of the block. Danny put on an edge of speed. He was catching up with her. He was gaining.

Jenna dodged to the right, around the men, stumbled for a heartbeat, but kept her feet.

Spinning, she pointed at Danny barrelling towards them.

“Help me!” She flailed in Danny’s direction.

They were good Samaritans; Danny could tell, as the taller man glared.

“Shit. No!” Danny skidded to a stop. He could also think on his feet. “She’s a thief.”

The taller guy of the pair grabbed for him. Danny ducked under his outstretched arm. David to his Goliath.

Jenna didn’t hesitate, angling out into the road and avoiding being hit by a braking SUV by a hairsbreadth. Darting around the hood, she headed straight towards the main strip of boutiques, cafés, restaurants, and street vendors.

Thick fingers scrabbled at the back of Danny’s shirt, unable to find any purchase on the well fitting fabric.

“Jesus!” Danny spun free from the guy’s hand.

“Freeze!” Steve was suddenly there, gun clasped between his outstretched hands, and murder in his eyes, as he barrelled towards them.

“No, Steve!” Danny bodily flung himself between the helpful bystanders and the incensed SEAL. “They’re friends!”

“What?” Steve didn’t lower the large, suddenly threatening, weapon. Implacable, standing tall, gun held high, unerringly pointed, he embodied incensed, cold calm.
The hole at the end of the barrel seemed massive.

“Wrong place. Wrong time.” Danny flung his hands about. “Honestly, they were just trying to help!”

Steve took in the tableau in an instant. A blink later and he was away, darting across the street after Jenna to a similar chorus of squealing brakes and blaring horns.

“What’s happening?” the tall guy demanded.

“Are you cops?” stout asked.

Danny didn’t stay around to answer; he had people to chase. He moved through the traffic more circumspectly, mainly since the cars had screeched to a halt. Emerging on the edge of tourist heaven, Danny scanned up the palm-dotted, paved esplanade. A mess of pedestrians were shying away from the running woman and chasing man.

“Steve!” he chased after them.

Steve’s giraffe legs were certainly a match for a scared Jenna. His problem, for a mere millisecond, appeared to be how to take down a woman. And then Steve delivered an almost gentle hip-check; Jenna stumbled, falling to the unforgiving hard sidewalk outside an open air café. Steve caught her arm, twisting and gracefully lowering her down to the ground in one motion. Danny was impressed.

“Hey, Dude! Are you a cop?” A guy rose from his café seat.

“He…” Jenna began, even as she lay, face pressed into the sidewalk.

“Naval officer in pursuit of a suspect,” Steve said tersely. He twisted her wrist up between her shoulder blades making her squeak.

Danny came to a stop, breathing hard, close enough to help, but giving Steve enough space to act.

“I am more than happy to wait for the Honolulu police. Shall we?” Steve asked Jenna directly, but loud enough for all the bystanders to hear.

“No,” she said meekly, to the ground.

“No funny business, or else,” Steve threatened. He hauled her to her feet, and shook her, once. Steve frogmarched her towards Danny. He canted his hip presenting his back pocket.

Unquestioningly, Danny reached in and hauled out Steve’s BlackBerry.

“Who am I calling?” Danny asked flicking it on.

“Lieutenant Simons,” Steve said.

“Oh, cool, is he back?” Danny scrolled through the extensive contacts list.

“Hmm,” was Steve’s only comment, and Danny remembered that Barnabas Simons was on the heels of the Hesse Brothers. Were they back on the scene?

The phone rang once and Simons answered cursorily -- name and rank with a polite, “Yes, Commander McGarrett?” tagged on the end; he obviously had Steve in his contacts list.

“Hi, Lieutenant, it’s Danny Williams.”
“How can I help you, Mr. Williams?”

“I guess I can say that we’ve taken Jenna Kaye into custody.” Danny looked at her fleetingly. She hung her head, morose. “I think Steve wants you to come pick her up?”

Steve nodded definitely: affirmative.

“Where are you?” Lieutenant Simons asked.

~*~

Danny was a little surprised that Steve hadn’t hauled Jenna straight to his Ford and dragged her to the base himself. The response time from Pearl Harbour-Hickam should be quick, Danny guessed, knowing where they were in relation to the base. He felt like they were vulnerable loitering suspiciously on a corner. Arms crossed, Steve scanned the street, his glare a searchlight passing over the sidewalk, road, trees, shops -- relentless and inexorable.

The car that the Navy deployed was a black and low slung vehicle that ostensibly looked like a sedan, but rode really low as if made out of lead.

“You’ve killed Josh,” Jenna said forebodingly, as the reinforced sedan approached. “Wo Fat will know that you took me.”

“If you had come quietly, we could have had a discreet interrogation, and figured out a way to address your needs and concerns.”

“You haven’t given me any reason to trust that you’ve got Josh and my interests at heart,” Jenna said pithily, eying Simons smoothly exiting the passenger seat.

“You’ve no doubt hacked my files. Read my psych profile. I haven’t given you any reason to distrust me. You, however--” Steve got precise when annoyed, “--have given me plenty of reasons to distrust you.”

“Commander,” Simons said. He didn’t salute, but his hand twitched as he overrode habit.

“Jenna Kaye.” Hand on her elbow, Steve handed her over to the lieutenant.

Lifting her chin, Jenna stepped into Simons’ custody.

“Steve?” Danny jerked his thumb at the sedan. “You going with?”

Danny figured Steve would, and he could return to Steve’s truck and -- Danny had kind of forgotten -- retrieve Mary.

“No. Simons knows what to do. Mary.”

“Sir.” Simons acknowledged as he guided Jenna into the back of the car with a hand on her head.

~*~

Mary, of course, was no longer in the bar.

“What now?” Danny stuffed his hands in his pockets, and rocked on his heels.

“I knew, I knew that I should have forced-paired her cell phone!” Steve snarled.
“Any idea where she might have gone?” Danny scanned the empty bar. Nothing ventured; nothing gained, Danny wandered over to the bartender who was watching them leery eyed as he wiped clean glasses with the horrible dish rag. Danny made a mental note to never drink in the bar.

“What do you want?” he said sullenly.

“Do you know where the blonde went?” Danny asked, and helpfully pointed to the empty booth where they had been sitting.

“No, man.” He shrugged. “You’re not cops, are you?”

“No, the woman that we chased was a … con artist.” Danny thought that that was pretty apt. “She’s… Any rate, the blonde?”

“Why should I tell you?”

Opening his wallet, Steve pulled out a folded note. He pushed a fifty dollar bill across the bar top, and kept the tip of his index finger on the edge of the bill. His fingernail turned pink with pressure.

“She sat for a while. I asked her if she wanted anything. She looked pretty upset. She got up and left.”

Steve released the bill. The bartender slapped his rag on top of it, and pulled the bill into his orbit.

“Where would an upset Mary go?” Danny asked.

Steve pondered, bottom lip automatically jutting out.

“Shopping maybe? Shoes?” he offered. “Somewhere where there are people. She likes… crowds.”

So Mary was a people person. Steve was not. It seemed suitably apposite for skirmishing siblings, Danny thought.

“The Ala Moana Centre,” the bartender offered, and then abruptly turned away, removing himself physically and mentally from the conversation.

Steve absorbed that statement.

“Good a place as any, thank you,” he said. “Sorry for the disturbance.”

“Yeah man, weird. This sort of thing normally happens after midnight.”

~*~

The mall was busy; post-Christmas sales.

There were a lot of shoe shops. Danny contemplated the deep furrow between Steve’s eyebrows. He was developing a headache, or the one he was nursing was intensifying. The mall was massive, four levels dedicated to shopping and eating, and it felt like the entire population of Honolulu and a dedicated portion of visiting tourists were buying offerings to appease the God Mammon.

“Okay. We’ll have to approach this logically.” Steve drew in a heavy breath.

“Look if there were a whole team of us, I’d go along with that. The only option is to return to the House and talk to her when she comes home. Or,” Danny said brightly, because hindsight was always twenty: twenty, “we can ask the Kapu guys if they know where she’s at? They had a team on
her.”
Steve slapped his forehead.

~*~

#83#

“Mary.”

“Steve,” Mary returned.

Stand off at the Not-OK corral, Danny observed. Mary had bummed a lift off her tailing Kapu protection detail to take her back to Seolh. She was set up at the kitchen table. A full, open bottle of red, and a white -- with only a smidgen of Pinot Grigio barely rounding over the indentation at the bottom of the bottle -- sat in the centre of the table. Mary regarded them over the lip of her white wine glass.

Steve sat opposite her without a word.

Jesus, Danny thought.

“Would you like something to drink?” Mary offered tightly.

“Yes,” Steve said, surprising Danny.

Mary blinked and stood up to get the glasses. So she wasn’t as prepared as Danny had thought. The scene was set but it wasn’t perfect.

“Danny?” she asked, as she reached up on tiptoes to grab the best glasses off the high shelf.

Steve patted the seat beside him, and glanced mutely at Danny. He looked ten years younger in an instant.

“Yeah, sure.” Danny sat. The red looked like one of Chin’s good bottles judging by the streaks of dust that has escaped a desultory wipe. Danny decided not to ask.

Steve was eyeing Mary closely. She poured two glasses of red without asking their preference, expertly twisting the bottle to prevent any drips. Danny was going to reward Steve with a massage. He was quivering finely, almost imperceptibly, as if his bones were going to vibrate out of his skin.

“Aren’t you going to ask?” Mary snapped, finally breaking the silence. She sat with a thump.

“You know what I want to know.”

Mary shot a glance at Danny.

“Danny, I’m sure will be happy to let us talk alone--” Steve said tightly.

Danny pushed up from his seat.

“--but you offered him a glass of wine,” Steve finished.

Mary sucked on her teeth, tasting her words for a heartbeat.

“How well do you know him, Steve?” Mary demanded. “As well as I know Jenny, I’m thinking.”
As comparisons went Danny didn’t like them. He plonked back down in his seat.


The calm emanating from Steve was icy.

“There is a slight difference in that Danny doesn’t work for Wo Fat, and was invited to live at Seolh by Kono, who knew him long before this whole affair kicked off.” Steve took his first mouthful of red wine. “I had to take this from Kavika and Koa Keawe; I’m not taking it from my sister. Danny has been thoroughly checked out by NI and he’s as clean as a proverbial whistle.” The glint in Steve’s eyes was daring.

“He could still be a gold digger.”

“What?” Danny said, insulted -- because, respectfully, he’d been quiet until this point by dint of biting his bottom lip. “I’m a resident. I pay my bills.” That was a matter of singular pride.

“Mary, quit being offensive, and trying to deflect.” Steve sounded tired. “Jenna Kaye? Why go see her?”

“I dunno.” She sagged back in her seat. Glass clamped to her chest, the contents almost sloshed. “I just thought that I could find something out. She’s my friend, Steve.”

“Some friend. She was manipulating you,” Steve said.

“Yes.” She drank and set the glass down with a thump that would have made Chin wince. “She’s a good person. I think I’m her only friend in the world.”

“Are you insane?” Danny began.

“We’ve spend time together. I’ve hugged her when she’s cried snots of tears! She’s all alone. If she’s done what you said she’s done it’s for her fiancé. She’s that....” Mary drummed well chewed nails against the tabletop. “She’s the saddest person I’ve ever met. We’ve gotta help her.”

Steve slumped back in his seat, his enviable posture momentarily lost.

“We can do that best by capturing Wo Fat,” he said.

“Exactly! And to do that we need to find what he’s looking for.” Mary said, suddenly enthusiastic. “So this thing is small, relatively small, hidden in Seolh. Mom stole it from this Wo Fat person. And Wo Fat killed Mom and Dad in that so-called accident. But why wait until now to look for it?”

Danny glanced at Steve, because Mary had laid a heavy card on the table.

“Why do you think Wo Fat killed Mom and Dad?” Steve asked, clinically.

“They were murdered.” Mary snapped.

“It was a car accident, Mary,” Steve sounded resigned. “There was an investigation. It was a car accident.”

“Convenient road accident,” Mary said mockingly. “Mom was driving and Mom was a great driver. Better than dad. And now I know that she was probably CIA trained! The big truck rolled over the top of us. A man got out of the truck and looked in our car. He checked us. Made sure Mom and Dad were dead! The truck drove away and so did the other car. No one believed me.”
“Mare.”

Danny remembered from talking with Chin that Steve had been knocked out during the accident.

“You never believed me. You never wanted to talk about it,” Mary said, hurt.

That Steve hadn’t wanted to talk about the accident -- his parents’ death -- Danny could believe. He wouldn’t have been able to under similar circumstances.

Steve stared pensively into middle space. There was a grey cast to his normally pale skin.

“Babe?” Danny prodded.

Steve pushed away from the tabletop. “Wait here.”

“Where are you going?” Mary demanded. But she was speaking to Steve’s back, and he was out the door.

Danny took a fortifying glug of very nice, spicy wine. He snagged the bottle. *Château Rayas Châteauneuf-du-Pape, 2006*, French, he guessed. Not too old; he hoped that Chin wasn’t going to kill them.

Mary eyed him.

“Yes?” Danny raised an eyebrow. He topped up his glass and then Mary’s glass. In for a penny, in for a pound, as Rachel’s granny would say.

“There was a truck,” Mary insisted. “And a car.”

“I believe you.” Danny did believe her, even if she had been hardly older than Grace.

Mary sat tall. A smile graced her face. Danny kind of guessed she hadn’t heard those words before.

“But there was an investigation back then?” Danny asked, curious, because surely the Honolulu PD had been able to figure out that there had been multiple vehicles at the accident.

“I had to speak to a detective. But they said I imagined it. If there had been anyone else there they got scared, and just drove away. I was young. I was confused,” she said mockingly. “But the man got out of the truck, he gave a thumbs up and the car drove away. That’s two people, two drivers, two vehicles. I bet you it’s all linked. Mom, CIA, so-called-car-accident. Jenny being so interested in Seolh.”

“I don’t think that you’re wrong,” Danny said pensively. The problem was how did the jigsaw fit, especially when they were missing some of the pieces? The pieces that they kept finding further confused matters. “Jenna knows more than she’s saying.”

“Jenny. Jenna’s a good person.”

“She’s made some bad decisions,” Danny pointed out, and lifted his glass in a mocking toast.

“I guess.” Mary sagged dramatically over the table, spent.

“Happens to us all,” Danny said commiserating, although hooking up with a terrorist was a doozy.

Steve came back into the kitchen weighed down with files. They were well thumbed and interleaved with colourful post-it notes, which was Steve’s habit. He sat with a thump and opened
a beige coloured file to a page marked with a blue tag.

“Mamo thought that Wo Yongfu was killed by a car bomb. He wasn’t, his brakes were rigged. He crashed along the Aeia Heights Drive; his brakes had been tampered with, and then his car conveniently exploded. This isn’t television. Cars don’t just explode. Wo Yongfu’s body had been blown free. Autopsy showed that he had been shot in the head; bruising development on the parts of the torso that were left showed that he survived the crash.”

“So he crashed, sat in the car long enough to get bruised, then he was shot in the head, and then the car was blown up. This didn’t happen in 1988, did it?” Danny asked.

Steve nodded.


“Figure that’s when mom restarted working with the CIA. The main players in her portfolio seemed to be the Noshimuri family. She had a long term relationship with them. Yakuza.” Steve laughed hollowly. He turned to a red tagged page. “I know that Wo Yongfu was the local dragon head. Assassination of a Triad leader would not have been taken lightly; there could only ever be serious repercussions to such an act.”

“You think mom killed him?” Mary said aghast.

“Possibly.” Steve shrugged. “It’s supposition. Ostensibly because she wanted to create greater ties with the Yakuza. Or Wo Yongfu figured somehow that she was actually CIA. I guess she was rusty after being out of the business.”

“So you don’t know mom killed Wo Yongfu, it’s just a guess?” Mary was sheet white.

“What you’re describing about mom and dad’s car accident is a hit,” Steve said. “Wo Fat is fascinated by McGarett. According to Jenna, he’s looking for something. We’ve guessed that he’s looking for something. I’ve looked him in the eye and he’s driven. Even against better judgment, he stays on the island. He’s had ample opportunity to kill me. So yeah, there’s some link, and it boils down to Mom’s past.”

“She used Dad, didn’t she? Dad was investigating the bad guys,” Unconsciously, she lapsed into childlike language. “That would have been her hook. An in with the police investigations. Dad always brought his notes home. Even when he shouldn’t have.”

Her eyes were tinged pink and there was a tiny tremble quivering her bottom lip. She was hanging on to her tears with all her fingernails, Danny could tell.

“Your parents died in 1990,” Danny said loudly. “Two years. Why two years? That’s a long time for serious repercussions. That’s like, oh, hey, isn’t it about time that we did something. You don’t know Wo Fat…” Damn, Danny couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“Murdered our parents,” Steve said clinically.

“Okay.” Danny stood up, and paced around the table. He clicked his fingers, underscoring his words as he thought out loud. “Wo Fat didn’t kill your parents. If he’s been looking for this something, and he was on the trail in 1990, why wait until the Twenty First Century, over two decades later, to finally investigate Seolh?”

Danny froze. A horrible thought blindsiding him.
“Danny?” Steve asked standing.

Danny turned to face him. Saying the actual words he was thinking somehow made it real and more hideous.

“Someone murdered your parents to prevent him finding it. And we don’t have a single clue who that person is.”


“Don’t sound so surprised.” Danny grabbed his wine glass. He was on the way to getting happily sloshed. “I think when Sang Min tried to burn down the House, Wo Fat had you investigated, Steve. Maybe he picked up an old, no longer that well-classified file that let him connect Doris McGarrett, official ‘hanger on’ to the Noshimuri Family, with Steve McGarrett, Naval Intelligence Officer and Navy SEAL.”

“Maybe,” Steve said equally contemplative. “Kaye said that Wo Fat killed Sang Min for trying to burn down the House. He knew about Seolh before that. Remember, I’d caught his interest investigating the Hesse Brothers.”

“My god, this is giving me a headache,” Mary declaimed, finding anger. “It’s all guesses. But you know, if we find this thing that Wo Fat is looking for in Seolh, we’ll get some answers.”

“So we keep hunting. Developing films, looking for clues.” Steve held his wine glass before Danny. “We’re going to figure this out.”

“What you said.” Danny clinked their glasses together.

“Hey, guys.” Kono sauntered into the kitchen. “So what’s for dinner?”

“Oops.” Danny glanced to where the board was hidden on the back of the open kitchen door, and winced.

“Shit,” Steve said. “It’s my turn.”

The mundanity of life amidst murder investigations, terrorist attacks, and assassinations, was actually sobering in a really, really real way. This was life. In the middle of horror you still had to feed yourself and your family.

“Pizza?” Kono suggested, reaching for the tin on the top of the fridge.

“We can’t have pizza on Sunday night. Sunday night is special,” Steve protested.

Mary corralled the bottle of red wine and took herself to the gap between the microwave and the cupboard the plates were stored in, to sit on the counter.

“Pizza,” Mary singsonged, and wriggled in to watch the entertainment.

Steve covered his mouth with the palm of his hand and stared at the kitchen wall clock beside the bookshelf.

“Lentils?” he offered.

~*~

It was actually reassuring that Steve couldn’t cook. Lunch he could prepare, with the salads and
sandwich makings. He could bake bread. He probably could, with sufficient preparation and an idiot-proof cookbook and no experimentation, provide a tasty and likely healthy -- given that actually seemed to be his main driver -- substantial, main meal.

The chicken was perfect. Danny had helped him prepare the microwave defrosted breasts. Smothered in cheese sauce, which complimented the overcooked broccoli and sweet corn dotted throughout the whole-wheat pasta, they had a truly boring main dish.

Danny was spoilt. Seolh was synonymous with excellent food -- Danny added the caveat: 'unless Steve was involved'.

Steve pushed his portion around the plate. He was, in Danny’s experienced estimation, about to crash. The family let the conversation range around him. Danny sat on his right, and Steve’s ear was free of any aid. Danny guessed that he had also removed the left one, which he had kept in for most of the day. The half glass of wine had probably been a mistake. Steve, Danny guessed, would probably stay awake long enough for Chore Wrangling.

Absently, Steve pushed a chunk of chicken into his mouth, and chewed. The furrow between his eyes promised either a headache or strategising, likely both. Danny remembered that Chin had told him that his father had attended the car accident. Danny guessed that Steve would be requesting the files through the unofficial Seolh network.

“Ice cream for afters?” Kono asked, and she stood up, ferrying the largely empty tureen of pasta away.

There was a chorus of agreement.

“Hey, I’ll make affogato.” Danny stood up. There was some good quality vanilla ice cream in the freezer. “Do we have any Amaretto?”

“Bound to.” Chin sat still for a moment, pondering on its whereabouts.

Danny tried to recall if he had seen any hard liquor in and around Seolh as he primed the espresso machine.

“Can I help?” Kono asked, after throwing the tureen in the dishwasher.

“Scoop of ice cream in glass bowls. It’s always best to let the ice cream rest before eating.”

“Cool.” Kono pottered around him. Dragging out the tiny glass bowls from their cupboard and setting them on the counter.

Danny liked affogato; it was his favourite dessert. The dark chocolate and cool creams of the dessert swirling together with the hot, black espresso was photographic.

“What chocolate?” Kono delved into the fridge and pulled out three bars. “Dark, Hawaiian Sea Salt, or Salted Pineapple and Chilli Pepper?”

“Philistine,” Danny said aghast, and plucked the dark bar from her hand.

“Hey,” Mary piped up, “I wanna try Salted Pineapple and Chilli Pepper.”

“Fine.” Danny let Kono set the bar on the tabletop. “It’s gonna taste disgusting.”

“Puccini Amaretto Mandorla,” Chin announced, setting a very nicely constructed bottle of liqueur at
Danny’s elbow. He moved onto finish clearing the table. Steve passed over his half empty plate.

“Oooh.” The bottle was tall and narrow, almost a pipe, with a delicate concave curve and a long, elegant neck. It hadn’t been cracked. Danny had expected Disaronno, but this was Seolh; he should have known better. He broke the seal and took a reverent sniff. The almonds and spice were rich against his nose. This was going to make a perfect affogato.

The coffee machine hissed and spluttered, reaching the required temperature.

“Steve, you want?” Danny wiggled the bottle in Steve’s direction.

He regarded it for a very long moment, and shook his head slowly.

“I want!” Mary sang out.

Danny couldn’t see it going with the pineapple and chilli, but what the hell. He carefully ladled just a couple of teaspoons over each dollop of ice cream bar one. Kono was decanting hot espresso, one after another into an old milk jug, so Danny could pour the coffee over the ice cream when ready. Not interfering with the production line, Danny broke bits of chocolate over the ice cream, adding poison to the last bowl. Normally he would have dissolved the chocolate in the coffee, but not with different types.

“Salted pineapple and chilli,” he gagged dramatically.

“You should try it,” Kono said, and stole a sliver.

“Later.”

“Chocolate syrup?” Kono reached high past Danny to a shelf above his head and retrieved a squeezy bottle of Hershey’s Chocolate syrup.

“No,” Danny said with the determination of a truculent toddler.

“Really?” Kono abruptly put it back. “Wow, you’re like a purist.”

“You have no idea.” Danny grabbed the jug of coffee and began to pour strict amounts over each construction of ice cream, chocolate and liqueur.

“Chore Wrangling.” Chin took the board off the back of the door and set it on the cleared kitchen table.

“I guess that’s my excuse to leave.” Mary launched herself to her feet, she snagged her bowl of ice cream and the bottle of amaretto as she arrowed out the door.

Kono moved to follow.

“Let her go,” Steve said hollowly. “When she wants to join us, she will.”

~#~

#84#

“Yeah, Monkey.” Danny smiled at the phone on the palm of his hand, as he sat on the edge of his bed. “You definitely get to visit next weekend. I promise. I spoke to your mom and we’ll pick you up after school.”
We will, suddenly that meant a hundred thousand different things.

“Uncle Steve?” Grace double-checked.

“Yes, Steve.” Danny curled his fingers around the phone. He had told his mom and pop about his new relationship, but he had never had to tell his baby girl that he had a new boyfriend, or girlfriend for that matter. He could picture Steve’s expression at the thought of being called a boyfriend. Sucking on a lemon, sprung to mind. The entry of Stan into Grace’s life had been met with tears and tantrums, the like that Danny had never experienced before.

Openness was the best policy, edited for seven and a half year old sensibilities. Danny could only imagine what spin Rachel would put on Grace’s wobbly explanation.

“Daddy?” Grace asked, and Danny realised that he had missed what his Monkey had asked.

“Yes, Monkey?”

“Can we go swimming in the bay, maybe surf? Please?”

“It depends on the weather,” Danny said pragmatically. “And Steve’s got an ear infection. It should be better by the weekend, but he’ll have to get the doctor to check it out.”

“Steve’s sick!” Grace said loudly, voice wobbling. “Oh. Oh.”

Automatically, Danny looked at the plasterwork ceiling of his studio and the eyrie floors above. They were not going to disturb the sleeping Steve, but the urge to check had been instinctive.

“Just a little ear infection, he’s getting better,” he promised.

“But his ears aren’t --” Grace ground to a frustrated halt, unable to put words to her thoughts.

“Steve has a special doctor. We’ve been to see Dr. Magnus, and he gave Steve antibiotics -- like when you had a sore throat. Steve will be better soon.”

“Can I make him a card?” Grace asked softly.

“I’m sure that he’ll love that, Monkey.”

“Grace,” Rachel’s voice came lightly over the line in the background. The clock app showed that they had been talking for a good twenty minutes, and tomorrow was the start of a brand new school week.

“Daddy,” Grace said sadly.

“I know, Monkey. But school tomorrow. Danno loves you.”

“I love you, Danno.”

Even after the call disconnected, Danny let the phone sit on his palm. Perhaps Seolh’s lawyers were correct; he could sue for shared custody. But with a new, burgeoning relationship, and the ongoing issues with Wo Fat, he had to admit, reluctantly, that he needed to be circumspect.

Setting the phone aside, he regarded the night’s sky through his expansive windows. He leaned over and reached under the tasselled lampshade to switch off the light beside his bed. The dark of the forest around the House was an impenetrable silhouette against the starry night sky. In the far distance, a few lights from houses were mere pinpricks.
Danny grabbed his Christmas tripod and set it up, with the D3s Nikon and AF-S VR telephoto Nikkor lens that he had acquired from the first set of paparazzi that had spied on them. He rubbed his hands together. He hadn’t really experimented with astrophotography -- the high light pollution back home in New Jersey made it difficult to see the stars -- but he had played with night shots, catching taxis rushing along the Turnpike and ghostly people.

A sturdy tripod was the key. Thanks to Steve, he now had one. Manhandling camera and tripod over to the windows, he opened the big window. He didn’t want a layer of glass between himself and his photograph. He set the speed at 600, and since he wanted to capture the stars, he flicked off the autofocus and enabled the focus ring just before infinity.

Danny hummed under his breath, figuring his way through the settings of the Nikon. He needed a thirty second shutter speed and a wide aperture with the lowest f-stop. Unfortunately, the paparazzi hadn’t left the remote control, so he had to resort to the camera’s self timer. Once all his room lights were off, he snapped a shot.

“Hmmm.” The first shot wasn’t much to talk about. Danny played with the aperture, trying to account for uneven lighting. He really should had ventured along the peninsula, and tried for total darkness, rather than playing from his bedroom window. But this was experimentation, not serious photography.

He flicked back through the shots, scanning them on the LCD screen. They were fun. Mostly amateurish. The last shot showed a streak of a meteor.

“Oooh.” Danny squinted up at the night sky. His eyes had missed the streak through the heavens. If there was one meteor there might be more. The trick was to leave the camera on a long exposure. Kneeling, Danny played with the settings, selecting a thirty minute exposure, which would be enough to capture any random meteors.

Setting the camera running, he contemplated options. He couldn’t do anything for the next thirty minutes because it was pitch black. He couldn’t even escape from his room, because the staircase directly outside his room was normally well lit.

Arthritically, he levered to his feet. Kneeling always was a bitch.

“Bath?” He could have a leisurely bath. He kind of liked that idea. Skinning out of his shirt and slacks he left them in a pile on the floor, with yet another borrowed pair of Steve’s boxers.

Sharing underwear was somewhere where he had never expected to go.

The bathroom was almost pitch black, only the starlight that he wanted to capture illuminating his way. Danny fumbled around because he didn’t want to flick on the light since the windows were orientated in the same direction as the studio-bedroom windows. The trick of night photography was to control any aberrant light.

The previous occupant had left a mess of candles that Danny had scooped into a plastic box and stuffed in the towel cupboard, tucked under the architecture of the staircase overhead. He retrieved them and rooted around the cupboard, because where there were candles there were normally matches.

“Heh.” He struck a match and used its glow to light his way to the wick of one of the most substantial candles. One candle lit, he drew the blinds of the bathroom partway, and then set just enough candles, so that he could see what he was doing, on the ever-so convenient shelf beside the porcelain claw-footed bath, which had obviously been bolted to the white tiles for just that purpose.
One of the best things about Seolh, in addition to the food, was that there were always masses of hot water.

“I wonder where the furnace is?” Danny pondered, and answered his own question. “Catacombs.”

Baths weren’t really his thing, but he was kind of looking forward to a quiet laze. He added a squeeze of hand soap under the water jetting from the tap to make some bubbles. He kind of wished that he had brought the bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. A glass of wine and a bubble bath sounded decadent.

He slipped into the water. It just covered his calves. The temperature was perfect. Singing under his breath, he gently swirled his hands back and forth, making bubbles as more water filled the bath. He was going to go for an indulgent, deep bath.

Finally, the water in the bath reaching his nipples, he turned the taps off with his toes, and relaxed back.

“Wonderful.”

~*~

“Danny?”

Danny cracked open an eye and peered at the open bathroom door. The long, dark silhouette was unmistakably Steve.

“Hey, Steve.” Danny was partway to sleep. The temperature was perfect, and the bubbles soft.

“Danny?” Steve padded soundlessly over the tiled floor, and knelt, folding his crossed arms over the edge of the bath. “Bath?”

Danny scraped his fingernails along the length of Steve’s unbandaged forearm, ruffling up the fine, dark hairs. The light from the candles painted Steve in golds and ambers.

“I thought you’d gone to bed,” Danny said, enunciating clearly.

“Did. Woke up. Came to get you.”

“Came to get me, eh?” Danny said. “Wanna join me?”

“Yes.” Steve planted his chin on his forearm. “I’ve had my shower, though.”

“And?” A bath could be fun.

Steve scrunched his nose. “I’ve moisturised my side.” He picked at the fresh bandage on his forearm. “Done my eardrops.”

Danny stretched up and kissed his nose. “It’s okay, I understand, Babe.”

“I want to,” Steve said, a little fractiously.

“I know,” Danny said. “I’ll be up in a minute. Okay?”

Steve nodded, his eyes liquid in the candlelight.

“Go on,” Danny craned his chin in the direction of the apartment. “Gimme half an hour.”
Steve cupped Danny’s jaw, angling him perfectly to match lips together. The kiss was deep, and needy in a way that Steve would never verbalise. He pulled back a fraction, sucking on Danny’s bottom lip. Steve released him with a happy sigh.

“Half an hour it is.” Steve stood.

“Switch the light on, Steve, will you?” Danny asked. It had been longer than half an hour; his fingertips had wrinkled.

“Sure.” Steve flicked it on as he left the steamy bathroom.

Danny contemplated his nails. They needed a cut, as did his toenails. One of his mom’s inheritances was awesome teeth and nails. Grace had also won the generic lottery, with healthy teeth and nails, instead of Rachel’s fillings and split nails.

Humming under his breath, Danny dealt with life’s little mundanities. His nails grew faster in Hawaii, as if he was trapped in a permanent summer. He lost most of the nails in the bathwater, but he guessed that they would drain down the plughole.

He scratched idly at his balls as he stood up, water sheeting off his body. Danny used the detachable showerhead to rinse off the suds. At home, back in New Jersey, it would have been chilly and he would have had to grab his flannel bathrobe and huddle next to the radiator as he dried off. The Hawaiian late summer was a distant memory of oppressing, sodden heat. Swings and roundabouts. Horrible summers and lovely winters verses summers (actually high summer In New Jersey could be a special Hell), glorious springs and falls, with wickedly arctic winters.

Desultorily, Danny towelled off. Tucking the towel around his waist, he meandered, happily, into the bedroom.

And came to a complete stop. He emphatically did not sigh, fondly.

Steve hadn’t returned to his bedroom. He was out for the count, curled into a ball in the centre of Danny’s bed on top of the blankets. He had probably meant for them to return to his ostentatious nest. However, he had lain down for a second and, inevitably, that led to a sleeping Steve. There was no reason why they couldn’t sleep in Danny’s room, even if Danny’s sheets were a cheerful floral print and the blanket was red with muddy brown flecks, rather than matching cream sheets and quilted throw in thousand-thread count Egyptian cotton.

It took mere moments for Danny to switch off and stow his camera and return to the bed. Steve slept on top of the blankets rather than under. Rubbing his chin, Danny contemplated the problem of a big, heavy lump on top of the blankets.

Tossing his towel aside, he ever-so-carefully folded the thin blanket and sheet back lengthwise alongside Steve’s body, flattening the covers. Leaning across the mattress, he set his hand on Steve’s narrow, bony foot.


“Hey?” Steve uncurled a fraction, and cracked open an eye, assessing.

“Come here.” Danny dropped flat onto the bed, caught Steve’s shoulder and rolled the lump into his arms.

“Huh?” Steve said querulously, as he snuggled his head into Danny’s neck. The sleepy need was a heady mix that Danny was primed to respond too.
“It’s okay, Babe,” Danny soothed, cupping the curve of Steve’s skull. Scrabbling with his other hand, he caught the tail end of the fold of covers and drew them over.

“Why did I never think that my parents were murdered?” Steve said softly.

So he wasn’t asleep, hovering on the edge of it, but not sleeping.

“Hey.” Danny shuffled them around so that they were sharing the same pillow, noses apart.

“There was an investigation. I mean, dad was a cop,” Steve continued, fractured. “Mary said that there was a guy. But…. She tells stories.”

“Peter and the wolf?” Danny whispered. As he had relaxed in the bath, he had mulled over Mary’s thoughts and insights. Back on Christmas Day outside the Gazebo, Chin had said something about the investigation into the deaths of Doris and John McGarrett. He couldn’t remember what exactly Chin had said.

“What?” Steve squinted tiredly.

“Chin’s dad was there after the accident happened. Koa Keawe’s a detective. You can get the files,” Danny spoke clearly and carefully. “There probably was a guy. A bystander that got scared and ran off. But we can check.”

The skin was scrunched tightly between Steve’s eyebrows. Danny smoothed his hand over Steve’s jaw, even as he craned across the miniscule distance and kissed that frown away. The skin under his lips was dry and unheated, not even the hint of a residual fever.

“Tomorrow. Okay?” Danny moved back, so Steve could see him speak. “We can thrash over all our thoughts. Okay?”

They folded together, finding their way between long and sturdy limbs, a broad torso and a body that seemed to be made out of elbows and knees. A warm, large hand cupped Danny’s bare hip. Skin to skin wasn’t an invitation, it was comfort.

“Sleep, Babe.” Danny drew Steve’s head to his shoulder.

A heavy sigh ruffled the hair over Danny’s chest.

“We’ll figure it out, Babe,” Danny mumbled, going for soothing, over meaning.

“Uhm.”

Knuckles brushed the skin low on Danny’s belly as Steve relaxed. Danny marvelled at Steve’s ability to sleep. It was actually a gift, given the post traumatic stress that Steve struggled with; insomnia and disturbed nights would have made his recovery more of a nightmare. Yet, somehow, luckily, he slept the sleep of the just. What would a recovered -- as much as Steve could recover -- Steve be like? Danny thought on that a lot, but really had no answers.

~*~

#85#

“I’ll bring you some coffee.”

At least that was what Danny thought that Steve said.
Danny managed a blergh in Steve’s direction. The light through the crack in the bedroom curtains indicated that it was well past dawn. Rolling onto his back, Danny rubbed at his face. Red wine always made him sluggish. Coffee was the order of the day. Danny lifted up his blankets and contemplated his habitual morning greeting. He couldn’t believe that Steve had left without lending a hand. Danny rolled onto his side, reaching for the tissues set there for just this purpose.

Sleep still dragged him down, making all sensation rich and comfortable. Lackadaisically jerking his hips once, twice, he came, and then lolled satiated.

He thought that he might have napped a little more. Noting the bright sunlight flooding his room, Danny guessed that he might have.

“Where’s my coffee?” he asked the world at large. No coffee had magically appeared. “The doofus got distracted.”

Sighing dramatically, tissues in hand, Danny dragged his sorry ass out of bed.

He would have to get his own damn coffee.

\[\sim*\sim\]

Bathed, dressed, still coffee-deprived, Danny contemplated the kitchen and the unprimed espresso machine. Steve was failing at being a good boyfriend. There was a mound of coffee in the bottom of the French press. The kettle was barely warm to the touch. Danny grabbed a travel mug as the water re-boiled.

He would take the coffee with him as he tracked the errant so-and-so down.

\[\sim*\sim\]

A bang, a clatter, took him down the reception rooms’ corridor to the Hall -- the doors of which had been left open. They were a giant, fat clue as to Steve’s whereabouts.

Danny guessed that the students were here, and that Steve was supervising.

The massive mock-plywood, temporary doors were open, filling the Hall with sunlight that made it all the more easier to see the damage. Sang Min had thrown the Molotov cocktail through the double doors; most of the fire damage was constrained to the north end of the Hall. The exoskeleton of Odum Construction’s repairs were visible beneath the gutted wooden walls. Constructing new panels to match the old and replacing the ornate doors was going to be part of the work of the students, Danny guessed. The wooden panelling where the House story tapestry had hung was soot marred and charred, but largely intact.

Chin, if Danny recalled correctly, had said that a couple of students and Addison, the lecturer, were coming. Call that five students, Danny observed, and two adults, in addition to the people he knew.

Mamo waved hello from a large table, where a sheaf of papers with a blue background -- architectural blueprints -- were laid out. Addison’s unlit cheroot was bobbing in his mouth as he scrutinised the plans with two of his students. The third student was sitting cross legged on the floor, folded over like a chunky pretzel, studying the intricate wood-patterned mosaic.

The kid had a note pad, ruler, and pencil at his side.

Steve sat next to him, matching the kid’s posture.
“Koai’a- Acacia.” The student tapped the main warp to the weft of the intricate knotwork that edged the central amber coloured portion of the floor. He tapped the weft. “Ohi’a.”

He pointed to the third entwining strand and snuck a sideways glance at Steve.

“Kamani,” Steve said, and then obediently named the fourth strand following the kid’s finger. “Lami.”

The kid smiled sunnily at Steve, for a fraction of a heartbeat, and returned to his contemplations.

“Santos mahogany.” The wood backdrop to the knotwork was named. The student retrieved his notebook and drew a carefully considered line.

It was a detailed drawing of the knotwork pattern.

“Shoes! Shoes!” The kid pointed at Danny’s suddenly offensive shoes and shrieked. “No!”

“No!” Danny backed off the floor onto the MDF panelling, which MacDonald had part-laid as a path. The floor was damaged but apparently even amidst repairs you weren’t allowed to wear shoes. Danny debated whether or not to tell the shoe monitor that the last time he had been in the Hall he was pretty sure that neither he nor Steve had changed their shoes.

“What happened to my coffee?” Danny waved his travel mug.

“It looks like you got some,” Steve observed dryly. “Uluwehi, this is Danny.”

“Uhm,” was Uluwehi’s contribution, focused on his drawing.

“I thought that you had blueprints.” Danny jerked his thumb at the guys by the long table.

“Uluwehi likes patterns,” Steve explained. “He’s getting it fixed in his mind so that he can repair the border.”

“Wood, Steve.” Uluwehi tugged at the cuff of Steve’s cargo shorts. “This is very special wood. Rare.”

“Yes,” Steve agreed. “We have a supply. Rangers and managers harvest the deadfall and selected trees on Seolh’s reserves. We have Koai’a- Acacia.”

“Good.” Uluwehi continued to draw, a veil of jet black hair obscuring his face.

Danny cocked an eyebrow at Steve in question.

“I know my wood types. Mamo trained me,” Steve answered a totally different question.

“’Reserves’, ” Danny made a set of sarcastic speech marks of sarcasm.

“Hawaii’s geographical position, specifically its isolation, has made for unique and delicate habitats, which need to be protected. Some management is required; certain species need specific habitats,” Steve said primly. “The wood harvesting is sustainable and funds go back into the management of the reserves.”

“I’m not talking about--” Danny clicked his fingers back and forth, “objecting to the fact that you chop down trees. It’s the fact that you have reserves.”

Uluwehi picked up his pad and, grumbling, moved down the curve of the floor pattern, to where fire
and water damage marred the intricate knotwork.

“They’re not my reserves, they’re Seolh’s -- well, part of Seolh.” Flicking a checking glance at Uluwehi, who was occupied, Steve stood. “Good morning, grumpy.”

Danny toasted him with his coffee. Steve knew that Seolh was awesome; there was a definite teasing glint in his eye. He was deliberately being obtuse.

“Fucking reserves,” Danny said.

“Language,” Uluwehi chided.

“Yes, Danno, language,” Steve grinned.

Danny resisted kicking Steve in the shin. “Sorry, Ulu-we-.” He grimaced.

“Uluwehi,” Uluwehi said precisely.

Steve patted Danny’s shoulder and Steve was very lucky that Danny was holding his first and most important coffee of the day. And Steve, in front of Mamo, Addison, and a bunch of students, leaned in and smacked a kiss on Danny’s cheek. There was a definite coo from Mamo’s side of the table.

“So what’s the plan?” Danny asked, as he fondly patted a blushing Steve’s tummy. “Are we going into Hickam or are you doing the floor with Ully?’

“Uluwehi,” the kid chastised, without lifting his head as he contemplated the floor.

“Sorry.” Danny winced an apology.

“We have to go to the base,” Steve said firmly, and circumspectly. “There’s photographs to develop, and I have to talk to someone.”

“True.” Danny encompassed Steve’s attire with a wave of his finger.

“Yes. I will change.”

“Breakfast! Most important meal of the day.” Danny reached up and caught the collar of Steve’s t-shirt and tugged him down.

“What?” Steve protested, as he obediently bent.

Danny slid his hand along Steve’s throat, and with a press of his fingers, turned Steve’s head. The skin behind Steve’s ear was smooth and unblemished. The right aid was securely settled in his ear canal.

“Looking good, Babe.”

Steve poked him hard, right under his ribs. “Ask next time!”

“You would have just said: ‘I’m fine, Danny’.” Danny contemplated him, deliberately through his eyelashes.

“Enough with the manhandling.” Steve stalked off like an affronted cat. He threw over his shoulder, “I’m going to get changed. We can get breakfast en route.”

Mamo was grinning at them from the other side of the Hall.
Happy with the way that the day had started, Danny gave Mamo a thumbs up, and followed Steve.

~*~

The day unfolded pretty much as Danny expected. Steve had changed into his neatly pressed tan uniform (US Naval Officer’s khaki uniform, Danny -- Steve had informed him, precisely), and had transformed into Lieutenant Commander Steven J. McGarrett -- sense of humour surgically removed and PDAs non-existent.

Danny had been dropped off outside the NCIS building and Steve had moved on to interrogate Jenna Kaye, Danny guessed. Corporal Oh had been waiting for him on the other side of the security barrier. Obviously, Steve had called or texted ahead.

Danny and the kid had got to spend the day playing with the two selected films that Danny had retrieved from the group of films that he thought were probably from the 1980s. They had also put in a request for some more chemicals and slide mounts for the kodachrome II 135 slide film, which Danny had unearthed in the shoe box of films. The problem with the slide film was that the chemicals to process the film were going to be a bitch to get a hold of, if even possible. Danny was resigned to the fact that they would probably have to develop the slides as black-and-white.

At seventeen hundred hours, Steve appeared at the end of the lab bench, looking as crisp as he had at zero nine hundred hours, apart from the telltale draw of skin under his eyes.

Danny jerked. “Hey, Steve!”

“Lieutenant Commander.” Corporal Oh didn’t salute, but he came close.

“Progress?” Steve asked tersely, and Danny guessed that the interrogation hadn’t gone that well.

“One film was a no-go no matter what we did. Took hours. Got some images off the second film. Mainly landscape shots.” Danny glanced at Oh, who thought that the shots were of installations embedded in hilly terrain, and then had diplomatically refused to comment further on the subject. Danny suspected that there were going to be no handy disc burnt of these photographs to share with the family. Danny wasn’t sure what use pictures from the 1980s might be, but they had sparked Oh’s interest.

“Show me,” Steve ordered.

Obediently, Oh pulled up a selection of the photographs on the largest monitor on the lab’s digital analysis bench.

Steve’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Yes, sir,” Oh said circumspectly.

“Oh, for crying out loud,” Danny said. “I have signed your security thingy, give me a clue. Compositionally, they’re really boring, but I’m guessing you’re seeing something I’m not.”

“Without GPS reference or dates they’re not actually that useful,” Steve said. “But--”

He leaned forward scrutinising the top right hand photograph in the selection of four photographs.

“And?”

“That’s a cool northern temperate forest on distinctly rugged terrain,” Steve said, “possibly
“Yanggang-do?”

“Or Hamgyong-butko,” Oh volunteered. “Or southern China.”

Ah, Danny understood. The McGarrett undeveloped family photograph selection now bore photographs from China.

“So, CIA photos,” Danny summarised.

Steve pursed his lips as he scrolled through the rest of the photographs, selecting and zooming in on a few areas where slivers of part-camouflaged buildings peeked out from jutting hills, or forests. Danny thought that they had multiple shots of two separate, almost hidden, installations. But he guessed that -- as Steve had said -- without a frame of reference, they were not that useful.

Steve straightened. “Corporal, put them on the Archimedes’ server, flag them DM-unknown, with processing date and appropriate file reference. Maybe the other photos will give us some clues.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Come on, Danny.”

~*~

“One positive thing, it does prove that the films that we’re looking at are linked to CIA work,” Danny pointed out, as they sat in traffic, waiting for the lights to change.

Steve flicked a glance at him. He was behind the wheel, another indicator that he was feeling much better. Danny had thought after a long day in the office, Steve might have thrown him the keys.

“My mother’s hard copy files arrived today,” he said.

“Oh.” Danny scrunched down in his seat. “And?”

“They’re redacted, quite heavily. She was assigned to observe the Noshimuri family. There are reams of accounts of observations of the family and Yakuza members, but little else.”

“What about Mary’s thought that your mom was using your dad’s investigations as the hook to get in with the Yakuza?”

“Insightful,” Steve acknowledged. “She deliberately did let stuff slip to Hiro Noshirmuri’s wife, thus ensuring that Haruna continued to be friendly. Man, I don’t know my mom. She played my dad. He put his heart and soul into trying to stop the Yakuza from getting a foothold on the islands.”

Danny reached out and squeezed Steve’s shoulder.

“Wo Fat’s dad? Anything about assassinating the guy?”

The lights changed and, perforce, Steve’s attention was on the road. Rather than turning onto the link road that led to the Highway, Steve drove straight ahead.

“Where are we going?” Danny asked.

“Mom’s records are mainly pre her so-called retirement,” Steve continued the thread of their conversation. “The files which have been released mainly concentrate on the late 1970’s and early 1980s. There’s very little about the late 1980s. She was asked to re-link with the Noshimuri family. She did. But--” Steve ground his teeth, “--if dad objected, as Mamo said, so heavily to mom’s work,
how did she go back to liaising with the Noshimuri Family?"

“How busy was your dad?” Danny twisted in his seat. “My pa’s a fire fighter, shift worker. If he was on nights, we might not have seen him for days.”

Steve glanced at him, and the car immediately veered towards the shoulder.

“How busy was your dad?” Danny shrieked. “Your driving sucks.”

Steve glowered, and then focused, knuckles white, on driving in a straight line. He indicated and turned down another street and the blocky Honolulu Medical Centre loomed before them.

“Why are we going to the hospital? Are you feeling all right? What’s the problem?” Danny said, staccato.

“Danny, calm. It’s okay.” Steve turned into the parking lot, and slid into a free space that had just opened up in front of the nose of his ostentatious giant truck. “I thought that we could pop in and see how Dool is doing.”

Danny puddled in relief in the passenger seat.

“You’re very high strung,” Steve observed. “What were you saying about fire fighters?”

~*~

“Hey, gift shop.” Danny caught Steve’s elbow. “We should get something.”

Steve processed that like a robot receiving a programme update. “Flowers?”

“I don’t think that they allow flowers anymore?” Danny scratched his head. “Allergies and stuff.”

The gift shop did not have a florist attached. There were a lot of cuddly animals holding hearts on the central display.

“I expect, since she had a penetrating wound in her abdomen, that she won’t want any chocolate?” Steve offered.

“Ew.” Danny grabbed a giant honey-coloured plush teddy. “Dolce will love it.”

“I think Dooll’s a little old for a teddy bear.”


He cocked his head to the side endearingly, and echoed, “Dolce?”

Danny nodded. “Codpiece.”

~*~

Steve in uniform turned a few heads as they strode down corridor D3 on the fifth floor to the surgical wards. Information on Dolce was scant, since they weren’t relatives.

“What -- you’ve been calling the hospital for updates?” Danny asked. In the advent of Steve’s infection and ongoing revelations, Danny had kind of forgotten about little Dolce. But Steve had been sick. He hadn’t been surreptitiously calling the Medical Centre.
Dolce was in a small two-bed room with a curtained partition.

“Danny. Steve.” Ensconced in her bed, Dolce scrabbled at her headphones, setting them down on her lap by her iPod. “Oh my god!”

“Hey. Hey. Hey.” Danny dove in, giving her a gentle hug. She looked fine. A little flushed and crumpled around the edges, but otherwise, okay. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine. Honest.” Dolce pressed her hand against her abdomen. “I mean. Sucks. They had to…. I had to have surgery. The glass nicked my lower intestine.”

“Sounds--” Danny pondered, as he perched on the edge of her bed, “--horrible.”

“Antibiotics.” She waved her arm with the IV attached. “I’m off this tomorrow. ‘Home on Wednesday.’”

“This is for you.” Steve thrust the teddy into her arms. “Do you have family in Honolulu?”

“Thank you.” Dolce cuddled in, half-obscured by the chunky teddy. “Thank you.”

“Do you have a mom and dad in Honolulu?” Steve persisted, and Danny saw a potential resident in their future, especially given her amazing cakes. That was a type of creativity that Danny could wholeheartedly support with bells, whistles, fireworks, and an appreciative appetite.

“Mom will be along later,” Dolce said, effectively derailing Danny’s embryonic cake plans. “She had to take my little sister to hula practice.”

“Yeah, how old is she?” Danny asked.

“Ten going on twenty.”

Danny laughed. “I hear you.”

“I gotta thank you guys; you were awesome. Can you hang around? My mom will be around at seven. She’d love to meet you.” She glanced at the wall clock -- seven o’clock was a good hour away.

“Unfortunately, we can’t,” Steve said sincerely, “we have a prior engagement.”

Danny didn’t know what that engagement was, but he decided to go along with the excuse. He suspected that Steve, understandably, wasn’t that fond of hospitals. The prickly cat impression that he was giving was very prickly.

Opening his wallet, Steve pulled out a business card. Purposely, he set it on Dolce’s side table. The card was a brilliant aquamarine with a delicate silver and black scrolled design that Danny really wanted to scrutinise. In the centre of the card was a stylised ‘S’. Dolce chased the card across the smooth Formica tabletop, trying to pick it up. The edge of the card was smoothly bevelled. Finally, resorting to clawed nails, she turned it over. Nose scrunching, perplexed, she contemplated the card.

“Seolh Co-operative?”

“Yes, if you need any help. Call us.” Steve was practically standing at attention.

“Hey, do you cater?” Danny said.

Turning the card over in her fingers, Dolce volunteered, “I do cakes. I could cater, I guess. Do you
need a caterer? I’m sure I’d be able to help.”

“Not at this precise moment in time, no. But you know, I was thinking. We’ve got a project back at Seolh.” Danny vaguely pointed in the possible direction of maybe where the House was.

Steve’s palm came out like a shark fin. “The House is north west of this position.”

“Me and Steve were thinking a charity ball at the House, when the Hall’s been refurbished -- it got damaged -- long story,” Danny said in the face of her continuingly perplexed impression. A plan unfurled in his mind’s eye. “Charity ball when it’s repaired. I can see one of your cakes on display. We’d need a naval-marine themed centrepiece. What?”

Steve was smiling fondly at him. Even against the backdrop of the sun setting on the horizon behind him, the smile was the brightest point in the room.

“What?” Danny asked again.

“Continue,” Steve said imperiously.

“What’s the charity?” Dolce asked. Danny could see that she was already figuring out possibilities.

“Navy SEAL Foundation,” Steve supplied, into Danny’s pause as he tried to remember.

“I can think of a few things. Do some drawings? I get that this is really in the early planning stages, right?” Dolce said.

“It will happen,” Steve stated. And the universe was definitely going to move aside and let the charity ball happen.

“It will also be for the benefit of the Technical College in Honolulu,” Danny added. “The kids are working on the project at the House.”

“Oh, cool, that’s where I studied.”

“Okay.” Danny clapped his hands. “Watch this space.”

“Excellent.” Steve consulted his watch. “We’ll have to make a move now.”

“Okay,” Danny drawled. The imp of the perverse wanted to know if Steve really had plans, or if he had reached his embarrassment quotient for the day. “Where are we going?”

“Wholefoods at Kahala Mall.” Steve lifted a folded piece of paper from his breast pocket. “Chin needs organic ghee.”

“What?” Danny asked.

“And groceries,” Steve finished. He waggled his eyebrows at Dolce. “Nice to see you again. I’m glad that you’re doing much better.”

“Yeah, great to see you, kiddo.” Danny leaned over and bussed her cheek. “You look after yourself.”


Danny pointed his trigger finger at Steve. “Remember that.”
“Aye aye, sir.” Steve drawled.

“Oh, I like that,” Danny winked *lasciviously*, and then let Steve tow him out of the door.

~*~

#86#

“So what did Kaye say?” Danny asked, as he stowed their Wholefood shopping in the footwell behind the passenger seat in the Ford.

“What?” Steve asked upfront from the driver’s seat, as he set the key in the ignition. “You’re back there. I don’t know what you’re saying.”

Danny slammed the door shut, and then clambered into the passenger seat. “Kaye.”

Reversing out of the parking space, Steve didn’t say a word.

“Come on, Steve. Give me a piece of the bone. I’ll even accept a bone spur.”

“It’s classified,” Steve said dogmatically.

“Classified. Smashified. It’s kind of relevant to what’s going on. You work best brainstorming. Let’s brainstorm. I’ve signed your official secret paperwork.”

“She’s not saying anything.” Steve said reluctantly.

The truck turned onto the main road.

“Really? Like?” Danny mimed zipping his lips shut.

Steve flicked a glance at him. Danny was not on board with that; when Steve took his eyes off the road, his driving weaved.

“We can’t force her to speak.”

“Uhm.” Danny managed, because he was pretty sure that Jenna could be forced to speak, and that sent a sense of disquiet through his bones. “Steve? I mean….”

Steve flexed his long fingers on the steering wheel.

“Kaye’s opted to stay quiet. You’ve met her. She’s--” clearly Steve hunted for words, “--high strung, but she’s also very intelligent. She’s going to co-operate, because she doesn’t actually have any choice. Co-operation is her most logical option. She’s looking at prison for the rest of her life if she doesn’t. Wo Fat’s got her terrified. She’s now out from under his thumb. She just has to reach the point where she realises that she needs to work with us.”

“What about her boyfriend. Her fiancé?”

Steve drove, and Danny let him. Danny watched the city architecture give way to the highway spanning through the start of suburbia. Home was a good half hour to forty five minutes away, maybe a little longer given the rush hour traffic.

~*~

“Excellent.” Chin grabbed the shopping out of Danny’s hands.
“What are we having? Steve wouldn’t say.” Danny asked.

“Murgh Makhani,” Chin said, as he unpacked the ratty old tote bag onto the kitchen table. The ghee stayed with a pot of natural yoghurt, fresh ginger root, a container of garam masala, and a carton of organic cream. The other stuff was divided between the fridge and the candy shelf, or put aside to be moved to the pantry.

“Indian food?” Danny hazarded. They hadn’t had anything even remotely close to Indian food since the poisoning.

“Punjabi cuisine.” Chin delicately kissed his fingertips.

There was a big Steve-shaped hole in the kitchen. Danny hadn’t even seen the giant goof disappear.

“You want a hand?” Danny ventured, deciding to give Steve his me-time, since he had had a long day.

“Yeah, sure. You can tell me what’s happening.” Chin fired up the stove-top under one of the largest frying pans they had in the kitchen. “I need to start the basmati rice for the pilau.”

“Pilau? You mean pilaf?”

“No. It’s delicately fragranced basmati rice. Pilaf is more complicated; like a risotto.”

“Oh, you learn something new everyday. So helping? What can I do?”

“The chicken pieces are marinating in the fridge,” Chin said. “Can you get them and put them on a baking tray? They need to roast in the oven.”

“Okay.” Inside the fridge there was a large Pyrex casserole dish piled high with chicken, marinating in what looked like yoghurt and a boatload of unidentifiable spices. “How did the Hall meeting go?”

“They’re a good bunch of kids.” Chin was grinding away at the contents of a large cast iron pestle and mortar. “Addison has them in hand. I think that he’s going to enjoy the project.”

“Steve has a plan to host a charity ball after it’s repaired.” Danny transferred the chicken over to the large kitchen table. Chin had already laid out two shallow roasting pans. Danny thought that he better wash his hands first. “For some Navy SEAL charity, and to highlight the kids’ work.”

“Okay.” Chin hummed introspectively under his breath, and left it at that.

Danny used dishwashing liquid in lieu of actual hand soap, and worked on getting a good lather. Chin tossed the spices into the warmed frying pan. A hiss and the scent of an evocative melange of warmth filled the air.

“What’s that?” Danny leaned over from the sink, sniffing appreciatively.

“Cardamom, cumin, coriander seeds.” Chin watched the roasting spices closely and at some indeterminate point (to Danny), he dashed oil into the pan.

“Have you ever thought about becoming a chef?” Drying his hands on a dish towel, Danny sidled around Chin, back to the kitchen table. “You could have a great fusion restaurant? Sushi one day. Mexican the next. Spanish….”

“I do like cooking, but as a hobby. I think if I had to cook every day, it wouldn’t be fun.” Chopped onions slid into the pan with a sizzle.
“This okay?” Using a knife and folk, Danny started positioning the chunks of chicken.

“Perfect.”

Tongue caught between his teeth, Danny got the chicken pieces rank and file over the two trays. Chin shifted to the right as he stirred the frying pan, clearing the way to the oven, and Danny took that as an instruction to get the trays in the oven, as soon as possible.

As Danny slammed the oven shut, he realised that he wasn’t actually one hundred percent sure about having Indian food again. But he wasn’t going to complain. The last time he had enjoyed the feast; it was only that it was linked with the Hesse Brothers that gave him the collywobbles.

“This isn’t spicy, is it?” he asked. Somehow, he managed not to say, this isn’t somehow poisoned, is it?

“I’m going to do a mild to medium sauce.” Chin nodded towards the kitchen counter where what looked like a hundred or thirteen separate pots of ingredients had been carefully measured out.

“Looks complicated.” Danny observed. “I’m fairly sure that you can buy this stuff in jars. I bet Wholefood has organic, what did you call it, muggy maki?”

“Murgh Makhani, and this will be superior,” Chin said. “I am cheating, though, the nan breads are pre-prepared.”

“What’s that?” Danny pointed at a green leafy thing in a chipped bowl.

“Cilantro and fenugreek leaves.” Chin poured rice into the frying pan and a volume of stock, the colour of pale chardonnay. “Cinnamon, bay leaf, and salt.” Chin tossed a stick, a leaf, and a generous spoonful of salt over the rice.

“Don’t let Steve see that.”

“It all balances out.” Chin smiled, even as he stirred only once and then set the lid firmly over the pilau rice. He glanced at the wall clock, expression segueing into abstracted as he calculated. Chin deposited a generous stick of the newly bought ghee in a second pan. Expertly crushing a couple of garlic cloves and a chunk of the ginger with the blade of a wicked-looking knife against a glass chopping board, Chin, Danny thought, was glorious to watch.

“It smells amazing.” Danny leaned over the pan, inhaling fragrant garlic.

“Excuse me.” Chin chivvied Danny to the side, and the contents of pot after pot after pot of spices were tossed over the frying garlic and ginger.

“I guess it’s actually kind of healthy. Spices are healthy, aren’t they?” Danny asked.

“In many traditions, yes,” Chin said. Pureed tomatoes were the next ingredient to be added, and it started looking like the type of sauce that Danny expected to see. “So the investigation?”

“Definitely, we’ve got some weird CIA-ish photographs,” Danny said. “From China. Some place called Yang gang gang gang?”


“Shit. I don’t think I was supposed to tell you that.”

Chin digested that with a raised eyebrow.
“But they’re old and not referenced, and it’s a guess. So they’re kind of useless.” Danny shrugged. “Kaye’s not saying anything. Steve thinks that she will soon, ‘cause she’s between a rock and a hard place, and the only people who can help her now is the Navy. She just has to figure that out.”

“Hmmm.” Chin gently folded cream into the sauce. “I asked my brother for the file on Mr. and Mrs. McGarretts’ car crash. He’s going to pull it from Criminal Investigation’s records, run a copy, and drop it by when he can. Can you turn the chicken over, please?”

“Sure.” Danny pulled the trays out of the oven. There was a witch’s cauldron on the stove’s back burner, contents bubbling like a volcanic mud pool. Plop. Plop. “What’s that?”

“Tarka Dahl.” Chin’s smile was impish. “Just for Steve: lentil broth.”

Danny snorted out a laugh, which honestly, was a giggle.

~*~

The table was set. The candle food warmers spread out over the expanse. Chin had chosen to serve the dishes separately: a bowl for the sauce; a tray for the roasted, marinated chicken pieces; a delicate metal tureen for the tarka dal; a plate of freshly fried onion bhajis; a pile of nans; the frying pan of pilau rice; and pots of chopped chillies, yogurt, cream, and slivered almonds with juicy white raisins.

“I’ll get the bell,” Danny said. What was he going to make when it was his turn to cook? In all fairness, he didn’t think that he was ever going to be as creative as Chin. He would have to call his Mom.

“Lager or wine?” Chin contemplated.

Danny let Chin make the decision, as he keyed the lights to tell all and sundry that dinner was ready. There was a rattle of running footsteps that made Danny smile fondly.

Home, he thought.

Mary came running in, Toast close on her heels.

“Hi, Danny,” they said in chorus.

“Oh, my favourite!” Kono proclaimed, a step behind them. “Chin, you’re a master chef.”

“Have you washed your hands?” Danny asked. He couldn’t help himself sometimes.

“Oh, dude.” Toast made an abrupt about face and darted out of the kitchen.

Kono presented her hands, fingers splayed for Danny’s inspection. Mary presented one finger.

“Smells delicious.” Steve had changed out of his uniform and into his customary t-shirt and cargo shorts. Pink faced, he looked freshly scrubbed. He took his customary place, directly opposite the date and cilantro dotted tarka dal.

Chin set a six pack of pale ale, condensation beading on the glass bottles, on the table, and sat.

“So, Kono, haven’t seen you for a couple of days? What have you been up to?” Danny asked, as he laded rice onto his plate.

“Training, brah.”
“You what?” Danny could not have heard that correctly. Steve shrugged, as he ladled dal onto his rice.

“I’ve been training,” Kono said. “There’s a Triple Crown at the end of the month. I got a new squash tail. I need to break it in.”

“What size?” Steve asked around a mouthful of nan.

“Five foot seven. Matt Biolos. I saved up.”

“Nice….” Chin toasted Kono with his bottle.

It was all code to Danny, but she was happy, so it was grand. Toast perched on the edge of his seat and started talking math. Something, Danny thought, to do with the analysis of waves.

“Mamo does surfboards?” Danny asked.

Kono froze. “Yes.”

“Oops?” Danny ventured.

“No, it’s cool.” Kono leaned back in her seat. “Uncle Mamo’s old school. He designs. He teaches. He doesn’t use the new materials, though. I can’t compete on his boards. But his shapes. His innovations are now textbook.”

“Why not? I mean, why doesn’t Mamo use the new stuff?”

“He doesn’t like the feel of them,” Chin said. “Too many chemicals. Plastics.”

“It’s an entirely different process,” Steve explained. “Mamo is an artist in wood.”

“Mamo,” Chin said contemplatively, “holds the history.”

Conversations ranged around the table, as Danny applied himself to making a decent dent in the food.

Home, he thought again.

~*~

They ended up in the television room for an impromptu movie night, after cleaning the kitchen.

“What do we wanna watch?” Toast asked the room.

Steve had ensconced himself on an armchair, sitting upright. Determined, Danny guessed, not to fall asleep on the sofa.

“What have we got?” Mary asked.

“Name your poison,” Toast part-answered.

She blew out a desultory raspberry as she considered. “I dunno… something real-ish. Not sci-fi.”


Mary, Danny realised from Toast’s teasing, was a Jeremy Renner fan.
“Mission Impossible,” Mary said.

Toast checked everyone and there were no immediate nays.

“Okay. Two secs.” He fiddled with the new Christmas PS4, hooking it up through some technological magic to display the film.

Text displayed over the Paramount Mountain opening sequence announced close captioning was on, and Mary slid a glance at Steve. He let it pass over him, ostensibly focussed on grabbing a handful of popcorn, but Danny could tell that he had seen her contemplative, borderline upset expression.

Danny hadn’t seen the movie. He guessed it was going to be entertaining, unbelievable claptrap. But at least Tom Cruise was on the short side. Mary turned out to be a commenter, pointing out that the guy who was killed at the start, looked like an old friend of Chin.

“Yeah, James.” Chin said, and left it at that.

“Simon Pegg. Oh, he’s good.” Kono grinned as Cruise tried to escape from a grim looking prison.

“Most unattractive, attractive, British guy, ever,” Mary said.

This Danny thought, was probably going to be an entertaining film, especially with comments from the peanut gallery. The movie was promising to be kind of ridiculous.

Movie magic shenanigans, led to betrayal, resulting in explosions, led to car chases, led (finally) to some plot, to more betrayal, and Tom Cruise and Jeremy Renner plummeted off a bridge into a canal.

Yawning, Steve pushed himself out of his armchair and wandered out of the living room. His exit was clocked, but wasn’t commented upon. The downstairs bathroom door clicked.

“Shouldn’t we pause?” Mary asked, leaning out of her seat, tracking Steve’s path.

“Nah,” Kono said.

Some thirty seconds later, Danny really wasn’t counting, the toilet flushed, but Steve didn’t come back. Unable to let it go, Danny rolled to his feet.

Steve was in the kitchen contemplating the insides of the fridge.

“Movie not your thing?”

“Hmm?” Steve pulled back out of the fridge, milk carton in his hand. “What?”

“You’re not enjoying the film?” Danny jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

Steve shrugged. He took a healthy glug from the carton, throat working evenly and smoothly. Draining it dry, he scrunched the quart carton in one large hand.

“What?” Steve wrinkled his nose in Danny’s direction, as he threw the carton in the recycle bin.

Danny leaned against the door jamb, and grinned.

“What?” Steve said a little louder.

“You up for a little nookie?” Danny asked.
Steve jerked back in the classic double take. A crazy grin blossomed. Danny waggled his eyebrows. “I could be,” Steve prevaricated, even as he grabbed Danny’s hand and towed him out of the kitchen.

~*~

#87#

Danny smoothed his hands over the dark hairs of Steve’s thighs. Lithe muscles and long flanks were a delight to stroke.

“Gonna teach you something, Steve.”

Steve hummed under his breath, relaxing. This was slow and sensual. The quick furtive mutual handjobs while sprawled on the spiral staircase had taken the edge off, even if Danny had bruised the small of his back on a rising tread.

Rain slashed against the lighthouse windows, creating a backdrop reminiscent of a cocoon. The warm copper bedside lights bathed them in an amber glow.

“Slow and steady is the way to go.” Danny drew a gentle fingernail down the soft skin in the crease of Steve’s thigh, scooping up a wayward pool of natural lubrication from earlier activities.

Steve wasn’t a passive participant. Sliding a hand up the curve of Danny’s chest, he ruffled coarse chest hairs, dabbled over his collarbone and curled his large hand around Danny’s neck.

“Come here.” Steve interweaved his fingers in the hair of Danny’s nape and drew him down.

Danny liked kissing; kissing was awesome. His toes tingled. It wasn’t about lips and tongues, and the mechanics of clacking teeth. Steve was happy. The gift of happiness was unparalleled. A thrum in his veins demanded release.

“Gonna show you something,” Danny mouthed against Steve. He rubbed a finger under Steve’s balls.


“You’re just my little bundle of nerves.”

“Hey,” Steve protested. “I didn’t hear that right.”

“Show me some of that yoga stretchiness,” Danny directed, pushing at Steve’s knee with his other hand.

Steve eyed him for just a second, and then decided to go with the plan. And, boy, Steve was lithe; canting his hips just so, he could fold his knee up against his chest. The path was clear. Danny gently circled his finger, just working the tip of his finger inwards. Glancing down the plane of Steve’s chest; it was apparent that his cock was still interested in the proceedings, bobbing gently, foreskin pulled back.

“You okay, Babe?”

“Perfect.” Steve reached up and sucked on Danny’s bottom lip, lusciously.

“I’m going in.” Danny delved, carefully sliding a single finger into Steve. He squeaked, although
Danny bet Steve would deny it until his dying day. Danny pressed. The hair trigger performed perfectly.

“Oh.” Steve breathed into Danny’s mouth. A pulse of wetness striped over Danny and splashed high on Steve. It was short and sweet, spent from a second coming, but in no way, not immensely satisfying. Steve shivered from the tip of his ridiculous mussed hair to his long knobbly toes, and seemingly, merged with their sheets.

“That,” Danny said with great deliberation, “was awesome.”

“Hhhhh,” was Steve’s contribution. Idly, he rubbed at his tummy.

Danny kissed the corner of Steve’s eyelid. “You okay?”

“Hhhhh.”

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Danny sniggered.

Verbal contribution might be on the ebb, but Steve was coordinated enough to wrap his large, warm hand around Danny’s cock. It was wonderful. Steve’s hands were magic. There was something very kinky about the calluses on Steve’s broad hands smoothed by his own come. The tip of Steve’s thumb was perfectly rough against the head of Danny’s cock.

Oh, he was sensitive there. Re-doing the piercing seemed like a good idea more and more. Steve moved his thumb away.

“No,” Danny protested.

With the tip of his tongue, Steve carefully licked the pearly bead on the pad of his thumb.

“Jesus,” Danny blasphemed, and jerked his hips, once, twice, and came.

Steve laughed lowly. He pulled Danny down, manhandling him into the perfect position. Lanky arms curled around Danny’s shoulders, squeezing. Danny was a happy camper, content to be held. A long hairy leg snaked around Danny. It was like being swaddled.

Lightning flashed, starkly illuminating the room in actinic white shards and shadows, and the grip became as hard as stone. Steve breathed harshly.

“One thousand.” Danny rubbed a hand over the dips and rises of Steve’s ribs, his bad side. The patchwork of striated flesh was smooth with moisturiser. “Two thousand. Three thousand.”

Thunder boomed. Steve jerked beneath him.

“It’s all right,” Danny rumbled. “So how far away is the storm?”

“What?” Steve said incredulously. He craned his head to better see Danny.

“I counted. Three seconds.” Danny managed to wriggle a fraction so they could see each other better. “So how far away is the storm?”

“Sound travels 1,130 feet every second,” Steve said.

It was like lying on a manikin, Danny thought.

“And that is?” Danny asked conversationally.
“3,390 feet.” Steve calculated immediately.

Lightning arced again. Caught like a black and white photograph, Steve looked like he belonged on a horror movie poster -- white faced and wide eyed, his pupils blown. The residual light burned the image against Danny’s retinas.

He didn’t even have a chance to count before thunder rocked the building.

“Man, curry’s just evil,” Danny said lightly, even as he made like a giant furry teddy bear in Steve’s grip.

“What?” Steve blinked at him.

“Curry equals storm. Twice is a coincidence.”

Lightning flashed again, but Steve didn’t flinch, too focussed on Danny. The thunder rolled around them.

“It’s different,” Steve said pedantically, “last time we had takeout because a storm was coming. This time Chin’s made a curry and there happens to be a storm.”

“Close enough,” Danny said mock indignantly. “Do we need to, I dunno, get out of this fish bowl?”

Lighting and thunder matched and vied for dominance.

“It’s right on top of us,” Steve observed.

“Funnily enough, I noticed.” He kind of vaguely made an attempt to sit up, but Steve was having none of it -- Danny was there for the duration.

“We’re earthed. There’s a lightning rod on the roof.” Steve glanced upwards at the bell shaped ceiling. “The ground rod is out back in the gardens. The whole structure is reinforced. When the House was designed back in the late 1800s, the architects knew the dynamics of the peninsula. That’s--”


“That’s one of the reasons,” Steve continued doggedly, “that we have the eyrie -- the lighthouse back then. You don’t build a lighthouse that’s vulnerable to lightning. And you build a lighthouse to withstand storms. You would have liked the lantern. It was a first-order Fresenel lens.”

“What’s a Fresenel lens?” Danny asked dutifully.

Steve paused a beat before answering. And obediently, lightning and thunder crashed again. Danny marvelled. Steve was probably running a complex mathematical equation in his head.

“It was state of the art back in the day,” Steve said. “It was so large it practically filled the room, but the light could be seen from twenty miles away. A Fresenel lens is made up of thin, light individual lenses in concentric annular sections.”

“Excuse me?” Danny pecked a kiss on Steve’s temple.

“It would be easier to draw you one.” Steve craned his head, kind of leaned with intent, and Danny bestowed another kiss. “Imagine a layered multifaceted giant diamond.”
Steve, Danny remembered, had been drawing an impossibly fantastical lighthouse last time Danny had seen his art folder. Steve obviously had a thing for lighthouses. Danny decided to keep the cheap, Freudian shot for later. He was sure that there would be ample opportunity in the future.

Lightning flashed and thunder did not clash immediately around them.

“One thousand, two thousand -- hey, it’s moving away -- four thousand.” The thunder rang out.

Steve relaxed infinitesimally, but Danny felt it, held as he was, tightly. Steve nuzzled the side of Danny’s neck and inhaled.

Another distant flash briefly touched the room. The thunder was barely a blip. Danny could imagine the sky boiling over head, rushing northwards following churning, storming winds. The sudden silence of lashing rain no longer pelting against the windows brought skin-tingling relief.

“So sleep, I think.” Danny draped over Steve doing his best impression of a blanket.

“If you insist.” Steve said formally, the ass – and, incredibly, held Danny closer.

“Ears?” Danny prodded.

“Hmmm? Oh, yeah.” One hand released Danny, and Steve picked the aids out of his ears, setting them on the headboard shelf above them. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

Steve enfolded him again. They were going to be a total mess in the morning.

~*~

“Let go, Danny. I gotta go to the bathroom. Danny, let go,” the voice penetrated his consciousness.

Reluctantly, Danny clambered out of sleep; he was deliciously comfortable. They had barely moved, only shifting to the side to facilitate breathing. A dry kiss brushed his forehead.

“Seriously, Danny, I need a shit. You gotta let go.”

“Whoa.” Danny let go with alacrity.

“Thank you,” Steve said mockingly.

“You all right?” Danny pushed up on one elbow, blinking sleep out of his eyes.

A gloriously naked butt jogged away down the spiral staircase. As wake up calls went it wasn’t Danny’s preferred way. The tattooed butt was pretty nice, though. He felt crusty. Gagging dramatically, he rolled out of bed. The sheets definitely needed a wash. He dragged them off and left them in a ball at the bottom of the bed.

Yawning, Danny sauntered after Steve. He kind of needed the bathroom himself. Curry, he thought darkly. The bathroom door was closed. Ah, the perils of partnership, Danny thought.

“Yo, Babe, you gonna be long?” No aids, they were still on the headboard, and a closed door meant that Steve wasn’t going to answer. He could, Danny thought, go to his own studio. Naked, crusty, and looking like he had just rolled out of bed. Yeah, right. Where the fuck were his clothes? There had been some hasty disrobing last night.
The shower turned on, its power jets clearly loud. Danny couldn’t hold on. Damn it, Rachel had been really picky about privacy, but Steve was Navy and Danny was one of a large family. The shower was already steamy. Steve was a vague, long limbed blur behind fogged glass. Danny darted into the bathroom, because, logic aside, this was pretty weird, and took the most satisfying dump he had had in an age.

He flushed and Steve yelped, jumping back out of the suddenly hot jet of water.

“Danny!” Steve poked his head out of the shower.

“What else was I supposed to do?” Danny asked, hands outstretched, beseechingly, hamming it up.

“I really needed to go.”

“You didn’t have to flush!” Steve said indignantly. “Or you could have gone downstairs.”

“Mea culpa.” Yeah, he had forgotten that there was a bathroom on the first floor. He glanced down at the toilet bowl. “I really had to flush.”

“Come on.” Steve ducked back into the sci-fi shower, leaving the door open.

“Ooh, shower nookie.” Danny rubbed his hands together, and got with the programme.

~*~

“Are you okay if I drop you off at the security booth?” Steve asked. “Corporal Oh will meet you there, and conduct you to the NCIS labs.”

“Where are you going?” Danny paused, mid-tying his shoelace, as he sat on the sofa. Steve had chosen not to wear his tan uniform, and had opted for a black pair of pants and black shirt -- he looked like a stick of liquorice. That should have been a clue that he was up to something. Danny was tempted to retrieve his camera; the morning light through the eyrie’s half moon windows cast long slats of shadow against Steve’s pale skin.

Steve shifted from foot to foot.

“Babe?”

“I have my regular appointment with Dr. Chowdhry.” Steve said flatly.

Steve’s therapist or psychologist, Danny wasn’t too sure which.

“Don’t forget to ask about the family group sessions, or the pamphlets,” Danny said easily. He really wanted that information. The seat-of-the-pants thing was working, but a little advice wouldn’t go amiss.

Steve stared.

“And?” Danny asked into that silence. Perhaps Steve would also say something about his reaction to the storm last night, although, in the scheme of things, it had been fairly mild. Sex writhen endorphins were clearly a good prescription to lessen shocks to the system.

“Okay.” Steve nodded curtly. “I should be on site circa twelve hundred hours.”

Danny parsed that into normal language. “So we’ll grab lunch around twelve-ish?”

~*~
Corporal Oh had texted Danny with a list of the equipment and chemical development packages that had been delivered in the morning, before Danny had even dressed. The slide film had burned a hole in Danny’s pocket all the way to the base. They had a day ahead of them maintaining delicate temperature control, balancing chemicals and multiple washings. Danny was looking forward to it. Oh had been gleeful with anticipation.

~*~

“We’ve got to let them dry now, kid,” Danny said, regarding the long strips of film hanging on the miniature washing line, pulled straight with little weights.

“They’ve gone milky,” Oh said, horrified, leaning in closely. It was apparent even under the red light of the dark room.

“It’s okay.” Danny closed the door on the light-proof drying cabinet. He slid the sign on the door from ‘free’ to the ‘do-not-open’ position. “They should clear as they dry.”

It was all a risk. They were getting images off better than fifty percent of the films that they had developed.

Oh crossed his fingers.

“Can—” Danny contemplated the cabinet, “—we lock this thing?”

“No one will open it. The room is security locked.” In fact, they had to go through two sets of key-card controlled doors before getting into the darkroom. But Oh obediently rooted in a drawer beside the cabinet and pulled out a padlock with a key twisted in the lock. “This do?”

“Yeah.” Danny clicked the shackle through the hole in the latch, locked it with a click, and pocketed the key. Obviously, it wasn’t unusual to add extra security. Call him paranoid, but his gut told him that this was the film they were after.

“All done.”

“Lunch time,” Oh said with the enthusiasm of the young.

Danny’s phone had pinged announcing a text while they were busy hanging the film in the cabinet, so he guessed that Steve was back on base. There was a text in all its pithy understated Steve glory.

“Hey, Oh, can you show me where the Hale Aina Dining Facility is?”

~*~

The dining facility was everything that Danny imagined that a US Navy dining facility would look like -- basically, Danny was back in High School. There were long tables, lots of chairs, and a rank of manned serving counters at the back of the hall. The food smelt better than High School, and was colour-coded red, yellow, or green depending on its health rating. They had been carded at the door, or more accurately, they had had to show their passes.

At just after one o’clock, it was culinary mayhem filled to the brim with uniformed women and men - - from sharply dressed officers to camouflage-bedecked grunts. There were more than a few people in civilian dress. Danny didn’t feel like he stood out, but there was a degree of observation as he followed Steve along the serving counters.

Danny went for the stir fry chicken with noodles that promised, according to the red ticket, heart attacks and high cholesterol. Danny was looking forwards to it. Grumpy Pants selected the high performance, healthy, green-marked Lasagne Florentine.
They took a couple of seats at the end of a long table, where Steve was greeted with respectful nods. Steve applied himself to his vegetable lasagne with his customary diligence: tiny mouthfuls; bit of pushing around the plate, and careful monitoring of the world around him. It wasn’t if Danny could ask him how his session had gone in a hall filled with people, so Danny watched Steve and the people around them.

By dint of their positioning Danny spotted her before Steve could -- dark, glossy brunette-almost-black hair tightly woven in a bun on the top of her head. She wore her camos well, and she even wore make-up (Danny didn’t know that soldiers or sailors were allowed to wear makeup).

“Visitor coming over.” Danny lifted his chin, indicating over Steve’s shoulder.

He set his cutlery down, and turned in his seat. “Catherine!”

And then they were hugging.

“Oh, my god, you look so good.” She stepped back, holding Steve’s biceps scrutinising him from top to toe. “How are you?”

“Fine. Better,” he said with a touch of honesty as Catherine raised an eyebrow at him. “You can see.”

“You do. You do. Are you…?”


“Don’t be an idiot.” Catherine casually smacked his arm. “Working?”

“Yes,” Steve said firmly, “in a specific capacity relating to NI. I’m still TDRL.”

Acronyms, the Navy and their acronyms, Danny made a note to Google it when they got home.

“Hey?” Danny waved his fingers. “Aren’t you going to introduce us?”

“Oh, Danny. This is Cath.” Steve waved his hand between the two of them. “Danny Williams, my friend, a resident at Seolh, and currently a contractor here at the base. Lieutenant Catherine Rollins, Naval Intelligence.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Catherine reached over to shake his hand. “Contractor and Seolh -- that’s an interesting mix?”

“I have eclectic skills.” Danny liked a woman with a firm handshake.

Catherine nodded understanding that details were not going to be forthcoming. She apparently knew what Seolh was, and appeared to be a good friend of Steve’s.

“Do you want to join us?” Steve pointed to their half empty plates.

“I was actually just finished,” she explained. “I was taking my tray to clean up when I spotted you. I’m back on duty in five.”

Steve looked actually disappointed at her words.

“You look so good.” She darted in and kissed Steve’s cheek. “Give me a call, okay. The number hasn’t changed. I’ll be here for the next two weeks.”
“I--” Steve managed, and shuffled, just a fraction of an inch.

She cocked her head to the side, and her eyes widened with comprehension. Evidently, she knew and could read Steve very well. She flicked a glance at Danny.

“Huh. Still give me a call. I want to catch up.” She kissed Steve’s cheek again. “Gotta go.”

She blew out in the same way she blew in, efficiently.

“You’ve got a little bit of gloss on your cheek.” Danny pointed.

Blushing, Steve wiped at the mark as he sat.

“Are officers allowed to do that? Kiss?” Danny asked, teasing just a little. Steve had just told a clearly, good friend that he had a boyfriend. A little bit of teasing misdirection would not go amiss.

“I’m in civvies, and currently not active, and she’s not on duty at this precise moment in time, so,” he hedged, “acceptable.”

“So no French kissing when you’re on the deck of your boat.” Danny grinned.

“It would,” Steve said primly as he stabbed a chunk of pasta and eggplant with intent, “undermine morale.”

“I thought that it would improve morale.”

Steve glowered, and Danny basked in the burn.

~*~

#88#

The two guys sitting beside them at the long canteen table started clearing up their plates. You didn’t appear to take long, leisurely meals in a Navy dining facility.

“Commander.” The crinklier of the two acknowledged Steve with a dip of his grizzled head.

“Commander,” Steve returned soberly.

Danny waited until they had their own pool of relative silence. The rush of people coming to eat appeared to be waning.


Steve eyed him across his forkful of white-sauce covered eggplant. Nose scrunching, he actually appeared to be struggling to follow the question, or formulate a reply.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “I think that I said that I dated her? Before? Catherine.”

“And you broke up?” Danny kind of vaguely remembered a mention of a Catherine, possibly, maybe.

Steve shifted in his seat.

“Hmm?” Danny said, because she was a very attractive woman, and, obviously, based on the greeting, cared greatly for Steve. Between them, deafness seemed to be a sore point -- especially for
Steve -- and that was hard to get a handle on. Steve was struggling with his new world, but he wasn’t bitter.

Steve covered with another mouthful of vegetable lasagne.

All Steve’s meagre words were in the past tense. Catherine had seemed happy and accepting of the fact that Steve had a boyfriend, and was geared towards boyfriends -- that must have been a doozy of a conversation.

Sue him, Danny knew that he was a nosy guy. He didn’t take photographs of people because he found them uninteresting.

“Communication -- she said I couldn’t,” Steve said tersely. “She tried visiting the last time the George Washington docked in Honolulu, about four months ago. It didn’t go well.”

Danny winced. Four months ago, Danny could imagine where Steve had been on the wiggly and back-tracking road to recovery.

“You broke up after--” Danny piano-accordioned his fingers around his ear. Anyone who split from their boyfriend when they were battered and down did not deserve Danny’s respect.

“No.” Steve rolled his eyes. “A year ago, maybe?”

That Steve didn’t actually know how long was very telling.

“Look, I’m getting better at the communication thing. Dr. Chowdhry--” Steve growled, frustrated.

“Say no more.” Danny waved his fork indulgently, because the communication-thing was obviously a work-in-progress, and it appeared to be something that Steve was working on with his therapist. He wondered, and realised that he would never ask, but… had Steve’s sessions led him to the conclusion that he could have a boyfriend.

Thank you, Dr. Chowdhry.

“So what’s your plan for the rest of the day?” Danny checked his watch; he wanted to give the film at least another hour to dry.

“Kaye,” Steve said, suddenly reduced to one syllable.

Danny winced. He hoped that she was thinking of talking.

“Ask her about Wo Fat.” Danny leaned across the table. “Get an idea of the man behind this. Not his plans, you know, but his likes and his dislikes. She won’t be deliberately compromising anything but maybe she’ll let something slip.”

“Danny, Danny, it’s in hand,” Steve said, almost indulgently. He shifted, and Danny got the distinct impression that Steve had almost bobbed up from his seat to bestow a peck of a kiss. “Okay, I need to move.”

“Sure, Babe. I’m gonna get dessert. The cheesecake looked awesome.” Danny waved his fork.

“How about a walk instead?”

“I thought that you needed to go to, you know.”

Steve stood gathering up his tray and the remnants of his meal. “No, I’ve been sitting on my ass all
morning in Dr. Chowdhry and Dr. Magnus’ offices.” He shook his head before Danny could ask the obvious question. “Dr. M. just wanted a check-up. I passed.”

Danny juggled lemon cheesecake against getting some fresh air. A walk wouldn’t go amiss. He was curious. Corporal Oh had driven him to the Hale Aina Dining Facility, through the military town within the base. He had seen a Burger King and a Post Office, signs for a school, and they had driven past a chapel. They would probably have to catch a bus back to the more formal part of Joint Base Pearl Harbour-Hickam within the whole, giant shebang that was the military’s presence in Hawaii.

“I dunno, I mean, walking, exercise….” Danny smiled because the decision was made, and the smile on Steve’s face meant that he knew it too. “I thought that this was a military base, not a town?”

“You haven’t really explored Oahu have you?” Steve observed.

“Well, no,” Danny said. He had walked a lot from his shitty apartment saving gas and trying to understand the new world that he was dropped in. He had walked his feet off. But it had never occurred to him that wandering around the base was allowed. He had imagined a massive installation behind a fence manned with armed guards, not a village with homes and schools. There was a distinct military presence but this was also home. There were main gates and visitor centres in this part of the base, but Danny was pretty sure that you couldn’t walk with impunity? He stood and corralled his plate and dirty cutlery.

“So walk?” Steve persisted.

“Yeah, Steve. Some fresh air before I go back to the lab would be nice.”

~*~

It was sunny. Sometimes it was hard to wrap his mind around the weather in Honolulu. Blue skies and temperatures in the eighties in January really messed with Danny’s world view.

Steve donned black Ray Bans that complimented his black shirt and narrow legged trousers -- the overly attractive ass -- and sauntered along at Danny’s side.

“Hey!” Steve startled. And then, abruptly, he was away, long legs powering.

“What?” Danny yelped, but Steve was on a direct arrowing line, focussed on target, angling across the quiet street.

“Steve!” Danny hared after him. “Careful of the traffic!”

“Joe! Joe White!”

The older, bald guy stopped dead on the top of the steps leading into the Post Office. Decked out in camos he was one man amongst many. Steve had to have eyesight like a hawk.

“Joe!” Steve took the steps three at a time, scaling them in less time than it took to blink.

“Steve! Son.” White greeted Steve with a hand clasp and slap on the shoulder. “You’re looking well.”

Danny jogged to a stop, and set his hands on his hips, guts churning. Lunch had been far too heavy for running even across the street. He stared up at them.
“Where have you been?” Steve demanded loudly. “I’ve been trying to get in touch with you.”

“Son, this isn’t the place.” White slid his hand down Steve’s arm and cupped his elbow.

“I’m not asking for a mission brief. Do you know what’s been happening?”

“No, tell me.” White started down the steps drawing Steve with him. “Hello, Danny.”

“Hello… Joe.” Danny really wanted to call him Commander or Mr. White, to keep that professional distance. But if Steve’s commanding officer was going to call him Danny, he was going to call him Joe.

“P-One is still on the Island. He’s looking for something,” Steve said urgently. “I need to talk to you about my mom.”

“Your mother?” White blinked. “What about Doris?”

“I know that mom worked for the CIA.”

That brought White up short. “And? That was a long time ago. And…”

“And what?” Danny said, invading White’s personal space.

“Yes, Doris was CIA,” White said lowly, too quietly for Steve, Danny guessed. “And? She was just a minor operative. A friendly operative, twenty-odd years ago.”

‘Friendly’ operative?” Danny stressed the word.

White stared down at him. “Assigned a family -- observation only. Low key. Why?”

“Because--” Steve began.

White held up his hand. “This isn’t the place, Steve.”

Wide street, civilians, soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, contractors. It really was kind of open, Danny observed.

“My Ford’s over there.” Steve pointed to a parking lot sign across the street that indicated down a side road.

“I need to post this letter.” White brandished the pale pink, card-sized envelope. “And then I have to get back to… my office, Steve.”

“This is important. We’re trying to figure out what Wo Fat might be looking for in Seolh,” Steve said damn near unintelligibly, he said it so quietly. And Danny knew that he really had to work at regulating his volume.

“What?” White blew out his cheeks with a huff of air. He held up his hand. “No, don’t say it again.”

Steve ground his teeth.

“Look, son,” White said, “how about I stop by this evening? It will be late, though, well after eight.” Steve glared. “Fine,” he said finally. “Just answer me one question, first.”

“If I can,” White hedged.
“When I asked you if my dad could have known the Yakuza, why didn’t you tell me that the link was my mom?”

“You asked about your dad, not your mom,” White said easily.

“Oh, come on, Joe,” Steve said disbelievingly. “My dad was investigating the Yakuza. Of course he knew them. And my mom was practically embedded in the family. How could you not tell me?”

“I get that you’re annoyed, Steve,” White said smoothly. “Your dad didn’t know the Yakuza. They were the people that he was investigating. It was one case among hundreds. It’s hardly pertinent.”

“Yes. But the fact that my mom knew them was.”

White leaned in closely. “It was over twenty years ago, Steve. Wo Fat’s Chinese-American, he’s not Yakuza. He would have been what? Twenty back then?”

“But he was working with the Yakuza when he killed Governor Jameson,” Steve pointed out.

“Are you sure about that? All the intel we have is that he’s actively working to fuck up the Yakuza—” White rolled his eyes “--and American interests, and line his own pockets.”

Steve breathed hard and fast, nostrils flaring. Danny set his hand on the small of Steve’s back.

“You deliberately held back information from me, why?” Steve demanded, hotly.

“Because I didn’t think it was relevant, son.” White regarded Steve, all avuncular perfection, and then he straightened, a mantle of professionalism draping over his shoulders. “This isn’t the place or time, Commander.”

“Sir,” Steve said obediently.

“I have to post this card to my daughter.” White waved it. “I’ll see you at eight – nearer nine.”

“Yes, sir.”

Steve watched Joe jog up the steps, back into the Post Office. The tension of his taut spine made the hair on Danny’s forearm stand proud. But he didn’t shy away from Danny’s touch. Glacially, Steve turned his head. He was carved in stone. The only expression that Danny could see was his own reflection in the expanse of Steve’s jet black sunglasses.

“Yes?” Danny asked.

“The guy I fought with on the highway was Yakuza,” Steve said forthrightly.

“Because of the tattoos you saw?” Danny clarified, because, yeah, he remembered that conversation.

“Yes, his irezumi were classic high echelon Yakuza -- wakagashira.” Steve turned his robot glare to the closed Post Office doors.

“You wanna wait until he comes out. Drag him to the SUV for a chat?” Danny offered.

“What?” Steve whipped back to face him, abruptly energy and action.

“We can corral him when he comes back,” Danny repeated. “We can go somewhere and find out exactly what he knows.”
Steve was inscrutable behind his Ray Bans.

“Hey, we can follow him back to his office,” Danny continued. “He definitely knows more than he’s saying. Fuck, he’s in the photographs back in the 1970s. Let’s find out.”

“He’s still a superior commanding officer, Danny. I can’t interrogate him.”

He was tempted, though, Danny could tell. Decisively, Steve marched up the Post Office steps, and pulled open the door. Danny matched his stride. Inside the transition from bright sunlight to gloom blinded Danny for a heartbeat. The Post Office was quiet; only a couple of people waiting to be served. Joe White had been and gone, no doubt through the swinging doors on the other side of the open plan area. Had he even had time to post the letter or had he just run, Danny wondered.

“He said that he would come around this evening.” Steve blew out an introspective sigh.

“Maybe that will work better?” Danny offered. “Talk to him as Stevie to Uncle Joe. He owes you that much.”

“Yeah.”

Assuming he comes, Danny thought.

~*~

The slide films were dry. Barely touching the edges with his fingernails, Danny transferred them to a light box, to better see the images. Magnifying lens to hand, he squinted at the first image. The colours were bleached, but the images were sharp. It appeared to be of a wooden doll-like figure dressed in a style that Danny couldn’t identify. The next picture was also of a doll, dressed in a fine tunic and trousers carefully detailed with beadwork. It appeared to be a Native American replication but Danny didn’t recognise the tribe. The next was a delicate porcelain doll devoid of any clothing. A collection, Danny decided. He rapidly scanned down the line of images, noting a vase and a brown leather covered journal, and then he froze.

Chinese coins.

Chinese coins, he breathed.

“Everything okay, Danny?” Oh asked.

“Hmmm, yeah. Colour’s a little bleached.” Danny scrunched his toes in his shoes. “We’ll need a slide scanner to scan these images. You know, your highfalutin scanner might work with the right setting, but we’ll definitely need a mount holder.”

“What am I looking for?” Oh was leaning towards the door, ready to run and do Danny’s bidding.

Danny straightened, thinking quickly.

“First check your specs on your scanner, see if it has a slide-to-digital setting. We’ll really need a mount holder. It’s basically a plastic template to hold mounted slides in position while they’re scanned.” Danny sketched a rectangle about the size of a large notepaper pad in midair. “If your scanner is able to scan slides, you’ll have one laying around. If not, I guess somewhere in this building, there will be an old fashioned slide scanner.”

“And if I can’t find anything?” Oh was leaning towards the door, ready to run and do Danny’s bidding.
“Oh, we can fudge something.” Danny could come up with a couple of ways off the top of his head, including projecting and photographing the image off a screen. “Go on. I’ll mount these slides.”

“Yes, sir.” Oh nodded and exited the room with alacrity.

Danny waited until the door locked before turning back to the line of film. The first images were probably from Seolh’s collections. An ugly green vase and a plain covered book. There was one of the Nandi Head and another of the House tapestry. But the coins were there -- a simple picture of them scattered on a white table top, plus a second very similar image taken with the camera pulled slightly back.

There were thirty six images -- three strips of dried film. The images on the middle strip appeared to be of documents, and Danny couldn’t make out the detail. A handful were blurry to uselessness as if taken by a shaky hand. Doubles, Danny guessed. There were three more document images on the final strip, and then a couple of pictures of a black Mercury Marquis. Finally, there was a photograph of a person -- two identical pictures of the same Asian man taken from a distance entering the same car. The rest appeared to be generic scenery shots of a beach and the ocean, the type Danny normally took when starting a film to check that the film cartridge in a manual camera was smoothly ratcheting shots.

Tongue caught firmly between his teeth, Danny leaned over and started to slice the film with a scalpel so he could mount the images. He guessed that he had a while since Oh diligently read manuals from cover to cover and he also had to find the mount holder, assuming that there was even one.

“No.” Danny glanced at the door. “I don’t have to do that. Dolls. Tapestry. Uhm….”

Danny looked around the lab desk. There was a notepad, random stationary, pens and pencils, and a small metal can of discarded, poorly developed negatives. He could mount them and simply slip the slide film in his pocket. The question was: which were the important ones?

The images of the documents he broke into groups of three, including the blurry ones. He guessed that the Asian man was Wo Fat’s father, but in all honesty, he could be anyone.

“Okay, okay.”

His mind whirred. He could leave one copy of the doubles, but maybe the scenery shots were important. Oh would probably let him have digital copies of the scenery and collection images, but the purist in him wanted the originals. Danny dissected out and set the two slides of the coins on the pile of the images of the documents. Maybe even the dolls were important?

Danny took a deep breath, carefully put the developed images of the coins, the tapestry, the papers, and the car with the Asian man into an envelope, carefully folded it over, and stuck it in the breast pocket of his shirt.

Sitting at the bench, resisting the temptation to run around in a circle, Danny started to carefully and professionally mount the remaining slides and a few of the discarded, blurry negatives from the can.

~*~

#89#

“You did what?” Steve said, as Danny stowed the envelope of unmounted slides in the glove compartment of the truck.
Danny had waited until they had driven through the base checkpoint before updating Steve on the day’s interesting developments.

One-handed, Steve reached under the middle car seat and pulled out the lockbox where he kept his gun while driving.

“C-Six-seven-zero-four-six-zero-five-one,” Steve said, thrusting the box into Danny’s hands. He continued unnecessarily, “Put the pictures in there.”


“Six-zero-five-one,” he said tersely. “You want to explain to me why you thought that this was a good idea?”

The lock clicked open and Danny popped the lid.

“Because, as you said yourself, there’s people behind the scenes waiting to see how this will play out. People at the Navy, CIA, FBI, and all the other alphabet soups.” Danny closed the lid on the box, the envelope lying flat on top of the foam packaging and ominous, metal-grey gun. “I didn’t know if Oh would let me have digital copies of the slides.”

“He did, though, didn’t he?” Steve checked.

Danny had a disc with copies of the day’s images. “Yes. But they just looked like random shots of Seolh’s collection, there’s that amazing wooden head of the antelope-cow thing, and a bunch of dolls. I don’t think that he would have let me out with the pictures of the reports.”

“Reports? Tell me what you’ve found out,” Steve ordered.

“Bunch of very interesting photographs. Random scenery, which might be the beach outside your old place, then several pictures of an Asian guy and a Mercury Marquis—”

“What?”

“What -- what? Everything I said?”

“No, the car!”

“It looked like a Mercury Marquis.”

“What colour?”

“Uhm. Black. Or dark blue, maybe -- the colours bleached.”

“License plate.”

“I dunno! The images are okay. We’ll be able to see. Why?”

“Dad had a Mercury Marquis. It was totalled in the crash,” Steve grated.

“Wow.”

“What else?” Steve rapped.

“It was the photos of Chinese coins that caught my eye. But there’s a bunch of pages from what I’m guessing is a big ledger -- or really close shots of a small notebook. But I don’t think that macro was
invented in the 1980s.”

“What?”

“Look.” Danny patted the box on his lap. Talking and driving really did not mix when Steve was behind the wheel. “There’s a slide projector in the museum office. I saw some empty mounts in your grandfather’s photography stuff. We can look at the slides, and then give them to your Navy People. But, you know, I wanted to have the chance to study them first before they were whisked away.”

It was lucky that they were on a long stretch of straight road as Steve stared at him.

“I’m glad you’re on my side,” Steve said.

“Of course I’m on your side,” Danny said immediately -- goof ball.

Gnawing on his lip, fit to draw blood, Steve drove. Danny let him cogitate. He glanced at Danny again and back to the road -- thoughts scrolling all over his face.

“Okay,” Steve said finally. “We’ll assess them first.”

Danny lazed back in his seat.

“Depending on the intel,” Steve continued, “we’ll bring the information to NI.”

“Fair enough,” Danny said easily.

Steve’s hands clenched and worked at the steering wheel until his knuckles were white. His foot tapped on the gas and forcibly relaxed.

“Do you want to pull over and let me drive?” Danny asked, in the face of the spectacular display of unease.

“No.” He let out a controlled breath. “Dr. Chowdhry wanted me to do something today. But given the slides, I’m thinking not.”

“Okay,” Danny drawled. He placed his hand on the box lid. “Like what? This isn’t going anywhere. What we gotta do?”

“What?” Steve glanced at him. “Was there a sentence in that garble?”

“What,” Danny said clearly, “did Dr. Chowdhry recommend that you do?”

Steve checked his chunky black watch. Danny knew that it was quarter after six o’clock, thanks to the clock on the dashboard.

“It’s a little early,” Steve said enigmatically.

“Mr. Secretive strikes again. Just say it, already, Steve.”

Steve slowly braked in response to the red traffic lights ahead. They then turned right instead of left, towards the highway northwest out of Honolulu.

“Steven!” Danny rapped.

“The café thing, Danny. The café thing.”
“What café thing?” Danny said. “Repeating it doesn’t actually help when you’re not explaining.”

The traffic was busy, criss-crossing back and forth at intersections. Steve was concentrating as hard as nails in the too-ing and fro-ing dance of cars, trucks, motorcycles, and pedestrians. It was partly because he obviously didn’t want to do what he had decided to do, and distraction was the name of the game.

“Steve.”

“The café that Irene told us about. The get-together.” Steve indicated, slowed to a stop and then parallel parked into a space by the sidewalk.

“Oooh.” Danny had forgotten about that. Irene had said that they met on Tuesday evenings, practised signing, and drank coffee. “Dr. Chowdhry wants you to learn how to sign?”

“It’s more complicated than that.” Steve patted his pants pockets. “Have you got change to feed the parking metre?”

“Whoa, I thought that they were phasing these things out?” Danny noted. He hopped out of the cab. “It’s after six; it’s probably okay. I’ll check.”

Danny peered at the small print on the old fashioned metre housing as Steve got out of the Ford, and rooted around in the back seat.

“We’re okay,” Danny called, as Steve hauled out a long cardboard box onto the pavement. “What’s that?”

“Jogging stroller. To replace the one we cannibalised for Dolce.”

“When did you buy that?”

“Picked it up from the department store en route to the Base.” Steve shifted as he manhandled the package, presenting his back pocket for Danny’s appreciative perusal. Indicating, Danny knew, that he had used his BlackBerry, probably while sitting in the waiting room outside Dr. Magnus’ office, to order the stroller.

“Same type?”

“It was the best one on the store website with the highest safety rating.” Steve shrugged. “I had to estimate height and weight. I guess Julian is three foot? Thirty-five to forty pounds?”

“About,” Danny judged.

“It’s got a metre that calculates distance travelled and calories used.” Steve grinned happily.

So a significantly different spec to the one that Julian’s family had been using previously.

“Can you take it?” Steve passed it over before Danny could say yay or nay.

“Sure,” he drawled.

Steve had his little emergency backpack stored in the back cab. To Danny’s professional photographer eye it broke the line of the Ninja-look that Steve was going for. Danny debated for a millisecond whether or not he should point out that the survival bag really wasn’t necessary, but he liked to pick his battles.
“You want me to take that?” Danny asked, because he liked to mess with Steve’s head.

Mutely, Steve pursed his lips, and the envelope, which Danny had thought was in the lockbox, was now being zipped into the little black backpack. Steve could be sneaky, underhanded, and very deft when necessary. Danny hefted the stroller under his arm.

“Where exactly are we going?”

“Independent coffee house on South King Street.” Steve set off on long legs, Danny on his heels.

~*~

Danny really liked Honolulu’s love affair with independent cafés and coffee houses. The simply named Oka Kope was a busy, open air café, the wooden tables protected from sun and rain by humungous umbrellas. The coffee part at the back had a glorious black and chrome altar to the god of Kona, which promised to make every kind of coffee on the planet. The blackboards overhead, half hidden by mock palms sprinkled with fairy lights, promised a fairly banal selection of brunch and lunch type sandwiches, and warm snacks. The coffee appeared to be the draw. A bald, extremely large native Hawaiian guy manned the coffee machine. His shirt was of the eye-bleeding, colourful variety.

“Are we eating?” Danny asked. He couldn’t see Irene or her husband but they were early.

Steve glanced down at him. “Missed that?”

“Are we eating?” Danny snacked on his fingertips.

Steve pondered the question for a ridiculously long moment.

“We’re down on the board to eat back at home. I don’t know what Kono’s cooking, but--”

“Okay,” Danny said easily. “What are we having?”

“You can have anything you want, Danno,” Steve said, perplexed.

“I meant, what’s Kono cooking?”

Steve shrugged. “It might be an idea to have a cupcake or something.”

There was no way in Hell that Danny was not having a cupcake.

“You want to grab us a seat?” Danny jerked his thumb at a free table beside them, and pre-empted the decision by setting the packaged stroller against the large table. “I’ll get you a latte?”

Steve shook his head. “I’ll have a hot chocolate, please.”

“‘Kay.” Danny sauntered up to the bamboo counter.

“Hey, brah.” The dude lifted his chin. “What can a’ get ya?”

“Hot chocolate and I’ll have a --” Danny contemplated the boards, there were coffees that he had never heard of, “what’s a Guillermo?”

“Two shots of espresso over lime on ice.”

“Ew, no.”
“You got a sweet tooth, brah?” The guy cocked his head to the side.

“Yeah, sure.”

“This being your first time an all, you trust me to make you something special? Something magical?”

Danny eyed him. “First time.”

“Yeah, you and your friend.” He waggled a chubby finger in Steve’s direction, who was watching them hawk-like as he perched on the edge of his chair.

Despite his weight, the barista was light on his feet, with a terrifying degree of lurch going on. The area behind the bar was wide enough to contain his immensity, so Danny guessed that he owned the coffee house. While his treat was being prepared, Danny contemplated the cakes and cupcakes on offer. The double chocolate fudge cupcake with chocolate icing topped with malted milk balls was calling him, beseechingly. There was a relatively healthy looking carrot cake that Steve would probably pick at.

“Caffè Medici.” A tall glass topped with whipped cream was placed on the counter with a flourish.

“Which is?” On a little saucer with a lacy doily it was neatly presented. Danny could smell oranges.

“Doppio -- filtered double espresso -- with chocolate syrup and orange spices.”

Danny could get behind that wholeheartedly.

“Can I also get that cupcake--” Danny pointed, “--and a carrot cake.”

Ears attuned, he heard Steve speak, and he turned. Irene and her husband were greeting Steve with hugs and kisses (on Irene’s part).

“Ah, you know Irene and Blair,” the barista said, as he set the cakes and Steve’s hot chocolate down.

Danny jerked back to face the guy. “Yeah, we met them last week. Irene invited us here.”

“Ten eighty,”

“What?” Danny checked the boards, because that was cheap at half the price.

“Freebie coffee and hot chocolate, first time, brah. Just this once.”

“Thanks.” Danny nodded, and passed over fifteen dollars. “Keep the change, Babe.”

“You’re not from around here,” the barista noted.

“Nah. New Jersey. Steve’s a local, though. Born and brought up. Kame-thingy, I think, but not quite.” Danny picked up the tray, and tossed over his shoulder as he sauntered back to Steve, “Thanks.”

“Danny!” Irene greeted him. “You came.”

“Thought that it was a good idea.” He bussed her cheek as he set the tray on the table. “See you got the present.”

Julian’s dad -- Blair, Danny now knew -- had the box open and the stroller shook out in all its high tech, black and yellow glory.
“It’s not necessary, you know. It’s very generous.” Irene blushed.

Blair touched his lower lip with his fingers and smiled at Steve and then Danny as he lowered his flat hand.

“Steve said that you went to see Dolce?” Irene said.

“Yeah, she’s doing well. I think that she said that she would get out of the hospital tomorrow.”

“Oh, that’s great. I didn’t even know what hospital she had been taken to.”

“Well, Steve’s this Naval Intelligence guru, I think that he can figure out anything,” Danny froze, and then remembered to smile. Steve’s abilities -- it made him sound like a superhero -- were not for public consumption.

Irene regarded him, but let it slide.

“We’re a little early.”

“It’s okay, we usually come down early so we can help Mr. Tupuloa set up.”

“Oh, what do we need to do?” Danny asked.

Steve and Blair were playing with the jogging stroller, investigating the pacing computer, and wheeling it around the café.

“Pull a few tables together, and borrow a handful of chairs from next door.”

“Oh, you’re popular.”

Irene shrugged. “I guess.”

“Well, I’ll give you a hand since our partners are occupied with the new toy.”

Irene sniggered. Together they hauled the tables around making the corner booth one giant table.

“We’re probably not going to be able to stay that long. We have a friend of the family coming around tonight.” Danny didn’t say that Steve’s tolerance for crowds of people was limited.

And then they were invaded by a group of five people, all knowing each other, all communicating with word and motion. Blair moved over to greet the crew and there were kisses and hugs as if they hadn’t seen each other in an age. Blair introduced Steve. Gamely, Steve said hello, stroked his cheek in a familiar way, and then carefully spelt out his name, finger-spelling each letter with deliberation.

“You’ve been hitting the books?” Irene asked.

“Oh, no. I mean, Steve’s obviously been looking at you-tube videos, but we haven’t been learning together. I didn’t know that he had decided to come here until about half an hour ago.” He glanced at Irene. “He had a bout with an ear infection over the weekend, couldn’t wear his aids. Still waters run deep….”

“He’s got a lot to think about. I can empathise, but I can’t really understand. Blair was born deaf. Julian also. I learned when I met Blair. Steve said that it’s been only a few months?”

Danny nodded. “So your youngest? Can he hear?”
“Callum, can, yes.” Irene nodded her fist.

“He’s going to grow up bilingual.”

“Yep, his first sign was ‘mom’.” Irene smiled. “He uses more sign than words. Oh, hang on.”

Blair was signing to his wife. The distance thing was quite useful, Danny realised. Blair finished by crossing his hands over his chest, then pointing at his wife.

“Hah,” Irene laughed.

“What was that?”

“Coffee order for everyone, and a sprinkling of ‘I love you’.”

“I’ll help you carry them over,” Danny said.

~*~

Danny saw Steve checking his watch for the third time; they would be leaving soon. He had enjoyed himself, Danny could tell. There were significantly more words in his repertoire, and everyone was very tolerant of his toddlerspeak. Danny got the impression that he genuinely liked learning.

Danny had found himself under Irene’s wing and had been introduced to the hearing partners. He had got two people’s phone numbers, in addition to Irene’s, and a promise to come the following week. The coffee was awesome, so Danny had said yes, life permitting.

Yep, they were moving. Steve pointed to the door, and gave Danny a thumbs up.

“Sorry, Rodney, we have to make a move. Dinner’s going to be on the table and we’re having a visitor.”

“Okay, don’t forget those links that I emailed you.” Rodney talked with his hands, loudly. “They’re good sites. Some sites shouldn’t be allowed on the web. If you really want to learn, you should sign up for a course. Hmmm.”

“In my copious spare time, yes.” Danny knew that he probably would.

“Yes, well, your partner can hear after a fashion,” Rodney said directly. “Mine can’t.”

“Danny! We gotta get moving. Kono’s gonna kill us.”

“Okay!” Danny stood. He sketched a bow at the group, and then mimicked Blair’s ‘thank you’ sign. He had learnt a few new signs himself. Carefully, he rubbed the palm of one hand on top of the other, and then brought his index fingers almost together. “Nice to meet you.”

_Bye, Danny_ and waves followed Danny’s exit.

“That was fun,” Danny said, when he met up with Steve on the sidewalk.

Steve hummed and sauntered along the path.

Danny let him bask.

~*~
“Paulo’s on duty again.” Danny nodded at the man scowling at him from the front seat of the Kapu-owned Chevrolet Silverado.

Steve shot a glance across to the vehicle outside the House gates as he smoothly slowed to turn into the drive.

“I’d like to know what I did to make him look at me like dog dirt,” Danny continued.

“Dog dirt?” Steve grinned, as he turned through the opened wrought iron gates.

“I have a seven and a half year old,” Danny pointed out.

“Kavika doesn’t like you much. It’s probably transference.”

“Does Kavika like anyone?” Danny wondered. “He probably doesn’t like Paulo, ‘cause he never gives him time off. I think that’s unconstitutional.”

“I don’t think they have a union.”

The crunch of gravel under the truck’s wheels was strangely appropriate -- grind, grind, grind. Steve pulled into his preferred parking place beside the workshops, and yanked on the parking brake.

“How much trouble do you think we’re in?” Danny asked, checking his watch. It was well after eight o’clock.

“I guess it depends what Kono’s prepared.” Steve indicated with a flick of his fingers for Danny to walk ahead on the winding path leading to the kitchen’s welcoming lights.

“Yeah, right, Babe. It was your decision to go to the coffee meeting.” Danny dug his heels in, and bowed with a flourish, gesturing with an extravagant wave that Steve could go first.

Nose high, Steve stalked ahead, and Danny fell in behind. Steve would get the volcanic blast that was no doubt about to be levelled, and Danny got to admire his ass in the tight, black pants.

“Win. Win. Heh.” Danny said, as a disgruntled Steve contemplated the closed screen door.

Turning, Steve eyed him, and then taking a breath, he opened the kitchen door and stepped in. Chin, Malia, Mary, Kono and Toast stopped chatting. Silence, Danny thought, always a good sign -- not. He peered around Steve’s breadth.

“I texted,” Steve protested to the weighing jury. “It was… necessary.”

“Your dinner is in the dog,” Kono said.

“We don’t have a dog,” Danny protested. “Not even a house cat, which is all together strange.”

Kono pointed an emphatic trigger finger at him. Danny shut up.

“I slaved over a hot stove,” Kono said dramatically, hand planted over her heart.

“She did,” Toast added mock-sadly. “She wanted to make something special. On par with Chin’s amazing food.”

Chin elbowed Toast in the ribs, hard.
“I’m sorry, Kono.” Steve hung his head, hamming it up, shoulders slumping.

“What can we do to make it up to you?” Danny grinned, enjoying the show.

“Dishes,” Kono proclaimed, imperiously. “You can do the dishes.”

They were actually down to do the clean up, which Kono knew.

“Your wish is our command.” Danny sketched a bow.

“Eh?” Steve asked.

“Just go with it, Babe,” Danny said, and setting a hand on Steve’s ass he pushed him into the kitchen.

“What are we having?” Steve asked as he slid across the tiled floor.

Kono jerked her thumb at the oven. “Crab cakes with mango and rice salad.”

There was a large bowl on the table, which looked like it was filled with white rice dotted with colourful fragments of chopped fruit and vegetables, so Danny assumed that the crab cakes were in the oven keeping warm. He went to the oven to get the crab cakes as Steve hung his backpack on the coat hanger on the back of the kitchen door.

The crab cakes looked a little on the crispy side. “They smell awesome,” Danny said diplomatically. There were two large patties each.

Steve sat, grabbing their plates sitting over a warming candle tray on the table, and set them side by side. Reaching over the table, Danny slid a couple of cakes onto each of their plates using a cake slicer, because he couldn’t find anything else. The roasting pan and the cake slicer ended up in the sink, landing on top of a charred frying pan. Danny plonked down into his customary place.

“So what held you up? You know, since you’re pointedly not saying where you’ve been,” Mary asked, eyes narrowing.

Pausing as he dumped a mounded spoonful of rice onto Danny’s plate, Steve stared at his sister.

“And?” Mary leaned back in her chair, and looked down her nose at Steve.

Danny had seen that exact same expression on Steve’s mobile face. The same lift of the chin and contemplation of excrement through long lashes. It was either their mother’s or father’s inheritance, he figured.

“None of your business, Sis.” Steve bared his teeth.

“Jesus. It’s not a secret.” Danny elbowed him in his good side.

Steve pursed his lips at Danny, and Danny shrugged back at him, conveying: *share with your family, goof ball.*

“We went to an ASL meeting,” Steve grated. “And I wanted to replace Irene and Blair’s jogging stroller.”

“ASL?” Kono asked.

“American Sign Language,” Danny answered when Steve didn’t.
“Excellent,” Chin said, and then changed the subject with aplomb. “So what do you want to drink? We have a NV Louis Drescher Amor Cava or an Albariño, if you don’t like bubbles.”

“Oh, bubbles.” Danny selected the thin-stemmed, narrow glass at his place setting, and held it towards Chin.

Seolh and food, and his tummy, it was a match made in heaven.

~*~

Danny admired Steve’s forearms as he scrubbed at the frying pan in the soapy water-filled sink.

“What?” Steve asked.

In answer, Danny leaned forwards and kissed the tip of Steve’s beaky nose. Steve scrunched it up, perplexed.

Chortling, Danny grabbed the damp cloth, which he had been after, and turned back to the kitchen table to wipe it clean. He corralled crumbs with the cloth and then ferried them over to shake them into the garbage can.

“Does the mango chilli chutney stuff go in the fridge or the cupboard?” Danny asked as he lobbed the cloth, with unerring accuracy, into the sink.

“What?” Steve asked, dodging out of the way of the cloth-missile as it splashed down.

Danny pointed to the homemade chutney on the counter beside Steve’s elbow, and then at the cupboard with the shelf dedicated to honeys, syrups of all types and condiments, including the dreaded Hersey’s chocolate syrup.

“Dunno.” Steve shrugged. “I’m guessing Kono’s mom made it. It won’t harm it to go in the fridge, will it?”

“Nah,” Danny judged.

“Very domestic,” a dry voice interrupted them.

Joe White was framed in the kitchen doorway regarding them as they cleaned.

“Hey, you came,” Steve smiled widely.

“Was there any doubt? I said that I would.”

“Something could have cropped up.” Steve dumped the frying pan on the draining board and dried his hands.

“I would have texted.” White stepped over the threshold, uninvited. So he wasn’t a vampire, Danny judged, possibly….

“Sir.” Steve came around the table and shook his hand.

“Hey, you want a beer or something?” Danny opened the fridge, put Kono’s mom’s chutney away and pulled out three long stem bottles of Pale Ale.

“Sure,” White drawled, as he sat at the long kitchen table.
“Steve?” Danny asked.

Steve nodded. He hadn’t partaken of the cava or the dry white wine at dinner so Danny actually doubted that he wanted a beer, but he wasn’t not going to indulge if White drank.

“Bottle opener?” Danny sat with a thump opposite White.

Both Steve and White presented him with Swiss Army knives.

“So well prepared.” Danny took the Swiss Army knife from Steve, as Steve came around the table and sat beside him.

“So what did you want to talk about, son, apart from accusing me deliberately of holding back information,” White sallied.

“Are you sure that you didn’t?” Steve riposted.

White splayed his hands. “You understand ‘classified’. And it was twenty years ago. I told you, your mom was just a low key, ‘friendly operative’ simply observing the Noshimuri family.”

“But it has to be relevant,” Steve protested.

“Really?” White shook his head. “You’ve been hunting the Hesse Brothers. You put a considerable dent in their organisation, son, with your relentless pursuit. Wo Fat is their boss. He’s been operating in the Islands for decades; a lot of his revenue is linked to and through Hawaii.”

Steve glanced fleetingly at Danny. “If you think it is just about me being a pain in the ass, why haven’t I just been taken out?”

“Lack of opportunity,” White said. “You are under surveillance. There’s a risk versus reward thing going on here. Son, you’re not going to be a SEAL again. What does killing you actually achieve?”

Ooh, Danny thought, go straight for the jugular.

“Okay, that kind of makes sense,” Danny said, giving Steve time to recover. “So why the shenanigans to search the House?”

“They wanted the camera, remember?” White said perplexed. “They didn’t want P-One’s, Wo Fat’s, identity known.”

“They tossed the House,” Steve clarified.

“Maybe they thought that you might have some paperwork lying around or something.” White took a slug of beer. “There’s valuable stuff lying around this walking garage sale.”

Steve’s eyebrows rose high.

“Okay, I’m missing something here,” White said. “Why do you think that Wo Fat’s interested in your mom’s work with the Noshimuri family?”

Danny put his foot on top of Steve’s.

“We’re just trying to figure out what’s what,” Danny said. “None of this makes sense, and it’s doubly creepy that the weirdest thing is that Wo Fat hasn’t just killed Steve. Do you think we want to spend the rest of our lives in protective custody?”
“We will catch him,” White said, “trust us. We will catch the son of a bitch.”

“So we’re also bait,” Danny said pithily.

Sighing, White slumped in his seat. “Yes,” he admitted. “The threat assessment level is low-to-medium, though. If he was going to do it, he would have done it already. But I’m not discounting that there’s a threat.”

“Well, why don’t we make him come to us?” Steve said straightening in his seat.

“Babe?” Danny jerked back in his seat, horrified.

“Pull back the guys camped out in the woods out back. Take away the surveillance truck parked on Kala Drive,” Steve said intently. “I’ll get Kavika to get the Kapu to stand down. Mamo doesn’t have to come around. Chin and Kono can stay at Malia’s place. I’ll give Toast airfare to visit his parents. Mary can stay with Mamo.”

“And Danny?” White asked.

“Mamo would be happy to have Danny stay with him.”

“I’m not going anywhere!” Danny protested.

“That will leave you unprotected,” White said. “That’s not an option.”

“Too damn right,” Danny said.

“Danny, it’s the best plan yet,” Steve said, eyes bright. “I’m not talking about all of the protection, but pull back. Let Wo Fat come to us.”

White shook his head, slowly from side to side. “No. No.”

“Why not? I can look after myself.”

“I made a promise to your father and your mother, god rest their souls. I was there at your christening,” White said. “You’re injured. You’re not fit. You’re not there yet, Steve. I can’t countenance that approach. It’s suicide.”

Steve thumped his bottle of beer down hard, but he didn’t say a word.

White drew a hand over his lips and down his chin. He looked tired and old, Danny thought.

“Look, I have to go.” White stood, abandoning his bottle half-filled. “I know that this is frustrating. But it isn’t going to go on forever. There are ongoing operations to take down Wo Fat that you’re not privy to. Wo Fat’s going to make a mistake, and we’re going to catch him. But I’m not going to let it be at your expense, Steve.”

“Sir.” Steve rose to his feet, chair scraping behind him on the tiles. “I’m glad you’re back.”

“Son.” White held out his hand. Soberly, Steve shook it. “Let me get up to speed. Read the reports coming in. I understand that you captured one of Wo Fat’s operatives: Jenna Kaye. We’ll get some valuable intel off her. We will find Wo Fat and take him into custody. Danny, nice to see you again.”

“Joe,” Danny returned, and nodded.

White marched out of the kitchen. The backpack on the coat hook swung to and fro in his wake.
“Weird,” Danny summarised into the quiet of the room.

“What?” Steve snapped.

“Okay, I’m confused,” Danny said, ignoring Steve’s tone with parental experience. “So when you go down to the base, you don’t tell everyone everything? White doesn’t know that we think that Wo Fat’s hanging around looking for something?”

“Lieutenant Commander White’s been ‘away’,” Steve said euphemistically. “I now report to Commander Archer. I submit full and detailed reports.”

“Which White hasn’t had a chance to read?” Danny guessed that the reports were very long; extremely detailed, each and every motive, inference, supposition, and interpretation meticulously rendered.

“I’m guessing that he returned today,” Steve said. “And that’s why he was rushing to the post office to post the birthday card.”

“White’s out of the loop, then?”

“Appears to be.”

“Or….” Danny said darkly.

“Or what?” Steve snatched up their half-filled bottles and dumped the contents of both in the sink.

“Why don’t you trust Joe?”

“I don’t know, because I’ve met him?”

“He’s been good to me.” Steve rinsed the bottles and then lobbed them one after another accurately at the recycle bin. The shattering clash as they hit glass made Danny’s skin crawl. “If grandmother hadn’t been able to look after me and Mary, Joe White would have been our guardian.”

“He’s that close?”

“He’s been my mentor for years.” Steve wiped his hands on a dishtowel, and draped it precisely over the stove to dry.

Thinking hard, Danny moved over to the kitchen door, closing and locking it against the night. He slung the backpack over his shoulder, and turned to face Steve.

“Yes?” Steve said circumspectly, and remained where he was on the other side of the table -- out of reach.

“Your plan to make yourself bait is off the table. Okay?”

“It’s a good plan, Danny. Let’s get this over with!” Steve said intently.

“No.” Danny stabbed the air with a pointy finger. “You don’t have the support of your Navy people in this.”

“D--”

“Don’t you be thinking; hey, I’ll just take off and capture Wo Fat myself. The man is a terrorist, with an organisation that he commands. I don’t care if you’re the freakin’ Terminator, you can’t go up against a billion people.”
“Danny, aren’t you getting tired of this?”

Danny dropped back down on his heels. “Yes, but not at the expense of your life….”

“Danny.”

“No.” Danny pivoted around, backpack swinging. “Let’s get these slides mounted, and have a look at what we’ve got.”

~*~

Tbc
#91#

Danny carefully dropped the last freshly prepared slide in the old fashioned slide projector housing. Steve was quivering in anticipation. He had been a barely-contained, annoyingly vibrating mess as Danny had prepared the slides.

“Do you want to get the light?” Danny asked, as a blurred image appeared on the projector tripod screen that Steve had unearthed from somewhere within the House.

“What?”

“Lights, Babe,” Danny said, as he tweaked the crude focus control by rotating the cylinder lens. The projector was older than both of them -- possibly older than even their combined ages. Steve flicked off the lights in the claustrophobic museum office.

The image showed a man, maybe late twenties -- early thirties, dipping into the front passenger seat. His face was part-obscured by the wing of the door frame. He was of Asian extraction. The next slide was also of the man, and then two of the black batmobile type car driving away.

“That is my dad’s car.” Steve’s teeth grated loudly in the small office.

“Do you know who that guy is?” Danny asked.

“No…. I’ve seen photos of Wo Yongfu. It’s not him. Well, I don’t think that it’s him. NI only has archived news photos from when he ran for governor a few years prior to his death.” Steve clapped his hands together loudly. “Mamo recognised that Wo Fat might be related to Wo Yongfu, we’ll….”

“Show this pic to Mamo?” Danny asked into the silence.

“What?” Air brushed Danny as Steve spun on him.

“Shall we show this picture to Mamo?” Danny scrubbed introspectively at the late evening bristle on his jaw. Mamo recognising a possible father-and-son relationship had been one signpost on the wiggly route that they were travelling. Time to talk to Mamo again, Danny realised, because he obviously knew Wo Yongfu well enough to recognise a part-photo of the guy.

“Hmm, yeah, and possibly Uncle Choi. We’ll have to get him to come around or go to him.”

“The police officer?” Danny checked. “The one we met in the bazaar?”

“Yeah. I wonder what shifts he’s on,” Steve mused.

“Take a photo with your BlackBerry, Babe. Just disable the flash, take a picture of the screen and email it to Choi and Mamo.”

“Really?” Steve snorted. “And email a pic to Mamo?”

“Yeah, good point.” Danny said, remembering Mamo’s attempts at navigating Laka’s brand new computer tablet. “But you know, we should photograph all these slides. It will probably take a couple of tweaks. Or I’ll have to get my camera and tripod. But yes, it will work.”

“Huh?”
Danny moved on. He’d had tried to keep the photographs in the order that they had been taken. An image of a single page separated into three columns resolved into pristine detail. The writing was recognisably an Asian text, but Danny knew that he couldn’t tell Cyrillic from Japanese.

“What is this?” Danny asked.


Danny cocked his head to the side. Maybe it was a ledger or a financial account. It had the same structure of his own ham-handed attempts to balance his bank balance. Manually operating the projector, he moved onto the next slide, which showed more of the same but different words and numbers, possibly. They were all basically incomprehensible to Danny. The final page had a different cadence, for lack of a better word, and no columns.

“Will Chin know?” Danny enunciated carefully since the room was dark, and Steve was heavily dependent on sight to communicate.

“I don’t--” Steve sighed tiredly, “--know if I want him that involved.” It sounded reluctant to Danny’s ears.

They slid through to the next incomprehensible set of slides -- some shaky, blurred or a wash of colour. He cycled through to the tapestry photograph. It was a good shot, taken in clear daylight. Slide film was really excellent at preserving crisp images.

“What’s happening with the tapestry? Is it being repaired?”

“Given that only the storm and Ke Kā o Makali’i survived, I don’t see why,” Steve said glumly.

“The what?”

“The night sky at the top of the tapestry. Ke Kā o Makali’i is a constellation. The Canoe-Bailer of Makali’i.” Steve held his hands like a cup in the stream of light, casting a giant shadow on the screen to encompass the stars at the top of the House tapestry. “Five stars curve across the sky holding the constellations of Orion and Taurus, if you’re more familiar with those ones. It rises in the night sky -- November to April. It’s part of the method that Hawaiians used to navigate.”

“Steve, the House needs the tapestry. It is the Legend of Seolh.” That spoke deeply to Danny’s romantic soul.

“Where am I going to get a twenty foot high tapestry repaired? My skill set’s pretty expansive, but I can’t knit a tapestry.”

“Don’t be so defeatist. Google is your friend.”


“The Nandi Head,” Danny said unnecessarily, because Steve knew what it was.

“Why take a photo of the sculpture and a photo of the tapestry?” Steve asked, as they both gazed at the screen.

“Hah!” Danny moved the slide carriage on to the first coin picture. “What’s the point of taking a picture of the coins?”
“What’s special about the coins?” Steve asked the world at large. He cocked his head to the side. “Is there a pattern? Other than that line?”

“And are they valuable?” Danny wondered out loud, contemplating the image of coins scattered on the page. Three were in a diagonal line, the others simply tossed over the white background.

Steve was close enough to smell, all savoury and musky. Danny felt his shrug.

“Some are rare, worth a few thousand dollars,” he said, with appalling unconcern. “But there’s no provenance. I’d have to get them chemically analysed to determine if they’re authentic. They didn’t crop up on any stolen items database.”

“But are they the coins? Or are they just a pic of any old coins?” Danny pondered. “Or are these the coins that Mary found, and the other ones that we have found aren’t?”

“What?” Steve demanded.

“Go get the coins from the museum, Steven,” Danny ordered clearly.

Steve huffed loudly, and Danny felt chilled as his warmth moved away. Dark-red light flooded the office as Steve entered the museum proper. Absently, Danny scrolled back to the image to look at the Mercury Marquis -- the photo was deliberately angled so that the license plate wasn’t captured.

Steve switched on the office light as he returned with the coin box. Apparently, he knew Toast’s database and the museum like the back of his hand, or he had checked the coins more than once.

Danny cycled back to the first coin slide -- the close-up image of lots the coins splayed on a page of white paper.

“Here.” Steve held up a coin with a distinctive nick on its edge between his finger and thumb. It was on the photo, bottom left-hand corner. Meticulously, Steve went through the coins, identifying more than half.

“Okay, so that proves that this is the film with the coins from your mom’s secret stash?” Danny said.

Steve tugged aimlessly on his bottom lip as he contemplated the image. His gaze was about a thousand yards behind the screen.

“I’m going to get Chin to look at the documents.”

“Hang on.” Danny lurched and grabbed Steve before he could march out of the office. “It’s almost eleven o’clock, Babe.”

“What?” Steve asked, but the tautness of his spine screamed: why are you stopping me?

“It’s eleven o’clock. If Chin’s not asleep, Malia will definitely be asleep. She spent all day at the hospital and is battling morning sickness. Do not disturb.” Danny did not say -- although the imp of teasing really wanted to -- that it was also well past Steve’s normal bedtime.

Steve consulted his wristwatch, brow furrowed, but he couldn’t mentally force the clock back. He sagged, frustrated.

“I know. I know,” Danny commiserated in the face of that frustration. “This isn’t television. We’re not going to be able to sort this out in forty three minutes. Time for bed, Steve.” Deliberately, he switched off the projector.
“D,” Steve whined, reinforcing the being sent to bed scenario. Danny had definitely heard that tone more than once. He missed Grace’s steady presence in his life as if bereaved.

“I’m going to grab a change of clothes from my room. I’ll be back in five.” Danny contemplated the red-tinged light of the museum. He could go through the museum and come out down the staircase beside his studio. He couldn’t believe that that hadn’t occurred to him before, instead of walking along the corridor in various stages of undress.

“If you move into—” Steve began.

Danny held up his hand.

“I know what you’re going to say. Later, Babe.”

Danny hung his freshly pressed shirt -- he liked to dress professionally as an employed naval contractor -- on a hanger, and hooked it over a doorknob on Steve’s fitted wardrobe. Danny looked around Steve’s tidy and sparsely-furnished second bedroom. Steve rattled around the eyrie like a forgotten toy in all its designer magnificence. It was tempting to move into the apartment, but it really was early days, and he did have Grace to consider.

Danny shrugged out of his shirt and balled it up with his slacks into the laundry basket beside the door. He made a note to check how many of his boxers were lurking in the bottom. They definitely needed to do some laundry.

Nude, except for his most comfortable, saggy-baggy, disreputable, chequered shorts, he caught himself giving a delighted wiggle. Steve’s enjoyment of skin freedom was contagious.

As he trooped up to the lighthouse bedroom, he suspected that Steve would be deep in the Land of Nod. Steve had been looking a little owl-eyed as they had separated to prepare for bed. Danny had taken the time to iron tomorrow’s shirt, and then ferry his tripod up to the office. He had debated about taking the photos of the slides, but he was tired and had switched off the ancient projector. Leaving Oh’s disc next to his camera, he had made a mental note to check out the photos of the dolls and the other things in the collection tomorrow with Steve.

The lights were on in the bedroom.

“Hey, Babe.”

Steve was caught in mid-flip of snapping out a thin blanket over their freshly made bed. Tonight’s colour scheme was navy blue and cream.

“I’d forgotten we’d messed up the sheets.” Danny leered.

“What?” There was a peek of his sea tattoo over the hem of Steve’s shorts as he leaned over to flatten out a microscopic crease in a bed that was about to be creased. Steve had done one of his super-fast navy showers judging by the disordered array of his tufty hair and pink-scrubbed skin. Steve had dispensed with the bandage protecting the scrape on his arm.

Danny slid in, and used the jut of Steve’s hip to turn him into his hold. He got a kiss on a luscious bottom lip and dabbed a finger under Steve’s thin, worn t-shirt to check his side. Steve had moisturised.

“What are you doing?” Steve mumbled against his mouth.
“Checking.” Danny moved onto Steve’s arm. It was healing nicely.

“Mmm.” Steve’s lips nibbled across Danny’s stubbled jaw as his broad hand stroked down Danny’s bicep, and over his forearm. His thumb stopped, encountering rough, sensitive skin.

“Mmm?” It was Danny’s turn to mumble. He craned his head away from Steve’s lips, mouthing against the hinge of his jaw. Gently, Steve circled his thumb over the multicoloured bruise in the centre of Danny’s forearm. The half-moon scab of Steve’s gouging thumbnail might even scar. “It was an accident, Babe.”

“Dr. Chowdhry pencilled you in for the last Thursday of this month at fourteen hundred hours. Family session. You have to call her and confirm.”

“Family session. Chin too, maybe?” Danny offered.

Steve contemplated that with a mask more appropriate to a poker game.

“Babe?”

“I’ll talk to Chin,” Steve said with a hint of reluctance.

“It’s okay. It’s just a thought.” Maybe the thought had been a mistake, but Danny was prepared to think about it. The idea had come out of nowhere, where the best thoughts normally came. It was probably a good idea. Maybe Kono should come too, and Mamo.

There was a deep, knotted furrow between Steve’s eyebrows.

“Time for bed.” Danny hooked an ankle around Steve’s calf and used his lower centre of mass to topple him onto the bed.

“Danny!”

In answer, Danny climbed on top of him.

~*~

Danny woke to a lonely bed. The sheets under his questing hand were cool. Steve was long gone. The sun was dancing over the horizon. Exercise boy was back in play, Danny guessed, as he sat up and scratched his sternum, ruffling at hairs.

Shower, shower, shower, went the litany in his head. The comfy bed held him. In reality, they had what they had been looking for, so why go into Pearl?

Abruptly, Danny sat up, and stared out at the ocean through the chink in the curtains. They should go to work, unless they had a good reason not to, otherwise…. Danny grimaced. Were they under that level of surveillance, he wondered. They were under surveillance, certainly, but that intense -- he wasn’t entirely sure. Steve said that observers were in the woods out back. They had to have been observed in the eyrie. The watchers had to know that Steve had entered into a relationship with a man.

Thank God for the curtains.

This level of paranoia was impossible to handle without coffee.

Danny rolled out of bed.
Steve wasn’t his dirty little secret. He wasn’t Steve’s dirty little secret. He was not ashamed.

He grabbed a t-shirt from Steve’s wardrobe. It was soft with years of washings and worn out of shape. Maybe once upon a time it had been navy blue. He yanked it on; his bed head was going to be outstanding.

“That’s a new look,” Chin observed, as Danny staggered into the kitchen.

“Chin,” Malia rebuked, gently.

“It was an observation.”

“You obviously haven’t caught him on his morning walks of shame,” Mary said gratingly.

It was the last thing that Danny wanted to have fired at him.

“They’re not ‘walks of shame’, Mary. There’s no shame involved. I’m in a relationship with your brother. We sleep together. Sleep is a’ euphemism for sex.” Danny made speech marks with his fingers. “I’m sure that you have had sex. You’ve seen us sharing a bed. And you’ve burst in on us when we’ve been in the shower.”

“Wow, you’re a grumpy bear before you’ve had your coffee.”

The old percolator was running, so Toast had been up early before heading into the University. Danny poured hot, stewed coffee into the biggest mug he could find. He toasted Mary with the coffee mug.

“You’re up early. You’re all up early. Why?” Danny asked.

“It’s not that early, brah.” Chin glanced at the kitchen clock. It was just before eight. Steve didn’t have an alarm clock, and Danny had no idea where his wristwatch was hiding.

“My shift starts at nine,” Malia said.

“I’m dropping Malia off at work, and Mary’s my buddy for the day,” Chin said.

Mary smiled impishly.

“Mary?” Danny couldn’t help saying.

“He, Chin’s cool.” Mary had a toothy smile. “We’re going to meet Sidney and see Chin’s gallery.”

“Sidney?” Danny had heard Chin mention Sidney before.

“My agent. I have a meeting at nine thirty,” Chin said. “And then maybe shopping.”

“Don’t forget to pick up my shampoo and conditioner.” Malia patted her fiancé’s shoulder.

“Yes, dear.”

Mary mimed poking her fingers down her throat.

She’s just jealous, Danny thought, but didn’t say.

“Has Steve gone out running?” Danny asked.

“Check the basket on the fridge,” Chin directed, as he stood and gathered up their breakfast dishes.
Reaching up on tiptoes, Danny grabbed the basket in front of the dusty radio. Steve’s hearing aids were rolling around the bottom with his iPod-like control.

“Gone swimming,” Chin inferred, as he set the dishes in the sink and turned on the faucet.

“Leave them,” Danny said, “you need to get moving if you want to get into Honolulu by nine.”

“Thank you, Danny,” Malia said.

“Thank you, Danny,” Mary chimed sweetly.

“Git.” Danny pointed at the door, thinking he really wanted ten minutes of peace and quiet.

“Thanks, Danny,” Chin said soberly.

“I just have to grab my bag.” Mary darted out of the kitchen. “I’ll see you out front.”

Malia stood, and moved around the kitchen table to bestow a kiss on Danny’s unshaven cheek.

“You all right, Danny?”

“Just woke up on the wrong side of the bed.” He scratched his cheek, where Malia had pecked a kiss, and dredged up a smile.

“That happens,” Malia judged, and let it go.

Chin was a lucky, lucky man, Danny thought, not for the first time. She sauntered over to where a large handbag sagged against the bookshelves, stooping to grab her bag.

“Did you see Steve this morning?” Danny asked between sips of coffee.

Chin shook his head.

So there hadn’t been a chance to ask Chin if he could translate the ledger. Danny couldn’t ask him to hang around for Steve. He didn’t want to ask if Malia was present. The less people who knew about the ledger the better, he guessed.

“When are you back?”

Chin eyed him. “Probably around lunch time. Are you going into Pearl Harbour-Hickam today?”

“I dunno.” Danny checked the clock again. “It’s not like we’ve been doing a nine ‘til five, but we’re running late today.”

“Steve told you about Governor Jameson’s funeral on Friday, yes?” Chin said.

The non sequitur threw Danny, but what the Hell, he went with the flow.

“Yeah?” Danny said. Steve had basked when Danny had made it obvious that they would be going together.

“It will be a formal affair, with a wake afterwards at the Governor’s mansion.” Chin’s gaze encompassed Danny’s state of dress.

“Shit!” Danny said succinctly.

“Sorry, Brah, I thought that I better say something. I’d lend you a jacket, but….”
“It wouldn’t fit,” Danny said. “Thanks, man, I had completely forgotten. I better go see Mrs. Yaayaa.”

“I thought that we were in a hurry!” Mary came into the kitchen from the garden side. She had to have gone out the front door, seen that they weren’t waiting by Chin’s car, and circled around the house.

Mary, Danny thought, had a lot of energy.

“Hey.” Steve came up behind her, and made a deliberate effort to shake seawater on his sister.

“Steve!” Mary pushed at his chest like a scalded cat. “You’re getting me wet!”

Chortling, he eeled around her. “Morning.”

“More like bye.” Mary poked him hard in the side, going for a ticklish point with sibling precision.

“Didn’t get that. No ears,” Steve said, with new equanimity, as he lithely squirmed away from her fingers.

“We are going to town.” Chin jingled his car keys. “Mary and I will be back for lunch.”

Steve squinted.

“Bye.” Malia waved and moved to the door, pushing Mary ahead of her.

“Talk to you later, Brah.” Chin followed his fiancée.

“That really is disconcerting,” Steve said in the wake of their exit, as he stripped off the plastic wrapping around his healing forearm, and tossed it in the garbage can.

“What is? You want eggs for breakfast? Omelette?”

Steve canted his head to the side, and pinched a blue earplug shaped like a Christmas tree out of one ear, and then the other ear.

“Dr. Marcus recommended that when I go swimming I use earplugs to reduce the chance of inflammation and infection.”

“Disconcerting as in a hundred percent no hearing?”

Steve waved his hand in the I don’t have a clue what you said gesture. It had been an ill formed sentence.

Danny got eggs from the fridge as Steve swapped earplugs for hearing aids. He desultorily dried his ears with a dishtowel.

“I hope you’re going to put that in the laundry now,” Danny observed, trying to decide between omelette or French toast.

Steve was suddenly in his space, palming his tummy, and scratching blunt nails through the hair peeking over Danny’s loose waistband.

“I like this new look.” Steve feathered kisses against Danny’s temple. “Scruffy.”

“You’re wet, Babe,” Danny protested, as Steve hefted him onto the kitchen countertop so he could
better get at that sensitive spot just under Danny’s jaw. A spot that made Danny’s toes curl. “Jesus.”

Danny was about to forcibly point out that hauling him up on to a counter like --

Steve stuck a damp hand through the slit in Danny’s boxers.

“Holy fuck, we’re in the kitchen.”

“I like the kitchen. It’s my favourite place in the House.”

“More than your lantern bedroom?” Danny said, as he leaned back over the worktop, banging the back of his head lightly against the cupboard behind him. Holy fuck. Steve worried at that sensitive spot. “Don’t give me a hickey.”

Man, they were going to a funeral on Friday, he couldn’t have a hickey.

“Oooh.” Danny groaned, arching his back, jutting his hips out. Steve was getting better with practice. He felt so proud.

“Come,” Steve whispered.

Danny came with a long, drawn out sigh, hips juddering. He sagged, and the only thing that was holding him up was Steve’s grip.

Steve chortled against his neck.

Man, that had all been Steve. Danny hadn’t had to start anything. Ambush Steve for the win, he giggled internally.

“Where did that come from?” Danny nuzzled Steve’s damp hair.

“I like swimming.” Steve smacked an affectionate kiss against Danny’s neck.

“Swimming makes you horny?”

“Exercise makes me horny,” Steve revised.

“Yeah?” Danny slipped a hand over the interested mound in Steve’s swim trunks. There was no purchase on the slick, wet fabric.

Steve ground his hips against Danny’s hand.

“Is it even possible to come in these trunks?” Danny wondered out loud.

“You wanna try?” Steve leaned back in Danny’s hold and raised an eyebrow.

“The game is on.” Danny slipped off the kitchen counter, slithering down Steve’s body.

It was Steve’s turn to blaspheme, as Danny sucked on his cock through the tight fabric. Steve was bracketed over him, hands braced on the counter, legs astride.

This is so naughty, Danny thought. The kitchen door was wide open. Mamo or Mrs. Keawe could appear at any moment. Steve tasted salty. He strained against the lycra fabric. Looking up the arch and curves of Steve’s t-shirt covered chest, Danny was treated to the patrician line of his jaw as he threw his head back.
Oh, for a camera, Danny thought.

“Stop thinking.” Steve rebuked.

Danny hummed ‘You will always find me in the kitchen at parties’ and the vibration made Steve giggle. Fun sex was the best. The trunks were better than a chastity belt. The pressure had to be driving Steve insane.

Two handed, Danny yanked the trunks down and Steve’s cock sprung free, almost taking out Danny’s eye. Laughing, Danny dove in. My god, this is insane. The angle was atrocious. He could only mouth the head, and butt his own head against the line of Steve’s abs. Steve didn’t seem to mind, as Danny carded his fingers through coarse dark curls to cup tight balls.

“Gonna,” Steve grated.

Danny sucked him down, taking every last drop. He slid down onto the floor, as Steve flopped over the kitchen counter, and just hung there on wobbly legs. Danny kissed the head of his dangling, flaccid cock.

Steve said something, but it wasn’t intelligible in any language. Danny splayed his legs out over the cool tiled floor, and relaxed as if all the bones in his body had turned to water. The fly of his boxers gaped open, leaving nothing to the imagination.

Steve slurred again.

Uncoordinated, as if newly born, Steve fumbled down to slump next to Danny, and slung a casual arm over his shoulders. His trunks were halfway down and tightly stretched over his thighs.

“That can’t be comfortable,” Danny observed.

“Can’t find the energy to do anything about it,” Steve mumbled.

“Is that Mamo’s truck?”

“What!” Steve was up on his knees and yanking his shorts up. He glared at Danny who hadn’t moved an inch. “You bastard.”

“It would have been hilarious,” Danny said unrepentantly, between laughs.

“Are you nuts?”

“Hey, you’re the one that started kitchen nookie. Gotta take the risks with the reward.”

Steve cackled, out and out cackled. “It was fun wasn’t it?”

He held out his hand, and Danny let Steve pull him to his feet. Danny casually resituated his damp boxers, squirming just a fraction. Simultaneously, he stole a kiss. Sometimes he could multitask.

“Yeah, that was fun. So, you hungry?” The counter was a mess, but four of the eggs from the box had survived Steve’s sneak attack. “You want an omelette?”

“Yeah,” Steve mused, sing song, “I feel like I deserve a protein rich breakfast.”

Danny eyed him, because that tone was different. Steve stroked a thumb over the corner of Danny’s mouth, mopping something up, and then licked his thumb.
“Guess you’ve had your protein today.” He grinned, supremely satisfied with himself.

Danny poked him on principle, and poked him again because he could poke him with impunity.

~*~

#92#

Danny teased a comb through his wet hair. Out of the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of Steve’s reflection in the bathroom mirror.

“Yes?” Danny said, in the face of that fond expression.

“We’re going to be late,” Steve said, “-- to the base,” he added, when Danny lifted an eyebrow.

“Oh, about that.” Danny moved a little over so Steve had a better view of his reflection. “Chin pointed out that the governor’s funeral will mean that I need a suit.”

Steve’s face was scrunched perfection.

“Okay, the reflection and your back to me is a weird combination. So why don’t you wear a suit?” he hazarded.

Danny pivoted on his heel. “I need a suit. I’ve got slacks and shirts. I bought them after the fire--” he shuddered, “-- at Walmart.”

“Oh,” Steve said realising. “The fire. Right. Okay, there is an excellent tailor’s on Kalakaua Street. I guess they can put a rush job through. No reason why not. I have an account.”

“Hang on, Mr. Moneybags.” Danny held up a hand. “Mrs. Yaayaa’s my tailor.”

“It will be faster--”

“We’re going to see Mrs. Yaayaa. She of the butt pinching tendencies.”

“Ass?” Steve echoed.

“I really don’t want to say ‘ass’ and Mrs. Yaayaa in the same sentence.”

“You just did,” Steve pointed out.

“Go change out of your very attractive uniform. Maybe we can find your Uncle Choi afterwards and speak to Mamo?”

Steve parsed that. “Okay,” he drawled. “Have you taken photos of the slides?”

“Did it before my shower.” Danny held up an imaginary camera, framed a shot of Steve in his uniform and clicked off a shot. “My Canon is in the museum office. I wrote a list of the order of the photos, best that I can remember. It’s next to my camera. Go download the photos from my camera and Oh’s computer disc onto your phone or something.”

“Or something,” Steve mocked. He saluted sloppily. “Yes, sir.”

~*~

To say that Mrs. Yaayaa was happy to have the opportunity to ogle his ass was something of an
understatement. She had immediately sent her great-grandson out to retrieve as many of her husband’s old suits as possible so that they could choose the right one to modify.

Steve had lolled in the centre of the saggy sofa along the far wall of the workshop, arms outstretched along the back, enjoying the show as Mrs. Yaayaa checked the fit around Danny’s butt.

“What about a shirt?” Steve asked, and Mrs. Yaayaa was happy to oblige.

“My Gustav,” she pronounced, stroking Danny’s waist, “was a little broader. Your ratios are superb.”

“What’s that?” Ben asked from the windowsill, where he observed as tailor-in-training.

“Shoulders to waist are 1.618. The golden ratio.” Auntie Yaayaa smoothed a hand down the small of Danny’s back. “Here come see the curve. The icing on the cherry.”

Danny closed his eyes and tried to go to the special place as Steve sniggered.

~*~

“Don’t laugh,” Danny chided, as they walked towards Steve’s ridiculously large Ford.

“You’ve made a lovely lady’s day.”

Danny glowered.

“She was teasing you.” Steve grinned. “And actually also enjoying herself. You didn’t really mind, did you?”

Relenting his ire, Danny shrugged. On one hand her lascivious interest was annoying, but it was essentially harmless. Danny thought that when Mrs. Yaayaa looked at him, she saw her beloved husband. He guessed that she had teased him a lot. And loved him more than Danny could encompass with outstretched arms.

“Nah,” he decided. “I’m pretty sure if I told her to stop, she would.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Steve observed. “She likes teasing. And you bite so enthusiastically, it’s almost irresistible.”

“So, find Uncle Choi?” Danny said, changing the subject, because he was not going to agree with Steve. “Do you know where he’s at?”

“Yeah. I spoke to Chin’s little brother. Uncle Choi is patrolling the Aloha Tower—” The hazard lights on Steve’s truck flashed as he clicked the car alarm off. He stopped abruptly, turned on his heel and eyes, agate hard, scanned the street.

“What? What?” Danny stopped on a dime and looked frantically around. He didn’t see anything weird. It was a normal street, dotted with moving cars and trucks, parked vehicles, and a range of pedestrians -- from shoppers and office workers to tourists. “Steve?”

Danny didn’t touch. He wanted to, though. The straight line of Steve’s back spoke of a deep unease.

“I just felt….”

“That someone was watching us?” There were no unusual suspects, no cameras, or watchers tucked around corners. Danny kind of doubted that they would be that obvious.
Steve huffed, nostrils flaring.

“Let’s get off the street then,” Danny said, moving towards the truck.

Steve’s arm came out, mom-blocking Danny’s forward movement.

“What?” Danny asked.

“Someone,” Steve said slowly, “has interfered with the truck.”

“What!” Danny demanded. “A bomb?”

“Maybe.” Steve slid forwards, head cocked to the side as he scrutinised the black Ford.

Danny could not see what Steve saw. It was entirely possible that there was nothing to see -- that it was all about feelings. Steve crouched to scrutinise the key lock on the passenger side. He scowled. Danny wasn’t the slightest bit surprised when Steve dropped down into a push up, his tiny backpack bouncing on his shoulders, and peered under the truck. A lady with a toddler in a stroller gave them a wide berth as she rushed by.

“Dropped his keys,” Danny fudged, but she didn’t look back.

Steve shimmied like a snake and craned his head under the engine block. He jack-knifed to his feet -- in no way that should be described as hot -- and marched around to the driver’s side of the vehicle.

“What?” Tentatively, Danny came a little closer, and then it occurred to him—if the truck was going to blow up, shouldn’t he be chivvying people away?

Through the windows, he could see Steve examining the inside of the truck. Danny didn’t have a clue what had caught his attention and kindled his suspicions. Danny lifted his hands and mimed a shrug through the window. Steve glanced at him, and Danny widened his eyes: *come on tell me.* Sighing, Steve pointed at the lemon scented air freshener hanging from the mirror in the centre of the dash. It was swinging fractionally, as if knocked a few moments ago.

Steve did another World War II searchlight scan of the immediate area.

“Maybe,” Danny said loudly, “a heavy truck drove by?”

“There’s a scratch on the passenger lock. You don’t use keys to get into the truck. It was picked.”

“Really?” Danny bent over to have a closer look. He couldn’t see anything, so he huffed a breath over the shiny polished metal trying to see if that helped, and an edge of the heel of a palm appeared in the condensation below the lock, and then disappeared as it immediately dried in the warm Hawaiian air. “Babe!”

“Don’t touch anything!” Steve came back around the truck with alacrity.

“We got a print!” Danny pointed in the general area.

“What?” Steve crouched, as Danny breathed on the lock.

“Okay, that’s not professional,” Steve said, tone disgusted. “Do it again.”

Danny breathed, and Steve snapped off a shot of the heel print with his BlackBerry.

“Okay, so we’ve got evidence and shit? Shouldn’t we be calling the bomb squad? I mean, you
know, someone’s interfered with your truck, and not in a good way. At least, I’m assuming that.”

“Yes, you’re right.”


~*~

“We found a bug, Commander. No bomb.” The camo-bedecked officer strode towards them behind the barricade of Army Bomb Squad vehicles. He had a walrus-bushy moustache.

“Excuse me?” Steve demanded.

The moustache, Danny guessed, and that he was a good few feet away, made the officer difficult to understand.

The army guy stopped, well on the other side of the barricade, and stared at them. The label over his right breast pocket gave his surname as Velasquez.

“We conducted a search of your vehicle.” He turned and looked over his shoulder, back towards the Ford, and continued speaking, “We found the bug in the music system.”

Steve snapped a glance at Danny, annoyed and frustrated.

“Major, report,” Steve rapped out, and strode around the barricade, straight into the man’s orbit.

The major spun on his heel, head jerking back as he clocked Steve’s invasion of his personal space. Almost at attention, he repeated his observations in short staccato sentences.

“Where’s the bug now?” Steve asked, after he dissected out the meaning of the major’s words.

“We secured it in one of the bomb boxes, as ordered,” Velasquez said. “They’re insulated. No electronic signals. I figured NI would want it.”

“Yes, NI will want it.”

“Yes. Lieutenant Commander Rickety asked for it.” Velasquez pointed to the other side of the road where a brown sedan was parked.

“Thank you,” Steve said tersely. “And, Major Velasquez, your facial hair is not regulation.”

Steve marched over in a direct line to Rickety’s car; all and sundry got out of his determined way. Danny hared after him because this was going to be incendiary. He waggled his eyebrows at Velasquez’s expression as he passed. Danny guessed that Steve was in the right, but it was hard for an Army guy to swallow a passive aggressive reprimand from a Navy guy.

“Rickety!” Steve rapped out.

The strawberry blond-headed Lieutenant Commander was just about to reverse out of the parking space.

“Commander?” He eyed them through the open driver’s window.

“Where are you going?” Steve demanded.

“I’m heading back to the base.” Rickety patted the box on the passenger seat.
“Why did you authorise removal of the bug?”

“Because it’s a bug,” Rickety said, as if talking to a moron.

“Where’s NCIS? My Ford needs to be checked. There’s a print on the front passenger door. There could have been residual evidence associated with the bug. Even the placement could have told us something about the operator that placed it.”

Rickety’s face fell.

Frustrated beyond belief, Steve threw his hands in the air. “Get NCIS down here to take my truck for processing. Now!” He spun on his heel, pale skin flushed.

“Hey, hey.” Danny caught the hem of his t-shirt.

“Fucking idiot,” Steve swore uncharacteristically. “Even if it’s highly unlikely that Wo Fat wasn’t aware that we had found the bug so we could have provided false intel--” Steve gestured at the public crowd on the other side of the police barricade, well outside of the Army’s sphere of action, “--we could have pinged it. Seen if we could get a location.”

“Steve,” Danny began.

Steve almost twisted out of Danny’s grasp. “Why aren’t you calling NCIS, Commander?” he demanded.

Flushing, Rickety got his phone out and started making calls.

“Look, he’s an idiot.” Danny tugged Steve away, and Steve followed the draw of his fingers. “But he’s obeying you. Okay? Let’s go over to the truck and make sure that no one touches it more before NCIS gets here.”

“I wouldn’t put him in charge of a girl scout jamboree,” Steve groused.

~*~

Steve watched glumly as NCIS towed his truck away to preserve any residual evidence and to process thoroughly back at the lab.

“Going to have to get it recalibrated,” he grumbled. “Towing damages the wheel alignment.”

“I’m sure there’s a cousin somewhere that will do it for you,” Danny mused. He guessed that there were probably ten cousins that could do it.

Steve grunted in agreement as he fiddled with his BlackBerry.

“You texting Uncle Choi?” Danny craned his head to look at the screen.

“Next. I’m sending the photo of the heel print to Dr. Hewson.”

“Who?”

“Head of the NCIS labs. You met her, the first time I took you.”

Danny nodded, remembering the lady with the long hair plait. He had got the impression that she was a long standing friend of Steve’s, which probably related to the stuff that Steve had done with Naval Intelligence.
“So where next, Kemosabe?” Danny asked. “How are we going to meet up with Choi now we’re without wheels?”

“What?” All of Steve’s attention was abruptly focused on Danny. “Chemo-Babe?”

“Kemo-sa-be,” Danny enunciated.

“I prefer ’Babe’,” Steve said petulantly.

“Noted. But why didn’t we get a lift back to Seolh with one of the fifty or so cops that checked on us to make sure that we were all right?”

“Because we need to go and find Uncle Choi, Danny,” Steve said, tone a little perplexed.

“Yes, mission,” Danny said, and hand-waved, because despite it being barely one o’clock, he felt like it had been a whole day. And he had been standing out in the hot sun and humid air for a long time. Wilting into a puddle seemed like a really good idea.

Steve shrugged his backpack off his shoulder, and hauled out a plastic bottle of water. Mutely, he proffered it.

“Aw, thanks, Babe.” Danny glugged down a healthy mouthful. It was warm, but so very, very good.

“I forget that you’re not used to the sun and heat.” A little tentatively, Steve reached out and touched the tip of Danny’s nose with his finger. “You’ve caught the sun.”

“Must have sweated off my sun block.” Danny resisted touching his nose. As soon as Steve mentioned it, he could suddenly feel the stretch of over-exposed skin across his cheekbones.

“I thought that we could walk to the Aloha Tower.” Steve lifted his chin in the direction of the white clock tower rising far in the distance. “But let’s get a taxi instead, get you out of the sun and grab some lunch. Uncle Choi can join us.”

“What about Wo Fat?” Danny asked, and he couldn’t help looking around.

“He wants to bug us for intel, Danny. Not shoot at us.”

~*~

They got out of the taxi at the entrance to the Aloha Market Place. Steve was hovering, which was altogether weird. That was Danny’s role in the scheme of things.

“Stop looking at me like that, Babe.”

“You’ve gone really, really red,” Steve said worriedly. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine.” Danny waved his almost empty water bottle. “Food wouldn’t go amiss.”

Catching him by the elbow, Steve towed Danny over to a placard map next to the harbour wall of the Aloha Tower Market Place. It was mounted on a stubby podium.

“Hey, stop with the pulling!” Danny protested.

“Here.” Steve helpfully pointed to the portion of the map that listed the various food emporiums inside the market, just in case Danny hadn’t been able to understand the way that the colour coordinated map was set up.
There were a lot of choices. Top of the list was ‘Aloha Sushi’. Danny didn’t want sushi no matter how much Steve adored sushi. He wanted something familiar and comforting after their morning bomb scare.

“Hooters?” Danny said out loud.

Steve looked a little horrified, but covered instantly. Danny made a mental note to play strip poker with him sometime in the near future.

“Let’s try the Brewery Restaurant,” Danny decided. He wasn’t familiar with the chain -- Gordon Biersch -- or even if it was a brand. But a long, cold beer sounded awesome.

Carefully, Steve led them through the maze of shops and store fronts, his pace slower than his normal march. Danny caught a glimpse of his reflection in a mirrored shop façade, and was surprised at the deep rosy flush over his nose and cheekbones, making his blue eyes pop out. Blond, pale and Hawaii didn’t mix very well. Aloe vera was in Danny’s future. Suddenly, his shirt was tackily uncomfortable against his back.

The restaurant was busy, but a table for three was available. Tucked in the far corner, it only provided a sparse view of the harbour, but it was cool and in shadow. Their young waitress was clearly responsive to Danny’s neon-glowing skin.

“I’ll let you guys look at the menu, and come back with a pitcher of iced water.”

“And beer!” Danny said to her retreating back.

“I don’t think that beer is a good idea,” Steve said.

“Beer is an excellent idea,” Danny refuted, going straight for the drinks portion of the menu. There was a light Golden Export that was just what the doctor prescribed.

“Hmm.” Steve was rooting in his backpack. Triumphanty, he pulled out a small screw topped jar of his moisturiser. “You want?”

“Yeah, actually, yeah.” His skin was pinching. He took it and stood. “I need the bathroom, as well. Order me a Golden Export when that delightful young woman comes back.”

Danny trotted off before Steve could lecture him on the evils of alcohol and sunburn. If the beer wasn’t there when he returned, he would simply order it when she came back to get their food order. Mentally, as he pissed in the urinal, he prepared his harangue if Steve didn’t obey orders.

He took the opportunity to throw cold water on his face after washing his hands. The cool splash felt awesome against his heated skin. Peering closely, he didn’t think that he was badly burnt, just a little singed. The moisturiser was oily and gloopy, so he used it sparingly, preferring not to look like a shiny troll doll. It did help his tight feeling skin. There was a line of heat between his shirt collar and his hair line. He dampened a paper towel and laid it over the back of his neck with a hiss.

“Sunburn,” he grumbled.

~*~

The beers -- one light-coloured one for him and a darker, amber beer for Steve -- and a large pitcher of water were on the table when he returned.

“Have you ordered food?” Danny sat and reached for the beer at the same time. It slipped down very
easily. The knot at the base of his skull unraveled.

“Didn’t know what you’d want.” Steve passed over a laminated menu. “There are a lot of fried foods to choose from.”

“Hah!” Danny scanned the menu, checking that there would be something for his own favourite picky eater. They had a good and varied choice. “Oooh. Oooh. Oooh. It all looks great. Have you decided?”

“Miso Mahi,” Steve said.

Finding it on the menu, it appeared healthy to Danny’s eye. He wasn’t entirely sure what mahi or the quinoa kale pilaff side was, and to be fair, he didn’t really care because the Kobe cheeseburger was beckoning. Danny was also going to try the advertised legendary garlic fries. Not wanting to wait a second longer, Danny waved their nice waitress over.

She dimpled a smile at Danny as he made his order, and told her what Steve had chosen.

“Hello, boys.” Uncle Choi came around the table from behind the young woman.

“Officer!” The waitress jumped. “Uhm, is everything okay?”

“I’m taking my lunch break with my nephew,” Uncle Choi said easily.

“Oh, okay.” She blinked. Deliberately, she poised herself, stylus and mini-tablet ready to finish their order, striving to find comfort in routine. “Do you know what you’d like? Oh, sorry, you haven’t had a chance to look at the menu.”

“It’s okay, keiki. I’ve been here before. Beer battered fish and chips.” Choi moved around to the far side of the table and sat with a clump, his heavy utility belt hitting the back of the chair. “Root beer. Thanks.”

“Coming right up.” She beetled off, tapping at her notepad as she moved.

“Hi, Uncle Choi. I’m glad you could come,” Steve said. “You remember Danny, don’t you?”

“Yeah. Hi, Danny. You keeping Stevie in line?”

“Of course.” Danny toasted Choi with his beer. He was a funny old guy. He had this lazy drawl as if he was onto his tenth beer of the day.

“How are you doing, kiddo?” Choi lolled back in his chair. “You weren’t well the last time I saw you?”

Blushing, Steve scratched behind his ear. “Moved too fast. Won’t happen again.”

Choi shook his head, avuncular. “It will, kid. But don’t let it stop you. So what’s up?”

Leaning to the side, Steve fetched his BlackBerry out of his back pocket. Thumb flicking, he scrolled through the picture files, and then passed over his phone to Choi.

“Do you recognise this man?”

Choi scrutinised the screen, holding it at arm’s length and turning it from side to side.

“I think that’s Koji. Yeah, Koji Noshimuri,” he finally said.
“Relation to Hiro Noshimuri?” Steve stretched across the table as far as he could, and grated, voice low, “The Yakuza boss?

“Younger brother.” Choi grimaced, as he handed the phone back to Steve. “What’s this about?”

Angling the phone so that they could both see the screen, Steve scrolled through to the second photo of the man. Automatically, the pictures rolled over to the Mercury Marquis. Steve thumbed it back to Koji’s photograph.

“Are you sure, Uncle Choi?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

“How do you know him?” Danny plucked the phone from Steve’s hand, curious because the man’s face was half hidden by the car door. “These are old photos.”

“He was a cop.” Choi said leaning in close. “That’s your dad’s old car, you know.”

“I remember it well,” Steve said hollowly. His changeable eyes had shifted to storm-grey.

“And so you should, son.” Choi smiled a sad smile. “Why the interest in Koji?”

“Koji Noshimuri.” Steve took his phone from Danny’s hand. “I’m guessing he was a mole for the Yakuza? Dad was investigating him, as part of his Yakuza investigation?”

“It was a nasty business. The investigation—” Choi grimaced, “—died with your dad. But Koji left soon after, ’cos it was an open secret that he was Yakuza, and he started working for his brother. Security.”

“Dad was investigating him? Why’s he getting into Dad’s car then?” Steve asked.

“What’s weirder is why’s that photo in your mom’s sequence of photos?” Danny tapped the phone with his fingernail.

Steve stared at his phone as if he had found it in the bottom of a nasty garbage can.

“Babe?” Danny asked.

“Babe?” Choi echoed.

“My mother—” Steve stared at Danny, eyes wide and hurt, “—was running surveillance on my dad?”

~*~

#93#

“Babe, your mom was probably surveilling this Koji Noshimuri guy, not following your dad. Koji was a Yakuza cop.”

“How do the photos stack up?” Steve thought out loud.

“What photos?” Choi asked, conversationally. “Apart from the ones you’ve showed me.”

“I really don’t want to get into it here.” Steve straightened in his seat.

Thinking hard, Danny recalled what order the photos came in. The photos of Koji were the first in
the sequence after a handful of shots of what, Danny guessed, was the beach in front of Steve’s old home.

“Your food, gentlemen.” The waitress returned, handling a large tray with skill.

“Hey let me give you a hand.” Carefully, Danny lifted Choi’s fish and chips and passed it over to the policeman on the far side of the table.

“Thank you,” she chirped.

Danny fought not to drool as a piled-high plate of burger, onion rings, tomatoes and a basket of awesome-smelling garlic fries were placed in front of him.

“Nom. Nom. Nom, as Grace would say.” Danny funneled a handful of fries into his mouth. They tasted as good as they smelled.

“I am so not kissing you.” Steve wrinkled his nose at the fries.

Danny blinked in surprise, and glanced at Choi, gauging the cop for a reaction. Choi eyed him placidly over the rim of his glass of root beer.

“You could try some,” Danny ventured slowly, “and we’d be equally garlicky.”

“They’re very oily,” Steve said disapprovingly.

“I’m not telling you to eat the whole basketful. In fact you’d better not eat the whole basketful.”

“I guess I should try and save your arteries.” Steve snatched a fist of fries.

“Hey!” Danny protested.

Steve munched the giant mouthful, cheeks bulging like a gerbil. He made kissy kissy sounds in Danny’s direction.

“Seriously attractive, dude.” Danny regarded him.

Steve grinned unrepentantly, sharing the little pieces of potato caught between his teeth, but he didn’t take any more fries.

“So when are you two getting married?” Choi asked.

Rather than blushing, Steve smiled even wider.

“After you and Uncle Adrian.”

“You know, we are considering vacationing in California.”

“No way. Congratulations.” Steve wiped his greasy fingers off on a napkin, and then shook his uncle’s hand.

Ah, that explained some of Steve’s uncharacteristic openness before his uncle, compared to when they had met Catherine.

“So how long have you and Adrian been together?” Danny asked.

“Thirty years. Anniversary this year. Hence, thinking of going to California. About time we should
be married."

Danny settled back and focused on demolishing his burger as Steve caught up with his Uncle. The breadth of the family on Oahu was astounding. Danny thought that his family back in Jersey, and the intricacies and intimacies of his dad’s Fire House was complicated, but Seolh was an institution, and an ancient one at that.

~*~

After a very relaxed lunch, which was just what the doctor ordered, they swung back around to Mrs. Yaayaa’s in a taxi and picked up the tailored suit and shirt. The black suit was a fine linen, light for the Hawaiian humidity, but still sharp and professional. Steve had wrinkled his nose, and insisted that they drop the suit off at his drycleaners. Reluctantly, Danny had concurred -- there had been the faintest whiff of mothballs. Febreze might have worked, but a thorough cleaning was probably for the best.

Walking out of the drycleaners, Steve stepped off the sidewalk onto the kerb, tall, arrogant and impossibly confident. He held his hand out, thumb and little finger extended, and middle fingers curled against his palm.

"Are you shaka-ing a taxi?" Danny asked, and then shook his head, because he had asked Steve’s back. “Am I ever going to learn?"

Steve flicked a glance over his shoulder. “What?"

“Nothing.”

The giant, blue Chevrolet Silverado, which was normally parked outside the House’s wrought iron gates, pulled up next to Steve. Pointy-headed Talmai wound down the passenger window.

“Everything okay, Brah?”

“Hi, Talmai—” Steve turned back to the car, “—can we get a lift back to the House?”

“Sure.” Talmai jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the backseat. “Figured you’d be asking.”

Steve held open the back door for Danny, automatically, giving a little bow. Sniffing, Danny clambered into the ridiculously high Chevrolet bemoaning the stupidly, overly ostentatious wheels.

“Looking a bit pink there, haole,” Paulo cracked, grinning shark’s teeth.

“Yes, this is what happens when you have pale skin and ridiculously intense sunlight twelve hours a day,” Danny said sarcastically.

“You could always go back to the mainland,” Paulo said maliciously.


“The sun shines on the mainland too,” Danny said equally sharply, patting Steve’s firm thigh, reassuringly. "You’ll find that it’s a basic phenomenon. It relates to the sun and the earth and how one rotates around the other. They teach it in high school.”

“If you can’t figure out how to use sun screen, maybe you should go somewhere where it doesn’t shine so much. I dunno, like the North Pole.”

“Hah,” Danny mocked. “It can shine twenty four hours a day up there. And you can get sunburnt,
along with frost bite. Why the Hell would I want to go to the North Pole?”

“Hey.” Steve clicked his fingers between their noses, and then pointed out to the road. “House.”

Paulo’s eyes narrowed at the peremptory order.

“Steve, I told you, we’re not your subordinates,” Danny deflected, because there was true anger in the Kapu gang member’s eyes. He definitely had to be getting sick of following them around at Kavika’s orders. “Please, Paulo, can you take us back to the House?”

“Yeah, Brah.” Talmai lightly smacked Paulo’s shoulder with the back of his hand. “I wanna hang with my woman. We get these guys back to the nest, we can get off early.”

Grumbling, Paulo screeched out into the traffic -- to the tune of a screech of brakes as he cut someone off.

~*~

Paulo and Talmai dropped them off at the House gates, letting them trudge up the long, curving drive. Never had the drive seemed so long amidst the rambling rhododendrons and twisted, shrubby bushes.

“How are you feeling?” Steve asked. “Should have got Paulo to drive up to the front door.”

“I’m not a delicate snowflake, you know,” Danny said, the pathway gravel crunching loudly under his feet.

“Yes, you are a delicate snowflake,” Steve said. And before Danny could protest added, “Snowflakes start avalanches.”

“I don’t know whether to be flattered or insulted.” Danny bristled.

“I’d be flattered. Relentless, dogged, stubborn…”

“I’m not entirely sure of your analogy.” Danny palmed Steve’s butt. “I like it, though.”

“Pale. White. Melts in heat.”

Danny pinched, hard.

“Ow.” Steve snaked to the side, out of reach.

“See if you get any nookie tonight.” Danny waggled his finger at Steve.

“Aw, Danno,” Steve protested.

“No, no, no. no. That’s my baby girl’s word. You don’t get to say ‘Danno’ in the same discussion as sex.”

“Or ass and Mrs. Yaayaa.” Steve slid back in, and swung an arm around Danny’s shoulder to pull him in to mash a kiss against his temple. “You’re still hot.”

“I’ll have a cool shower, slap on some aloe vera.”

“You’ve got some?” Steve asked as the House loomed into view.
“Yeah. Me and aloe are intimately acquainted since I came to this tropical Hell hole.”

“Intimately?” Steve said with a hint of humour.

“Get your mind out of the gutter. Aloe vera isn’t slippery enough. But…,” Danny pondered imagining skin to skin contact, smoothing his hands over muscled thighs, “you could still play with it.”

“Shower?” Steve asked, grinning.

“Could be fun. But--” Danny pointed at the tailgate of Mamo’s beat up old truck visible from around the side of the House, “--you wanted to talk to Mamo.”

“Hmmm.” Steve angled his arm around Danny’s shoulders -- squishing him, so Danny elbowed his side -- to peer at his chunky wristwatch. “I better grab him now. You go shower and maybe take a couple of Tylenol? I’ll go chat with Mamo.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Without another word, they separated, Danny heading to the front door, and Steve angling alongside the wraparound porch to head straight to the workshops.

~*~

Typically, once Danny had stopped running around, suddenly the urge to collapse had overtaken him. Grabbing a couple of Tylenol from Steve’s Armageddon stash of meds, he took himself into the Star Trek shower, sat on the non-slip mat, barely-warm water cascading over his back.

Twenty minutes in, he felt much more human, and capable of cleaning up. Wet hair combed slick against his scalp, he finally clambered out of the shower, surprised that Steve hadn’t made an appearance. It was strange rocking around Steve’s loft without the man. Danny rooted in the vanity unit for after-sun cream or aloe vera since he had forgotten to collect it from his studio. There were a host of prescribed moisturisers but nothing over-the-counter.

Clean shorts and t-shirt felt luxurious against his skin. He was frankly glad that he had worn a long sleeved shirt and pants, otherwise he would have probably been more burnt.

“How’s it going?” He suited action to words, grabbing dirty clothes from the basket by the bathroom door, and then darted into the second bedroom to get the clothes tossed in the other hamper. Why Steve had two hampers really didn’t make sense. Other than the eyrie was definitely set up for more than one person.

Arms full, he wandered down the twisty-turning staircase. There was an empty room in Steve’s apartment that was obviously set up for utilities but nothing had been plumbed in. Thinking next time he would just lug a hamper, Danny waddled through the House trying not to drop a trail of skanky pairs of shorts like Hansel and Gretel in the forest dropping breadcrumbs.

“Ooh, ouch.” Mary stepped out of the blue studio as he passed by with his armload. It was like she lay in wait for him whenever he was in the vicinity. “Sunburn?”

“Yeah, got caught.”

“Man, you should know better.” Mary crossed her arms and leaned against the doorjamb.

“It happens.” Danny eyed her dark eyebrows with her bleached blonde hair, and thought on Steve’s darker colouring and Grandmother Audrey whom he clearly took after. Mary probably tanned in the sun rather than burning. “When I was little just looking at the sun made me burn.”
“I’ve got some after-sun cream in my… handbag,” Mary offered. “You want?”


“Yeah, sure.” Mary closed the door in his face.

“Weird.” Danny shrugged and got on with tackling the much-needed laundry.

Aloe vera first, though.

~*~

Danny separated out the whites and colours, dumping them in separate washers. It was like being back at university with communal Laundromats. He should have done this first thing in the morning and then the clothes could have line dried.

“Den mom.” He shook his head.

“Hey.”

Danny jumped.

“Jesus, Chin, you almost gave me a heart attack.” Danny clutched at his chest.

“I just wanted a word,” Chin said seriously and then blinked. “You caught the sun.”

“Yeah, out at midday, hot and sweaty. It happens. You wanted a word?” Danny hedged, not liking Chin’s tone. The lid on the washer dropped, clanking loudly, and Danny took a long moment to turn the dial to a whites-only, hot wash.

Chin swallowed and came along the driers tucked in next to the washing machines -- under the shelves stacked with soaps, bleaches, and other detergents out of the reach of any young kids that might run around the House.

Holy shit, Danny observed, this looks serious. Chin was cogitating over his next words.

“What, man? Spit it out?”

“Malia--”


“No. No!” Chin was suddenly animated. “No, she saw the bruises on your forearms. And, she was worried. I -- She’s a doctor.”

“Oh.” Danny angled his arms. The fading fingerprints were ghostly around the darker, central purple bruises, which were stark against his pale, hairy skin. He had put on a t-shirt after his shower. “Yeah. Looks bad. It was an accident. Look, you know Steve. Jesus.”

Chin met his floundering with a look of alarm.

“You can’t think for one millisecond that Steve did this on purpose!” Danny protested indignantly.

“So what happened?” Chin asked.

“It was when he had a fever, with his ear infection. He got confused and had a flashback. He
grabbed me. That’s all.”

“That’s all?” Chin echoed. “Danny, I’m not apologising for asking.”

“I get that.” Danny thumped the side of the churning washing machine with his fist. “Look, Steve was beside himself when he saw the bruises. He’s talked to his therapist and organised a family session. You’re invited.”

Chin absorbed that for a long moment.

“I’m not worried,” Danny continued in the face of Chin’s silence. “Steve listened to me when he was having his flashback. I just thought that it was sensible to get some professional advice.”

Jesus, Danny didn’t have a clue what Chin was thinking.

“He had a fever, it’s understandable,” Danny said. “I’m not apologising for him. There’s nothing to apologise for.”

“Okay.” Chin nodded. “Talking to the therapist is a good idea. When?”

“Thursday thirtieth at two o’clock. Steve said he was going to talk to you about it. And maybe drag Mamo along. I don’t know if he’s decided to include Mamo.”

“Okay,” Chin said decisively, “when he mentions it, I’ll tell him we’ve spoken.”

“Chin,” Danny began.

“Danny,” Chin returned equally soberly, “we’re family. We look out for each other. I’m not not going to ask when I see a member of the family sporting bruises like that. But I’m also not going to assume that there isn’t an understandable explanation.”

Danny fumbled his way through all the double negatives, and realised that they were on the same page. Family, it had a nice sound. In all honesty, if anyone else had asked the question, apart from maybe Mamo, Danny felt like he might have overreacted. But there was something about Chin that demanded calm and collected behaviour.

Family was about the difficult conversations, but knowing that everything would be all right in the aftermath.

~*~

#94#

“Hey, Babe.”

They had had a quiet dinner. It had been Toast’s turn to prepare dinner, but he had texted Chin with abject apologies in the face of an emergency at the University. All hands on deck had resulted in a pot luck pasta dinner of Seolh’s ubiquitous tomato sauce with sautéed fresh vegetables, and garlic bread. The vegetarian slant to his diet was a new chapter in Danny’s life, but he didn’t mind. Dinner had uncharacteristically segued into the family separating in their own directions.

Danny scrunched down lazily on Steve’s sofa, opposite his ridiculously large flat screen television playing the news, and set his sore head against Steve’s shoulder. Steve’s hand draped comfortably down Danny’s chest.

“You feeling all right?” Steve scraped his stubbly chin against Danny’s temple.
“Yeah.” Danny nodded to emphasise his words since they weren’t facing each other. He knew what it was; too much sun giving him a minor headache. Knowing the cause made it somewhat easier to deal with. “What did Mamo say?”

“Uhm?” Steve questioned.

“Mamo?”

Steve leaned into Danny as he twisted to haul his phone out of one of his voluminous pockets. He thumbed to the picture of the Asian man.

“Mamo said it’s Koji Noshimuru. Said he worked with dad sometimes.”

Danny lifted the phone out of Steve’s hand. He moved through the pictures, scrolling through the ledger pages, pausing to admire the House tapestry in all its glory -- it was a tragedy that it had been burnt -- the massive carved Nandi Head, to the splay of coins over a white background.

“It’s a weird combination of photos,” Danny observed as he flicked to the front cover of a journal of indeterminate size -- no scale made it difficult to judge. The sequence of dolls were just simply creepy. “Do you think that this is the front of the ledger, or a different book? I kept the sequence of photos, so why take a picture of the pages then wander around the House taking photos of the tapestry and Nandi Head and the coins, and then take a picture of the front of the ledger?”

“What?” Steve unfolded from him in a tangle of limbs and shifted around, sitting crossed legged, so that he had a better view of Danny’s face. Danny missed the snuggling, but it was necessary.

“The sequence,” Danny repeated, holding up the photo of the vase for Steve’s inspection, “is weird.”

“It tells a story, I assume.” Steve took his phone back. “We just don’t have any words to go with the pictures.”

“Have you asked Chin to look at the pages in Chinese?”

“Haven’t had a chance.” Steve went back through the pictures, stopping on one of the coin images.

“Do you think we should show the picture of the guy to Mary?” Danny asked.

Steve’s chin came up. The crease between his eyes was deep as he considered Danny’s words. Slowly, Danny circled his finger in mid-air, mimicking the passage of time as Steve thought hard.

“Because--” Steve carefully uncrossed his long legs, “--this is a person of interest around the time of our parents’ deaths? Well, before, really.”

“When you put it like that… But you know, I didn’t mean now.”

“No time like the present. Come on.” Steve was off like an arrow.

“You know, Mary’s not that fond--” Ridiculous, he was once again addressing Steve’s back, or in this case an empty space, because he was out of the door and clattering down the hairpin staircase.

“What the Hell.” Danny levered off the sofa because, regardless of Mary’s feelings, he wanted to know.

Steve moved like the proverbial greased piglet when galvanised. The door to the blue studio was wide open by the time Danny made his more sedate way after the idiot. Danny just hoped that Steve had knocked rather than barging in. He stuck his head around the door, checking for unexploded
ordnance or flying ornaments. Studying the phone, Mary stood in the centre of the ode to the colour blue. Danny so understood why Chin was planning on redecorating. It was undeniably a lovely pale blue shade, the same aquamarine of the Seolh business card that Steve had given Dolce, but accents, rather than every single surface, was the way to go.

“And?” Steve probed, hands on his hips.

“Jesus.” Mary held up her hand. “Give me a moment.”

“Is it the guy that you thought that you saw looking in the car?”

“I ‘thought’? I didn’t make it up, Steve!”

Defensive Mary bit like an antagonised rattlesnake.

“Or someone around the house when you were with mom when you were little?” Steve said, crossing his arms over his narrow chest. “If it wasn’t the guy looking in the car?”

“Pressure!” Mary turned away, stomping over to the windows overlooking the gravelled drive and the landscaped greenery in front of the House. “Could be. I mean—”

“Did you say ‘could be’?” Steve echoed. “Why do people turn away when they talk to me?”

Mary spun back, a flush colouring her cheeks. “I forget. Sorry.”

“So is it?” Steve demanded.

“He came so close, pushing his nose against the window. But… I can’t. It was dark.” Mary drew her fingers through her short hair, strands catching on her heavy rings. “Who is this?”

“Yakuza heavy,” Steve said, uncompromisingly, playing at being a cop. “Mom may or may not have been running surveillance on him.”

“And you asked if he came by the house?”

“He was a cop, once upon a time,” Steve said. “Mamo recognised him.”

Man, Steve liked to play his cards close to his chest, even when not necessary, Danny observed.

“If you had asked me if I just knew the guy, I wouldn’t have known him.” Mary was hollow eyed. “I didn’t remember that that guy was Asian. He was just a guy. It could be him. It was a long time ago, Steve!”

“But you’re sure that the guy looking in the car was Asian.” Steve stalked over to her. “‘Cos you’ve never mentioned that before.”

“Like we’ve ever talked about it! I didn’t think in those terms; I was nine. Adults were adults. But now I’d say…” She closed her eyes scrunching her face up. “Late twenties–early thirties, middling height, Asian. Twenty years ago, I would have said old guy like dad. And then got really annoyed because no one believed me.”

“So it’s a possibility, based on ethnicity, but not a definite one.” Steve snatched his phone back. “Because, one, it’s a poor picture, and two, your memory is old.”

“Maybe if there had been a proper investigation twenty years ago, after the death of a cop and his wife,” Mary spat, “I would have been questioned properly and showed photographs of possible
suspects.”

“Proper investigation. Hmmm.” Steve paused, visage frighteningly blank.

“Babe?” Danny asked, in the face of that expression.

“That’s a really good observation. Uncle Choi said that it was an open secret that Koji Noshimuri was a Yakuza cop, and he left soon after the murder. Why? He wasn’t under any threat? It had to be to the Yakuza’s benefit that he was placed in the department.” Steve went preternaturally quiet, thinking hard. “He was forced to leave. By whom?”

“I’m guessing you’re going to answer your own question?” Danny hazarded.

“I’m so slow since I got injured!” Steve growled, clenching his teeth and fists in pure frustration. “I swear. I swear. Fucking head injuries.”

“Babe, calm down,” Danny said. And head injuries -- that was the first mention of head injuries.

Mary was a silent statue, fingers stuffed in her mouth.

“A CIA agent and a detective investigating the Yakuza were killed. And there was only a police investigation that ruled that it was an accident?” Steve spat. “There was a ‘proper’ investigation. Uncle Joe has a lot to answer for.”

“Babe. Babe.” Danny got his hands on his chest, stroking for calm. “Explain your leaps of logic? Cause you’re losing us.”

“Joe was mom’s handler. We know that from the photos in the album. He was there when mom was being a ‘friendly’ operative,” Steve said mockingly, sliding away from Danny’s comfort. “There was a police investigation. None of the files that Koa Keawe or Hyo Kelly have passed my way reported on the incident other than it was filed as an accident. The omission is conspicuous by its absence.”

“What’s missing?” Danny asked. Steve’s thought processes were impossible to follow sometimes.

“The CIA would have had to be involved. The CIA would have investigated our parents’ murder.”

“But why didn’t they talk to me?” Mary asked quietly.

“What?” Steve spun around, making her jerk back.

“But why didn’t they talk to me?” Mary repeated. “If there had been a CIA investigation shouldn’t they have talked to the only witness?”

“They did. Uncle Joe talked to you. Remember? The funeral. You were sitting on his knee, and he asked you what you remembered. That was the first time you mentioned the guy around the car. Uncle Joe shushed you. Told you that that couldn’t have happened. You burst into tears.”

“It was a funeral!” Mary said indignantly.

“I know it was a funeral! I thought that you were doing it to get attention--”

“What!”

“Uncle Joe shut you down, because if you could identify a Yakuza hit man I doubt you’d be standing in front of me today yelling at me.”
“You’re yelling at me.”

*Jesus. Siblings*, Danny thought, not for the first time, and rubbed his hand over his face.

“Hey. Hey.” Danny stepped between them flourishing out his arms, holding them apart. “Calm.”

“Danny,” Steve said.

“Kiddywinkles, you now have yet another complicating layer to the story. You, Mary, know why people never believed you, because your Uncle Joe made sure -- in your best interests -- that it was never documented for your own safety. Steve, you’ve got to talk to Joe, and get him to tell you the whole truth. It’s past the time that you need protection.” In all honesty, Danny thought Steve did need protection, and maybe that was behind Joe White’s machinations.

“Kiddywinkles?” Mary repeated.

“That’s your take away?” Danny rolled his eyes.

Steve’s phone vibrated in his hands, announcing a text. Glaring, he stared at the screen. Suddenly, his eyes widened in horror.

“Steve?” Danny asked, moving in close.

“The doc identified the palm print: Jovan Eteinne.”

“And?” Danny asked. The name wasn’t familiar to him.

“Comrade of Victor and Anton Hesse. He’s their computer expert.” Steve’s face pinched. “Not normally the person I’d expect to deploy a bug.”

“Do they all travel together?” Danny asked, because that was worrying, on a whole new level of worrying.

Steve had his ITE remote out and was simultaneously fiddling with the dial as he thumbed through his phone contacts. Danny slid in even closer to better listen. It was unusual for Steve to talk on the phone.

“Barnabas?” Steve said.

The only Barnabas that Danny knew was Simons, the Navy SEAL, who had stayed with them after the Hesse brothers’ attack, only leaving to pursue the terrorists in Europe, and who was now back on ‘Oahu.

“Sir?” The text came up on the BlackBerry’s screen courtesy of the mobile translation app.

“It’s ‘Steve’, Barnabas. It occurred to me, that I hadn’t reiterated my invitation when we last spoke. You’re welcome to stay at Seolh,” Polite Steve, precise Steve -- Lieutenant Commander McGarrett -- was palpably present, despite the tenor of a friend inviting another friend to visit.

The screen remained free of any further text for a long moment.

“That sounds like a good plan, Steve,” Simons said, eventually. “My rental is grim. Would tonight be okay?”

“No time like the present,” Steve said tightly.
“I’ll be there in about half an hour.”

“Excellent.” Steve simultaneously flicked phone and remote buttons, ending the call, and changing the setting on his aids.

“We’re getting a visitor?” Mary asked.

“A colleague. A good man.”

What they were really getting was another layer of protection, Danny knew, but Steve wasn’t saying that.

“Really?” Mary drawled. “I mean, really, who is he?”

“You’ll like him.” Steve scratched at the long elegant line of his throat as he regarded Mary through his lashes. “He’s an officer and a gentleman.”

Mary, Danny guessed, would probably eat Simons up with a spoon.

“Dick,” Mary said, without heat. “What is he -- a bodyguard?”

“Better than that. He’s a Navy SEAL.”

Mary absorbed that, paling.

“You know,” Steve said stoically in the face of that unease, “Aunt Deb would probably love it if you visited.”

“You trying to get rid of me, bro?” Mary cocked her head to the side.

“Just trying to keep you safe.”

“Danny’s here. Chin and Kono are here. Toast’s here. Are you saying it’s not safe?”

“It’s as safe as I can make it. But if you were in Florida, which you could do, you’d be out of the line of fire.”

“And Danny Boy could go back to -- where was it? -- New Jersey.” She stared at Danny pointedly.

“My Monkey lives in Hawaii,” Danny said, showing his teeth, because he wasn’t moving anywhere. Well, if Steve said that they should go to Jersey, he would simply kidnap Gracie and deal with the legal fall out under the umbrella protection of the Williams’ Clan and every single one of the numerous Hudson County Fire Departments.

“I’m staying,” Mary said, chin up.

“Fine,” Steve said. “But you’ll follow the buddy system and wear your tracker.”

“When did this become a lecture about how I’m supposed to follow your rules?” Mary rose up on her toes. “I have been using your buddy system since you explained it to me.”

“Kiddiewinkles,” Danny chastised, moving between them once again. “You’re both impossible. Your default position seems to be defensive and offensive at the same time. Grow up.”

Mary bristled. If she had been a cat, her tail would have been lashing.
“I’m talking to both of you.” Danny helpfully pointed at Steve and then Mary. “You should just hug it out. I’m going to check the airbed in the room that Simons’ normally uses, ‘cos it will probably be as flat as a pancake.”

Maybe they would hug? Although, Danny didn’t expect them to do it with him watching. He stalked towards the door, and came to a complete stop at the sight of the large sagging handbag on a blue bookshelf.

“Danny?” Steve asked.

“Mary?” Danny pointed to the handbag. “Care to explain?”

“What?” Steve asked.

“That’s Jenna Kaye’s handbag -- the one that you took off her at the bar,” Danny said. Steve had thrust it into his hands when he had disarmed the woman. Danny had completely forgotten about it, leaving it at the table when he had chased after Kaye. “I remember it. It’s big enough to keep a kitchen sink in.”

“Mary,” Steve whined through all the syllables, as he stomped across to the bag and snatched it up.

“There’s nothing in it,” Mary said, “that you wouldn’t expect to find in a woman’s bag.”

“She’s a CIA data analyst pretending to be an intelligence operative.” Steve upturned the bag right there on the carpet, and pawed through the contents. “Where’s her cell phone?”

“There wasn’t one.”

“I’ll repeat it, she’s a data analyst.” Steve cocked a mocking eyebrow. “A data analyst that doesn’t have a cell phone or an iPad?”

“Maybe it was in her pocket?” Danny offered.

“I know what was in her pockets.” Grunting, Steve rent the bag in two between his clenched fists. A smart phone fell out of the lining with a clatter. Steve snatched it up triumphantly. “Ha!”

“Oh, my god,” Mary exclaimed.


“Computer specialist.” Steve bounced to his feet. “Hidden smart phone. There are going to be toys on here.”

Tongue peeking out, Steve fiddled with the phone. Craning his head, Danny saw that it was as responsive as a corpse; the battery had long since run out of charge.

“I need to go into Pearl.” Steve announced.

A blink, and he was out the door.

“Shit.” Danny chased him into the corridor, yelling, “I’m coming with!”

Steve was already by the staircase outside Danny’s studio.

“Stop! Now!” Danny ordered, as he raced down the corridor, because orders always worked best with Steve. Satisfactorily, Steve froze, one hand on the banister.
“Danny,” Steve whined, as Danny grabbed the hem of his t-shirt, stopping him going any further. He was doing a lot of grabbing today. Steve was wound tighter than a spring.

“Buddy system, Babe. You don’t go anywhere alone.” Danny stared straight at him, forcing understanding.

“I’m going in, dropping this off, and coming straight back.” Steve slid his hand around Danny’s neck, smooth fingernails skirting over the sunburn, and leaned in to lightly kiss Danny’s lips.

Danny stretched into the kiss, touching chapped lips with his tongue. Steve’s large hands bracketed his face, carefully as if holding glass. A glorious shiver shimmied across Danny’s nerves, as he matched Steve’s kiss.

“Oh, gawd. Kissing brother. Yuck.” Mary made a disgusted sound.

Steve rested his forehead against Danny’s and sighed. Danny rolled around in their loose embrace, as Mary made an about face and darted back into the blue studio.

“Sisters.” Steve screwed his nose up at the space where she had been standing.

“Steve, I’m coming with you.”

“Look, I won’t be long. You look like a boiled lobster. Chill out.”

“Your truck’s at the Base,” Danny pointed out, ignoring the insult, because boy, Steve could be obvious and oblivious at the same time.

“So I’ll take Chin’s, or Kono’s jeep,” Steve said, shrugging, unconcerned.

“Steve,” Danny began.

“I’ll be one and half, two hours at best.” Steve glanced at his watch.

“This is not up for negotiation,” Danny said simply.

Steve pouted, truculently.

“Look, you don’t need to go all the way to the base,” Danny realised. “Jog on over to Kala Drive where the surveillance vehicle is. Give it to them, and they can get a courier to take it to Dr. Hewson.”

Steve absorbed that with all the expression of a Winnebago.

“Huh, that’s a good idea.” Finally, Steve stood a little straighter, turning the suggestion over in his head.

“I have them,” Danny said. He made a point of smiling his cat had got the cream smile.

“Okay.” Steve nodded, eyes narrowing slightly in the face of Danny’s expression. “I’ll be back in fifteen-twenty minutes. Look, if you want to help, see if you can find the ledger.”

“You think it’s here?”

“You sure you got the order of the photos right?” Steve countered, raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah.” Danny was sure; he worked with sequences of photos all the time. It was one of his things.
A story could be told in images over time.

“Mom had possession of the ledger,” Steve said. “It’s as you said before-- She took the photos of the pages. Then ran around the House taking photos of the tapestry, and the Nandi Head and the coins and then took a photo of the front of a notebook, ledger, or any old book. But it’s probably the ledger. She did that here at the House. Mom never lived at the House. But Joe’s right, this place is a walking garage sale. It’s the perfect place to hide things in plain sight.”

“So where’s the library hiding?” Danny asked. He would have preferred to go with Steve to the surveillance truck, but he had that resolute cast to his patrician’s face that was impossible to argue against. Danny was going to let him win this minor battle. “You’ve got a museum. Where’s the library?”

“There isn’t any library, Danny.” He smiled fondly. “There’s shelving stacks in the museum for the rare folios. But there’s no library per se. Well--”

“Ha! Ha!” Danny jabbed his finger. “See!”

“One of the reception rooms has a lot of books in it.” Steve flicked the tip of Danny’s outstretched finger. “There is an attempt at order. Like all of Grandmother’s stuff in one room. But, first go see if Toast has an idea of the whereabouts of an old ledger on his database.”

“Yes, sir.” Danny fired a sloppy salute.

“Go to it, Private Williams.” The kiss that followed was in no way military.

～*～

#95#

Uncharacteristically, Steve had forgotten that Toast was stuck at the university dealing with a computer emergency. Danny wasn’t too sure what a computer emergency would be comprised of, and made a mental note not to ask, because he never understood Toast’s rambling explanations.

Instead, Danny took himself off to Chin’s studio.

“Hi, Danny? You coming in?” Chin stepped aside, opening his door fully.

“Oh. Hi, Malia.” Danny leaned to the side and waved at Malia, who was looking interestedly over the back of the sofa. “Can I steal your fiancé for ten minutes or so?”

“Sure. Are you sunburnt?” She started to rise.

“Honestly, I’m okay.” Danny waved her to sit back down. “I was just in the sun a fraction too long. I’ve got cream. I forgot. It’s January, for fuck’s sake, you shouldn’t get burnt. Pardon my French.”

“You should be careful,” Malia admonished, folding her arms on the back of the sofa, and leaning her chin on her hands as she watched them.

“I know. I know. It was an accident.” Danny jerked his head down the corridor directing Chin.

“Be right back, Malia.” Chin carefully closed the door behind him.

“Sorry, I didn’t know that Malia had come by,” Danny said, as he led the way up to Steve’s apartment.
“Yeah, she just finished her shift. She’ll appreciate ten minutes, or twenty,” Chin said astutely, “doing nothing.”

“Yeah, it could take a little longer,” Danny said, as he stepped into Steve’s front room. The television was still on.

“Where’s Steve?”

“Believe it or not, running out to talk to the security guys.”

“The ones on Kala Drive?” Chin confirmed. “Or the Kapu?”

“Jesus, did everyone know about them except me?”

“My brother, my entire family, and most of my extended family, are cops. We have increased patrols, so believe you me they were spotted. You can’t leave a van on a suburban street for longer than twenty four hours before someone mentions something to someone. Especially in this neighbourhood.”

“Strangely, that makes me very happy.” Danny pressed the panel, and the hidden door opened, to reveal the museum office.

“Oh, my--” Chin huffed out a laugh, “--that I didn’t know about.”

“Seriously? Hah.” Danny preened. I knew before Chin went the sing-song voice in his head.

“So why do you want to talk? Steve’s all right?”

“Steve’s fine.” Danny made an about face that would have made the drill sergeant wanna-be in Steve perk up and salivate. “What’s this about a head injury?”

“Head injury. Who?” Chin said, suddenly all focus and worry.

“Steve said he had a head injury. I thought that it was his side.” Danny touched his own ribs and then waggled an earlobe. “And ears?”

“Ah.” Chin’s entire body segued into still calm. “Well, you don’t get close enough to a blast that deafens you without getting your brain rattled. It was described as a moderate traumatic brain injury - essentially a bad concussion.”

“Holy shit,” Danny said horrified. “What else don’t I know?”

“I don’t know what you don’t know,” Chin said with Spock-like neutrality.

Danny absorbed that statement, momentarily bamboozled.

“I get that Steve’s private, and you’re going to protect him.” Danny braced himself. “But answer me one question: is the Steve that I know, the Steve that you knew?”

“Oh, yes,” Chin said without even a millisecond’s hesitation, and very reassuringly for Danny. “He’s quieter. Has less energy. But he’s Steve.”

“No weird and inexplicable personality shifts?”

“No weird personality shifts,” Chin confirmed. “Other than actually getting a boyfriend, of course.”
Danny glowered at Chin’s supremely satisfied smile at the jibe.

“So is that what you wanted?” Chin smoothly moved on.

“Oh, we need your help with something.” Danny stepped aside, letting Chin see the projector and screen set up. “The Mystery of the House of Seolh by Doris McGarrett, and Uncle Tom Cobley and All and All.”

“Who?”

“Rachel -- English thing.” Danny hand waved off the incomprehensible. “So we found the film, and I developed it. I have the slides here.”

Danny made three long steps across the office to the slide projector. It whirred as he switched it on, the old motor revving up. Fine dust motes danced in the beam of light.

“What can you get the switch?” Danny asked.

“Oh,” was Chin’s only contribution as he flicked off the lights.

“Okay. There’s a bunch of shots of the Mercury Marquis.” Danny flicked through them. “Mamo and your Uncle Choi think that’s Koji Noshimuri, who may or may not have been involved in Mr. and Mrs. McGarrett’s car accident -- also known as murder. He’s Yakuza. That’s Steve’s dad’s car, in case you don’t remember. And these are a whole bunch of papers that me and Steve can’t read. Can you?”

“Oh,” Chin repeated and slid forward.

Danny gnawed on his little fingernail, as Chin studied the screen. He had unloaded a lot on the man in a very short period of time. It was understandable if it took Chin a moment to process. Or a minute. Or two. Or three.

“Steve said that was a whole lot of numbers,” Danny said, when he couldn’t contain himself any more.

“It’s an accounts page. And it’s a lot of money.” Chin sighed. “Millions. Millions back in 1988.”

“1988?”

“Yes.” Chin moved closer and tapped on the fabric in the bottom left hand corner, making the picture warp on the wobbling screen. “February 2nd 1988, to be exact.”

“But it’s written out. Not a printed statement.” Danny automatically looked to the box of Audrey’s old statements stored on the shelf by the hidden door.

“Yes. I don’t understand some of it. I think it’s coded.”

“And what’s been accounted?” Danny asked.

“I don’t know,” Chin said. “I’m guessing it’s a euphemism. ‘Medicine’ graded by type: black, gold, dragon. So I assume drugs.”

“Okay,” Danny said, not liking the sound of that. “Next image?”

Chin nodded and Danny moved the slide carriage on.
“Do drugs keep?” Danny asked. “Could there be a stash of drugs hidden in the House or anywhere in Seolh’s holdings?”

“I can only imagine that the amounts here relate to a lot of drugs.” Chin threw a speculative glance over his shoulder. “I would think that we would have found a room of heroin or cocaine.”

“What’s the word picture for medicine?” Danny asked.

“The word that you’re looking for is Hanzi.” Chin tapped the screen again. It looked like a stick person dancing in a three sided box.

“Hanzi? Okay?” Danny said, trying the word out. “Hanzi.”

“Dragon,” Chin continued, pointing to a hanzi that was significantly more complex. “Black.” It appeared to be a walking window with four legs.

“So it’s possibly a naughty drug lord’s diary,” Danny mused, and moved onto the next page of the ledger. There was more of the same. Able to now spot the stick person, the wiggly splodge and the walking window, Danny could only wonder on the importance of the ledger.

“Hang on--” Chin cocked his head to the side as the final page in the sequence of slides came on the screen.

“Yes?”

“Names. Family history. It’s written in a child’s hand. Practicing the traditional Chinese characters. Wo.”

“Whoa? Or Wo?” Danny pounced. This was amazing. “That’s the Wo Fat family tree?” He pointed at the long line of characters drizzling down the screen.

“Wo family tree. Wo is the family name. Fat will be his given name. Yun-fat possibly.” Chin reached up high and tapped a sequence and then the same sequence on another level. “Yun-fat is a given name through the generations.”

“So this is Wo Fat’s ledger, or more likely, Wo Yongfu’s ledger, and Doris McGarrett stole it off him.” Danny rocked up on his heels and back down. “You know, if I was a criminal mastermind, I wouldn’t write my family history all over the front cover.”

“I doubt he meant to lose it,” Chin said sagaciously. “And I can imagine that the child that scribbled on the book probably got smacked.”

“Holy shit. Do you think that the ledger is what Wo Fat’s after?” Danny rubbed at his temples, thinking hard. Had Doris taken the ledger off Wo Yongfu when she had assassinated him? Probably.

“Possibly.” Chin turned back to the screen. “The photos might be enough. There’s code I can’t read. Doris may have taken the photos, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that she stole it.”

“Oh, she stole it,” Danny said authoritatively, and started working through the rest of the slides. “The sequence of photos. The book was here in the House. She took photos of the pages and then the tapestry, Nandi Head, coins, and then the front of the ledger. She then took photos of a vase and a bunch of dolls.”

Danny moved the slides onto the first of the doll photographs. The wooden doll was propped up against what was possibly an old glass window frame. The grey putty holding the glass in position
was bubbly and worn. The landscape behind was a vague blue blur that was probably the ocean.

Danny cycled through the rest of the slides for Chin’s benefit, all the way to the creepy, beady-eyed, blonde doll. And then he reversed allowing Chin to take in the sequence again.

“Okay.” Chin rubbed his hands together as the first page of written text flicked onto the screen. “Let’s look at the Nandi Head.”

“Why?”

“The ledger is not hiding in the tapestry. But the Nandi Head -- although more accurately it’s the Nandi’s Head -- is a giant carved wooden head of the bull that serves as the god’s Shiva’s mount. And interestingly, Nandi is the gatekeeper. So let’s have a closer look at the head and the podium.”

Danny beat him to the giant Nandi’s Head. Shadowed in the single red spotlight it was impressively wrought. The care and attention to detail was evident in every line of the bridle, the curve of an eyelid, each and every single carved petal on the garland around the bull’s neck.

Bright white light flooded the room.

“Jesus.” Danny flinched away from it, his headache sparking.

“Sorry,” Chin apologised.

“Isn’t that damaging or something to the artefacts?” Danny said, wincing under the actinic light.

“We’re not going to leave it on very long.” Chin circled around the podium. “The Nandi’s Head is actually carved out of a single piece of wood, and that includes the podium.”

“Where did it come from?”

“Kerala, India. Seventeenth century.”

Gingerly, Danny tapped the bull’s nose with his closed fist. It was solid. Reassured, he bent and tapped the podium that was solid under a cross-hatchery of woodwork. If there was some sort of secret compartment, he doubted that it would be easy to find.

“How big is the journal?” Chin asked.

“Don’t really know.” Danny skirted his finger along the delicately carved bridle. “Macro lenses have been around since 1955, so it could be relatively small. But since a kid used it as a practice book, I’m guessing at the least it’s the size of a notebook. I don’t think that you’d practice hanzi in an insy winsy tiny little book?”

“No,” Chin confirmed. “So a drawer or something?”

“Great minds think alike.”

Crouching on his good knee, Danny scrutinised the cross-hatched pattern, because he doubted that the drawer was hidden in the actual head of the beast. It was lucky that they had the lights, because under the low watt illumination of the red lights, looking for a secret compartment would have been difficult.

“What about the dolls and the vase you mentioned?” Chin asked.

“Haven’t found them. Haven’t looked for them yet,” Danny revised. “We focused on identifying the
“guy in the photo first.”

“And who was he? I know you said but….”

“Koji Noshimuri, Yakuza mole in the Honolulu Police Department back in the late 1980s, and possibly--” Danny poked a smooth knot in the woodwork and was disappointed when no magical drawer appeared, “--involved in Mr. and Mrs. McGarrett’s deaths.”

Danny leaned to the side, out of the shadow of the Nandi’s Head. Chin was staring down at him, expression pained.

“I kind of wish you kept us more in the loop,” he chastised gently.

Danny nodded, because Chin was right. Things seem to move at strange rates, slow-fast, slow-fast, like a demented tango. This morning had been particularly intense, with the threat of the car bomb and bug planted by Jovan Eteinne.

“Steve thinks that --”

A clatter of running footsteps sounded, echoing across wooden floors. Danny turned on his heel. Setting a hand on the floor, he leaned over trying to see through the door into the museum office.


“Hey, Steve, we’re in the museum,” Danny called and, for the hundredth time, mentally chastised himself for forgetting the limitations of Steve’s hearing.

“They’re through that door?” Malia ventured, tone high and stressed.

“Malia?” Chin raced out of the museum in response to that pitch.

“Is Danny with you?” Steve demanded too loudly.

“Yes. He’s in the museum,” Chin said.

Not likening the entire tone of the brief conversation, Danny scrambled to his feet and darted after Chin.

“Are Kono and Mary with you?” Steve continued urgently.

“No,” Chin answered, as Danny skittered into the office.

Malia was sheet white, curling into Chin’s side. The light from the projector set them in bright illumination cut by harsh shadows.

“What’s happening?” Danny demanded.

“The Kapu weren’t parked outside the gates,” Steve said. The projected hanzi script looked like tattoos over his face. “I jogged up to Manoa Street to overlook the Heights, in case they’d changed their look-out point. They weren’t there either. I called Kavika, they should be here.”

“Talmai said that he wanted, you know, to get off early tonight, to see his girlfriend,” Danny thought out loud. The edge of worry around Steve made the hairs on his arms rise. “Paulo’s fed up. Maybe they just went home?”

“Have you triggered the House alarm?” Chin asked carefully.
Danny glanced to the door almost expecting a host of Navy SEALs and Marines to descend upon them. Was Steve overreacting?

“Yes,” Steve said tersely. “Do you know where Mary and Kono are? They weren’t in their rooms.”

“No,” Chin said.

Brusquely, Steve tapped on his BlackBerry. A high pitched squeal made everyone wince. Steve yanked his right aid from his ear, grimacing.

“What the Hell was that?” Danny demanded, he could swear that he could hear his ear bones grating.

“Cell phone signals have been scrambled.” Steve ground his teeth as he plugged the aid back in. “We’re--”

“Are you sure that the House alarm signal got out?” Chin said reasonably.

“Yes,” Steve said, flatly. “Different type of signalling system for just that reason.”

“But this Jovan guy is a special computery person.” A distant shatter of breaking glass caught Danny’s stressed attention.

“What? What did you hear?” Steve snapped.

“Breaking glass,” Danny answered.

Surprisingly, Steve glanced at his watch.

“What do we need to do?” Malia asked, very calmly.

“We stay out of harm’s reach until backup gets here in the next four minutes,” Steve said precisely. Danny suspected that they were going to be the longest four minutes of his life.

“Do we hide in here?” Chin asked, curling an arm around Malia’s shoulders. “Secret room? Seems perfect.”

Danny hated the thought of closing the door on the tiny office and waiting things out. The narrow walls and low ceiling seemed to crush down on him.

Steve shook his head, but then glanced at Malia, or more accurately Malia’s abdomen, indecision rife across his mobile face. Then resolution flared brightly in his changeable eyes.

“No, I don’t like foxholes unless they’re the last resort,” Steve said. “Switch all the lights off, and shut the door into the museum. Into my apartment, now. Fire drill.”

And then he was darting into his eyrie, leaving them stunned for a moment.

“What?” Danny protested.

Chin untangled from Malia, and went to switch off the lights in the museum as instructed. Stirred into action, Danny went for the projector. In their absence, the only light left was from the television in Steve’s apartment.

Malia followed it -- a moth to its flame -- with Chin on her heels. Danny went with them. Steve came
out of his study holding the biggest, chunkiest submachine gun that Danny had ever seen. It was an angular, black monstrosity that looked like it had been put together in a toy factory. Danny, however, did not doubt its power. Steve swung a lumpy black holdall onto the sofa. He pulled out a curved magazine from the bag and slotted it into position, with a skin tingling, satisfying clunk.

“Oh, my god,” Malia said, hands over her mouth.

“There’s a Remington 870 and shells in the bag, Chin.” Steve flared his nostrils. “Danny, topple over the bookcase.”

“What?” Automatically, Danny looked to the off-kilter bookcase, between the kitchenette and sitting room. It gave the apartment the ambiance of the cant of a ship sailing through waves.

Steve didn’t explain further. Stepping to the far side of the bookcase and setting his hand up high, higher than Danny could reach, he easily pushed the bookcase over. It had to be pivoted since it folded like a falling house of cards. The contents smashed onto the floor. The collapsed bookcase totally blockaded the door as it had been no doubt designed exactly to do.

“What about Kono and Mary?” Chin demanded.

“I haven’t forgotten them.” Steve pointed to the office door. “Close it now.”

Quashing his automatic response to argue, Danny went to slap the panel to conceal the door.

“You’ve used a handgun, Danny?” Steve asked, and then answered his own question. “No, fuck, of course you haven’t.”

Danny curled his fingers around the swinging door bringing it quickly back into position, flush with the wood panelling. Chin had a shotgun in his hands and was loading large shells into the barrel. Steve reached into the bag, and hauled out a sheathed machete.

“Catch.”

Danny caught.

“I’m licensed for a handgun,” Malia said quietly.

Steve glanced at her, a furrow deep between his eyebrows.

“I’m licensed for a handgun,” Malia repeated, louder.

“Kel Tec PF-9.” Steve tossed it over, and then a box of bullets. “And rounds. You familiar with?”

Malia answered with actions rather than words, efficiently loading the rounds. The next piece of equipment that Steve pulled out of his bag of toys was a bulky pair of high-tech goggles. He moved over to the semicircular window overlooking the woods behind the House, and held them up to his face without putting them on.

“Come on.” Steve gestured the three of them over, as he flipped open the half circle window and ducked under the glass and out onto the balcony.

“Malia, go.” Chin directed. He kept his shotgun pointed at the door. She moved after Steve. “Danny.”

“Hey, go with your fiancée.”
“I have a gun, Danny. You have a knife,” Chin said.

Now wasn’t the time to argue. Danny followed Steve and Malia. He stumbled over a large bag of plastic wrapped garbage and kicked it out of the way. Steve had Malia crouched down low, under the protection of the balustrade as he scanned the woods out back. There was, Danny remembered, supposed to be a surveillance team camped in the woods. And there, in the distance, was a flash of laser-red light -- three short blips.

Steve breathed out hard, the rush of breath sounding like wind in the woods.

“You good with heights, Malia?” Steve asked, glancing over her shoulder at the hook of a hoist suspended above their heads. The arm of the wheel mechanism was bolted into the junction between the House roof and the slight jut of the tower of the lantern bedroom on the next level. Danny guessed that he was wondering if they had to lower Malia to the ground.

“If I have to be,” she said resolutely.

“Where are they?” Steve said, probably louder than he intended to, as he looked heavenwards.

A dull pop, popping thud made Danny look back into the living room. Directly opposite the door, strafing the back wall of the kitchen, rounds hit.

“They’re here,” Danny said for Steve’s benefit. But he got the impression that Steve was looking for the cavalry arriving by helicopter, not the bad guys.

Steve gave the living room the most cursory of glances as he squatted beside Malia.

“Tight angle at the top of the staircase,” he said, sounding supremely satisfied as a few rounds continued to ineffectually smack against the far wall, but most were caught by the solid bookcase.

“Chin.”

Belatedly, Danny realised that Steve was bench pressing a thick coil of metal that resolved into a rolled up ladder. He levered it over the balustrade and Danny leaned over the balcony to watch it unfurl all the way down to the ground.

Chin stepped under the canted window and onto the balcony.

“You guys have practised this?” Danny asked, amazed.

“Fire drill. It’s a four storey building,” Steve said with a distinct of course we have tone to his voice.

“We didn’t factor in terrorists, however.”

“Malia, you done this?” Danny asked.

“No,” Malia said succinctly.

“Keep three points of contact on the ladder at all times,” Steve advised.

“Okay,” Malia squeaked.

“Chin, there are two guys out back waiting for you. They’ve got you covered.” Steve angled the blade of his hand at ninety degrees to the House. “Use the walls of the terraced gardens for cover. Head straight towards the stand of soapberry trees.”

“Okay.” Chin swung his leg over the balcony. “Malia, follow me down. Danny, you okay coming next?”
“Yeah, sure?” Danny looked at the ladder and hoped that it could take all their weights combined. It appeared sturdy, bolted to the ironwork of the balcony, and made of thick twists of steel rope and piping.

Steve ducked back into the sitting room, slipping the submachine gun off his shoulder and into his hands.

“Steve!” Danny yelled.

“Go with Chin, Danny. I’ve got some rats to take care of.”

~*~

#96#

“Rats!” Danny echoed.

Steve angled across the sitting room, grabbing the holdall, but staying far out of the splay of any rounds. The top of the door was a honeycomb of wood, suffering under the onslaught of the bullets.

Night vision goggles tucked up high on his forehead, Steve crouched between the hidden door to the office and the entrance into his apartment. He plucked out a shape that was unmistakably a grenade from his bag.

“Steven!” Danny snapped out loudly.

Steve was going to throw a grenade inside the House! Utter insanity.

“Go!” Steve mouthed, jerking his chin furiously, indicating get over the balcony.

Vehemently, Danny shook his head. He wasn’t leaving unless Steve was on his heels. Steve yanked the pin out from the grenade with his teeth. Determined to stop the madness, Danny ducked back under the counter-levered window.

Almost casually, Steve was watching the top of the door shredding under the force of bullets; all his focus was captured. As Danny raced across the room, Steve released the lever on the grenade, clearly counting under his breath. He jack-in-the-boxed up, shot back through the door to a bunch of swearing, and then tossed the grenade through the hole. All in one smooth motion, as if he had practiced time and time again.

“Steve!” Danny yelled. “No!”

Wide eyed, Steve pounced, and Danny went down under his long limbs. Danny’s head would have cracked off the hardwood floor except for the big hand cradling the back of his skull. Danny’s protest was smothered by Steve’s chest in his face. A dull thwump rolled over him deafeningly, and fingers of white light frayed his nerves.

“C-m- O-” Steve hauled him bodily to his feet.

The hidden door was pushed forcibly open, and Danny was frogmarched through. Unerringly, Steve guided him this way and that through the pitch-black darkness.

“You with me?” Steve muttered, squeezing Danny’s shoulders tightly.

Danny rubbed his free hand over his hot face, fighting through the discombobulating ringing that he could feel through his bones.
“Stun grenade?” Danny said indignantly.

“Very effective in tight spaces,” Steve said, with no small amount of glee.

There was a clunk of a lever, and a door swung open before Danny. Abruptly they were out on the balcony on the far side of the House, directly overlooking the peninsula framed by the starry night sky. Steve had taken them straight through the higgledy-piggledy museum like an arrow. Twisting his shoulder, Steve dumped the big holdall on the decking.

“Steve?” Danny took in a deep breath, trying to clear his brain.

Steve stared back at him, owl-eyed behind his infra-red goggles.

“Stay here.” He loped off around the balcony to overlook the drive.

Danny followed, of course. The light over the front porch lit up the entire turning circle in front of the House. The Kapu Chevrolet Silverado and another black panel van were stopped, skew-whiff on the gravel.

“Is that the Navy surveillance van?” Danny asked.

“No.”

“Reinforcements?”

“Maybe.” Steve turned on his heel and pushed Danny back to the museum fire exit. “Kono’s jeep is still out front.”

Steve parked Danny by the fire door, and then jogged to the far corner to look along the back balcony toward the lighthouse. This time, before Danny could join him, Steve came trotting back.

“Malia and Chin are in the trees. Why didn’t you go with them?” he asked, crouching to haul a bulky black vest out of the bag.

“You need back up.” Danny said. It wasn’t up for argument. Steve absorbed that, blank eyed behind his lenses.

“Here.” Rising to stand, Steve plopped the heavy vest over Danny’s head.

Astounded, Danny let it happen. Only finding himself as the heavy rasp of Velcro penetrated his bamboozled, stunned brain, as Steve fastened him in quickly, but tightly.

“Steve,” he protested.

“Stay close and when I tell you to duck -- duck.” Steve towed Danny back into the museum, and Danny let him, because once the fire exit was closed it was pitch dark. “Watch my back.”

“Stev--” That order surprised Danny.

“Shush,” Steve whispered loudly. The glint of light from the security code panel provided poor illumination. “The new code is 85337EEC.”

His hand blurred over the panel, and the hermetically sealed door snicked open. Steve led them down the tight, steep staircase running alongside Danny’s bathroom. Circumspectly, Steve peeked around the corner at the bottom of the stairs. Danny got in close behind him, peering around his shoulder. A blink and Steve seemed to teleport along the corridor, pausing briefly to check the hall.
staircase curving down to the front foyer. He glanced back, checking on Danny, before ghosting along the length of the panelled wall to the staircase leading to his eyrie.

Heart in his mouth, Danny crept after him.

An unmoving dark lump at the end of the corridor resolved into a figure lying sprawled at the bottom of the steps. Flattening against the wall, Steve glanced around the corner and jerked back as a foot flew past his face. The foot caught Steve’s chunky gun, and it clattered to the floor.

“Steve!” Danny managed not to yell.

Almost inhumanly fast, Steve caught his attacker’s foot, using the man’s poorly thought out height advantage as a disadvantage. Pulled, the assailant clattered down the steps. Nimbly, the man back flipped and kicked out with both feet. Steve practically pirouetted to the side and Danny heard the rush of air underscoring the man’s attack.

It was fast. It was brutal. Instinct and reaction. Slaps and grunts the only sounds as they fought with focussed precision.

The man’s face was burnt and bloodied. Taking an opening that Danny wasn’t aware of until he saw a spray of blood, Steve delivered a punishing jab to the man’s chin. Stunned, the attacker staggered back. Steve ruthlessly pressed his advantage, pile-driving the terrorist to the floor.

There was a nasty sounding dull crunch and Danny didn’t think that Steve’s attacker was getting up any time soon.

“Anton Hesse.” Steve bounced to his feet. Breathing out hard and fast, he rolled the lax body over with his foot. “Where there’s an Anton, there’s a Victor.”

Smoothly, he dipped down and scooped up his submachine gun. All poetry in motion running on adrenalin and focus. Steve gave his apartment staircase a cursory glance and went stone-faced.

“Where is he then?” Danny whispered, making sure to face Steve directly. “And the Kapu? And where’s the freaking cavalry?”

Hard eyed, Steve darted past Danny heading along the corridor to the main staircase. Danny kind of wanted to know what was on the stairs leading up to Steve’s rooms, but decided against looking. He guessed, as he hared after Steve, that flash bangs and people in close proximity were not as innocuous as the television and news reports had him believe.

Steve oozed down the main staircase down to the foyer with a skill that bordered on the obscene. He practically slid down the banister, precariously leaning over to scan the hallway below. Never had Danny been so aware of the passage of every second. Where was the Navy? But more importantly where were Kono and Mary?

“Hello, McGarrett.”

Danny knew that slimy, poisonous voice. He might have been drugged and barely conscious the last time that he had heard Victor Hesse, but he remembered that strangely mocking accent.

Steve skirted around the heavy newel post at the bottom of the staircase, using its carved bulk as protection. He flicked a fiery glance up at Danny, impressing him to stay at the top of the stairs out of view. Danny tried to peer over the top baluster to get a glimpse of Hesse, but the man was back towards the end of the corridor by the kitchen and pantries.
“Let Kono go,” Steve ordered. Sighting along the weapon, his elbows were tucked in tight, leaving the barest amount of body unprotected by the thick post.

“You’re not in charge here, boyo,” Hesse drawled.

“Wanna bet?” Steve asked. “And where did you get that black eye from?”

“Steve, shoot him,” Kono ordered.

“Hey, shut up, bitch.”

“Oh, I will, Kono, I promise.”

“Really,” Hesse mocked. “And why don’t you ask me where Mary Mary Quite Contrary is?”

Danny clamped his hand over his mouth to corral any gasps.

“Yeah, and where’s Anton?” Steve shot back.

“You better not have hurt my brother!”

“You better not have hurt my sister.” The glint in Steve’s eyes was fervent. “Either of them.”

“Give me what you’ve found and I’ll let your sister… sisters go.”

“Hah. You’re premature, dickwad,” Steve mocked. “We haven’t found Wo Fat’s secret yet.”

“Yeah, well. I don’t believe you,” Hesse said. “You know more than you’re saying. And you’ve definitely been up to something all day today. You were taking something out to the surveillance van. I want it.”

“Oh, you mean Kaye’s smart phone that we found?” Steve said, curling his lip. “You know I gotta admit, we had Kaye trying to find out what Wo Fat was looking for, which is kind of weird. And now we’ve got you carrying out an unsanctioned attack on the House. Wo Fat’s gonna be seriously pissed at you.”

*What?* Danny raised his hands in the classic ‘what’ sign that incidentally matched the one on his youtube ‘learn ASL’ video. How did Steve know that this wasn’t Wo Fatty Pant’s plan?

Steve didn’t even flick a glance at Danny.

“Something’s rotten in the State of Denmark?” Steve continued to mock.

“There’ll be brains splattered over walls,” Hesse countered.

“You don’t even know what you’re looking for,” Steve continued.

“And do you?”

“I know that it’s really important to him.” One handed, Steve pulled Kaye’s smart phone from his polo shirt pocket. The gun remained rock steady, resting on the top of the post, pointed at Hesse, still out of Danny’s view. “You want?”

“What’s on it?”

“A CIA agent’s investigation into Wo Fat.”
Danny edged down a step. He wasn’t entirely sure what he could do, but he couldn’t stay standing at the top of the stairs.

“Hey, Hesse.” Paulo sauntered in through the front door. “The--”

A single short explosive shot from Steve’s gun made Danny jump. Kono yelped.

“Steve!” Danny yelled.

“Fuckin’ Hell.” Paulo swore. A large sawn off shotgun swung lackadaisically at his side. He fumbled with it, bringing it up to point at Steve.

Danny did the first thing that popped into his head. He threw the machete, scabbard and all, at the traitorous Kapu member. Baseball was Danny’s sport of choice. Normally, he threw balls, but throwing was throwing. Paulo squeaked as the blade smacked him between the eyes. He dropped to his knees with a grunt.

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” Danny clattered down the stairs, jumping the last few steps onto the floor. As Danny skidded over the polished wood, he caught sight of the tail end of Steve darting into the gym after Hesse.

“Kono!” She lay in a lump, as if cast aside, by the kitchen door.


Blood streaming from his nose, Paulo was struggling to his feet. Kneeling, he weaved, shotgun in his hands. Danny resorted to the tried and tested kick to the head. Baseball might be his sport, but Danny could kick a football. The force of his kick jarred up his leg and twinged his knee.

“Geez!” Kono grated, as Paulo went down to a clean kick. If his head had been detachable, Danny would have scored a great goal.

“Kono, are you okay? Did you get shot?” Danny demanded.

“No.” Kono struggled to her feet, holding her right wrist gingerly as she wriggled her fingers. “I felt it go by my head, though. Geez! Ouch. Ouch.”

“Where’s Mary?” Danny looked about; he needed to tie up Paulo.

“I left her in the catacombs.”

“What?”

“We were in the catacombs checking out Chin’s wine collection, debating what type of wine to drink, when we heard Steve yelling. Then he clomped up the stairs like the hounds of Hell were on his heels. Then there was a crash.” Kono managed to stand upright. “Discretion was the better part of valour. I told her we should hide in the catacombs. I came out to switch the light off in the cold pantry. But I closed the trapdoor and put a keg of beer on top of it.”

“Okay?” Danny digested that for a heartbeat.

“So it wouldn’t look like anyone could be down there,” Kono explained. “And I had to see if I could help Steve.”

“Umh. Good idea, I guess. The flaw being you weren’t safe.” Danny shook his head. “Look, tie Paulo up or something. I have to go after Steve.”
“Yeah, okay, brah. Uhm.” She sucked on her bottom lip. “Clothesline in the utility room.”

“Good plan.” Danny chased after Steve.

The gym was an ankle barking and bruising hazard in the darkness. Only the light from the conservatory made it possible to work his way through the maze. The conservatory doors leading to the back gardens were wide open as if a gale -- Hurricane McGarrett pursuing Tornado Hesse -- had passed through.

Out in the moonlight gardens, protected by the shadow of the House, it was difficult to see anything. Supposedly, there was a two man team out in the back of the woods watching them, and hopefully, Chin and Malia were with them, but that didn’t help Danny.

Their backup sucked.

“Fucking Paulo,” Danny swore. He could have kicked himself. They had never answered the question of who had drugged the Indian Curry takeout that they had consumed. They had trusted Blue’s assumption that it had been the dead Kapu member -- Gareth -- who had poisoned the meal.

He couldn’t see anyone. Should he go back to Kono? He had left her with Paulo, and her wrist was sprained or something. What if there were more terrorists in the House?

He didn’t know what to do.

It had to be longer than the four minutes that Steve had calculated.

A shot rang out. Loud and crystal clear in the night air.

Danny ran straight towards the peninsula.

His eyes adapted. He knew the trails. If he had a flashlight his route would have been much easier. He could only guess that Hesse had taken the main, widest trail, best seen in the moonlight. It curled through the woods, eventually splitting in two, the south trail dropping down to the beach, the west trail going deeper into the woods.

Danny hit the fork in the path. He paused, breathing hard. The only sound was his panting. Yay for not knowing how terrorists thought. Frustrated, Danny tugged on the collar of his heavy vest.

He couldn’t even yell for Steve, he wouldn’t hear it.

Another shot was the last thing that Danny wanted to hear.

“Steve!” It was ahead, deeper into the woods. Madness. He would have thought that Hesse would have gone to the beach, and then across the bay and off Seolh’s lands.

That assumed that Hesse knew the trails.

Danny jogged as quietly as possible, listening for Steve. Weren’t submachine guns, or whatever type of gun Steve held, supposed to fire streams of bullets? The great-grandfather ‘ulu tree cast a massive, twisted, creepy shadow over the glade in the moonlight.

Steve was hunting Hesse. Silent and deadly.

‘Shit. Shit. Shit,’ went the litany in Danny’s head. He would give his left nipple for a flashlight.

A helicopter roared overhead, its searchlight panning the forest.
“Backup!” About frigging time. But good luck penetrating the thick canopy over the peninsula. Danny scuttled out of the shadow of the ‘ulu hoping to see SEALs and Marines rappelling from the low flying helicopter.

There was a shot and then another. Sparks strafed the side of the helicopter. There was a dull clank that heralded major repairs in every car that Danny had ever owned. The helicopter veered widely away, noisily screaming as it rotated around itself.

The shots came from close by.

There was a sudden rat-tat-tat that could only be described as rapid fire. The squealing from the plummeting helicopter was deafening. The explosion rocked the woods. A plume of smoke and fire billowed upwards into the night sky. Holy Shit, the helicopter had crashed! The cloud was like a mini nuclear explosion -- the head mushrooming and spreading over the sky.

Surely, Danny thought, that had to bring reinforcements.

Steve.

Danny took the trail that headed straight for the tip of the peninsula and the cairn of stones. He skirted the path, keeping to the trees. Danny crept, trying to breathe as quietly as possible, because he knew that this was a stupid thing to do. He was following two trained professionals intent on killing each other and he had thrown away his only weapon.

He picked up the next handy dandy chunk of wood he almost tripped over.

The trail twisted and turned, edging further to the northern side, where the scrub wasn’t as dense. Danny knew this part of the trail. It was very close to the edge where the poles marked the trail so that the kids didn’t run off into the wild blue yonder.

“Danny. What the Hell?” Steve popped up like a genie from a lamp.

“Jesus.” Danny flailed, brandishing the log at the doofus. “How the Hell did you do that?”

“Practice.” Steve grabbed Danny’s collar and hauled him right into the understorey off the trail. “Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

“No, I’m trying to help,” Danny snapped back matching Steve’s strident tones. “You can’t run off after a fucking terrorist, Steven!”

“I’m not running. I’m trying to capture him.”

“What if there are more of them back at the House?” Danny flung his hand in the direction of their home. “Kono and Mary are back there.”

Steve absorbed that blank-faced.

“I know he killed your friends,” Danny said lowly, right into Steve’s stubborn expression.

“Danny,” Steve grated.

“But your family’s back there.” Even as he focused on Steve, Danny continued to point behind them, jabbing the thought home. “Kono’s injured. Mary’s trapped in the basement. And I don’t know if there are any more terrorists creeping around the House!”

He knew when Steve capitulated, shoulders slumping.
“You’re right.” Steve gusted out a sigh. His eyes were flinty.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here.” Danny nodded furiously, underscoring his words.

“Come on then.” Teeth audibly grating, Steve pushed Danny ahead of him.

Keeping to the scrub rather than taking the path, it was treacherous underfoot. Roots and vegetation threatened to trip them. But it felt safer than being on the paths. Danny thought that they were going down hill, slightly.

There was a shot and a punch to Danny’s side, and he went down, gasping.

“Danny! Danny!” Abruptly, Steve was in his face, utterly terrified.

“Jesus!” Danny groaned, half-winded as he lay on the ground, stones jabbing the back of his head.

“You’re okay. You’re okay.” Steve said, as he pawed at Danny’s chest. Danny didn’t know who he was trying to convince. There were fringes of darkness creeping over Danny’s vision. “Thank God. The vest caught it.”

“Oh?” Danny managed. He meant to say: I’ve been shot! I’ve been fucking shot!

“You’re okay,” Steve repeated. A drop of dew on a dry moonlit night splashed on the bridge of Danny’s nose.

“Ble--”

“Stay down, we’re too exposed.” The kiss was quick and furtive and mashed against the corner of Danny’s mouth. “I’ll be right back.”

“No.”

“Yes,” Steve said, and then the fucker rolled Danny over and further down the dusty incline under a bushy rhododendron.

Teeth gritted, Danny scrambled for Steve’s ankle and missed. Curled over, Steve squirreled off at a right angle to the bush.

Up until then it had been Hesse doing most of the shooting, Danny guessed, as Steve stalked him. Now it sounded like war had broken out. Steve was going to run over him like a tank. Retribution was in Hesse’s future.

Danny genuinely didn’t know if he was seriously hurt or not. He felt like he had taken a punch to the breadbasket. He breathed lightly and shallowly as his diaphragm spasmed. When he touched his side his hands were dry. He had expected blood. He had expected rivulets of blood.

“Fuck and shit and fuck!” Danny rolled onto his side and spat. He wasn’t lying under a bush while Steve went after Hesse. Adrenalin got him to his knees and gritted teeth got him to his feet. He staggered up the rise and onto the trail.

Silhouetted against the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean off the peninsula, Steve traded punishing blows with a shorter man. Brutal -- it was more about inflicting pain than ending a fight. The smack of a roundhouse kick echoed. This was Hesse, the man that had orchestrated the death of Steve’s best friend, Freddie, and left Steve permanently hard-of-hearing. A shaft of light speared the scene. A second helicopter hovered over them. Detritus and leaves whipped up from the helicopter’s rotor
blades half blinded Danny as he staggered forwards.

It wasn’t Kung Fu, it wasn’t Karate, and it definitely wasn’t Boxing. It was close and vicious, about deflecting and inflicting damage. Hesse lunged, and Steve eel ed around and under his arm, fiercely punching his ribs. Hesse fell back, but his foot came out as he rolled, and Steve was suddenly flipping over his head. He smacked down hard on the earth, flopping -- stunned. Steve tossed head over heels would be completely discombobulated.

“Shit!” Danny yelled, and started running. To do what he didn’t know, but Steve was still sprawled, failing to get up on one elbow.

Hesse spun away, scrabbling through dusty grass close to the edge, hunting by the illumination of the helicopter’s strobing light. Metal glinted.

“Gun!” Danny hollered. The earth under his feet felt strange and friable.

Hesse scooped the gun up, but swung around towards Danny.

“No!” Steve screamed.

A shot, and Danny scrunched in reaction, tripping and falling. Rolling, he scrabbled at the dry soil. Danny got to his knees and, madly, he patted his chest, but there had been no impact. Astonished, Danny raised his head -- who had fired the shot? Directly in front of him, Hesse was frozen. Even as the terrorist stood, he looked dead, floppy. His gun dropped from his lax fingers. Hesse started to slowly turn. And then he toppled, too close to the edge, too far away from stable earth. Danny reached, instinctively, to grab the man, but he was just a fraction too far away.

Hesse simply fell --

-- plummeted straight off the precarious cliff edge.

Clumpy chunks of grass, soil and stone broke away with Hesse, and man and boulders pin wheeled through the air down to the ocean hundreds of yards below.

“Danny! No!”

~*~

#97#

“Shit!” The dirt beneath Danny was disintegrating. A monolith of rock was shearing away from the edge -- a gap was separating a handbreadth before Danny’s feet. Danny scuttled backwards, heels kicking out. He wanted to run, but instinct told him to stay low, to spread out his weight. A horrendous, nail-scraping, blackboard-nerve-screeching noise clawed the air. The rock face started to truly detach.

“Danny!”

He was yanked back by the scruff of his neck, and dragged across the ground.

“Geez--” Danny craned his head around.

Steve, one hand wrapped around one of the sturdy poles delineating the edge, the other twisted in the collar of Danny’s flack jacket, was yanking him back. Adrenalin and fear fuelled Steve. Abreast of the pole, moving into a crouching run, he kept pulling, hauling Danny well past the pole line and
onto solid, hard rock.

A numbingly loud crack ricocheted through the air. Steve froze, stopping them dead. Before them the shaft of rock shaved clear off the edge of the cliff face with a boom like a canon.

“Holy Mother of G--” Danny shook.

Abruptly, Steve was in Danny’s space, patting him over, feeling his chest, stroking his hair. There was babbling, but Danny wasn’t too sure who was babbling. Large hands cupped Danny’s face, carefully turning him towards Steve’s wide eyed concern.

Danny forced himself back to reality. He scrunched his fingers in his hair. He had just watched Hesse fall to his death off the cliff. He had almost followed Hesse to his watery death. It was emphatically not like television. Hesse was dead.

“Hey, you’re okay,” Steve said, intent. Two-handed, he hauled Danny to his feet. “You are. You’re okay.”

“I got shot!” Danny protested indignantly. “I almost fell off your stupid peninsula. I’m never letting Grace play out here!”

Steve snorted out a laugh, and abruptly, Danny was mashed up against Steve’s chest, his nose smushed in the hollow of Steve’s throat.

“You’ll be fine,” Steve rumbled, “you just caught a glancing shot. I bet it will hardly bruise. And you were miles away from the edge.”

Danny poked Steve’s side with his pointy finger, making him tickle-wriggle away from its probing.

“I am traumatised!” Danny jabbed him again, and Steve backed off a fraction.

A crazy grin threatened to blossom over Steve’s face. There was a thin ribbon of blood trickling through the stubble from his nose, to spread over the structure of his top lip like tributaries in a river delta.

“You are okay,” Steve said firmly. He cupped the back of Danny’s head, and pulled him into a kiss.

Danny’s brain was going like a freight train: shot; kissing; fighting; plummeting; falling; House; terrorists; Kono; Chin and Malia…. The searchlight from the helicopter framed them in stark light and shadows. Kissing on a precipice in moonlight, illuminated by a shaft of a searchlight -- Danny would have killed for a camera.

“Where are you?” Steve rested his forehead against Danny’s.

“What?” Danny licked his lips, tasting blood.

Warm fingers pressed against his throat. Danny could feel his own pulse thrumming against the cool fingertips.

“Okay, Babe,” Steve said uncharacteristically, “you’re a little shocky. It’s allowed.”

“What?”

Steve slid a large hand under Danny’s heavy vest and pressed his abdomen.

“Ow,” Danny protested. It hadn’t really hurt.
“No rigidity,” Steve said, sounding ridiculously professional. “Come on, back to the House.”

Danny let Steve tow him, hand in hand, back along the paths.

~*~

The House was in an uproar. Every single external light was on, illuminating a scene of chaos. Fire engines, patrol cars, ambulances, and black sedans were stopped left and right. Some vehicles were on the gravel drive, others on the grass. Chin had only just started to reclaim the gardens after the fire engines had torn up the area fighting the Hall fire. There was a stream of fire fighters heading north towards the plume of the burning helicopter, behind the workshops, deep in the woods.

“Sir!” Simons marched over.

“Lieutenant, update.” Steve said, as he angled them over to one of the ambulances.

“Anton Hesse and Jovan Eteinne have been taken to the Honolulu Medical Centre under guard. A third unknown is dead. Paul Leto is in custody, he’s being taken to the Base. Victor Hesse hasn’t been found.”

“We need search and rescue to retrieve his body from Wailele Bay,” Steve said. “The bay north of the peninsula.”

“Retrieve?”

“He fell, very far, after I shot him in the chest,” Steve rapped. “I don’t care how many lives he has, that fall isn’t survivable.”

Smug wasn’t the word that Danny would have used to describe Steve’s expression. Satisfied wasn’t correct either. Nor was content. Perhaps a combination of the three with a soupçon of relief? Maybe not?

“This is Danny Williams,” Steve was saying. “He took a round to his chest. No rigidity, but he’s a little shocky.”

“What?” Danny protested, as he was plopped down on the tailgate of an ambulance and suddenly had two unknown paramedics in his face.

“Just let them check you out, Danny.” Steve made a rapid scan of the immediate area. “Simons, with me.”

Tangled with the bulletproof vest that the paramedics were removing, Danny was momentarily captured. A young man was in his personal space, talking soothingly, as his female companion lifted up Danny’s t-shirt.

“That’s an old scar,” She pressed his abdomen with a hand protected by a glove that tangled tackily with his abundant body hair.

“Hernia decades ago. It caught my intestine. I needed emergency surgery. I was seventeen.” Hardly anyone commented on it. Steve had never even mentioned it, or possibly even realised that it was a scar. Danny barely thought about it.

“You got shot?” the paramedic asked.

Danny winced as she pressed a sensitive spot skirting the edge of his ribs, higher and to the left of the
bisecting scar.

“You’re going to have a great bruise, but your ribs are intact. Did you fall? Hit your head?”

“No, I didn’t hit my head.” Danny shook it.

“Let’s just get your blood pressure; you’re looking a little flushed.”

“Sunburn,” Danny explained, moving his arm away from the kid, who was already unfurling a blood pressure cuff.

“We just want to rule out internal bleeding,” the female paramedic said. “I think that you were very lucky that you were wearing the vest.”

“You have no idea.” Danny submitted to their ministrations, guessing that it was the quickest way out of the ambulance.

~*~

Escape came with recommendations to ice the rapidly forming bruise, and take some Tylenol, but not ibuprofen.

The House was in an uproar. There were more people milling around than at their New Year’s Party.

“Danny?” Kono jogged over, skirting around an engineer who was checking the foyer security alarm pad. “You okay?”

“Yeah, fine. More to the point, are you okay?”

She had a pristine white bandage wrapped around her wrist. She flexed it gingerly.

“Bad punch. My sensi will have more than a few words. I guess. It’s actually different when you’re punching a person for real,” she said ruefully.

“Hesse?” Danny asked.

“Hesse,” Kono confirmed with a grin. “Steve said he fell. He’s dead?”

“It’s easily a straight drop of four hundred-five hundred yards. I don’t think anyone could survive that. I’ll be happier when they find his body, though.” Danny sniffed. “Chin and Malia? Mary? Have you let her out of the catacombs yet?”

“Yeah.” Kono wrinkled her nose.

“She’s not happy with you?” Danny diagnosed.

“Mmmmm, that’s a no,” Kono jigged a little from foot to foot. The twist of her shoulders said she was unrepentant.

“You did it on purpose, didn’t you?” Danny said astutely.


‘You know’ held a multitude of reasons, top of which was Kono apparently didn’t trust Mary, which surprised Danny because Kono was the trusting sort. Danny didn’t trust Mary, but he was a suspicious New Jersey native. Mary had met with Jenna Kaye. Mary had kept the handbag secret.
She, by her own words, was not a member of the co-operative, nor did she want to be, and it wasn’t a case of protesting too much.

“Mmmm,” Danny could only echo. “Chin? Malia?”

“Making tea.” Kono pointed at the kitchen.

“Have you seen Steve?”

“Danny, you all right?” Steve strode out of the Seolh office with a Barnabas Simons dedicated shadow on his heels.

“Bruised,” Danny started to expand on the situation, but stopped when Joe White appeared behind them with another tall uniformed officer. He was an older African America man -- grey touched the hair at his temples -- and he was a senior officer based on the multiple stripes on his cuffs. There was an air of confidence around him that Danny wanted to photograph.

“Commander Archer. Mr. Danny Williams,” Steve introduced them, politely.

“Oh, yeah, Steve’s mentioned you.” Danny offered the officer his hand. “Boss, right?”

“Mr. Williams. Dr. Hewson speaks well of your photography skills, and that you’ve taken Corporal Oh under your wing.” Archer had a firm dry grip, the kind that you instinctively liked and respected.

“Hey, I have to ask, was Talmai involved in this?” Danny checked them all for a reaction. “Was he working with Paulo as a -- I dunno -- mole for Wo Fat?”

“Talmai?” Archer asked, eyebrow arched.

“Member of the Kapu, worked closely with Paulo, while Blue was on medical leave, so-to-speak,” Steve explained, standing at attention.

“Your personal, family protection detail,” Archer observed, regarding him.

“Sir,” Steve said.

“Hmmm.”

“Kavika is on his way here. Talmai? I’ll check up on him.” Steve pursed his lips.

“He wanted a night off with his girlfriend,” Danny offered. “Maybe Paulo used that as an opportunity when he saw Steve going off to the Navy surveillance van. Are they all right?”

Steve shook his head.

“Hesse thought that you had found what Wo Fat was looking for.” Archer lifted his chin, and flared broad nostrils. “It wasn’t you going out to the surveillance van with Kaye’s smartphone that triggered this activity. They were planning on questioning you before you found the phone. Commander?”

“Yes, sir, but we haven’t found what Wo Fat’s looking for.”

Ah, of course, Steve had been running out to the van when Danny and Chin had looked at the ledger images. Interestingly, Steve wasn’t mentioning the slides.

“I’m tempted to get every single crime scene investigator linked to PACCOM to turn this house upside down. But on seeing this -- what did you call it, White? -- garage sale, I’m not entirely sure
that we would know it if we found it. You’re an intelligent man, Commander, what is Wo Fat looking for?"

“It’s personal, sir. Very valuable to him. I’m guessing that it’s portable. Something that my mother could have stolen from his father.”

“Which you’ve told me, Commander.” Archer regarded Steve from his taller height. “I want specifics. I want the item.”

“Yes, sir.” Steve’s hand twitched as if he aborted a salute.

“There’s more than just finding what P-One is looking for. Our ultimate goal is to capture P-One and dismantle his network,” Archer said, seriously. “This is our trap. Commander, find out what Wo Fat is looking for. The woeful lack of security will be addressed. You are under lockdown, Commander.”

“I can stay,” Joe White said.

“No. Lieutenant Simons.” Archer turned to the younger man.

“Sir.” Simons straightened. Starkly, he was a younger, slimmer version of Archer, gauche in the man’s shadow.

“I understand that you sing in your copious spare time.”

“Yes, sir. Tenor. In my copious spare time.” Manfully, Simons did not smile.

“Well, that seems to be appropriate criteria.” Archer glanced at the ramrod straight Steve. “I am sure that you will fit in in Seolh, Lieutenant.”

“Yes, sir.” Simons nodded.

Huh, new resident.

“White, you’re with me. Commander.” Archer nodded at Steve.

Steve inclined his head, accepting all orders and instructions without argument.

“Yes, sir.” White followed Archer out of the front door, a respectful three paces behind the commander. At the threshold, White cast a fleetingly obscure glance back over his shoulder before following Archer. Danny didn’t know what to make of it, but maybe Steve was adept at understanding cryptic Joe White communications.

“Is he--” Danny jerked his thumb at the empty doorway, “--like the god of Naval Intelligence? He’s a Commander, like you?”

“No, not lieutenant commander, a commander -- higher rank. And he should be a rear admiral.”

“Commander–commander?” Danny checked.

Steve rolled his eyes. Simons impassively regarded them as if on a parade ground.

“Hmmm.” Danny knuckled his brow. “What now?”

“We’ll--” Steve sniffed and scrubbed at his top lip disturbing flecks of dried blood, “--do clean up. We won’t be allowed near Paulo tonight. I gave NCIS Kaye’s phone. That will take time to analyse.
This is frustrating.”

“Brah!” There was a kerfuffle outside.

Steve slid a checking glance to Danny.

“That’s Talmai,” Danny explained, “at the door.”

Steve strode down the corridor on long legs. Simons working to step protectively in front of him; he failed.

“Hey, wait for me.” Danny chased after them.

Talmai was on the veranda, hands half-raised, before three Naval officers. The stocky one at the forefront had her hand on her hip by her holstered weapon.

“You guys okay?” Talmai asked. “Man, Paulo said that I could go see my woman. Man, I didn’t know that this would happen. Oh, fuck it. Kavika is so pissed.”

“Stand down,” Steve ordered the officers.

The woman measurably gauged all the players, before stepping aside to allow the conversation to continue.

“Stevie, is everyone okay?” Talmai asked. “Kono, Mary, Toast?”

“We’re fine,” Steve nodded shortly. “Paulo just took an opportunity. It was ill conceived and badly planned…..”

“Babe?” Danny asked as Steve segued into silence.

“Talmai, is Kavika on his way?” Steve asked.

“Yeah, brah.” Talmai nodded like one of those model dogs in the back of people’s cars. “He’s like five minutes behind me.”

“Simons, liaise with S&R. I want Hesse’s body found. Talmai, watch for Kavika; I want to know immediately the status of the Kapu watching Mamo. I need to talk with the security engineers and find out where the signal scrambler is and shut it down.” Steve stared straight at Danny. “Danny, can you check on Malia, Chin, Kono, and Mary for me?”

“Yeah, sure,” Danny said. Normally, he liked to rail against orders, but there was a feverish cast to Steve’s eyes that needed to be assuaged by regaining order.

“Right.” Steve visibly drew himself taller. “Go.”

~*~

What felt like a thousand years later, Danny trooped his way up the twisting stairs to Steve’s eyrie, cognizant of his sore tummy.

Malia and Chin were fine -- Malia had handed him a cup of tea with hands that shook when he had found them in the kitchen, but her eyes had been steady. Kono had, after some cajoling, gone to the ER with Chin to get her wrist x-rayed. That had left Danny with Malia and an angry Mary. She had not appreciated being locked in the catacombs one little bit. Luckily, she didn’t seem to have twigged that Kono had locked her down there because she wasn’t trusted.
The narrow staircase smelled strongly of bleach and fresh paint, competing with charring. There was no evidence that a flash grenade had gone off in the contained space, nor that (Danny assumed) Jovan Eteinne had been badly burnt. Danny stayed away from the glistening white walls. The NCIS clean up team had moved obscenely quickly in Danny’s opinion. It was as if they had worked to obliterate any memory of the attack. Danny wasn’t going to forget it any time soon.

The door to Steve’s apartment was missing. And the clean up team hadn’t been able to remove the evidence of shredding bullet holes in the kitchen wall, although the floor had been swept clean.

The bookcase was back in position, and the diamond wells were empty. The fine wood was marred by splintering dints. Books were in strategic piles on the floor alongside the bookcase. No rhyme or reason dictated the multiple Leaning Towers of Pisa, waiting patiently to be put back in position.

The only light was the television, which was still on, sharing infomercials with no one.

It was close to two o’clock in the morning, but Danny didn’t think that Steve was in bed. Sniffing absently, he rubbed at his sunburnt nose.

Where was Steve?

Danny looked in the most obvious place, the museum office.

“Hey.” Sitting at the desk, Steve looked up as Danny stepped into the room. “How’s Kono?”

“Just bruised,” Danny reported, “no breaks.”

“Good,” Steve said tersely.

“Whatcha doing?” Danny drawled on seeing that Steve held a doll. He pointed his thumb at the shelf behind his left shoulder. “Playing with dolls? Your GI Joe is in the box up there.”

The wooden doll wore a long collared tunic, which splayed at the waist. The figure was possibly Chinese -- well, Danny wasn’t too sure of the style. It was the first doll from the suite of slides. The vase was set solidly on the desk at Steve’s elbow. It was bigger than Danny had guessed from the images, easily three foot tall, typically shaped, black with a gold five-clawed dragon curling around the body. A warrior holding a bow cocked an arrow, threatening the dragon.

Danny reached out to touch the gilt.

“Best not,” Steve warned absently.

Belatedly, Danny realised that Steve was wearing white cotton gloves.

“Oh.” Danny clasped his hands firmly behind his back. “Valuable?”

“Mmmm,” Steve said uninformatively. “Fourteen century. Yuan Dynasty. Unusual for the date. It’s been repainted circa the Sixteenth Century, adding the gold highlights so that the dragon erroneously gained five claws. Essentially, they vandalised the vase.”

“Stolen?” Danny hedged.

Steve glanced up from his contemplation of the doll.

“Do you think that your Mom stole this Chinese vase from Wo Yongfu?” Danny clarified.

“No.” Steve shook his head. “I have its provenance. My great-great-grandfather purchased it from a
collector in Beijing.”

Danny rolled his eyes.

“What?”

“Great-great-grandad bought it for the museum?” Danny said with a hint of mocking.

“Yes,” Steve said seriously, eyes narrowing slightly in suspicion, evidently getting a hint of the tone. “He was a patron of the arts.”

“Patron of the arts,” Danny echoed sing-song. “Do you not think that these things should be on display instead of stuck in the attic?”

“Well, the vase used to be on that little round table in the foyer. But when me and Mary moved in permanently, Grandmother moved it up here for its own safety.”

Visions of a teenage Mary and Steve careening around the House chasing each other scrolled across Danny’s mind’s eye.

“Did Great-great-grandad buy the doll?”

“Funnily enough, yeah, same time as the vase. But he’s a 17th Century Qing dynasty Manchu bannerman.” Steve held up the doll for Danny’s benefit. Belatedly, Danny realised that the doll was male, short of stature and stocky.

“That’s Chinese?” Danny asked.

Steve hummed and harred. “In so far as much as the Manchu conquered the then Chinese Empire and established the Qing dynasty.”

“Okay? How does that link with the storyline of the slides?” Danny asked, thinking hard. “The link with China is obvious: coins, vase, doll…”

“But—” Carefully, Steve picked up a second doll from a protective layer of tissue paper, “—this one is Sioux, probably Lakota.”

It was another male doll. The long black hair had thrown Danny’s first impression. The beadwork on the tunic was incredibly detailed as were the carefully reconstructed belt and knife, and the strap of a tiny bow case over the warrior’s shoulder. The doll held a stave with a mounted stone.

“China. Native American,” Danny mused. “Have you found the third doll?”

“No. Grandmother might have knitted clothes for it and it’s in with her stuff in the reception rooms.”

“That third doll was white, wasn’t it?” Danny squinted, thinking hard. It was a porcelain baby-girl doll with blonde ringlets and creepy glass eyes.

“I don’t know what story it tells,” Steve said glumly.

“Maybe,” Danny pondered, “the whole sequence isn’t relevant to Wo Fat? The photographs of your dad’s car and that Koji guy were from your mom’s ‘friendly’ investigations into the Yakuza? And then she finished the film off after she stole the ledger? Although taking the set up shots of the beach at your old home was strange.”

“In what way?”
“Did she develop film? I’m just guessing, but taking photos of your home, and then giving them to the CIA to develop seems a little hinky?”

Steve’s thumbnail went to his lips as he digested those thoughts.

“She never developed the film, though, did she,” Steve said around his thumbnail. “I’m guessing things moved fast. Mom was a planner. Even picnics were full on battle plans. Yet, you mentioned that some of those slides you developed were out of focus and shaky. Did dad leaving with Koji in the Mercury Marquis trigger something?”

“Like what?”

“We’ve speculated before that while she was assigned to the Noshimuri family, she was working the Chinese Triad angle. I mean, there’s the photographs that you developed from Southern China or North Korea. So something alerted the Chinese Triad Dragon Head that she was not just a housewife. Between taking the Mercury Marquis photo she acquired the ledger. She finished the slide film, maybe taking random shots around the House, and then hid the undeveloped film roll and coins under the floorboards back at our old place.”

“All of those things couldn’t have been laying around in the same place? She didn’t just randomly shoot pictures,” Danny pointed out.

“Yeah, you’re right,” Steve said. “The tapestry has always been in the Hall, and the Nandi Head installed in the museum.”

“Okay, I’m at a loss.” Danny threw his hands in the air. “It’s the middle of the night, can we, please, please, go to bed?”

Steve looked like a wrung out dishcloth, pale, wan, and wrinkled.

“Yeah, that’s probably a good idea.” Standing up, Steve peeled off his white gloves and moved around the desk. He paused, momentarily worrying at his bottom lip. “Danny?”

Danny opened his arms, and Steve folded into his hug.

~*~

Unsurprisingly, Danny woke before an exhausted Steve. Danny blinked at the slowly rotating fan hanging from the ceiling, as he lay flat on his back, wondering what had woken him. A shaft of bright sunlight through the partially opened windows told him that it was late morning.

Steve slept a good three foot away, perched near the edge of the bed, curled in the centre of his pillow fort, defended by mounds of goose feathers. His little rasping snores spoke of him being deeply asleep.

Danny smacked his lips, his mouth was dry; he had been mouth breathing.

“What?” Danny asked the world. What had woken him? The frittering edges of a dream teased him. He was surprised that nightmares had not disturbed his sleep. Arm wrapped around his abdomen, Danny rolled off the far side of the bed. It wasn’t too bad, he thought as he tiptoed across the room, creased over at the waist.

The siren call of a hot shower and a handful of Tylenol led him to the bathroom. He did his best
thinking in the shower. The image in the bathroom mirror in the vanity unit showed a strip of red across his nose and cheekbones -- which promised freckles in the future, but otherwise he appeared to have staved off a bad sunburn. T-shirtless, the tennis ball-sized, lurid bruise spreading over the bottom side over his floating ribs was stark. Looking at it made it hurt more. Danny dry-swallowed a couple of Tylenol from Steve’s stash.

“Shower. Shower.” His abdomen pinched slightly as he stepped over the edge of the bath. As the water warmed up to a comfortable level, he pissed down the sink drain, with a sigh of relief.

Showers were awesome. He scrubbed his fingers against his skull, working up a good lather, wishing that it was Steve massaging his scalp. He lost himself in the zone, going through the routine of getting clean.

“Shit?” Danny froze. He knew what had woken him: the slides. “Pictures. Pictures. Backdrop?” Quickly, he smoothed on conditioner -- otherwise his hair would be a rat’s nest -- rinsed, and got out of the shower. Still dripping, towel wrapped around his waist, he trotted out of the bathroom.

“Steve’s BlackBerry?” It was probably on his bedside table.

Leaving wet footprints on the highly polished floors, he jogged up the stairs. Steve still slept the sleep of the just and worn out, a long punctuation mark of curled up sleep.

Danny flipped through the sequence of all the photographs on the BlackBerry, focusing not on the obvious theme of the shots but the backgrounds. Surely they could identify where the pictures of the Mercury Marquis had been taken? Perhaps it was even where Wo Fat’s father had been murdered. The papers were framed so only the text was captured. The ‘Legend of the Curse of Seolh’ tapestry was similarly well framed. The Nandi’s Head was, as expected, in the museum judging from the cant of shelving behind the sculpture. Blurred, Danny couldn’t make out details of the shelf contents.

The splay of coins were on a simple white background -- paper, Danny guessed. Eight coins on the first picture, three of which were in a neat diagonal line, the mess of others tossed off-kilter in the corners. The other coin photo was of all the ten coins splayed over the paper in no discernable pattern -- there was maybe a vee shape. The vase was photographed on the mahogany-like round table in the foyer, the multi-coloured sunlight through the stained glass window in the ceiling highlighting the ebony black porcelain with glints of blue and gold. The photo had been taken before the orphaned Steve and Mary had moved into the House.

“D--?”

“Hey, sleepyhead,” Danny greeted, watching the slow sweep of Steve’s incredibly long eyelashes. He set the phone back on the bedside table, so he could give Steve -- sans hearing aids -- all his attention.

“You all right?” Steve smacked his lips.

“I’ll live.” Danny pondered on going for hyperbole and exaggeration, and decided not to before he had fortified his body with a vat of hot sugary coffee.

“What are you doing?” Steve mumbled.

“I had a thought, but I don’t think that it came to anything.” Danny didn’t want to lean over with his sore ribs, so he settled for stroking the curve of Steve’s sleep creased cheek instead of leaning in to kiss.

“Huh?” Steve said, pushing into the caress like an affectionate cat.
“I thought that there might have been a clue in the backgrounds of the photographs, but after looking closer I’m not convinced.” The multiple doll pictures were… The porcelain doll with the golden ringlets was propped against a blue sofa, so that was taken in the blue room.

“You’re all wet,” Steve said, wagging his eyebrows.

“Oh, Babe….” Honestly, Danny thought, Steve was really endearing when he tried and failed to flirt.

Mischievously, Steve tugged on the edge of the towel wrapped around Danny’s hips.

“Oh, it’s like that, is it?” Danny said, as, one-handed, he unhooked the tucked-in corner of the towel by his belly button.

Steve’s pupils dilated most satisfactorily. Grinning, Danny let the towel fall to the floor. His cock was already rising to greet Steve’s prurient interest.

“Danny. Danny. Danny,” Steve encouraged as he grabbed and hauled Danny into the bed, directing him with large hands spanning his hips.

“What’s the plan?” Danny said, almost, but not quite conversationally, as he straddled Steve’s chest and looked down at him.

“Been reading.” Steve batted long eyelashes.

“Oh, really?” Danny started to say, as Steve carefully lifted him up onto his knees. Following the guiding hands, Danny leaned forwards to grab the headboard as he basically sat on Steve’s face. The morning stubble set all kinds of interesting sensations off over the sensitive skin of his inner thighs as Steve mouthed behind his balls.

Steve’s large hands cupped and squeezed Danny’s ass, as he nuzzled in. The rasping kiss of his stubble was all kinds of awesome. Danny could feel his balls contracting against Steve’s nose.

“Sweet Jesu--” Danny kind of froze as Steve’s blunt finger played with his asshole. “Oh, God.”

Steve hummed. Danny gripped the headboard hard as Steve found Danny’s own hair trigger between his balls and ass. It wrung him out all the way up his spine, setting fireworks behind his eyes and probably shooting out of the top of the lighthouse for all to see.

Manfully, Danny managed not to squish Steve as the orgasm left him wobbly. Breathing hard, his heart was hammering. The pinch of his bruised abdomen also kept him upright. Their play was a good position for his sore chest, and Danny was fairly sure that Steve had thought of that.

“What have you been reading?” Danny finally found the coordination to ask, breathlessly. He pushed off the headboard and arthritically levered down on his side, rather than sitting back down on the arch of Steve’s vulnerable ribs.

Steve lay loose and pliable, sunk back into his pillows. A fatuous smile graced his face.

“Huh?”

Danny flipped up the edge of the blanket and followed the enticing line of sparse hairs all the way down to Steve’s flaccid cock. The big lump had also come, judging from the pearlescent drops dotting his hairy thighs. Letting the blanket fall back, Danny kissed the corner of Steve’s eye, although he aimed for his cheek.
“One of these days,” Danny said, “we’ll figure out how to draw this out, Speed Demon.”

“No ears, Danny,” Steve said. “Yes, we need to clean the headboard before it stains.”

“Most of it is on my chest.” Danny decided to follow the conversation that Steve was having with himself. He rubbed the thick hair on his chest into damp sticky swirls. He glanced upwards. “But yeah, a wet wipe won’t go amiss.”

Steve chortled as Danny kissed the side of his face, this time mashing his nose.

~*~

Almost an hour later they picked their way, showered (re-showered in Danny’s case) and dressed, down to the kitchen to get a late breakfast-brunch.

“Oh, good, you’re up,” Mrs. Keawe greeted them.

“Morning, Mrs. K.,” Steve responded, blinking, as she waggled a spatula at them.


“Cheese, please,” Steve said rhyming, as they obediently sat in their customary places.

“Goat cheese and spinach?”

“Yes, please.” Steve nodded a little enthusiastically.

“Bacon and cheese?” Danny ventured. “No spinach.”

She ferried over the percolator coffee pot and two mugs. Milk and sugar were already set on the table. Steve snagged the cups and poured two generous portions. It smelt divine.

“I’m going to text the boys, and then they’ll come and plaster the holes in your little kitchen and replace the door,” Mrs. K. told them, with absolutely no room for argument, as she beat eggs in a bowl. Chin must have told her that the plasterboard was Swiss cheese. “I know that those people came and tidied up, but I want to wipe down the floor and make sure that it’s clean.”

“Yes, Mrs. Keawe,” Steve said from behind the dubious protection of his mug of coffee.

Mrs. K. had a bee in her bonnet, as Danny had heard Mamo say more than once. Those people -- the NCIS clean up crew -- had invaded her territory.

“So what are your plans today?” Mrs. K. asked as she poured beaten egg into the frying pan to a satisfying hiss.

“Uhm,” Danny glanced at Steve. Off the top of his head he could think of upwards of two handfuls of things that they needed to do, but what was the current priority escaped him.

“Everyone has had their breakfast. You’re the last ones up, but that’s understandable, Steve,” Mrs. Keawe continued as she tossed chunks of cheese and leafy spinach over the eggy mix. “The Navy people have given Malia an escort to the hospital; she was a little surprised. They weren’t going to let her out of the House. She insisted, though. I never knew that Malia had a temper. She does. Chin went with her. I think he’s planning to camp in the hospital staffroom, and make sure that she comes home safely.”

“Kono?” Steve coughed before asking.
“She’s surfing in the bay. The forecast is only for calm weather. But I think that she needed the water.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Danny saw Steve’s hands clench around his coffee mug.

“Toast went to bed after breakfast. He pulled an all nighter at the university. I don’t know.” Mrs. Keawe folded over the omelette. Rising up on his seat to see better, Danny thought that she was making multiple layers of eggy goodness. “He’s supposed to be an intelligent keiki, but getting him to go to sleep is like having a baby with croup. And I’ve had babies with croup.”

“Grace had croup,” Danny volunteered. “Longest week of my life. Four days without sleep.”

“Ah, son,” Mrs. K. said, with the wisdom that experiencing teething, croup, and diaper rash could develop. They shared a commiserating smile.

“You’re ‘locked’? You can’t leave today?” Mrs. K. continued, as she tossed bacon into the frying pan. They were both getting cheese, bacon, and spinach omelettes by the look of things.

“Oh, yeah,” Danny remembered, “Archer said that we’re locked down.”

“I’m not entirely sure that he meant that we can’t leave the estate.” Steve’s expression turned obstinate. “I need to go into the base and find out what Paulo said. I’m betting he’s said a lot. And get updates on Anton Hesse’s condition.”

“Dude, what did you do to him?” Danny winced, viscerally recalling that crunching sound.

“I might have broken a few of the vertebra in his neck.” Steve actually smiled slightly.

“That’s horrifying,” Danny blurted.

Steve jerked in his seat away from Danny.

“He’s a terrorist, Danny.” Steve looked a little hurt. He set his coffee cup down on the table with a thump. “What leverage do you think that he would have used to make me talk if he’d caught us? Do you know who Victor and Anton would have used…?”

Slowly, Danny shook his head, mute in the face of Steve’s intensity.

“Malia. He would have used Malia, to get us to tell him everything that we know and have guessed. And he would have done it with a knife.”

Mrs. K. froze before them, two plated omelettes in her outstretched hands.

“Sorry, Mrs. K.,” Steve apologised.

“Eat up, boys.” She set the plates down with infinite caution before them. “I have to go and clean.” She scurried out the kitchen, slippers scuffling.

“Damn,” Steve swore. He pushed up from the kitchen table to switch off the gas on the stove top. “I didn’t mean to upset her.”

Danny regarded Steve’s miserable face as he turned from the oven.
“I know, I know,” Danny began, and thought carefully on his next words, “you’re ‘used’ to this, but it’s unreal. It’s like living a dream. Terrorists broke into the House last night, for the second time in a couple of months! It’s…”

“Unreal,” Steve repeated for Danny, derailing his words. “The reality is that this happens every day in other parts of the world. We’re lucky and we don’t appreciate how lucky we are.”

It was the inclusive ‘we’, Danny knew, Steve was talking for all the people that he protected as a military intelligence officer and SEAL in the Navy.

“I have the skill set and the backing of my colleagues to protect us,” Steve continued.

“And you did, last night!” Danny interrupted. “You realised that something was wrong.”

“That was lucky,” Steve said, mercurially turning from defensive to pensive.

“And the preparation and escape plan in place? That wasn’t luck. You were prepared,” Danny widened his arms to encompass everything that had happened the night before with the motion. “Okay, the thought that -- I dunno -- violence can come so close to home, is disturbing, not unreal. This is freaking everyone out. And if it’s not, it’s because they try not to think about it. But it’s not your fault. And I am ecstatic that you have the abilities -- that makes you sound like a superhero -- that you have. Even if you weren’t a SEAL, even if you weren’t in the Navy, this would still be happening, because your mom set it in motion twenty years ago. But if you weren’t an Intelligence Officer SEAL where would we be? I’m not horrified by you or your actions, I’m horrified by the world that we live in.”

Danny breathed out low and slow. He felt a little nauseous as emotions ran high.

Steve plopped down next to him. Danny leaned over and pushed his shoulder against Steve’s bicep.

“Eat your breakfast,” Danny said. “Mrs. K. prepared it especially for you.”

Steve poked the perfectly fluffy eggs with his fork. Danny thought that if Steve ate half he was going to count that as a win.

The silence as they ate was contemplative.

“We do have to go out,” Danny blurted, on the heels of a thought coming out of nowhere.

“Why?” Steve shifted in his seat, to see Danny better.

“We’ve got to pick up my dry cleaning unless, of course, lockdown means that we’re not going to the funeral tomorrow.”

“I’m not missing Auntie Pat’s funeral,” Steve said uncompromisingly.

“We better talk to Simons then, and organise whatever needs to be organised for a trip to the-- Where exactly is the funeral being held?”

“The official ceremony will be held at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. The family have chosen to carry out a small, private cremation before the ceremony, and scatter the ashes at a later date.”

“And are we going to the cremation?” Danny knew that Steve had a long history with the Governor, but he wasn’t sure that they were considered family. Additionally, if the family considered that Steve
had failed to save her in the aftermath of Wo Fat’s shooting, they might not want to see his face.

Steve shook his head. “Only Uncle Brian, and their kids, Charlene and Robert.”

“Okay. What tim--”

“Commander?” Man on a mission, Simons strode into the kitchen from the corridor. Even though he wore civilian dark blue pressed slacks and white shirt he seemed to be in uniform. All that was lacking was a tie.

“Yes, Lieutenant?” Steve sat up straighter.

“Search and Rescue have confirmed that they have Victor Hesse’s body,” Simons rapped out.

“Oh.” With great deliberation, Steve set his fork down beside his plate.

Danny expected Steve to ask for more information, but he remained mute, digesting Simons’ words.

“They’re transporting the body to Pearl Harbour-Hickam to the NCIS mortuary,” Simons volunteered into the silence.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Steve said woodenly.

Danny could feel the infinitesimal shiver walking up Steve’s spine, which made his whole body shake, against his own thigh.

“Yes, sir.” Simons nodded. “I’ll be in the room I’ve been assigned. We’ve set it up as a security centre.”

He executed a turn worthy of the parade ground and marched out of the kitchen.

“Babe?” Danny checked.

“I--” Steve tried. “I… God.” He rubbed his hand over his freshly shaven jaw. “He’s dead. He’s dead. I should be compartmentalising.”

“Steve?”

Steve glanced at Danny sideways, and swallowed, Adam’s apple working, as his gorge clearly rose. He was pale, sickly pale. The muscle in his jaw flexed as he swallowed convulsively. Abruptly, Steve’s gaze slid away from Danny.

“Steve?”

Steve shook his head: no -- a tiny, almost imperceptible, emphatic, no. He wasn’t listening to Danny, though. His stare was a sniper’s stare, fixed on memories far beyond the walls of the House.

Carefully, Danny rose to his feet, and telegraphing every step, worked his way slowly and cautiously to the sink to rinse out a clean dishtowel. Every urge within Danny told him to hold, to hug, to touch Steve -- but no, a quieter, more logical voice said, give him space.

“Babe.” Danny offered him the wrung out dishtowel. Wet -- the total opposite of the deserts of Afghanistan. A cool droplet trickled down his wrist.

Mechanically, Steve turned his head, and Danny was pinned by an eerie, fixed, assessing gaze. The unshed tears in Steve’s staring eyes were the only sign of life.
“Steven.” Danny proffered the towel again.

Staccato, Steve reached, paused, and then finally took the damp towel. They both froze for a long heartbeat. And then Steve pressed his face into the cloth and there was a low, almost imperceptible keen.

The terrorist, who had just been confirmed dead, had permanently injured Steve, killed his friends and comrades, attacked his home on two separate occasions, threatened his family, and had no doubt tried to kill Steve multiple times.

“All Steve, just tell me: where you are? Steve?”

The shaking of Steve’s shoulders was Danny’s only answer.

“Steve, it’s over, you’re in Seolh,” Danny said solidly. He flicked a quick glance at the kitchen door into the hallway, wondering if he should shut it. “That bastard can never hurt you again. Okay? I can only guess what you’re feeling. They’re both out of the picture. Dead. They’ll never hurt you again.”

“I shouldn’t be feeling this,” Steve said muffled. “I shouldn’t be feeling like this.”

Danny clenched and unclenched his hands. The fallout from the attack last night and six months ago was long overdue. For one bare millisecond, Danny wondered whether or not he should call Dr. Chowdhry. And then, muffled by the towel, the sound of sobs were unmistakable.

“Seolh,” Steve said. “I’m home...”

Danny slid around the table and curled his arm over Steve’s shoulders.

“Your family is here,” Danny said into that delicate, shell-like ear and nestling hearing aid. “You are indeed home, with your family.”

“I shouldn’t--”

“You can.” Danny squeezed him tightly.

“No,” Steve protested.

“You can,” Danny repeated. Knowing that Steve was present, and that he knew that he was home, Danny bodily turned Steve on his favourite carved chair, and into Danny’s arms. The curve of Steve’s spine accentuated the knobbles of his backbone as he pressed his face into Danny’s neck.

“Shusssh, shush,” Danny soothed, running a hand up and down over Steve’s taut back. “It’s okay. It’s okay.”

“Danny.” Steve curled his hands around Danny’s waist and gripped tightly.

“It’s okay,” Danny soothed. The dampness from the towel, pressed between them, seeped into the collar of his t-shirt.

Danny had no frame of reference to know the best way to help Steve. He could only go with his gut. A weight had been lifted from Steve, the likes of which Danny could only compare to... nothing in his experience. Danny, emphatically, had no single frame of reference. His empathy was piecemeal and built on knowing that hurt, emphatically hurt, and sometimes the surcease of hurt, meant more pain on the rebound, because you’d lived with it so very long.

Danny held him tightly. Steve was going to be embarrassed by this breakdown, even if there was
nothing to be embarrassed about. As if thinking led to realisation, Steve sniffed, and pulled free, using the dishtowel to scrub at his red face.

“Sorry,” Steve said gruffly.

“Doofus.” Danny hooked a hand around the back of his neck and pulled him in close. He planted a kiss on Steve’s creased forehead, and released him. Steve didn’t cry prettily, he went flushed and snotty. “Nothing to apologise for.”

“I don’t know… I don’t know why I did that.” Steve brushed the back of his hand over his left cheek and then right, sniffing. “I’m not eight years old.”

“It wouldn’t matter if you were eighty years old,” Danny said sagely. “Something has just came to an abrupt end. Hesse, your personal bugbear, is out of the picture. Freddie’s avenged?”

Steve absorbed that statement, face poker still. He nodded shortly, and sniffed again.

“Here.” Danny snagged Steve’s lukewarm coffee and pressed it into his hands. “Drink.”

Steve drank, accustomed to following orders.

“A glass of water would be better for you,” Danny decided, and stood.

Steve caught Danny’s fingertips in his own long fingers, and squeezed.

“Yeah, Babe?” Danny asked, stopping as if tethered to an anchor.

“Thank you,” Steve said softly.

~*~

#99#

Danny contemplated his cell phone. Gracie was now at school. Art -- he knew from her memorised timetable. Whether he liked it or not, and he didn’t like it in the slightest, he had to reschedule their weekend. Terrorists were attacking and watching the House. The US Navy was working to capture an international terrorist, who had ties with the Yakuza and Chinese Triads, who funded dead terrorists, who operated all over the world from Afghanistan to Hawaii. A terrorist who was fixated on Seolh. The churning of his gut told Danny that events were coming to a head.


He wasn’t letting his Monkey anywhere near the vicinity. It was bad enough that she and Rachel had a team assigned to them. The conversation about using the emergency alarm signal in Grace’s necklace had been difficult. Rachel had protested and, ungraciously, relented in the face of Danny’s insistence. It was another lead-lined layer in the coffin of their antagonistic relationship. Only the threat of Steve’s looming, powerful lawyers had prevented Rachel from stating that Danny would never see Grace again. Only ‘stating’ because the result of that declaration would be lawyers and court appearances, and Danny was fairly confident that their custody agreement wouldn’t be overturned. Steve was very confident that his lawyers could wrangle out a better arrangement. But now Danny was preparing to call Rachel to ask if she could look after Grace. It would go on her Danny-is-a-bad-parent list.

Danny hit speed dial five.
Aware that Simons was watching from the top balcony skirting around the House, Danny made his way along the path where he had chased after Steve and Hesse mere hours ago.

Steve had, ostensibly, gone to check on Kono. In reality, the likelihood of him not going in the ocean, after being wrung out in the aftermath of the announcement of Hesse’s death, was zero.

Danny tugged on the brim of his borrowed baseball cap, shielding his nose and face from all the watchers and the evil sun. Apparently the guys out back, behind the House, were still in position. Danny wasn’t entirely sure what to make of them, since they hadn’t been too helpful during the night. Steve had explained that their role had been to observe and report to the authorities, and not to engage. He seemed unperturbed, and understanding of those restrictions. But Danny simply thought that they should have come into the House guns blazing. Although they had protected Malia and Chin.

Danny trotted down the path to the bay, forking away from the dense shrubby undergrowth and the route to Hesse’s demise.

An unknown couple, their tans mediocre and their designer sportswear crisply pressed, sat on the bluff overlooking the bay. The man’s pale blond buzz cut was a dead giveaway along with his slabby muscular build that promised action when needed.

Danny eyed them, belatedly thinking that the short stocky woman in the tight fitting shorts was the officer that had faced off against the two foot taller Talmai the night before.

“Sir.” The man greeted Danny with a terse nod.

“And you are?” Danny asked.

“On vacation, sir. This spot has a lovely view,” the man answered.

The woman’s gaze was unerringly scanning: bluff; path; beach; bay; gaudy beach umbrella, and both of their charges in the water.

Danny made a mental note to tell Joe White that his team members needed some drama training. Grace was a better actor, and her main starring role to date had been as the lamb in her kindergarten’s Nativity.

“Yeah, right. Who are you exactly? Or shall I call you Lucy and Ricky? Ricky and Lucy?”

“Lieutenant Burton, Mr. Williams,” the man introduced himself. “And this is my colleague, Lieutenant Tweed.”

“Sir.” Her encompassing green eyed gaze took in Danny, and returned to sweep over her charges out in the shallow bay.

“Are you planning on swimming?” Burton asked, viewing Danny’s shorts and flip flops.

“Only if I have to bodily go into the water and drag those idiots onto dry land.”

Burton’s thick monobrow rose in surprise.

“Not a fan of water?” he asked.

“No, I like sidewalks and paths, dry land and breathing. I’m guessing you’re a SEAL or something?”
Tweed sniggered.

“I’m not a squid, sir,” Burton said, his flat nostrils flaring. “I’m a Marine.”

“So how does that work when this is a SEAL thing?” Danny hand-waved off the question. “Tell me later. I gotta go corral my troops. Oooh, if we do have to go into town, what’s the procedure? Are you guys coming with?”

“Why,” Tweed asked, “do you need to go into town?”

“I have to pick up my suit from the dry cleaners for tomorrow’s funeral. We do need to go to the funeral tomorrow, has St-- Lieutenant Commander McGarrett mentioned that?”

“Yes, sir, arrangements are being made,” Tweed said.

“The suit can be picked up for you,” Burton said, but Danny heard an uncompromising ‘will be picked up on your behalf’. Danny wasn’t adverse, being inherently lazy, but it was another straw that was bowing the camel’s back.

“I’ll give Simons the dry cleaning slip,” Danny said.

“Excellent, I’m sure that the squid will be able to manage that mission,” Burton said dryly.

Geez, Danny thought. “I’m gonna go get them.” He flicked his fingers in the direction of the bay, and then followed his motion, away from creepy bodyguards and down the sloping track.

A seal-slick head was visible in the ebb and flow of the gently bobbing waves as Steve powered diagonally across the cove. Danny wasn’t entirely sure what Kono, who was sitting astride her board, was achieving surf-speaking, in the calm bay. She was far out. Under the waves, the dark of the subtidal rocky reef below her made Danny think of giant, hunting, sea monsters.

She spotted him coming down the path and waved. By the time he was slipping and sliding over the fine golden sand, Kono was using a baby wave to ride the last few yards onto the beach.

“Hey, brah.” She splashed through the ankle waves.

“Should you be surfing with a sprained and bruised wrist?” Danny nodded at the black neoprene wrapping.

“This isn’t surfing. This is paddling. Actually….” she trailed off considering.

“No,” Danny protested reading her mind. “Now is not the time for a surfing lesson.”

“It’s perfect,” Kono refuted. “They’re baby waves and it’s not like we can go anywhere else, is it?” The shadow of the night’s adventure scrolled across her face, expression smoothing.

“Kono.” Danny reached for her.

“Oh, come on.” Kono shook herself, and smiled hopefully. “You’ve got sun block on; you’re shiny. You can probably even keep your cap on. The water’s lovely.”

Danny reluctantly realised that he was having a surfing lesson.

~*~

“Okay, enough.” Danny spat seawater, and then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Half
an hour; I’ll have washed my sun block off now.”

“Yeah, judging by the amount of times you got dunked,” Kono cupped his elbow, and helped him stand in the knee-high water. “But you are getting better.”

“I was shot yesterday, you know.”

“What?” Kono was suddenly as close into his personal space as Steve could get.

“Hey, hey.” Danny caught her hands. “It’s okay, I was wearing Steve’s bulletproof vest. I’m just stiff… exercise is helping.”

“Where?” Kono looked him up and down.

Reluctantly, Danny pulled up his wet t-shirt.

“Holy shit,” Kono said -- quite satisfyingly, Danny thought.

Her fingers dabbled a hairbreadth from the bruise on the side of his ribs.

“Don’t touch.” Danny flinched away.

“Brah! You could have died.” She latched onto him, clutching him against her breasts. “Danny.”

“Hey. Hey.” Danny gently patted her back, and indulged in the hug just a little bit because he was emphatically bi. “Steve had me in a bulletproof vest. It was, apparently, a glancing shot.”

“Danny.” She hiccupped miserably.

“Hey.” Danny cupped the back of her damp head. “You’re okay.”

It was his day for comforting people.

“I know, I’m okay.” She sniffed and pulled back. Narrowing her eyes, she held her clenched fists perfectly positioned for an uppercut. “I punched him.”

“Good for you,” Danny said seriously. “I box.”

“Yeah?” Kono mimed an easy hit with her unbandaged arm that Danny pretended to block. “I do karate. But, it’s different when you do it for real. I know that it’s not really about punching people.”

“I kind of thought that was what it was about,” Danny said jokingly, knowing that it was about discipline, primarily.

“Steve uses a lot of different things. They are all violent,” Kono said pensively. “I remember seeing him practice before--”

Before he was hurt, Danny translated.

“I love Karate, but maybe….”

“Hey.” Danny caught her pale cheeks between his hands, holding her still. “Last night was horrifying. Don’t forget that you’re okay. You punched Hesse. You protected and contained Mary. You went to help Steve. You were awesome. I’m proud of you.”

“Danny.” Kono smiled as bright as the sun.
“Kono,” Danny said in response. She was his first friend on the Islands of Hawaii. She had found him and given him a home. He would die for her.

She launched herself back into his arms, hugging him tightly.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” she said.

“I’m glad we’re okay,” Danny emphasised, returning a firm squeeze.

She released him, but not before bestowing an indulgent kiss to his cheek.

“Are you okay?” she asked. “I mean. It’s been insane recently. And you know, you and Steve.”

“I couldn’t begin to say—” Danny mashed spider fingers together in demented battle. “And that’s because you know. Seolh’s… encompassing, and Steve’s a force of nature.”

Kono dipped down a fraction and kissed his forehead.

“You fit into Seolh so well, Danny. It’s like we’ve been waiting for you since forever. You got me into Seolh.”

“That’s only because everyone else is really slow. I think that Seolh would have got you anyway, like a Godzilla or a giant blanket, engulfing you.” Danny chuckled. “Steve calls it Smothery Seolh. Or Mary called it Smothery Seolh,”

“I get why Mary doesn’t fit.” Kono gritted her teeth.

“I can understand why it would grate. But—” because he understood that Seolh wasn’t for everyone.

“You fit.”

Danny nodded. Even amidst the insanity, he had found a home in Seolh.

~*~

“I think, maybe,” Kono said from under their shared beach umbrella cowering away from the sun’s intensive rays, “we’re going to have to go in and get Steve.”

Danny couldn’t even begin to guess how many times Steve had trawled across the cove. He had only planned to come down and get Kono and Steve back to the House, before he had been railroaded into an impromptu surf lesson. Steve had been swimming for, at the very least, an hour.

Steve was obviously in the zone. Lost in the meditative place where exercise superseded all thoughts.

Danny stood. Steve needed someone to stop him. He was that person. Yanking off his t-shirt, he stripped down to his shorts and stomped into the waves. He dove, short armed, and powered through the water on an intercepting line to Steve. The shallow sloping bay was a perfect harbour. When they had first been trying to figure out why people were targeting Seolh, the primary reasoning was because of this easily-approached bay, where flat-bottomed smugglers’ boats could be easily pulled ashore.

Steve might be exercising to exhaustion, but where he was swimming he could stand and make his way to shore. That babies could drown in a two inch bath, did not, emphatically, cross Danny’s mind. He treading water directly in Steve’s path. Jerking, Steve jack-knifed in the water to a sharp and staggering halt.
“Idiot!” Danny remonstrated, as Steve stood in the chin-high water. “Tell me -- do your muscles feel like jelly?”

“Danny?” Steve squinted at him.

“Yes, Danny.” He nodded, and mimed doggy-paddling swimming motions and pointed to the shore. Emphasis was added with a brand new sign learned at the coffee meeting, a terse: now, which kind of resembled a double-shaka but palms facing upwards.

“Danny.”

“Before I have to rescue you.” Danny snatched for the collar of his wetsuit, planning on towing him back to dry land.

Steve avoided his grasping with appalling ease, finning back with a mere flick of his fingers.

“Shore,” Danny directed, and started kicking in that direction.

Steve side-stroked along at Danny’s side, watching him like a hawk. Danny started swimming in earnest, concentrating on maintaining a good breast-stroke form as Steve easily kept pace.

“I think we should get you an optician’s appointment. You squint a lot,” Danny huffed out between breaths.

Steve didn’t react, simply, almost insultingly, using a single stroke to maintain pace.

Finally, Danny touched sand beneath his feet, and stood. Steve mirrored him.

“This is nice.” Danny poked Steve’s shoulder indicating the tightly clinging short-sleeved wetsuit. It was patently evidence that Steve might have been checking on Kono, but swimming had been on his agenda. It defined his form in long, delectable narrow lines. The matching blue trunks were a little baggier.

“I’ll pose for you another day.” Steve stalked up the beach towards Kono’s umbrella.

“I’ll take you up on that!” Danny yelled, for once deliberately addressing Steve’s back.

“Did you enjoy your swim?” Kono said carefully, and held up a small towel.

Steve dropped to his knees beside Kono, and scrubbed the towel over his head. Danny scurried under the protection of Kono’s enormous umbrella with them.

“Hey.” Clasping his knees, Danny scrunched up in the darkest umbra.

Pinching one blue waterproof earplug and then the other from his ears, Steve regarded them with his I have no aids in expression. It sort of made him look like an attentive meerkat.

Danny held his palm up before Steve, pressing it forwards, followed by cupping his ear with his thumb and forefinger, and then pointed towards the House.

Steve cocked his head to the side, considering.

Danny repeated the sequence of signs and then added the definite shape of a house -- flat roof and sides with the palm of his hands -- instead of just pointing up to the House on the peninsula above.

“I got that,” Kono said. “You were asking if Steve’s hearing aids were in House. Cool. I really need
to learn. Can I come to classes?"

“I can hear, sort of, after a fashion,” Steve said. He pointed at Kono’s water bottle, and she handed it over. “Thank you. I’m trained in lip reading.”

“It’s another string to our bows.” Danny shrugged.

Steve scowled over the cant of the bottle as he drank, clearly not following that sentence.

“Okay, I’m going to go into the base,” Steve stated, hooking the damp towel around his neck. “I want -- I would like you to…. hmmm.”

Ah, Bossy Steve was learning.

“Kono can you read Chinese -- Mandarin, hanzi thingies?” Danny sketched the dragon hanzi in mid-air.

“Excuse me?” Kono asked.

“What?” Steve demanded.

“Yeah,” Danny clicked his fingers. “We didn’t get on to that last night, did we? Let’s go back up to the House, grab your hearing aids, and I don’t know about you guys, but I’m up for a second-breakfast-brunch-lunch, and we can have a download.”

“You’re speaking deliberately fast, aren’t you?” Steve said.


Steve reluctantly stood, matching Danny as he clambered to his feet.

“I don’t know what’s happening,” Kono grumbled as she pulled down the umbrella. “You better tell me, or else.”

“Some of it’s classified.” Danny scooped up her bag, and stuffed the water bottle in its depths. “Steve can update you over lunch.”

~*~

Danny spread out all of the portable evidence out on Steve’s expansive architect’s table matching them up with the printed out hardcopies of all the photographs. He had even included the blurred images that Oh had given him on the computer disc. Dolls, vase, and the coins were spread out between the two photographs. They hadn’t found the blonde haired baby-doll. Two of the dolls were warriors, but that didn’t match the third doll.

Steve had given Kono an edited version of the events to date. She was currently looking for the ledger in the reception rooms.

Danny rubbed his hands together. If he solved the mystery, Grace could visit -- that was considerable impetus.

~*~

Glumly, Danny went to check the Nandi’s Head because he’d be fucked if he understood what Doris McGarrett was trying to convey. He contemplated the Nandi’s Head wondering if an axe was
the solution. Steve would probably object. He hunted along the wall between the stacks looking for the light switch for the harsh, bright light.

“Whatchya doing?”

“Steven!” Danny remonstrated at the figure silhouetted against the office lights. “Don’t creep up on me.”

“Sorry.” Steve scrunched up. “What are you doing?”

He hadn’t changed out of his tan uniform, coming straight to the museum.

“Hey, have you had your hair cut?” Danny moved into the light from the doorway. The silhouette of Steve’s fluffy head was a little more groomed than normal. Haircut or application of product was the only answer.

“The funeral,” Steve answered simply, implying that he had had a haircut while on the Base. “What are you doing? You were doing this last night as well.”

“Oh, Chin wondered if there was a secret compartment in the Nandi’s Head.” Danny waved at the carving expansively. “Did you know that the Nandi Head is actually the Nandi’s Head and it’s a bull not an antelope?”

“Yes,” Steve said, lying.

Danny eyed him, because he was a master at detecting children lying. How had Steve been an intelligence operative in the US Navy when his dissembling skills were on par with a four year old’s?

Steve reached over beside the door and a hundred watt bright light flooded the room.

“Thank you,” Danny said, eyes tearing.

“You’re welcome,” Steve said primly, because he could be an ass.

“A little warning next time.”

Steve acknowledged the gripe with an absent nod.

“Secret compartment in the carving?” Steve said, dubiously.

“Could be.” Danny shrugged, more interested momentarily in the precise cut of Steve’s hair. Somehow, he thought, he doubted that Steve had popped into the barber’s on Base for a run in with a shaver. That was a two hundred dollar haircut. The errant curl high on his forehead had been tamed.

“I suppose so.” Steve circled around the enormous carved statue.

“So what happened down at the Base?” Danny asked admiring that leonine slink around the podium.

“Hmm?” Steve glanced at him. “Danny?”

Danny shook himself. Oh, for his camera.

“Did you talk to Paulo?”
Steve scowled, so Danny took that as a yes.

“He’s singing like the proverbial canary,” Steve sounded unimpressed.

“What tune?”

“He was in the Hesse brothers’ pocket. He was their lackey. He knows next to nothing about Wo Fat. Victor needed a weak spot -- he’s good at finding them -- and used Paulo as his eyes and ears. There were some threats, some coercion, and a few promises.”

“Promises?” Danny prompted, as Steve continued to circle. Danny could imagine him doing that to Paulo in a small, badly ventilated, poorly illuminated interrogation room.

“I can’t believe that we never suspected him,” Steve grumbled. “He drugged the curry. And where was he during the aftermath? Nursing a measly gun crease on his arm.”

“But why did he do it?” Danny persisted.

“He wanted an in with Wo Fat’s operation. Thought if he proved that he was a good mole in the Kapu, Wo Fat might look after him. Idiot. If he was useful, the Hesse brothers would never let him go. If he proved useless, Victor would have enjoyed killing him for his brother’s pleasure.”

Danny absorbed that with a shiver. It told him more than he wanted to know about the Hesse brothers.

“So nothing about Wo Fat at all?”

“Never even met him.” Steve crouched and tried the same knot in the wooden podium that Danny had tried the night before. “Victor Hesse keeps his associates on a short leash. Kept his associates on a short leash.”

“You thought that Wo Fat had nothing to do with Hesse’s invasion last night. Why?”

“Because it wasn’t well thought out. If anything, Wo Fat has proven to be infernally patient. He’s a planner. All of the intel we have on P-One is that he’s highly intelligent. He was an agent in the Chinese MFS working in Counter Intelligence with the Sixth bureau. Hesse was going to break Seolh apart looking for whatever Wo Fat wants. Which is interesting….”

“How?”

“Hesse took orders from Wo Fat. That Victor Hesse was taking orders led us to the existence of Wo Fat. It was unprecedented.” Steve stood and continued his circling. “Evidently, Hesse was getting a little sick of following orders, and wanted some leverage over Wo Fat. Pretty much the same thing that Jenna Kaye was thinking.” Steve eyed Danny, contemplative.

“Something is rotten in the State of Denmark?” Danny offered, recalling Steve’s comments on the staircase.

It took Steve a moment to parse that sentence.

“It tells me that there’s a vulnerability to exploit. Wo Fat is not as secure in his organisation as we have previously thought. We’re not clear on how his ‘business’,” Steve said euphemistically, “operates with the Yakuza. But if his subordinates think that they can operate independently, yeah, ‘Something is rotten in the State of Denmark’.”
“Maybe they were thinking to get an ‘in’ with the Boss?” Danny offered.

“Kaye, maybe. Victor Hesse doesn’t think like that. Hesse is focused on money, sex, revenge, and violence, and not necessarily in that order. Attacking the House wasn’t a way to get an ‘in’ with Wo Fat.”

“But if he found what Wo Fat is looking for….” Danny said, leadingly.

“No.” Steve stopped his pacing. “Wo Fat killed that greasy, mullet-haired guy -- Sang Min -- for setting fire to the House. Whatever we’re looking for is fragile, easily damaged.”

Danny blinked.

“A ledger isn’t fragile,” Danny pointed out. “Old books can be fragile. But that was page was dated 1988.”

Steve simply shrugged. “Books burn?” he said.

“Maybe it’s not even in the House?” Danny said playing Devil’s Advocate.

Steve absorbed that phlegmatically.

“Mom was all about misdirection and magic tricks. Wo Fat’s spent years, I assume, looking for this. We’ve wondered if my pursuit of the Hesse brother’s brought me to Wo Fat’s attention, and that led him to link me with Doris McGarrett. Mom was watching the Noshimuri family. But I’m pretty sure that she was also operating in North Korea and China. She more than likely killed his dad. Or it might have been you.”

“Excuse me?” Danny said indignantly.

“The photo that you took of him led Sang Min to follow you to Seolh. Maybe then Sang Min reporting that you were here, led Wo Fat to make a bunch of connections -- Steve McGarrett of Seolh to Lieutenant Commander McGarrett US Navy. More digging ended up with him to linking my mom as the woman who was around Hiro Noshimuri back in the 1980s. That was probably Jenna Kaye’s investigative work.”

“It’s less of a coincidence than Wo Fat getting interested in you just because of the Hesse brothers,” Danny said slowly. One little photograph leading to all this aggravation and intrigue, it was kind of incomprehensible. Danny mentally reviewed the incriminating photograph in his mind’s eye. “Victor Hesse is also in the photo of Wo Fat.”

“The little intel that we have on Wo Fat -- to be accurate, the intel on the Hesse Brothers… We always knew that the Hesse Brothers had a funder, but your photograph was the first evidence of that mastermind behind the Hesse Brothers.” Steve preened on Danny’s behalf. “That it is Wo Fat correlates with the evidence that Victor Hesse operates internationally. Wo Fat is not a terrorist with a religious or ideological agenda. He’s in it for the power.”

“So they all shit themselves when they realised that I’d taken a photo of Wo Fat and Victor Hesse, and had moved in with a Navy SEAL.”

“You haven’t actually moved in yet.” Steve leered.

Danny glared at him fondly.

Steve waggled his eyebrows.
“Continue with your inferences, Sherlock,” Danny proclaimed regally, ignoring Steve’s blatant attempts to get him to move into the eyrie.

“Wo Fat is playing a long game. He’s wound us up and pointed us in the right direction, but he doesn’t know where the ‘treasure’ is, either. I think that he’s interested to see where our investigations take us.” Pensively, Steve scratched along the long line of his throat as he thought. “And he’s giving us enough rope to hang ourselves.”

“I’m not entirely sure of your mixed analogies, but I think I know what you’re saying. You’re saying that there might not be a mystery to solve.”

“No, there’s a mystery….” Steve’s expression segued to blankness as he clearly worried at a thought. “I--”

The bright lights flashed coding the dinner is ready signal.

“Excellent.” Danny clapped his hands together. “Chin’s cooking tonight.”

“Hmm.” Steve absorbed that without comment.

Danny could practically see the thought bubble forming over Steve’s head. It was tempting to prod it, but then it would likely pop.

“I’ll be down in five,” Steve said absently, already wandering away. “I need to change.”

“Okay, Babe,” Danny said slowly. He was happy to give Steve his five minutes. He would even let him have ten, because that was an expression of a man chasing an important thought. Danny didn’t want to derail that thinking.

~*~

“Should I put a plate in the oven?” Mary asked, glancing at Steve’s clear place setting.

“He’ll probably go for the rice dish,” Chin judged, “that will dry out in the oven.” He levelled a speaking glance at Danny.

“Hey, Steve knows dinner’s on the table. He’ll come down.” It wasn’t improbable that he had sat on his bed for a moment and flagged. “I’ll give him another five.”

“It’s been ten minutes since we rang the bell … light flashed,” Mary said.

“He could be in the shower,” Danny pointed out. Steve could easily shower two-three times a day, especially if he had been running, gone in to Honolulu, or swum in the sea.

“Hey.” Steve slid into the kitchen. The pristinely pressed Naval uniform had been swapped for one of his tight running t-shirts and cargo shorts. He plopped into his seat beside Danny.

“Spiced carrot, garbanzo, and almond pilaf.” Chin pointed to the bowl on the centre of the table. “Steak Diane with sautéed potatoes and peas.”

Steve promptly put a spoonful of garbanzo and colourful rice on his plate.

Chin called it, Danny thought. He helped himself to another portion of the Steak Diane, making sure to get a generous scoop of the brandy sauce.

While Steve was normally quiet when at the dinner table, tonight he was a vacuum of thought, as he
worked his way through fart-inducing garbanzo beans. He appeared to be oblivious to the glances being cast in his direction.

‘Thinking,’ Danny mouthed at Chin. ‘Thinking hard.’

“So.” Chin tapped the tabletop, getting Steve’s attention.

His head came up, focussing on Chin.

“Steve, what are the funeral arrangements for tomorrow?” Chin asked practically.

“Limousine will arrive promptly at ten thirty.” Steve flicked a glance at Mary, who flared her nostrils at him. “ETA at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific is circa eleven twenty. The ceremony starts at twelve hundred hours. We will then proceed to the Governor’s Mansion for a light lunch.”

“And it finishes?” Mary asked.

“I expect that we will be able to return home at fourteen hundred hours.” Steve flashed a luminous smile at Danny. “So we’ll have plenty of time to pick up Grace after school.”

“No,” Danny shook his head. “She’s staying with her mom this weekend.”

“But I thought?”

“Steve.” Danny’s gaze encompassed the whole family. “No. Emphatically not. It can’t happen -- not until we figure this out. There were men running around the House yesterday with guns.”

Chin cast his eyes downward. Malia was conspicuous by her absence; she was staying with her mom and dad.

“I’m sorry, Danny,” Mary blurted. “I wanted to meet her. She sounds awesome.”

Danny carefully sighed, breathing through the misery.


In a blinding millisecond, Danny considered the offer. It was tempting but, one, it would cost a lot of money, and while Steve could easily pay, Danny wasn’t a kept man, and, two, Danny didn’t know what this ‘protection’ would entail. They would probably be kept in the room, or accompanied everywhere with a bunch of men in suits. He wouldn’t upset Grace for the world.

“No,” Danny said decisively. “We’re going to find this thing and get Wo Fat off our backs and put this all behind us. Okay!”

“Yes,” was the resounding reply.

~*~

“I’m sorry about Gracie, Danny,” Steve said.

Danny turned from closing the newly replaced eyrie door, and curled straight into Steve’s embrace. He sagged, tension draining out of his body like a faucet suddenly twisted fully open.

“Hey,” Steve soothed, cupping the back of Danny’s head with a large hand.
“We have to figure this out,” Danny said into his neck.

“We will,” Steve said, picking up vibrations. “Gracie will be able to stay with us anytime. We’ll get you a fair and equitable custody arrangement. Everything will be fine.”

“You can’t promise that.” Danny pushed off his chest, digging fingers into Steve’s right hand side ribs. “We’re running around blind.”

“Hey.” Steve wriggled away from the tickle like a scalded cat.

Danny couldn’t help a tiny smile because such a big, rough and ready SEAL could be brought down by tickling.

“Look, I know that there is something, and it’s here in the House.” Steve caught Danny’s fingers and drew him towards the sofa.

“Steve…”

“We’re going to find it, and end this.”

“How?” Danny plopped down on the cushions with a thump. Pulling his hand free from Steve’s grip he crossed his arms.

“You told me,” Steve said intently, as he sat and twisted around to directly face Danny. “Mom was careful and cagey and very intelligent. She didn’t intend on getting that film developed. Remember?”

Danny nodded. He had wondered why she had taken photographs of her home on a film that nominally should have been given to the CIA since she had photographed the Yakuza cop, Koji Noshimuri.

“She was creating a stash. Insurance.” Steve gave Danny his full and intense concentration. “There were passports in the box under the floorboards. Mom had an escape plan. Something prompted Mom to have an escape plan.”

“Your passport and your mom’s false passport were there. But not your dad’s and sister’s,” Danny observed.

“Correct.” Steve nodded. “They’re in the second stash along with the thing that Wo Fat’s looking for. Mom would never have put all her eggs in one basket. The coins under the floorboards are valuable. I’ve sent the paste jewellery that Mary played with to be assayed. They’re probably real jewels.”

“So what,” Danny asked slowly, “made her create these stashes? And the breadcrumb clues?”

“This all kicked off in 1988, when she was just getting back in the game.” Steve picked a loose scab off his forearm, examined it, popped it in his mouth, gave an introspective chew and swallowed.


Danny slithered back across the sofa cushions out of reach.

“What?” Steve asked again. He shook his head. “She might not have known all the players and that made her collect some insurance. I’m guessing the clues were for whoever might find the stash if her plans went south.”
“Yeah, right,” Danny said dubiously.

“One thing or someone scared her,” Steve said, ostensibly agreeing with Danny. “But she didn’t run back in 1988, she controlled the situation… resolved it.”

“By killing Wo Yongfu?”

“By killing Wo Yongfu,” Steve confirmed.

Danny mulled over that. “Don’t forget that two years later someone killed your mom and dad.”

“I’m hardly going to forget that, am I?” Steve said.

~*~

#100#

Yippee ki yay…! Danny had thought that Steve would have worn his uniform for the funeral. No. Steve wore a new, ebony-black, classic-cut suit, crisply tailored for his current narrow breadth and weight. The accents on the pockets of his closely fitted waistcoat were the Seolh aquamarine-blue.

“Is that an eldritch knot?” Danny said weakly, transfixed by the Seolh-blue tie.

“Eldredge,” Steve corrected, as he affixed a Naval platinum tiepin below the folded, layered knot.

“Hhhhuuurrrr,” Danny managed, because he was bewitched.

Steve squinted at him, perplexed, clearly not following that Danny was about to climb him like a tree. Although, reluctantly, Danny knew that that wasn’t possible given that they were leaving for the funeral in less than fifteen minutes, but all bets were off when they came home.

Danny couldn’t resist sliding forwards. Steve had shaved closely, and his newly cropped hair had an endearing hint of a curl.

“You clean up good, Babe.”

Beaming, Steve smoothed the line of his waistcoat, accentuating his flat abdomen. He even had the chain of a pocket watch forming a perfect curve from the middle button to the tiny pocket on his left hand side. Wanting to mess with perfection, Danny tugged the aquamarine silk handkerchief in his suit breast pocket a little more prominently.

“Perfect.” Danny’s fingers itched for his camera.

“You’re smiling. You look really happy.” Steve pecked a kiss on Danny’s lips.

“Really? Oh?” Danny knew why: Steve looked healthy. It was a pleasure to see. The hollow cheeks had filled out, the drawn lines accentuating tiredness under his eyes were gone, and his eyes were bright.

“What?” Steve cocked his head to the side.

“You look good, Babe.” Danny smoothed his hands up the perfectly pressed lapels and around the back of Steve’s neck.

Obediently, Steve leaned in to kiss. “I like your suit too,” he murmured before delving down.
The limousine was big enough for the entire family. It felt as solid as a black hole, heavy with protective, ponderous weight as it powered along the Lunalilo freeway. When it had driven up the House drive, Danny had expected it to gouge deep furrows in the gravel. There were even flags on the hood.

Mamo and Maru were up front; Chin, Kono and Mary in the middle, with Steve and Danny taking up the rear seats. Steve was cool and collected, leg crossed over his knee, as if he was chauffeured in an ostentatious limousine every day. Assigned personnel were in the sedan before them and the SUV with black-tinted windows behind them.

Danny peered out of the limo windows as they came off the freeway, amidst twisting flyover and concrete barricaded roads, before hitting suburbia. A few pedestrians on the streets turned to watch. There was another limousine ahead. Danny guessed that there were going to be some seriously important guests at the funeral. Although was guest the proper term? He didn’t know.

They climbed higher, twisting and making a couple of sharp turns. As they crossed over a bridge, Danny read: Department of Veterans’ Affairs, National Cemetery, Punchbowl.

There were more vehicles on the road, all heading in the same direction. Perforce they slowed. They climbed higher and higher on the wide, circling road. The sidewalks were clean, the verges carefully maintained with colourful flowers and verdant bushes.

It was a bright, sunny day. Danny always wanted it to rain during funerals. Smoothly, they drove through the gates. Ahead of them the road split into two lanes on either side of a green central median. All three vehicles took the left-hand road after a brief discussion with the uniformed policeman standing before the half-mast flag. A marble edifice constructed of white tiers -- the steps of giants -- was at the end of the long drives.

Slow and measured, their limousine glided up the left hand drive. The giant steps resolved into individual white-dressed mausoleums stacked on either side of a wide set of steps leading up to a statue of a lady looking down from an ascetic building built of lines and angles. It spoke to Danny of the proud figurehead arising from a ship’s prow.

Danny made a mental note to visit the cemetery when he wasn’t attending a funeral. Their car filed in behind the sedan, coasting to a halt, parking on the side of the road by a pink flagstone area before the steps. Lines of folding chairs were set out neatly on the open space.

“Sir--” the chauffeur turned to face them but his voice came over the in-house microphone, “--please remain in the vehicle until Lieutenant Simons joins us.”

Steve carefully resituated his tie a millimetre.

“Wo Fat’s not going to do anything here,” Steve said, and exited the vehicle.

“Whoops, Stevie on a mission. Defying authority.” Mary piled out after him, the wide skirt of her black and red poppy dress flaring around her.

“Geez.” Danny scrambled behind them.

The pair were simply standing in the middle of the road. The air was warm and sweet. A gentle breeze lifted Mary’s fine, flyaway hair.

“Auntie Pat,” Mary suddenly blurted.
“Yes,” Steve said simply. He caught her hand, and Mary let herself be held.

Danny fell in behind them, following them to the seats.

They had assigned seats up in the second rank of seats in front of the milling uniformed schoolchildren lining up at the base of the steps. There was a large photographic portrait of the governor set on an easel beside the choir. Cursory nods and quiet greetings murmured across the space as the multitude found their seats. Danny sat between Steve and Kono, Mary and Chin on either side. Maru and Mamo were behind them, flanked by heavy-set male Navy officers.

The man standing before the choir lifted his hands, and obediently the children quietened and moved to their assigned positions. The air was of waiting.

A grey haired man, with a chiselled lantern jaw, walked down the centre aisle. At his side a younger man wearing the same face, but unlined and softer-angled, shadowed him. A woman, her light blonde hair tousled in the breeze, walked arm in arm with a soberly dressed man, unremarkable and unmemorable. Governor Jameson’s immediate family, Danny guessed. The supposition was supported by the attendance of Acting Governor Denning walking soberly in their wake.

The conductor was watching them closely. As they took their position at the front of the assembly he raised his baton. Unexpectedly, the woman, Governor Jameson’s daughter, moved from her husband-partner’s mantling wing, and skirted along the rank of chairs, past Governor Denning and his wife.

“Steve,” she said, on making her way to their position.

“Charlie? Hey.” Steve reached out and caught her questing hand over the back of the chairs separating them.

The angle forced by reaching over the chairs was uncomfortable, but she pulled Steve into a hug.

“Thank you,” she said softly, wetly.


“We’ll talk later.” She kissed his cheek and pulled away, to return to her family.

Palpable relief lightened Steve’s taut stance to parade rest, hands crossed behind his back, feet shoulder width apart.

The choir master took her return to her family’s fold to re-lift his baton. A clear treble sang out. The boy’s voice was pure, the tone clean with no unnecessary trills and breathy sounds. Danny had clutch of cousins and second cousins, who had attended or were attending the American Boychoir School in Princeton. Great Uncle Thomas was an institution at the school, and vetted every single boy of the Williams clan to ascertain if they could sing. Danny had been to more choir performances than he could count.

The kid was good. The choir master was an accomplished director. The cant of the choral work was Hawaiian. Danny, unsurprisingly, didn’t recognise it, but he was really tempted to ask for a recording to send to Uncle Thomas.

As the final notes ebbed, Governor Denning took the podium between the portrait and the choir. He waited until ponderous silence echoed across the cemetery.

Danny looked for that internal place where he followed what was happening, but didn’t listen. He
did not like funerals. Did anyone, he wondered.

The eulogy washed over him.

~*~

The choir performed a second work after the series of speakers finished extolling the virtues of Patricia Jameson, closing the formal part of the ceremony. There was a long moment while attendees waited for direction, before Governor Denning announced that there was a wake at the Governor’s Mansion.

The shuffle and murmur was an abrupt disturbance after the silence. People started to move.

“Steve?” Mary leaned around Steve so he could see her face. “Are we?”

“We should,” he said cryptically.

“Okay, right.” Mary visibly braced herself.

“Be right back,” Steve said tersely.

“Uhm?” Danny began.

But they were already working their way through the milling crowd. Backs straight, pace measured, walking side by side, their siblinghood was tangible. Their goal was off at a tangent from the seating arena, and in the opposite direction from their protection detail and the milling crowd.

“They’re not going far,” Chin explained to Simons. “Their parents’ gravestone is in the grounds, just beyond those trees.”

Stalwart banyan trees, lining the walk up to the memorial, guarded the fallen.

“Noted.” Simons followed his charges, but stayed respectfully back.

Danny watched. Past the promenade, a vast field, far too many servicemen and women, stretched across the Punchbowl. Steve knew where he was going with unerring accuracy. As one, both McGarrettts stopped, heads bowed before a simple flat headstone.

The family waited patiently.

~*~

Danny had thought that they were going to the Governor’s residence for the wake, but confusingly there were two residences. The oldest had been the official home of Queen Lili’uokalani of Hawaii, before she had been arrested during the coup d’état that eventually led to the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii. The governor actually lived in the residence behind the mansion, which had been built in the late 1990s so that the history of the original mansion could be preserved for all.

It reminded Danny of the ’Iolani Palace, which they had visited for the Christmas Ball, but more intimate. A buffet had been set up in a stately chambered hall, with a ceiling of overly ornate wooden interlocking beams, but some of the guests had meandered through the open doors into the gardens.

A waiter passed with a silver tray balanced with glasses of white and red wine. Danny wasn’t driving, so he snapped up a frosted white wine glass and a red. The red wine he handed off to Mary.

“Oh, thank you.” She took a deep quaff.
Danny matched her.

“Not fun,” Mary summarised, quietly.

“No,” Danny agreed watching the family holding court before a rank of supplicants, mourners and those merely interested in being seen by the throng. He volunteered, “I haven’t been… I’ve not been the centre of attention at a funeral before.”

Mary sighed. “When mom and dad died I was pretty young. I remember the day. It sucked. I dunno. It didn’t make any sense. I didn’t know what to do.”

Danny didn’t know what to say. He opted for clinking his glass against her glass.

“To your mom and dad.”

“And to finding who killed them and making them pay,” Mary growled.

“Steve’s working on that,” Danny said lowly.

“Yeah.”

They both turned to regard Steve, who was speaking with Mr. Jameson off to the side from the throng. Steve was nodding soberly, and intently, at Mr. Jameson’s words. Finally, Mr. Jameson patted Steve’s shoulder. Steve shrugged depreciatively, a little shy.

’Son,’ Mr. Jameson clearly mouthed, and offered his hand.

“Good,” Mary said as they shook hands. “I suppose I better go over.”

“You want me to come with?” Danny offered.

“Nah.” Mary shrugged. “I’ll be girl talking with Charlie. Go give Stevie a hug. He looks like he needs one.”

Danny watched her stride off, before heading over to Steve via the smörgåsbord. He snagged a few choice morsels for them to share. Crab puffs, smoked salmon and Roquefort cheese on tiny crackers, juicy shrimps, vegetable spring rolls, fresh fruit and savoury sausages on little sticks, plus skewers of fried chicken drizzled with satay sauce for himself. Cleverly, the plates had little clip hangers that you could suspend your wine glass from.

“Hey, Babe,” Danny slid into Steve’s orbit with all the skill of an aircraft carrier, telegraphing his approach.

“Danny,” Steve returned.

“A lot of guests. I guess you know most of them?” Danny set himself beside Steve, plate held prominently, so that they could both graze.


“Is Kahuna Creepypasta here?” Danny looked around, because normally when he thought about the man, he promptly appeared.

“I saw Kahuna Keōua earlier,” Steve said mildly.

“Mmmm.” Danny continued to check, but didn’t spot the man.
Steve snagged the wine glass perched on the edge of the plate, and took a sip.

“Nice,” he mused.

Danny flagged over another waiter and got another sweating glass of white wine.

“What is this?” he asked the young man.

“Grüner Veltliner from New Zealand, sir. The Pinot Noir is also from the Yealand’s Estate.” With a nod, the waiter moved off to serve more guests.

“You want to walk out into the gardens?” Danny made a step towards the open glass doors to the outside world.

Steve obediently followed. It was a lovely, tropical January day in Hawaii and the sun was shining. Danny scrunched his nose up and led them to the protective shadow of a tree. They weren’t the only ones that had sought out the midday sun and light breezes rather than the chamber. A pristine green lawn stretched before them, flanked by flagpoles adorned with a multitude of half-mast flags. The light breeze made them flap dispiritedly.

“What’s the one with Hawaii written in the centre of the circle of stars?” Danny asked.

Steve stared at him. “I forget that you haven’t been on the islands that long. It’s the flag of the Governor of Hawaii. The others are--”

“American State flags,” Danny supplied.

“Some of them. Some are for countries,” Steve said, pointing. “Australia with the Southern Cross.”

Danny rolled his eyes.

Steve grinned.

“Drink your wine, Babe,” Danny directed.

“Steve McGarrett. Well, hello. You look well.” An Asian woman, maybe their age or a little older, paced over. Her waist-length black hair swished with each step.


“Hello.” She looked Danny up and down, and smiled widely.

“And how do you guys know each other?” Danny asked. He instinctively liked her brash frankness.

“Oh, I used to babysit Steve and Mary when I was in High School.” She grinned at Steve.

“And, as babysitter’s go, you were pretty cool,” Steve said faux reluctantly.

“I was awesome,” she refuted. “Blanket forts, spies and agents, lava floor, and laser tag.”

“Laser tag?” Danny grinned.

“Not the laser tag that you’re thinking of.” Steve gestured with his wine glass. His fingers automatically made a gun shape around the stem -- the wine sloshed enthusiastically. “We used to string up a room with criss-crossing red wool, and then you had to try to get from one end of the
room to the other without being burnt to a crisp by the lasers.”

Danny laughed. “Sounds like fun.”

Steve shrugged, but there was a glint in his eye, that bespoke of enjoyment. Danny hoped that there were photographs.

“I’ll let you guys catch up,” Danny said. “I’m going to find Chin and make sure he makes a note of this wine. I like it.”

Steve paused a beat. “Okay, sounds like a plan.”

Danny ambled off. It would do Steve some good to talk to someone who wasn’t directly involved with Seolh or the Navy.

~*~

Danny made a circle of the inner chamber, spoke briefly with Chin, ascertaining that, yes, he was familiar with the winery. Chatted with Mamo and Maru. He had seen Kahuna Keōua and managed to avoid him, although he was fairly sure that the man had clocked his presence. He had passed his condolences to the family, without explaining that he too had been on the freeway with Steve and their mother.

Inevitably, the circuit took him back to the veranda doors, and out into the garden. Steve was -- characteristically, the anti-social so-an-so -- right where Danny had left him, under the trees. Amy Cotillard had moved on.

Palms together, Steve had his hands up, forefingers touching his lips, as if praying.

He was a statue of thought.

Danny glanced across the lawn trying to see what had caught Steve’s attention. His gaze was fixed on the gently wind-rafted flags. Slipping his phone out of his pocket, Danny selected the camera option. As cameras went, he wasn’t massively impressed with the specifications of his camera phone, but needs must. He framed the first shot, going for a full body shot, framing Steve against the lush flowering hibiscus bush behind him. The blood-red splashes of colour, the flowers, were a startling contrast to the long line of liquorice string, which was all Steve, from his highly polished shoes, the bespoke black suit, and his dark, freshly cropped hair.

Zooming in, Danny framed the next shot, as close in as he was happy to do with the shitty camera -- balancing resolution with quality to capture perfection. Dappled sunlight through the tree canopy above Steve cast him in contrasting shadows and light as a cloud overhead drifted aside. Danny couldn’t have made Steve pose for a better shot. A flawless profile, details crisp, contrasts sharp -- Danny could be clinical -- all made for a superlative photograph. Danny sighed. He had captured thought.

He had captured Steve.

The smart phone prompted him as to whether or not the shot should be used as the phone’s wallpaper. He clicked ‘yes’.

Steve still hadn’t moved a millimetre. Setting aside the siren call of photography, Danny belatedly wondered if Steve was caught in another flashback. Cautiously, Danny angled around and walked towards Steve so he could be easily observed approaching.
“Babe?” Danny asked carefully.

“Mom was all about misdirection and magic tricks.” Steve said, turning a laser-intent glare on Danny.

“You all right?” Danny froze.

Abruptly, Steve pulled out his BlackBerry. Thumbs flicked back and forth, scrolling, no doubt, to the photographs.

“Flag of Alaska. Australian Flag. Papua New Guinea. They all have constellations.”

“And?” Danny asked, and stepped closer.

Steve thrust his hand out. One of the pictures of the coins was prominently displayed on his phone. It was the one with the diagonal line of three coins and the others cast to the corners.

“It’s the body of Orion, The Hunter. The constellation. It’s incomplete, though. There’s no shield of lion’s skin or club.”

“And?” Danny asked, seriously, not following.

Steve flicked through the images, stopping on the vase. “The archer is hunting the dragon.”

“Hunters?” Danny asked slowly. The Native American doll had a club, with a set of bow and arrows.

Steve was a step ahead of him, pulling up the photograph of the Lakota Plainsman. He tapped a button and the Manchu bannerman flicked onto the screen.

“Two hunters, warriors, soldiers,” Steve said.

“And the baby doll?” Danny ventured.

“I dunno. But the hunter is mom. Hunting a dragon,” Steve said darkly.

“Okay. Okay.” Danny held up a finger. “So the other picture of the coins? Is that a constellation? It looked messy to me. There was kind of a vee?”

Steve flipped to the image and glowered.

“Invoke the power of Google, my son,” Danny intoned.

Steve froze for a millisecond, thinking hard and then started keying the pad furiously. His focus was absolute. Craning his head, Danny watched, as Steve scrolled through pictures and then navigated to the first link that promised to supply a list of well known stars and constellations.

“Why don’t you Google constellations with, I dunno, eight or nine coins -- I mean stars? Danny asked.

“Because it’s probably also incomplete,” Steve said. “Mom didn’t intend on making this easy.”

Photographs of constellations -- some helpfully highlighted by joining lines, and others that were just vast, bright starscapes -- zoomed across the tiny screen. Steve stared, scowled, glowered, and rapidly moved on to scrutinise the next image in the collection.
“Show me Orion?” Danny asked.

Tongue caught between this teeth, Steve selected a link and angled his phone further for Danny’s benefit. There were lots of stars in the constellation -- more than the belt and body that Danny was vaguely familiar with. A faint drawing of a man overlaid the joined up dots of stars. Orion, improbably, held a dead lion in his left hand. His right arm was raised high, holding a club threateningly.

“Dead lion?” Danny asked, raising an eyebrow at Steve.

“Sometimes it’s a shield. Essentially, it’s a shield.”

“They taught you that in the Navy, eh?”

“Nah, Grandmother liked to stargaze. Astrology and legends.” Steve returned to flicking through the selections of images trying to find another constellation to match the vee image.

“But you are Navy; didn’t you also learn to navigate by the stars?” Danny gibed, when boredom set in. “Orion’s pretty well known.”

“Yes, but it’s incomplete. It’s just a line of coins -- Orion’s Belt,” Steve grumbled. “Fuckin--!”

“Steven,” Danny chastised as an affronted, elderly lady turned on her stilettos to tut at them.

“I don’t believe it. It’s the horns of Taurus, The Bull.” Once again, Steve thrust the phone towards Danny.

“The Bull, like the Nandi’s Head?” Danny said, jabbing two horns from his head with his fingers.

“Yes, the Bull,” Steve grated slowly. His gaze drifted introspectively to the speckled tree canopy. “Just like the Nandi Head.”

“We’ve searched the Nandi’s Head, Steve,” Danny said. “There’s nothing there.”

“The Hunter faces off against the Bull.” Steve abruptly segued further into silence, thinking hard.

Hunter faces off against the Bull, Danny pondered. Was Wo Fat, or more accurately, Wo Yongfu, the hunted Bull? Now that they had realised the thread of hunters that were apparent in the photographs.

“What do we do with constellations? Come on, Danny, you said before.”

“You navigate,” Danny said, because he wasn’t an idiot.

“Yeah, you navigate. Come on.” Steve stalked off, straight across the grass towards the open gates at the end of the lawn.

“What are we doing?” Danny chased after him.

“We’re going to flag down a taxi and go home to Seolh.”

~*~

#101#

“I’m not entirely sure that this is a good idea. We’ve left everyone back at the wake.” Danny
thumbed his phone -- debating whether or not to call Joe White, whose number he had -- as the landscape sped by outside the taxi.

“Where they’re safe,” Steve insisted.

“Look, gimme your phone.” Danny clicked his fingers with his free hand. “I wanna call Simons.”

Steve glanced at him sideways, bottom lip pouting.

“Phone. Now.” Uncompromisingly, Danny held his hand out.

Steve slapped it into his palm, and returned to glaring at the back of the taxi driver’s head, clearly mentally urging her to drive faster.

The phone was switched off. As Danny pressed the ‘power on’ button -- Simons, he guessed, was probably going to be pissed. Two text messages promptly downloaded. Wincing, Danny navigated through Steve’s contact list.

“Sir,” Simons said drolly, as he answered partway through the first ring.

“Hey, Barney. Danny here.”

“Sir, where are you?”

“We’re in a taxi about two minutes from the House.”

“Can I ask why?” Simons said, with studied patience.

“Uhm--” Paranoid, Danny didn’t want to give specifics, “--needed to come home.”

“I will call Lieutenants Tweed and Burton, alerting them of your arrival. Don’t do this again, Mr. Williams.”

“Hey, I didn’t do anything. It’s all down to Lieutenant Commander Ants-in-his-Pants McGarrett.”

Silence met that epithet.

“So I’ll let you call Tweed and Burton.” Danny ended the call, wincing.

~*~

Steve let them through the front door, using a combination of a keypad and key. He immediately crossed over to the carved, round table and hauled it across the foyer and directly under the shaft of multihued light from the stained glass window above.

“So what are you thinking?” Danny asked, cocking his head to consider the numinous effect of lights and imaginary porcelain vase. Now wasn’t the time for photographs, but this was an effect that he was going to explore in the future.

“You thought that there was a clue in the backgrounds of the photographs,” Steve said, clinically.

“Yeah,” Danny drawled, recalling that he had then been distracted by a mischievous Steve.

“The vase was on the table here.” Steve regarded the domed stained glass window directly overhead. “But the table’s never been put here. Mainly, because I used to slide down the banister.”
Danny mapped the trajectory: banister; flying Steve, and table -- all which equalled a crash of epic proportions. Looking at the length of the curving banister, Danny had to admit, that it was kind of irresistible. He made a mental note not to mention it to Grace.

“So.” Steve pointed at the imaginary vase on the table, and then up the stairs on a high angle to the attic museum. “Nandi Head.”

“Nandi’s Head,” Danny corrected.

“What?”

“It’s the Nandi’s Head,” Danny enunciated. “Not Nandi Head. There’s a possessive.”

Steve stared at him.

“Anyway, continue, Sherlock.” Danny waved his hand. There were times and times for clarification; whether or not Nandi had a possessive wasn’t really germane to the current discussion.

Eyes narrowed, Steve spun around to point down the corridor of the reception rooms to the closed Hall doors.

“Tapestry,” Danny supplied. “Tapestry with a constellation on it!”

“Yes, the Ke Kā o Makali’I constellation.” Steve nodded. “The Canoe-Bailer of Makali’i.”

“But your mom didn’t stitch the tapestry?” Danny double checked, unnecessarily, because he knew its history. A lady after the Second World War had woven the tapestry.

“No, but it’s the framework whereby she then placed the other clues.” Steve set off rapidly down the reception room corridor. Two handed, he slammed through the heavy doors straight into the Hall. He marched across the part-repaired floor, stopping before where the rent and burnt tapestry would have hung forlornly on the wood panelled wall.

“So is there a legend, you know, associated with this constellation? The Canoe thingy?” Danny asked.

“Yes.” Steve contemplated the space. “But it’s not about Hunters and Bulls. A Chief, who was frugal and wanted to destroy the land and demoralise his people, took all the food and plants into a fishing net. He threw everything into the sky to be caught on the stars. His people starved.”


“A tiny rat climbed the tallest mountain, and jumped onto a rainbow to reach the heavens. He gnawed on the net, and the food and plants fell back to the land.”

“Did the people hunt the Chief? Punish him or something?” Danny asked, because that man deserved to be punished.

“I don’t know what happened to the Chief.” Steve flicked a fond smile in Danny’s direction, and then pointed at the imaginary tapestry. Steve let his hand drop and stared glumly at the bare panels. “But I do know that Ke Kā o Makali’I holds both Orion and Taurus in its net.”

Danny could imagine the trailing burnt ends wafting dispiritedly. Its loss underscored the devastation wrought by Wo Fat. They had to get the tapestry repaired somehow.

“Hey, Babe,” Danny said, drawing his attention away from the void of tapestry space. He scratched
at the mid-afternoon bristle on his jaw as he thought. He matched the sprawling architecture of the House with the positions of the items, in his mind’s eye. Another identifiable room was on the floor above them but to their left. “The blonde doll was photographed somewhere in your Grandmother’s blue studio.”

“Yes.” Steve followed the direction of Danny’s gaze.

“Do you know where the bannerman was photographed?”

Steve already had his BlackBerry out. He studied the screen, brow furrowed. “It’s one of the old windows in the lighthouse room, my bedroom,” he said slowly. “Before I replaced them.”

With bulletproof glass, Danny recalled.

“Okay.” Danny shifted his gaze directly upwards above the Hall’s vaulted ceiling. “What about the Lakota guy?”

“The points are the same truncated version of Orion on the photograph of the coins,” Steve non-answered the question. “Basically the body of Orion structured throughout the House.”

“Really?” Danny tried picturing it in his head. He sketched the two points of Orion’s shoulders in mid-air -- maybe the Lakota doll and Nandi’s Head -- and then the edge of the bottom of the hunter’s tunic in line with his knees -- vase and tapestry. “There’s three stars in his belt, isn’t there?”

“Yes.” Steve’s glare bounced between the direction of his grandmother’s apartment and his phone. “I don’t know where the Lakota Plains--? Although, that orange background…”

“But if he’s part of the belt of stars -- coins? He’s on the same floor as your Grandmother’s rooms?” Danny suggested.

“Yes. Come on, Danny!” Steve strode off again.

Danny moved quickly. “What are you thinking, Steve?”

“There’re only six photographs of objects around the house,” Steve spoke as he strode rapidly down the corridor. “There are three stars in Orion’s belt. We find where this photo was taken, and extrapolate the position of the middle star.”

“Eh?” Danny skidded around him, and almost beat him to the stairs. “You think the middle star is where the cache is?”

“Yes!” Steve set off up the stairs, taking them three at a time.

As he dogged Steve’s heels, Danny didn’t think that it was going to be that easy.

“I couldn’t develop all of the slides,” Danny said, loudly, because Steve was moving fast. “Some were degraded. Some were just too blurry.”

Steve wasn’t listening. At the top of the stairs, he paused, clearly mapping positions in his head, before moving down the dark corridor. Steve drummed his fingers along the dark wooden panels on the right hand wall.

“Okay.” Steve stopped at a closed door on the opposite side of the corridor just along from Danny’s studio. “This is the smallest room in the House. And, well, you’ll see.”

The door swung open. Revealing--
“Man, that’s nasty,” Danny proclaimed regarding the giant amber, orange and brown circles adorning the walls. “When was this insult to style and fashion last redecorated?”

“No idea.” Steve grimaced.

On seeing the décor, Danny actually had a reasonably good idea.

“It is kinda seventies kitsch. All that’s missing is a mirrored disco ball.” Danny ran a finger across the top of a bureau. He examined his grey fingertip. An empty bookcase looked sad and forlorn propped against the wall alongside the window. Pale, sun-bleached drapes hung lankly from the grubby windows.

“Mrs. K. doesn’t come in here?” Danny asked.

“No real reason.” Steve scanned the narrow room. “When Grandmother and Ben remodelled their apartment, they should have just knocked through the wall and made this part of their bathroom. It’s too small for a resident and there’s no en suite.”

“It’s been cleaned out,” Danny observed, regarding the sole two pieces of furniture. “I guess the doll could have been propped on that bookcase.”

Steve regarded the photo on his BlackBerry. “And the background is the right colour.”

Danny craned his head to see the photo. Steve had zoomed in tightly. The pixellated background showed the lurid orange squares. The orange could be the puke orange of the circle -- the photo carefully taken to ensure that the other colours weren’t visible.

“Your mom is lucky that no one redecorated.”

“It’s Seolh, we don’t redecorate that often. Although, I doubt she expected that over twenty years would have passed.”

Danny examined the carpet. There were tiny footprints in the dust. Explorer Grace had investigated the room. Thinking, he hefted up the corner of the bookcase. The weight had driven deep dents into the pile.

“The bookcase has been here a while,” he figured.

“Maybe twenty years?” Steve said. “Okay, assuming that it hasn’t moved…. The blonde doll was where?”

“It was in your Grandmother’s apartment,” Danny told him, “I guess -- based on the ubiquitous blue. The doll was lying on a sofa or something fabric-y.”

Whirlwind Steve was out the door. Danny ambled after him.

“You know, where are Tweed and Burton?” Pondering, Danny took his time following Steve. He thought that Steve was on the right track, but they were missing some clues…. Steve stood in the centre of the open plan living area of the blue studio, hands on his hips.

“I’m surprised Mary didn’t lock the door,” Danny observed. Steve locked his apartment.

“The sofa’s probably moved,” Steve rapped out, “The bathroom is between here and the 70s disco room. This entire side of the corridor was remodelled and refurbished back in 2000. The new bathroom is the extrapolated position of the middle star. Grandmother should have surely found what
we’re looking for when they pulled up the floors and everything. But they could have stored it anywhere.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Danny mused, pushing his hands in his pockets.

“What? Why?”

“I mean.” Danny rocked back on his heels, unperturbed by Steve’s intensity. “I couldn’t develop all of the slides. They were degraded. Some were too blurry.”

Steve stared at him, processing.

“So you think,” Steve said slowly, “we should estimate where the other points are??”

“You immediately focused on Orion, ‘cos the photos show… uhm… kinda the points in the House, which are part of Orion? Yeah?”

“So I extrapolate the lost points?” Steve said intently. “Come on!”

“Baby reigns? Toddler leash?” Danny mused as Steve sprinted for the door. “Babe!”

“What?” Steve skidded to a stop.

“Where are we going?”

“My bedroom,” Steve said urgently. “That’s where the Lakota warrior -- Orion’s raised shoulder -- is based on the old window. But we’re missing where Orion’s club should be. My bedroom was extensively refurbished after me and Mare moved in. But the roof hasn’t changed.”

“The roof?”

“Come on, Danny!”

Perforce, Danny ran after him.

~*~

“What do you hope to find in your bedroom?” Danny asked, slowly turning to take in the Spartan décor of Steve’s lighthouse bedroom. The vista was amazing: verdant woods; blue ocean, and the stretch of the horizon, but there was nowhere to hide a condom let alone a twenty year old mystery.

“Back before Cates redeveloped the lantern room into my bedroom, there was a ladder and a hatch up to the lightning rod.” Craning his neck, Steve stared at the ceiling, where the fan idly turned. “There’s a little dovecote on the roof.”

“A what?”

“Kind of a bird house. It was ornamental; no birds.”

“And? You think that’s one of the coins?” Danny asked as Steve strode over to the large window overlooking the balcony below.

Steve opened the latch and swung his leg over the windowsill.

“Jesus.” Danny darted forwards and grabbed his arm. “Stop.”
Partway, Steve froze. “What?”

“You’re not climbing up on the roof,” Danny said.

“But, Danny, that dovecote is a really good hiding place.”

“You’re not climbing up on the roof,” Danny said, bluntly. “You’re not climbing on the outside of a house over four storeys high on the basis of a guess.”

Steve’s eyes widened, expression stoically hurt.

“Don’t pull that face,” Danny berated, because he simply was not going to be swayed. “No fuckin’ way.”

“Danny…”

“No. Emphatically not. You wobbled coming off a swing. You came this close--” he pinched his finger and thumb together, “--to puking your guts up when you fell over.”

“I took my vertigo meds this morning.” The muscle in Steve’s cheek flexed as he clenched his jaw.

“Why did you take your vertigo meds?” Danny pounced. “Did you feel sick?”

“No--” Steve rolled his eyes, “--I was going to be a passenger in the backseat of an unfamiliar vehicle. So, you see, I could go on the roof.”

Danny met his triumphant expression with aplomb.

“It’s not up for debate, Steven,” Danny said directly. “You know that climbing on that roof is a bad idea.”

How would it even work? The lighthouse bedroom was a wall of windows. Only Spiderman could climb up windows.

“Okay,” Steve chewed on his words, “what if I get my climbing equipment and run a line?”

“You have climbing equipment?”

“Yeah, I used to climb a lot, before, you know.” He shrugged, *faux* offhandedly.

“Or we could get Simons to climb up there with the proper equipment,” Danny proposed. “Or, you know, we could rent a cherry picker -- get a handy ladder with a gloriously protective cage extended all the way up to the roof.”

“Steve?” Joe White’s voice echoed up the spiral staircase.

“Huh?” Danny looked in askance at the stairwell in the floor. But for once he was happy for Joe White’s distracting presence.

“Did someone?” Steve pointed vaguely as if tracking an errant fly.

“Joe White’s here.” Danny jerked his head at the staircase.

“Really?” Steve stepped fully back into the bedroom and trotted over to peer down the stairwell. “Hey, Joe, what are--”
“Steve?” Danny asked, as Steve stopped dead. The line of his suddenly taut back screaming: no.

“What are you doing?” Steve asked hollowly.

“I’m sorry, son.”

“No,” Steve grated. “No.”

Joe White turned the final twist of the spiral staircase coming fully into view. He held a snub nosed handgun, pointed directly at Steve.

“Why?” Steve moved over to the left, shielding Danny from Joe. Automatically, Danny shifted over so that he could still see.

“I’m sorry, son,” White repeated.

“Stop apologising,” Steve grated.

Close on Joe White’s heels, Wo Fat climbed the staircase behind him.

~*~

#102#

“Joe, why?” Steve wasn’t to be dissuaded from his questions even in the face of guns and his mysterious nemesis, Wo Fat. “Why?”

“It was an accident. I never meant for it to go down like it did,” White said, in an unexpected non sequitur. “I never meant for Doris and John to die.”

Danny truly experienced stunned -- Joe White had just admitted to killing Steve’s parents. He had been Doris’ handler; he was Steve’s mentor; he could have been the orphaned Steve and Mary’s guardian; he had been their parents’ friend -- the betrayal was stark like a cutting knife.

“I don’t believe you.” Jerking backwards, the colour drained from Steve’s face. “My parents trusted-...”

“As entertaining as this is.” The stain of a smile that graced Wo Fat’s face spoke of nothing even remotely close to amusement. “I would prefer to retrieve the items that your mother stole from my father.”

“Oh, Geez,” Danny said, shock segueing into frustration beyond belief. “We don’t know where they are!”

The snake turned his attention on Danny. It was an altogether disturbing place to be under the terrorist’s eye.

“I find that hard to believe,” Wo Fat said. “Why are you in this room?”

*Why were they in this room?* They were following a mismatched extrapolation of incomplete clues trying to figure out where a CIA agent had hidden a stash. Why, because, Doris had been between a rock and a hard place because of this man’s father, and probably the machinations of one Joe White.

“Go to Hell,” Steve said.

“Steven--” White began.
Wo Fat shot a quelling glare at White, who subsided with an equally dark look back at the man.

“Answer the question, Mr. Williams,” Wo Fat directed.

“Why do two adults come to a bedroom when the sun is up?” Danny snorted, because he wasn’t going to answer the question. “If you don’t know, I’m not going to tell you.”

“Shut up,” White snapped -- evidently, he could only be quelled for a heartbeat. He exhaled harshly through his nose. “Put your hands on your head, Steve. If you try anything Wo Fat will shoot Danny.”

Teeth audibly grating, Steve planted his hands on his head, and glared at White as he was patted down. White divested him of his BlackBerry and a blade tucked in his sheaf strapped to his calf, and tossed both onto their crisply made bed.

“Mr. Williams, next,” Wo Fat said.

“We’re not finished yet. Give me your wrist, Steve. Your left wrist.”

It was impressive that White hadn’t spontaneously combusted into a pile of ash under Steve’s volcanic glare. White unfastened Steve’s watch and tossed it after the weapons. The GPS signalling device, Danny remembered.

“Ah ah ha.” Wo Fat waved his gun, and Danny didn’t press the button on his own Navy-issued watch.

Danny added a pile of slime over the imaginary hissing pile of ash as White patted him down -- which was an altogether creepy, shivery abuse to endure -- and divested him of his watch and phone.

“So now you’ve got us, now what?” Steve demanded.

“You were going out on the roof, Steve,” White said. “I overheard you on the staircase. You think the package is on the roof.”

“No,” Danny said. No one on the planet could make him shut up. “It could be on the roof.”

“Go on.” White waved in the direction of the open window with his handgun.

“Joe,” Steve protested.

“Joe--” Danny turned his full attention to the turncoat, beseechingly, “--Steve can’t climb out there.”

“I think that Commander McGarrett climbing up on the roof sounds like an excellent idea,” Wo Fat said. He jabbed his gun in Danny’s direction, the threat plain. “Go retrieve my father’s bankbook.”

“Danny, I can’t,” Steve said nonsensically -- I can’t risk you. I can’t let you do it? -- and he slipped through the window onto the gently sloping roof that skirted around the base of the lighthouse.

“White,” Danny growled.

“Steve, you can do this,” White said with a caring, avuncular tone that was horrible to hear.
“At least let him change his shoes,” Danny beseeched. The highly polished lace up Oxfords could not be the correct shoes to climb in by any stretch of the imagination.

“Climb, McGarrett,” Wo fat ordered. “White, keep an eye on McGarrett. Mr. Williams and I are going to watch from the balcony below.”

He gestured towards the spiral staircase, indicating for Danny to precede him.

Furious, Danny edged around the bastard, and contemplated the rim of the staircase. He could run.

“I’ll shoot you in the back.”

Teeth gritted, Danny started walking. It was insane; surely the surveillance team out back would be able to spot a bespoke black-suited Steven McGarrett scaling the side of the lighthouse room? Unless White had dismissed them, or something more permanent?

Danny picked up speed, wanting to get to the balcony. If Steve fell, he needed to be there to catch him.

Wo fat didn’t protest, simply speeding up behind him. Danny ran across the living room and tipped open the semi-circular window.

“Slowly,” Wo Fat finally ordered.

Was the ladder still unfurled to the ground? Danny glanced briefly at the balcony wall, and yes, it was still in position. He wasn’t entirely sure how he could use it, but he made a mental note. He leaned out far over the balcony, looking around the arm of the hoist, to better see the open window above. The circular lighthouse room, which had housed the giant Fresnel lens however many years ago, jutted from the House -- the skirt of tiles merging with the House-roof proper.

Above Danny, Joe White straddled the windowsill, one foot on the sloping tiles. He leaned out, precariously, hand on the window frame, to map Steve’s progress.

Steve was scaling the drainpipe that funnelled rain from the guttering that encircled the domed roof of the lighthouse. The vent at the back of his suit jacket flapped in the light breeze. Thankfully, the window that opened fully wasn’t on the North facing side, otherwise there would be a long, unforgiving, unimpeded drop all the way to the hard ground.

“Be careful,” Danny breathed.

Steve hooked an arm over the gutter and grunting, swung a leg up.

“Jesus.” Danny held his breath.

If Steve fell, hopefully, he would fall down onto the skirting roof at the base of the tower and roll onto the House roof and the angle should then funnel him over the balcony. Danny mapped trajectories and knew that catching him would be close. Another grunt and Steve pulled himself up onto the iron work. Gingerly balancing on the guttering as if it was a tightrope, Steve set a hand on the curve of the domed roof.

Danny hoped that the ironwork wasn’t rusty. He flashed a scowl at Wo Fat by his shoulder. The terrorist smirked

“If he falls you won’t get your bankbook.” Danny couldn’t believe that this was all about a mere bankbook. “What are you going to do then?”
“How’s your head for heights?” Wo Fat returned.

“You can’t make me climb up there. If Steve falls, where’s your leverage?”

“I’m sure we’d find something, Mr. Williams,” Wo Fat said confidently.

Steve scaled the domed roof on hands and toes, body close to the tiles. He moved with surety, one shift of position at a time. Steve, Danny realised, was an accomplished climber. It was something about the way that he held himself. They were so lucky it wasn’t raining because that would have made the tiles horrendously slippery.

Danny unclenched his fists, so that his nails weren’t driving into his palms. He had to be ready to catch. How did height affect Steve’s vertigo? It seemed to be mostly triggered by flipping. Each step Steve made was agonisingly slow, until finally, he reached the little, mock white-painted house on the very tip of the roof. Despite the distance, Danny could see the white of his knuckles as he clutched the delicate cornicing.

“Jesus.”

Shimmying closer, Steve stood tall and grabbed the lightning rod sticking out from the pagoda-like roof of the dovecote. Secure, he flashed a triumphant grin down at Danny.

“Idiot,” Danny berated. He emphatically did not wish for his camera.

Steve flipped out his black knife -- White had missed that one -- and wiggled it into the gap between the dollhouse roof and wall. The crack of breaking wood made Danny jump. Steve levered open the roof and peered inside.

Danny held his breath.

“There’s nothing in here,” Steve shouted, staring levelly at Wo Fat leaning out beside Danny.

Danny didn’t know whether to believe him or not. Steve’s poker face was normally anything but -- however his expression was blank.

“I don’t believe you,” Wo Fat returned loudly.

“What?” Steve canted his head to the side, questioningly. The ass was pretending to misunderstand, Danny could tell.

“You’re lying,” Wo Fat shouted.

“You’re welcome to come up and look.” Steve raised an eyebrow.

Impasse -- because how could Steve prove that there wasn’t anything squirreled away in the dovecote?

“White,” Wo Fat called, “toss up his cell phone.”

Joe White blinked at the order, and then stared at Wo Fat for a long, considering moment before ducking back into the bedroom.

“There isn’t anything in here,” Steve repeated.

“Take a photo,” Wo Fat ordered.
It did take Steve a second to parse that instruction. He glanced automatically to Danny for clarification. Danny pretended to click the button on an imaginary camera. Steve’s expression was befuddled confusion as he perched, one hand wrapped around the lightning rod.

White was edging along the windowsill, stretching out to reach the drainpipe paralleling the frame.

*Fall,* Danny breathed. But White was as accomplished and as annoyingly confident as Steve. And he also had better shoes on. He shimmied up the drainpipe, to plant an elbow in the guttering.

Steve viewed his appearance over the edge of the roof, stoically.

“Catch,” White directed, and lobbed the phone at Steve.

Steve snatched it out of the air.

“Carefully. No phone calls,” Wo Fat shouted. And Danny felt a blunt point press against the bruise on his side.

With a flourish, Steve held up the BlackBerry, little fingers extended, aiming into the housing of the dovecote. He snapped off a picture with flair.

“What’s your number?” Steve yelled, almost conversationally.

“055 587--” Wo Fat automatically started to supply.

Steve grinned. Danny could only imagine what Navy Intelligence would do with Wo Fat’s personal phone number if Steve gave it to them, assuming, of course, that they got away from the terrorist.

“I can send it to Danny’s phone,” Steve said helpfully.

White swore and started back down the drainpipe. Steve started to ass-shuffle down the domed, inclining roof. White swung back through the window and out of sight to retrieve Danny’s phone.

This was fucking hilarious, Danny ground his teeth; it was like something out of the Keystone Cops. Danny had pictures of Grace, of his family and friends, on his phone. He loathed the thought of it in White’s hands. The Navy people had to get here soon. Simons was on his way. Any delay that Steve could eke out was in their favour.

“Wo Fat?” Directly above the drainpipe, Steve rested his heels on the iron work guttering, superlatively confident in his precarious perch, phone in his hand. “Hey, just catch my phone. You can look at the photo that way.”

“Throw it carefully,” Wo Fat directed, leaning out over the balcony.

The doofus was going to do something, Danny thought.

“As Wo Fat reached out, Steve launched himself off the roof like Tarzan.

“Jesu--”

One hand on the lighthouse drain pipe, Steve leaped, and somehow the plunging descent was all controlled energy. Hitting the skirt of tiles, he dropped into a crouch, thighs bunched like springs, and surfed down onto the House roof on his ridiculously boat-like shiny shoes.
Wo Fat jerked, aborting the catching motion, swinging his gun around to shoot at Steve. Danny pile-drove his elbow deep into the terrorist’s ribs as he simultaneously slapped Wo Fat’s gun away. Wo Fat pivoted on his heel, and suddenly Danny was facing off against a demon. Hand splayed blade-like, Wo Fat went straight for Danny’s eyes. Danny boxed; he punched the fucker square on the chin -- the snap of the hit reverberated up Danny’s entire arm. Blood gushed from Wo Fat’s mouth like a squished red strawberry and he dropped to his knees.

Whooping, Steve was in the air above Danny, swinging out on the hoist chain, way out over the balcony, suspended far over the unforgivingly hard ground far below.

“Holy Shit!” Danny couldn’t believe his idiot.

There was a crack of a shot.

“White, you bastard!” Danny yelled, as Steve continued his wide swinging circle.

“Behind you!” Steve warned.

Danny turned and only just avoided the jab of Wo Fat’s needle sharp stiletto.

Steve swung right over the top of the balcony balustrade, a wild grin on his face, as he boot-kicked Wo Fat firmly in the centre of his chest with both feet. Propelled backwards, the terrorist smacked into the propped open window frame. Glass shattered as the window dropped shut, and, Wo Fat fell, his fall broken by the black plastic wrapped bag of sheets. It exploded with a noisome, foul stench.

Momentum sent Steve across the balcony floor, half-sliding on his smooth soled shoes. Slapping his hands against the fractured frame, he managed not to end up face first into the remaining glass.

Shots spat as White tried and failed to hit them, stymied by the angle.

“Come on, Danny.” Steve knocked his elbow against a shard of glass that was still in the frame, clearing a passage. As he ducked through the opening, he caught Danny’s shoulder and pulled him into the living room.

“What are we doing?” Danny asked, avoiding another glass shard by a fraction of an inch.

“Running.” Steve glanced towards his office, frustrated, but pushed Danny towards the open doorway to the hairpin staircase and escape. “I don’t have a gun.”

Danny -- because at times his mind was a very strange place -- realised that it was unfortunate that Steve didn’t take handguns to funerals. Footsteps sounded loud above their heads.

White was in pursuit.

~*~

#103#

“Run.”

“I’m running,” Danny snapped as he sprinted down the corridor. Steve’s concern -- no, his fear -- was palpable. They ran from Joe White. Danny couldn’t imagine Steve running from anyone, but he ran from White, putting as much distance between them as possible.

They clattered down the foyer staircase, but Steve caught Danny’s shoulder before he could head for the front door.
“Too open.”

The pantry was their destination, or more accurately, the cold pantry behind the first pantry. Steve slammed shut the door, and reached for the shelving. Knowing this trick, Danny loaned a hand, hauling the weight across the stone slabs to barricade the door. The abrupt shift to cold froze the sweat trickling down his back, chillingly.

“Why the running?” Danny demanded.

“Joe White is dangerous. He plays -- fuck it -- the amiable, inscrutable helper so very, very well. But he was my trainer during BUD/S and then during commando training. He is a CIA agent. He’s--”

Steve grimaced, “--lethal.”

“So what are we doing?” Danny glanced, speakingly, at the trapdoor in the floor leading to the catacombs.

Steve nodded, following Danny’s thoughts. “I don’t know what brought him to this moment. But he’s laid all his cards on the table. If he doesn’t kill us, he’s dead.”

Practically, Danny yanked open the trapdoor holding it open for Steve. “I’m guessing that there’s a backdoor? A secret backdoor.”

“What can I say? The family is paranoid.” Steve clattered down the steep wooden steps. Halfway down, he looked up at Danny, a white grinning face in the darkness. “Come on.”

The door of the pantry rocked. What did White have? A bazooka? Holding the trapdoor up, Danny angled around onto the steps, letting it descend on his head as he followed Steve.

“This is so Enid Blyton. Seriously, Steve, secret passages.” It was pitch black; Danny had to fill the blankness with words.

“It’s hardly surprising. You know that there’s a door into the museum. They’re not actually secret passages.” Steve clicked a switch and a naked bulb flared to life illuminating walls of the rough hewn room, the cluttered shelving, and the dark voids of tunnels leading off north, south and west. “You knew that the catacombs exist.”

“White knows your family.” Danny jumped the final step to Steve’s side. “Does he know about this place?”


“Oh?” Danny glanced up at the closed trapdoor. There was a heavy bolt that could be slid into position. He didn’t wait for direction, scurrying back up a handful of stairs so that he could slide the lock into position. “Really? Because family? Mary?”

“Dad could have told mom, but mom--” Steve stopped frustrated. He grabbed a humongous handheld flashlight off the second stack of shelving. Clicking it on, its shaft of light was blindingly bright. “My mom was my mom. But she didn’t get on with grandmother. They were polite.”

As he picked his way back down the steps, Danny winced, and not just from the flare of the six million candle spotlight. Searching, Steve rooted through the shelving casting boxes aside to fall to the hard packed floor.

“Even if we had phones we wouldn’t be able to get a signal.” Danny groused. “White has my phone.”
“Solid rock above our heads.” Steve glanced over his shoulder as he hunted through the contents of a red crate. “There’s nothing that Joe can do with your phone.”

“All my contacts are on that phone. Pictures of Grace are on that phone.”

“We’ll get it back. You knew immediately that it was only a distraction.” Steve raised an eyebrow, and smiled.

“True. An actor you are not,” Danny mocked. “What are you looking for?”

“This.” Steve turned and pressed what could only be described as a large wooden comma into Danny’s hand.

“What?” Danny hefted its substantial weight. The edge of the dark-red wood blade was viciously curved and dotted with what appeared to be shark’s teeth. “You can’t expect me to use this? Is it real?”

“It’s a reproduction throwing axe,” Steve said, nostrils flaring, “You can use it. It’s not museum worthy although it is made out of Koa wood.”

“Seriously, you’re focused on the fact that it’s not authentic?” Danny said, because Steve’s priorities were a little screwed.

“It’s a very good reproduction. I’ve seen you throw. You’re good.”

Danny blinked. “Thank you?” he managed.

Steve’s jet black knife appeared in his hand and he flipped it over his long fingers, and then, as if by magic it disappeared.

“Was there anything in the dovecote?” Danny asked, watching the practised trick. Steve had obviously learned misdirection and magic at his mother’s knee.

“Nah.” Steve scrunched his nose up. “I thought that it was a good place, though.”

“Yeah, but you don’t hide treasure in a club.” Danny struck a pose just like Orion, using his own Koa wood club.

Steve absorbed that with a blank expression.

“Okay, we have to move,” Steve finally said. Glowering, even as he strode toward the dark maw of Chin’s wine cellar, he led the way. “If Mom did know about this priest’s hole, she might have told Joe.”

Danny thought that it was highly likely that Mrs. McGarrett had known about the catacombs. She didn’t come across as a person that didn’t know as much as conceivably possible about her environment. The question was would she have told Joe White.

There was a light switch on the wall that was the boundary of the wine cellar. But when Steve slapped it, the light behind them switched off. Dual control, Danny guessed, because he doubted that Chin wandered around his celebration of wine by the light of a silvery flashlight. The lightsabre bright light of the spotlight illuminated an obscene amount of wine. Stack after stack of dusty bottles lined the corridor that they jogged along. A subterranean chill settled into Danny’s bones.

“Is Chin an alcoholic?”
Steve huffed out a laugh.

“They’re an investment. They’re part of the estate,” Steve said.

“How much are you fucking worth?” Danny asked crassly.

“Why? You jealous?”

Danny batted Steve’s shoulder with the back of his hand.

“Seriously, this isn’t the time.” Steve made a sharp left hand turn and Danny stumbled, caught himself and eyed the narrower corridor. “Focus.”

“Well, I want to know.” Danny needed the distraction from the low looming ceiling. The flashlight picked up ancient cabling running along the roof and the occasional dusty, bare light bulb.

“You know that I’m well off.” Steve caught Danny’s hand and tugged him along. It was so dark that the blackness ate the light apart from the core of the intense beam. “I’m more of a caretaker, though. Seriously, not the time.”

Little dark nooks beckoned as they trotted on.

“What is this? A lava tube?” Danny asked, and flinched as Steve swung the light into his face.

“Didn’t get that?”

“Is this a lava tube?”

“No. Wrong sort of rock. I dunno, geology isn’t my thing.” Steve continued to jog, pulling Danny along. “They were used during the Second World War by the Navy to store munitions and supplies in case of invasion when the House was a hospital. They were probably important to the native Hawaiians; but we’ve never found any evidence of inhabitation. The network riddles the peninsula.”

“So if they were used during the Second World War, there are probably maps and things,” Danny pointed out, moving to jog at Steve’s side instead of being towed. “Where are we coming out? Because, you know, there is a chance that White will be waiting for us.”

“Well, we’ve got a thirty three point three percent chance of getting caught because there are three exits.” Steve made a ninety degree turn into a nook and shone his light at the ceiling. “We’re going to come out in the outhouse where Chin stores his gardening equipment.”

Carved into the ceiling was a tunnel, and bolted into the wall was a rusty ladder. At the top, Danny could see the slats of a wooden door.

“Hold,” Steve said, and pushed the spotlight into Danny’s hands. Stretching up, he unhooked the bottom part of the ladder and lowered the extension to the floor. “I’ll go first.”

“There’s a surprise,” Danny said waspishly.

Steve cocked his head to the side, perplexed, but before Danny could elaborate, he was squirreling up the ladder. At the top, he carefully drew back the heavy dual bolts and opened the solid trapdoor an inch. Danny held his breath, because if White, or an accomplice, was standing by the exit, they were fucked.

Steve threw back the trapdoor and burst through like a jack-in-the-box. The flap of his coattails disappeared. Steve could move fast. Danny started climbing.
“It’s clear.” Steve bobbed back into view, and immediately jerked back so he didn’t head-butt Danny.

“Obviously.” Danny was one rung from the top of the ladder. He wasn’t waiting at the bottom.

Steve loaned him an unnecessary hand. A fusty smell tickled Danny’s nose. The outhouse was evidently the hub of Chin’s plots; garden tools hanging off racks on one wall, Mrs. K’s wooden crates stacked neatly, and high shelving -- the dad in Danny noted -- with brightly coloured containers festooned with information labels. There was even a riding mower. Danny dumped the heavy flashlight on the seat.

Steve eyed the tools and selected a hand axe, testing its weight and balance with a thoroughly creepy spinning toss.

“Steven,” Danny chastised.

“What?” He yanked off the protective cover over the blade, and dropped it to the floor.

“So what’s the plan?” Danny asked, and crossed to the small window to peer out across the gardens. He took in the maze of hedges and bushes that Chin maintained. The back of the House loomed. White could be anywhere. It was a nightmarish form of hide-and-seek.

“Stay here,” Steve directed. “Stay safe.”

“What? Idiot!” Danny yelled, because Steve was already out the door and heading towards the House, skirting the deeply dark sun thrown shadows of bushes and hedges. Danny bit down on his clenched fist for a millisecond and growled. “You never learn, you infuriating--”

Danny pelted after him, because, really, it went without saying.

*He’s probably going to say that he has a tactical advantage now because he’s put some distance between us and White,* Danny groused inwardly.

Danny chanced running, since, while Steve was moving fast, he was trying to keep to the cover of the trees and bushes. The gravel path crunched loudly under Danny’s feet.

Steve flicked a glance over his shoulder, and skidded to a stop.

“How?” Danny?”

“We’re not doing this again, Steven.” Danny caught Steve’s elbow, dragging him deep into the protection of a dense stand of bougainvillea and plumeria.

“Danny, you should have stayed in the shed.” Steve bent a twig out of his face, grimacing.

“What’s the plan?” Danny ignored Steve’s words. “First we were running, but now we’re hunting?”

“I told you to stay in the shed,” Steve gritted.

“Like that was ever going to happen,” Danny said.

“It’s safer.” Steve could be a little dogmatic.

“Apart from the gaping trapdoor in the floor that locks on the inside, which White could come through?”
Steve’s expression blanked.

“And that’s beside the point, Babe,” Danny continued vehemently, “because I’m your backup!”

Danny emphasised his very relevant and important points poking Steve hard in the centre of his chest. Steve, for once, let it happen as he processed the rare horror of making a mistake.

“Shush.” Steve suddenly breathed, barely perceptible, but it was a harsh order.

Danny wasn’t moving an iota, because Steve had frozen deathly still. Danny hoped that their colourful camouflage concealed them. Steve’s grip was iron-tight on Danny’s forearm. View impeded by the dense shrubbery, Danny could make out White stalking along the side of the House scanning the woods.

*He knows that we’re out here.*

*He knows that Steve would never leave.*

White stopped by the unfurled ladder and gave it a hard yank. It rocked but remained firmly attached. He glanced at his wrist watch and scowled. Time, Danny guessed, was running out. Simons was now probably ten to fifteen minutes behind them. They hadn’t had a chance to trigger any alarms on the race out of the House. Danny angled his wrist towards Steve and waggled his finger over an imaginary watch face, indicating the passage of time.

Steve shrugged.

They couldn’t say anything; White was still considering the stretch of gardens and woods. If only they had learnt sign language.

Grimacing, White stalked off, passing the boarded up hall doors and angling along the side of the House.

“Plan?” Danny grated.

“I’m going up the ladder to get to my weapons.”

“That is a stupid plan,” Danny responded.

“We don’t have time to argue, Danny,” Steve said. “Work your way through the undergrowth, find a rock, and break some windows. The alarm is wired to the ground floor windows, even when it’s in latent mode. Triggering it will bring help more quickly.”

Effectively ending their argument, Steve launched himself out of the dubious protection of the bushes and sprinted towards the ladder. Danny gave himself a moment to indulge in a delightful fantasy of wringing Steve’s neck.

Windows, which windows, Danny wondered. The conservatory windows were old glass, likely easily broken, but he didn’t think that all of the tiny windows had the tiny microchip shock sensors placed on every pane of glass. But the larger windows of the reception rooms had definitely been integrated into the security network. Danny knew from many years of street baseball that windows could be surprisingly resilient to blows. Chin’s loamy, carefully maintained earth was free from handy stones.

Impressively, Steve was already nearly halfway up the ladder, practically running up it.
Danny hefted his axe, and figured that a good-sized stone was a better bet. He hooked the axe on his belt and considered his options. The passage of the fire trucks over a month ago to deal with the Hall fire had damaged Chin’s carefully maintained lawns, but they had also taken out the edge of a small wall and a decorative stone urn. The bits and pieces were stacked up in a neat pile by the steps leading to the Hall, waiting for repair.

“Perfect.” Danny raced across the grass, skidding to a stop by the stones. They would easily break more than a few windows.

Steve was at the top of the balcony, swinging a leg over the balustrade. Danny waved his hands vigorously, gathering Steve’s attention like a bee to honey.

‘What?’ Steve mouthed. Stay in the cover! He pointed, helpfully, back to the trees.

Danny held his hands up, demanding a moment. He tapped at his chest with his finger, and then carefully drew a giant heart in midair, before pointing directly up at Steve.

Steve froze, stunned for a heartbeat and then he smiled, wide and incandescent even from over forty feet. He deliberately crossed his clenched fists over his heart, and then flicked his index finger at Danny.

*I love you.*

Danny wished he knew the sign for goof.

Steve disappeared out of sight.

Still smiling, Danny picked up a good-sized, round chunk of masonry, set his feet shoulder width apart, at a slight angle to the impressively large window. A small part of him was really looking forward to this…. He wound backward, raising his left foot off the grass. Pushing off with his right back foot he powered forwards, bringing his hips into the action, and whipped the stone straight at the window.

It shattered.

An alarm peeled.

And then Danny did what every kid had done since the dawn of time -- he bolted.

~*~

#104#

He would have preferred to be climbing the ladder with Steve -- the idiot -- but instead, he was sprinting back into the maze of Chin’s gardens. Danny glanced over his shoulder, wondering if Wo Fat was still lying on the balcony floor. Distracted, he almost stumbled; straightening, he continued heading for cover.

Skidding into the protection of one of Seolh’s ubiquitous maze-like hedges, he pondered his next step. White had clearly got rid of Tweed and Burton somehow. Hopefully, not permanently. But there were also the guys manning the watching post somewhere in the depths of the woods. Assuming that they had been (hopefully) sent for coffee, their equipment might just be lying around. Steve had said something about following a wall and a copse of trees. Danny really hadn’t been in the woods other than on the peninsula; he was a child of cities -- hard asphalt interspersed by skyscrapers rather than rainforests and mosquitoes.
Thinking, he moved off -- skirting the protection of the large hedge. The watchers had to have a good view of the House, so they had to be close by, maybe just on the edge of the boundary of Chin’s gardens and the denser wood beyond.

He found a flimsy gazebo cradled in the middle of a stand of ‘ulu branches. The side wall of the gazebo, which was yet to be engulfed by the ‘ulu, was artfully hung with netting festooned with mock leaves and branches. Danny considered it ruefully. The camouflage netting with the pale pink cornicing and the spiral meringue-like roof was altogether incongruous. It actually stood out more.

It was recently abandoned: a flask, the lid unscrewed; a half-filled plastic mug; a scrunched up granola bar wrapper, and a screensaver whirring laptop sat on a picnic table. An enormous telescope, which could probably scan features on Jupiter, was pointing directly at the House. There was a boxy camera that had a humongously wide lens with a short housing bolted to a heavy tripod. The set up was not familiar to Danny. The lens would be able to capture a lot of light. Heat sensitive night camera and video, he guessed, noticing the cable that led from the camera to the laptop.

Danny peeked through the telescope, hoping to spot Steve or White. It was pointed straight at Steve’s lighthouse bedroom -- had the Navy Peeping Toms been getting an eyeful? The angle wasn’t great, or it was okay, depending on your perspective. He noted that they really could only see the top part of the bedroom, the cant of the far wall, ceiling and fan.

Danny did, however, have a good memory of sitting on Steve’s face enjoying himself thoroughly.

Clearly, Steve’s bedroom was the entertainment de jour for the watchers.

“Oh, well.” Pragmatically, there wasn’t anything he could do about it, and he wasn’t ashamed. If they had video and it ended up on You Tube he’d sue their asses off.

“Actually?” Danny turned to the laptop. There weren’t any useful guns lying about, or walkie talkies, but the laptop had to have wireless or something….

Danny dumped his reproduction axe on the table and leaned over to stroke the computer touch pad. The screensaver switched off and a locked screen icon appeared.

“Damn.” The watchers hadn’t helpfully left their computer unlocked.

Danny pondered -- tapping his fingers on the touch pad -- inadvertently, selecting ‘change user’. He was greeted by a depauperate screen, but there was a Firefox icon.

“Nothing ventured; nothing gained.” It was a Navy computer, maybe he could email someone.

“Skype!” Inspiration struck. However, his only Skype contacts were his mom and dad, and Grace. Was there a Navy version of Skype?

“Shit.” He bemoaned his lack of computer skills.

He tapped on each tiny icon in the bottom right corner of the screen one after another. It triggered a multitude of programmes, flaring over the screen like fireworks. But the Navy computer was evidently a higher specification than the one that he was borrowing off Toast.

And then something that very much looked like Skype communicator with a contact list appeared on top of what could be a power manager programme judging by the picture of a battery.

Danny scanned the short list of contacts and selected J-TAC@cnic.nav.mil because Steve spent most of his time down at the J-TAC at the Base.
Danny typed fast and hit send.

He paused, holding his breath, but there was no response.

Yes! Danny exulted at the response, and leaned back over the keyboard and pigeon-tapped at the keys.

The text on the bottom of the screen indicated that J-TAC was writing a message -- or an essay judging by the time that they were taking.

Danny hit return three times. It didn’t really help, but it made him feel better.

Whoever was writing the message paused. Danny resisted the temptation to drop kick the laptop out of the gazebo.

Keeping an eye on the laptop screen and the dissertation that J-TAC was composing, Danny returned to the telescope, scanning what he could see of the House and grounds.

“Williams.”

Danny froze; White’s voice unmistakable. Lifting his hands up, Danny slowly turned away from the telescope.

White stood in the curtained doorway of the gazebo. He didn’t even point his weapon at Danny, but he held the short, boxy machine gun across his chest, an extended finger resting idly near the trigger. Danny kept his hands up.

“White.” Danny swallowed. “Did you kill Tweed and Burton?”

“What? No. I sent them away.”

“Well, that’s one thing. Hopefully, not very far.” Danny managed not to fling his hand out in the direction of the House. “You know, the alarm is still going off. I’ve been chatting with the J-TAC guys. You shouldn’t be here. You should be running.”

“Shut up.” White grated out.

“Do you want to be caught?” Danny continued. “I mean, I guess the guilt must be driving you insane. Why did you do it?”

“Do you ever shut up?”
“Not generally, no,” Danny admitted. “Steve’s hunting you, and he’s probably going to kill you with his teeth.”

White sighed heavily. “I guess I need a hostage then.”

“What?”

“Walk ahead of me.” White gestured with the barrel of his threatening machine gun. “Put your hands on your head.”

Slowly, maybe a little insolently, Danny set his hands on his head as he skirted around White, giving him the widest berth possible through the curtained doorway. It didn’t help; White wrapped a heavy hand around Danny’s neck as he passed.

“Stay close.” A hard, blunt point jabbed in Danny’s armpit.

White forced him into a marching trot towards the workshops.

“What are the clues?” White said, surprising Danny.

“What?” Ignoring the gun half pushed into his armpit, Danny stopped and turned. “What? Oh. My. Fucking. God! Doris McGarrett put those clues together for you in case anything happened. You were her back-up. You were her support network. You were her children’s godfather.”

Danny stepped back, repulsed.

“But she sorted it out, didn’t she, back in 1988?” Danny continued -- it was all coming together like a falling set of Dominos. “So she didn’t need to give you the key…. But she kept the insurance, ‘cos how was she going to give it back to Wo Fat’s Dad -- he was dead? And you know, insurance and emergency stashes are useful to have, especially in your line of work. You killed Doris and John McGarrett for what? A bankbook? Money? You’re a reprehensible, out-and-out, fucking, miserable creep.”

“Shut up!” White grabbed Danny’s collar and twisted it hard, shaking. “They weren’t supposed to die. It was a snatch and grab. I was going to find out where she had hidden Wo Yongfu’s Swiss Bank account records. But the idiots that I had hired fucked it up. And it was lost. I did my best to look after Steve and Mary.”

“Oh, good for you,” Danny said sarcastically. “You were going to kidnap the entire family and threaten thirteen year old Steve and nine year old Mary to get Doris to give up a stash of money. You hired Asian guys; they were going to pretend to be Triad people.”

“Shut up.” White twisted Danny’s collar a strangling notch, and frogmarched him down the wide paved path to the workshops. An unfamiliar rusty old Hummer, White’s own car, Danny guessed, was parked by Kono’s beat-up jeep and Chin’s Harley Davidson. White and Wo Fat had evidently thought that they had free range of the House for the duration of the funeral. White must have been looking for the clues that he guessed that they had found. A child would have been able to figure out that they were hiding something. Steve was as unsubtle as a brick, and he was writing reports for Commander Archer. White wanted the clues he was sure that he could decipher. The architect’s table in Steve’s workroom had copies of the photographs and some of the actual items laid out for all and sundry (assuming that they were in Steve’s garret) to see.

“Stop dawdling,” White remonstrated, as Danny scuffled his feet against the paved cobbles.

The reverberating peal of sirens sounded in the distance. Police, Navy, everyone descending on
Seolh. Danny smiled, because White deserved everything that he was going to get direct in the face. Galvanised, White forced him up a set of stone steps and across the open grassy area to the parked cars.

The question was: where was Steve?

“You drive,” White ordered as he pushed Danny bruisingly hard against the driver’s door of the Hummer.

“What?”

“So I can shoot you easily. In.” White helpfully prodded Danny with his gun.

Growling, Danny slid into the driver’s seat, and automatically pulled on the seatbelt. White clambered in behind him, and leaned over the front seat.

“If you try anything, I’m going to shoot the first car that I see, regardless of who is in it. They’re going to be dead. Civilians, police, I don’t care.”

The key was still in the ignition. Teeth gritted, Danny turned it, and the Hummer engine roared.

“I bet you don’t get good gas mileage,” Danny noted.

“Move.” There was a sharp knock to the back of Danny’s head, which made his ears ring.

Grimacing, Danny hauled on the wheel, directing the large vehicle in a wide circle. He felt like he was driving a tank. This monstrosity could probably drive straight over the top of any car it felt like. He missed the responsiveness of his Camaro.

He could only hope that Simons in the limousine would turn into the House’s drive, blocking the gates as gravel crushed under the tyres of the truck. But they passed through the open wrought iron gates without incident, and turned onto Heulu Drive.

At the head of the long road a white blue-striped police car, sirens flashing, sped past. Danny groused inwardly. Two seconds too late, he thought.

A cold, hard point pressed at the base of Danny’s skull. A freezing shiver like a million centipedes built of needle points jabbed its way up and down Danny’s spine. There was a gun sitting between the two tendons down the back of his neck, neatly pressing against the base of his skull.

The police car drove straight past the Hummer, with a scream of sound, but continued past the House’s open gates onto another emergency. Frustrated, Danny clenched his teeth. He heard White sigh in relief, and the horrible pressure against the base of his skull moved away.

Kind of frozen -- luckily the road was straight -- Danny blanked for an incomprehensible moment. The rules-of-the-road instincts took over. The mirrors weren’t right; set for the taller White. Danny reached up to tweak the rear-view mirror.

“Careful,” White snapped.

“Geez, I’m just shifting the mirrors.”

And, unmistakably, he saw Steve turn out through the gates on Chin’s Harley.

Oh, My God. Danny’s stomach clenched. Steve had said that he couldn’t use Chin’s bike, implying that it was because of his balance issues. Yet, there he was: black suited, hair wind ruffled, and his
ostentatiously expensive Ray Bans perched on his nose, shadowing them. Steve had managed climbing on the roof and his stupid acrobatics. Danny could only hope that the medication and his clearly improved health would mean that he wouldn’t end up wrapped around a lamppost, because the idiot wasn’t wearing a helmet.

Danny concentrated on driving, because he couldn’t look at Steve. He couldn’t telegraph to White that they were being followed.

~*~

#105#

Heulu Drive was long and straight, running north-south at a right angle to the peninsula. The suburb was home to large, expensive estates. High walls protecting large residences lined the road, which meant that no one registered their passage, but neither did White have anyone lined up in his sights. There was the sound of sirens reverberating, but judging from the racing police car earlier, people were dealing with some sort of emergency elsewhere. Danny wouldn’t have put it past Wo Fat to have orchestrated a diversion.

“So what’s the plan?” Danny asked, because, one, he wanted to know and, two, it distracted White from spotting Steve.

“Just drive where I tell you to,” White said uncompromisingly.

“Fine.”

At the junction ahead a recognisably heavy black limousine turned onto the wide road.

Yes, Danny exulted.

Simons was in the front passenger seat with the burly chauffeur, his face half obscured by the pulled down sun-visor. Danny saw Simons’ jaw drop as he leaned forwards and clearly spotted Danny at the helm of the Hummer.

The limo was built like a brick shit house; designed to protect the passengers from everything up to, and probably including, rocket launchers. For a fraction of a heartbeat, Danny entertained the idea of smacking the Hummer into the limousine.

White swore viciously.

Simons beat Danny to the punch, reaching across the driver to yank hard down on the limo’s steering wheel. The long, heavy vehicle kangarooed directly into the Hummer’s path.

Danny saw the edge of the barrel of White’s gun in the corner of his eye.

Instinctively, Danny swerved to avoid the limousine. The Hummer was as responsive as a tank. The limousine smacked them sideways like a Pacific Rim Jæger slamming down into a Kaiju monster. There was a telephone post in front of them, and then there wasn’t a telephone post in front of them. The Hummer juddered to an abrupt, bone-jarring stop and White tumbled back in his seat. But Danny was held safe by his seatbelt. Steam, hissing loudly, gushed from the crumpled hood.

Freeing the seatbelt, Danny scrambled across the front passenger seat, away from the crumple zone on the driver’s side, intent on escape.

He got halfway out of the door, foot on the sidewalk.
“Freeze!” White ordered, tersely.

Hanging on the door frame, Danny pivoted on one foot. White was also halfway out the Hummer. The backseat window was rolled down and White had him in his sights. The assault rifle would shred him into pieces at such close range. The face above the seemingly abyssal black hole of the muzzle was zombie pale.

“Damn,” White said hollowly.

Simons was eeling around the far side of the limousine, keeping low but edging towards them with surety. He was on the opposite side to Danny, trying to find the best angle between the obstruction of the heavy roll cage of the Hummer and the heft of the limo piled into the vehicle.

Directly behind them, Steve pulled up kitty corner to the back of the Hummer and simply abandoned the motorcycle. He let it crash down on the tarmac, as he vaulted aside. He held a handgun that seemed large in his gigantic clenched hands. Taking account of absolutely no cover, he advanced forwards, eyes wide.

“Stand down, White!” Steve rapped.

Despair flared in White’s eyes; penned in by advancing SEALs -- Simons to the left and Steve behind him. Danny was close enough to feel the slow, deliberate exhale of breath that White blew out, as he lifted his machine gun up.

“No!” Danny protested, seeing impending death in White’s eyes.

But it wasn’t his own death that Danny saw.

White swung his lethal gun around, angling it tight against his chest, the stubby barrel dug under his chin.

“Holy!” Danny startled.

A shot -- a simple sharp, horribly loud shot -- and White slumped.

Horrified, Danny tried to make sense of what he was seeing, but his brain refused to engage. There was no blood and gore and brain matter splattered over the ceiling of the Hummer. White had just slumped.

Peculiarly detached from the scene before him, Danny watched Steve dart forwards and reach into the backseat. He caught White’s arm and dragged him bodily off the backseat and into the gutter between road and sidewalk.

Blood stained White’s right side, turning his light grey t-shirt into a horror movie.

Steve, Danny realised, had shot White.

Steve stood over his ex-commanding officer, face devoid of expression. White, at his feet, gasped in pain, eyes shut. There was a puddle forming under White. Danny flashed on Governor Jameson lying on a highway, her hair fanned out, as her life started to bleed away. The clearness of the recall was as stark as a migraine.

“You okay, Danny?” Steve asked.

“Yes,” Danny managed, matching Steve’s equanimity.
Simons angled around Steve, crouching to divest White of his weapon. And then pushing one hand under White’s shoulder, the SEAL half-knelt on White, planting pressure directly on his chest.

“You shot White in the back,” Danny blurted.

“It was necessary,” Steve said blandly. “And to be accurate it was the back of his shoulder.”

“I’ve got EMTs coming in less than two,” the chauffeur announced, a cell phone plastered to his ear.

Judging by the echoing and resounding sirens, a thousand police cars, SWAT response units, ambulances, and Navy personnel were finally descending. A boxy emergency vehicle, flanked by a police car, raced down Heulu Drive, blue lights flashing.

“It’s just a shoulder wound,” Danny said, inanely, watching the puddle of blood growing under White’s shoulder.

Simons was muttering under his breath as he struggled to stem the flow of blood. The ambulance and police car both stopped, double parking by the next telephone post down.

“There’s a surprising amount of blood vessels and complicated joints and muscles in a person’s shoulder,” Steve said clinically. Chin tilted up, he viewed White lying in the gutter as if the man was a complete stranger. “It’s not like on television.”

“Clear? Is it clear?” the cop called out from behind the protection of his car door. Yet another gun was pointing at Danny, he was getting a little sick of it.

“It’s clear.” The chauffeur held up a wallet folder with some kind of identification up for the policeman.

“Guys, you’re good to go.” The cop waved to the paramedics poised beside the ambulance. They barrelled forwards as if reacting to a sprinter’s starting pistol.

“He’s a dangerous criminal,” Steve said tersely, as the pair seemingly teleported beside them. “You need to secure his hands.”

“Out the way, sir, please.” The leading paramedic said to Simons. Belatedly, Danny realised that it was Lori under the peak of that EMT baseball cap. Max flashed the briefest of smiles at them, before kneeling opposite his trainer over White’s body.

Simons stood up and stepped aside, holding his dripping red hands before him. Danny watched a burgeoning drop elongate and splash down onto the sidewalk. Simons’ left knee was bloodstained all the way to the toe of his black shoe.

“That’s a lot of blood,” Danny noted.

It didn’t look like White was going anywhere -- shock or unconsciousness or, perhaps, resignation silencing the man. But Simons stood close by as the paramedics worked, his gun held down by his hip, primed.

There was a morass of activity around them, more cops and a couple of tan uniform-dressed Navy guys, momentarily held back by some sort of ephemeral barrier that Danny could not make out. Belatedly, he realised that he was in the way. Danny unpeeled his fingers from the Hummer door frame, and put another step between him and the drama.

“Update, Commander?” Simons asked, surprisingly. Danny thought that he was more in the loop.
“White’s working with Wo Fat.” The words catalysed Steve. “We have to get back to the House. Wo Fat is still at large. Come on, Danny.”

“What?”

Without a second glance at White, Steve pivoted on his heel and strode back to the Harley, flat down on the road. The wing mirror was broken. Danny crossed his fingers and hoped that this was not the start of seven years bad luck.

“Chin’s gonna kill you.”

“I’ll buy him a new one.” Grunting, Steve worked on lifting the bike. Danny squatted and loaned a hand, putting his back into moving the heavy weight. “You sure you’re all right, Danny?”

“I’ll probably have a nervous breakdown later this evening, but, you know, the adrenalin is about to make me levitate. What are we doing?” The bike weighed a ton. Working together they got it upright.

“I told you, we’ve got to go back to the House.” Steve swung his leg over the bike. “Wo Fat wasn’t on the balcony when I got back up to my loft.”

It wasn’t really the time to find it hot, but it was certainly hot. Danny clambered on behind him and wrapped his arms around Steve’s narrow waist.

“Follow us, Simons.” Steve revved the engine.

~*~

The wind ruffling his hair was exhilarating. Danny knew that they weren’t going that fast, but he understood the thrill of riding without a helmet. Steve had gunned the engine, zipping along the road, and then -- typically -- needed to decelerate practically immediately given the short distance back to the House. Danny leaned into Steve’s back as they turned onto the drive.

The crunch of the pebbly drive was strangely satisfying.

“So Wo Fat wasn’t on the balcony?” Danny said loudly into Steve’s ear.

“No. There was blood but not a lot. I don’t know where he went.” Steve angled around the House to pull up beside Kono’s jeep by the workshops.

“Did he come with White?” Danny nodded at the familiar vehicles.

“What?” Steve kicked down the foot stand and, standing akimbo, held the bike steady, allowing Danny to climb off first.

“Where’s Wo Fat’s car?” Danny came around the bike into Steve’s line of sight. He flicked his fingers at Kono’s jeep, indicating that there were no unfamiliar cars on the premises.

“I can’t imagine White giving Wo Fat a lift. But then again, I could never have imagined White being in cahoots with Wo Fat. Why the hell did White work with Wo Fat?” Steve finished plaintively, demanding answers that no one could give.

“Because…. Because he was going to give the bankbook to Wo Fat?” Danny shrugged, because he only had guesses.

“That doesn’t make sense.” Steve remained sitting on the bike, deliberation wrought in every tense
line around his eyes behind his Ray Bans.

“Maybe the bankbook with the accounts needs Wo Fat with, I dunno, his birth certificate to get the money?” Danny offered. “I don’t know how Swiss Bank accounts work. Will it be linked to the Fat Family? I mean the Wo Family? White couldn’t use the accounts?”

“Depends on the bank account set up, but….” Steve’s words ebbed.

“Yeah, what are you thinking?” Danny asked, as he turned to scan the House. Weirdly, it seemed as if the old world spires and balconies and cornicing were looming, as if the House held a threat. The House had never been anything other than welcoming. Was Wo Fat scurrying in the wainscoting? They needed to make sure that Wo Fat wasn’t contaminating their home.

“If that was the case, Wo Fat wouldn’t have kept the contents of the stash secret. He would have got Kaye or Hesse to come and find the stuff. Wo Fat has never wanted his people to know what he’s after,” Steve said thinking out loud, breaking Danny’s mad thoughts. “That’s been obvious since the beginning. It’s very valuable to him. Something which White could sell to him, ransom? Or maybe swap for a way off the islands?”

“Needed some heavies to help him?” Danny knew that that idea was nonsensical because he guessed that White could get heavies anywhere.

“I still don’t get why he worked with Wo Fat,” Steve repeated. He pulled off his sunglasses and rubbed a large hand over his face.

“Because….” Danny tugged momentarily on his bottom lip, thinking. “The stash has to contain more than just a bankbook and your dad and Mary’s passports. The item, not the bankbook, is only valuable to Wo Fat. When I met Archer -- when he came to the House after the Hesse Brothers attacked -- it was obvious that Archer didn’t trust White. He’d sidelined White, didn’t let him stay with us, gave us Simons instead. And didn’t Archer send White away months ago and take over the P-One case?”

“I thought that it was more about White not wanting to talk to me. You know, making up a mission,” Steve said. “But if he was trying to figure out where mom’s stash was, he wouldn’t have left. He would have needed our help to find the stash.”

“Shit,” Danny swore. “Sorry, Steve, yeah, that’s exactly what White was up to. He broke into the House today just to see the clues. Your mom created them for him. I figured that out.”

“What?” Steve gazed at Danny, face crumpling.

Danny wanted to hug the stuffing out of him, to dispel that wide-eyed hurt expression.

“I’m sorry, Babe.” Danny reached over and cupped his cheek.

“He really did kill my parents, didn’t he?” Steve leaned into Danny’s touch.

“Yeah. I think he was going to use Asian guys to pretend to be Triad, to get your mom to give up her insurance. But they fucked up when they tried to stop your car. It was an accident.”

Shying away, Steve slung himself off the motorbike and turned his back to Danny.

“That doesn’t really help, Danny,” he said quietly.

Danny refrained from responding, Steve had deliberately set his back to him. Carefully, Danny set
the palm of his hand between Steve’s shoulder blades. He was breathing hard. And Danny could easily imagine the trip-hammer beat of a hurt heart beneath his fingertips.

“What Wo Fat’s been running his investigation as long as we have,” Steve said clinically dry, “but from his end. Wo Fat probably got something on White; he’s clearly dirty. And then Wo Fat used that card he was holding as a last ditch attempt to get to the item before we and White did.”

“And?”

“We’re going to find it first!” Steve spun around making Danny jerk back. “Come on.”

“Whoa. Whoa.” Danny held his place. “This is a bad idea.”

“What is?” Steve snorted. “Going back into the House with terrorist possibly on the premises?”

“You took the words right out of my mouth.”

~*~

#106#

“Babe—” Danny managed to stay calm, “—we cannot search the House for Wo Fat. It’s not like it’s an emergency and we’re trying to find Kono or Mary running away from Hesse. Going in there is a stupid risk. Simons will be here any moment.”

Danny emphatically didn’t say: you’re plainly exhausted and you’ve just taken the biggest emotional hit — of many — in your entire life.

Steve regarded Danny down his long nose, and then nodded once. “Simons will catch up with us before we even search through the kitchen.”

Danny glanced at the winding drive, and as if a genie rubbed from a lamp, the Navy limousine wound up the final curve. The limousine paralleled the House, then entered the parking area. As the car braked to a halt, the front bumper fell off with a clang.

“Oops.” Danny winced.

A second dark green jeep followed the limousine, parking beside it. Four soldiers in camouflage uniforms -- cookie cutter stamped: all very tall, lithe and clearly fit -- stepped out of each door as if choreographed. They remained by the jeep, their startlingly intent gazes scanning the area.

“Sir,” Simons said dryly as he exited the limo. He marched directly over to them, almost as if he was on a parade ground.

“Good work, Simons,” Steve said authoritatively, as his fellow SEAL stopped before them, hands clasped behind his back to regard them with a measured gaze.

The chauffeur-come-bodyguard came around the limo and stopped by the bumper. He gave it a desultory kick. A sort of damn it all to Hell – paperwork kick.

“Commander Archer,” Simons began, his flat expression saying a hundred unspoken sentiments, “requests your presence on the Base.”

“We need to clear the House first.” Steve pointed towards the wide-open backdoor.

Interesting, Danny noted. He supposed that Steve had come out that way like a firecracker, racing to
Chin’s motorbike so that he could chase after White.

“We will do that, sir,” Simons said. Immediately, one soldier by the jeep started moving towards the kitchen door. “You need to go to the Base.”

“Have you spoken to Commander Archer?” Steve checked. He did his little head tilt of clarification.

“Yes, sir, you are requested to return to Base,” Simons said, implacable, and backed it up with a firm nod.

All the team of four were now fanning out towards the House. Between the start of the conversation with Simons and the direction go to the Base, three of the four were now wearing black bulletproof vests and were weighed down with a multitude of weapons. The tallest, a black guy, was handing off a vest to his infinitesimally shorter white companion, who was glaring at the kitchen door.

They were a team. It was obvious in every motion.

Steve watched them, his bottom lip jutting out slightly. Two were plastered on either side of the kitchen window, protected by woodwork, peering into the room. The other two, now both wearing vests, simultaneously checked the door entry.

“Lieutenant.” The chauffeur handed Simons a vest and a long rifle with a curved clip. Pointedly, neither gun nor vest were given to Steve, or Danny. Danny didn’t expect nor want any Navy gifts in a hundred years.

“Sir.” Simons shrugged into his vest and clipped the fasteners with the ease of years and years of practise.

“Understood.” Robotically, Steve turned to face Danny. There was a whole blatant undertone going on, which Danny knew boiled down to Steve not wanting to go to the Base while Wo Fat was running around Seolh’s grounds. It was perfectly understandable. There was the almost more unpalatable message that Simons was simply not going to let Steve go into the House. There was a distinct air of I’ll sit on you, if I have to.

“You want me to come with?” Danny ventured.

Steve absorbed the question and plainly turned it sideways and on its head.

“Not at this time no. But you will be called to the Base. It’s entirely possible that my account will be sufficient,” Steve pondered his words, bottom lip still jutting out. “No… no…. You have to come.”

“Okay,” Danny said, a little surprised at the uncharacteristic equivocation, but it had been a stressful hour or so. Travelling and being debriefed at the Base, especially being debriefed, wasn’t at the top of Danny’s list of things to do by any stretch of the imagination. Navy debriefings were interminable, but he would sooner get it done with than wait for later.

“You’ll need to report what occurred when you were alone with White.” Steve was grey and gaunt - all the robust good health of the morning bled away with White’s betrayal.

“Better to get it over with,” Danny said. A long day was going to become horrendously longer.

“Yes, we’ll both need to be debriefed.” Jaw firmed, Steve addressed Simons, who impressively waited patiently, but somehow managed to communicate the essence of resigned, experienced subordinate.
Danny was just glad that he was wearing a suit, it was always better to be wearing a suit when facing the police or the equivalent of the police.

“No.” Steve made an abrupt about turn, metaphorically speaking. “Wo Fat is here. We’re not leaving until the House is clear.”

Danny was getting whiplash.

“Sir?” Simons didn’t even blink.

“That’s an order, Lieutenant.”

Simons absorbed the directive with barely a flare of his broad nostrils.

Steve was currently medically retired or TDNR or some other combination of consonants, which -- Danny thought -- meant that he couldn’t give orders. On the other hand he probably didn’t have to take orders. Impassé.

“You will, of course, stay here,” Simons compromised, meaning by the motorbike, safe, outside.

“Of course,” Steve agreed too easily.

“Sir?” Exasperation finally tinged Simons’ tones. “Your word of honour.”

Steve straightened, shoulders rolling back, and he stood taller.

“We will not enter the House until it is clear, Barnabas.”

Danny refrained from pointing out that Steve shouldn’t make promises for him, but he kind of liked being part of the “we”.

Simons nodded, and then was away, the chauffeur flanking him -- both arrowing to the House. In the lead, Simons gestured -- thumb and two fingers, followed by a scooping motion by his hip -- and three of the four peeled away from scoping out the kitchen to skirt around the veranda.

Oh, they were Simons’ team.

“You can go out and play with them next time, Babe.” Danny patted Steve’s shoulder, as half of the team darted through the kitchen door.

Steve curled his top lip. “Not funny, Danno.”

Okay, that was a little close to the bone, but hey Danny had to say something. Steve was eyeing the House. Simons extracting his promise was the only thing keeping his feet on the ground.

“So,” Danny said going for misdirection, the Art of any parent, “your mom put the clues together, you know, nominally for White, so does that help you figure out where the stash is?”

Steve rattled out a sigh, like a horse neighing.

“It’d make the astronomy idea a little more robust -- White specialised in navigation. He ran the course during training. And he taught me to navigate by the stars before I went to college. But, I dunno -- my grandmother was into astrology and astronomy.”

“Could the clues also be for your grandmother?” Danny said. “I mean, equally, your mom might have left clues for your grandmother to follow.”
“They didn’t get along,” Steve said.

“I know you told me, but this is about insurance, remember? She’d tell her children’s next of kin. She could have put together a package of clues that would be for her family. Your grandmother could have needed to know where your mom hid the false passports.”

Danny couldn’t really imagine where in a fucked up scenario the family would have needed false passport. But Doris McGarrett evidently could.

“And clues for her trusted handler,” Steve said dourly.

“Okay,” Danny said barrelling on, “Just let it go, Babe, I know easier said than done, but--”

“Danny,” Steve said, and that horribly hurt brightness was shining in his eyes.

“So Orion is standing.” Danny continued -- anything to assuage that terrible pain. He set himself in a boxer’s stance, left foot forward, right foot braced back. He raised his left arm as if holding a shield. Automatically, his right hand came up, and he held it high as if brandishing a club. “Where’s the Bull?”

Eyes narrowing, Steve contemplated. Danny’s thoughts and motion had catalysed thoughts -- the mystery dangling like an enticing, wiggling thread, as Danny had intended.

Steve set his large, warm hands on Danny’s waist and manoeuvred him all the way around so that the House was at his back and Danny faced the sun high in the west. Now behind Danny, Steve rested his chin on Danny’s left shoulder.

“The points of Orion face this way.”

“Towards the Nandi’s Head? If I was in the House?”

“Excuse me? Sort of,” Steve said, and Danny felt his shrug. “The Nandi Head is offset from the other points, which stands to reason: Taurus is above Orion.”

“We’ve searched the Nandi’s Head. I’m tempted at this point to take an axe to it,” Danny said. “So if the House is Orion, where’s the Bull?”

“It gives us a direction of travel.” Steve stretched his right arm over Danny’s shoulder, enveloping him, as his forefinger pointed at the dense woods. “West.”

“The peninsula?” Danny stepped out and under from Steve’s warmth even though the temptation was to turn into his hug. Steve let it happen.

“Grandmother used to take me and Mare out there to stargaze at the cairn.” Steve made an easy, long-limbed step forwards as if following a siren’s song.

“Hey, you promised Simons.”

“I promised Simons that we wouldn’t go into the House,” Steve flashed an impish grin.

“You know what he meant.”

“Well, he should have been more specific.” Steve’s grin turned devilish. “Come on, Danny!”

~*~
“So the peninsula -- where your ancestor was washed ashore, so many, many, many years ago,” Danny said dramatically, regarding the bare rock of the tip of the peninsula around them.

“It was probably the South Bay,” Steve said and pointed at the shallow inclining beach far below, where the Family was liable to gather. The North Bay was a morass of rocky outcrops, and less attractive to sunbathing beach bums and surfers.

Danny leaned forwards fractionally as if to peer over the abyssal drop. He was definitely staying a good body length away from that abrupt edge. The blue waters of the bay far below were flat and calm. Bright sunlight sparked off the gently lapping waves. A white powerboat was anchored offshore, and little Playmobil-sized people were fishing or sunbathing.

“The legend was that Mary was washed up on the peninsula, but it’s not specific,” Steve said.

Danny scrunched an eye, recalling the tapestry. Mary -- great, great, great, great to the nth degree -- great-grandmother McGarrett had lain on the rocks, half in and half out of the water as her husband-to-be had reached out to help her.

“Phone.” Danny clicked his fingers.

“What?” Steve asked as he handed it over.

Danny found the photo of the tapestry. Shielding the screen with the palm of his hand against the sun, he could make out the faint scales on Mary’s legs as she lay in a rock pool. Behind the Hawaiian man there was a backdrop of stone -- the peninsula complete with cairn. In the centre of the tapestry, dancing dolphins circled the sinking topsail schooner. A morning of rising sun bled into the night sky filled with stars, warm ambers merging into starlit black.

“So the canoe bear of the thingymabob is in the sky.” Danny held up the picture so Steve could see it. “Where are Orion and Taurus in the sky at the moment, ‘cos they move around don’t they?”

“It’s a little more complicated than that.” Steve rolled his eyes. “You can’t always see the constellations of Orion and Taurus. Ke Kā o Makali’i is high in the sky during the winter months and it’s not visible in the summer.”

“And you said that Orion faced up against Taurus.” Danny gazed heavenwards, imagining the star field above his head, beyond the backdrop of the azure sky dotted with puffy white clouds.

“Well, it depends on the arena. Orion holds his shield--” Steve struck a pose, “--high to protect his head from the Bull above him.”

Danny looked across Seolh’s wood to see only the prominent lighthouse on the House roof peaking forth.

“The peninsula rises like the front part of a boat,” Danny said.

“Prow,” Steve corrected.

“Prow,” Danny echoed. “Did you mom like analogies and puns and play on words?”

“In what way?”

“You said that this is hard rock.” Danny stamped his foot against the bare rock underneath. “This is a headland. Hard headed like a bull.”
“And it rises above Orion -- the House.” Steve said, as he slowly turned in a circle.

“The Nandi’s Head is in the House,” Danny mused as he followed Steve’s direction of travel. “Oh.”

“Oh?”

“The vee of Taurus’ horns above Orion.” Danny held his arms out, hands splayed, index fingers extended, paralleling the triangle point of the peninsula.

“We’ve searched the House,” Steve said.

“Search the peninsula?”

They scanned the amazing sun-kissed oceanic vista, the verdant greens of Seolh’s variegated trees, the lichen covered hard dark-grey rock of the tip of the peninsula, the single stubby determined little bush striving to survive between a crack in the granite, until their gazes settled on the proud rock cairn -- the highest point.

“The tiny little rat scaled the tallest mountain to climb on a rainbow to reach the stars,” Steve said, recalling the legend of the Ke Kā o Makali’, “both Orion and Taurus.”

Together they made a step forwards.

“What do you know about the cairn?” Danny asked.

“Always been here. You put a stone on it to celebrate the dead.” Steve crouched and gingerly reached out to touch the topmost stone. “This is Grandmother’s.” He reached lower. “Mom’s. Dad’s.”

“Babe.” Danny curled his hand over Steve’s neck and squeezed.

“Cairns are also trail markers,” Steve said introspectively.

“And no one is going to move it, are they,” Danny said.

“No one except me,” Steve said, and two-handed, he carefully removed his grandmother’s stone from the tip of the cairn and gently set it on the ground.

Danny watched him slowly lift free the next stone, and then the next.

“Can I help?”

“Hmm?” Steve craned his head over his shoulder.

“Can I help?” Danny repeated.

Steve nodded once.

Danny set himself on the opposite side of the cairn, gently removing each stone as if it were breakable. He didn’t know the people that the stones represented but generations were built into the cairn. One small stone flecked with dashes of rose quartz made him think of Grace, and he knew that he held the memory of a small child.

The late afternoon wind picked up as they worked, whipping Danny’s hair until strands fell in his eyes.
Steve held one perfectly round stone, long fingers tracing a carved mark.

“Babe?” Danny asked.

“An ancestor, one of Seolh’s ‘ohana. I don’t recognise the mark. I think that it is old.”

“We’ll put them all back in place, Love. We’ll get the whole family out here and do it properly.”

Steve smiled and set the stone aside and reached for another. Danny lifted a stone and beneath it the edge of a flat slab of rock was revealed.

“I think that we’ve got something,” Danny said.

Steve shuffled around to his side oblivious to the damage to the knees of his thousand dollar suit.

“Yes! It’s like a cist. It is a cist.”

“A what?” Danny asked.

“You know, a stone burial chamber.” Steve glanced at him, nose wrinkling, perplexed at his lack of knowledge.

“Someone is buried in there? What? Should we be doing this? A cist? Do we need an archaeologist?”

“I don’t think that there will be someone buried in there. There might be an urn in there. It’s…it’s….“ Steve rubbed his jaw line, “it’s traditional. It’s Scottish. British. Northern European. We kind of cling to traditions in Seolh. I can imagine that whoever started this cairn, years ago, built it on top of a natural depression in the rock.”

“Or dug it?” Danny ventured.

“I don’t think so, it’s pretty hard rock,” Steve said dubiously, and removed another stone memory revealing more of the rock slab.

“There are lots of tunnels riddled throughout the peninsula,” Danny mused.

“Maybe it’s the entrance to one of your secret tunnels.” Steve flashed a smile.

“You’d have to be skinny. You might be able to get through.”

Steve stuck out the tip of his tongue at Danny.

Danny resisted the temptation to nip it between his fingers and concentrated on clearing the last of the cairn’s memorial rocks.

The slab was about three foot long and two foot wide, maybe a little wider.

“We’re going to need a lever,” Danny observed.

“Come on, give me a hand.” Steve got into a deep crouch and wriggled his fingers under the curved edge of the pockmarked stone.

“Yeah, okay.” Danny shuffled in close, the warmth of Steve’s bicep burning into his shoulder, and found purchase.
“On, three. One, two, three--”

Grunting, putting their back into it, they lifted. It was heavy, borderline too heavy. How had Doris McGarrett lifted it? Danny bet that she had brought a lever.

“Geez.” Danny felt the burn across his shoulders, but together they got it balanced on its edge.

“Rest it back on the stones. Careful,” Steve directed.

Teeth gritted they positioned the slab against the stones they had removed. They had revealed a crevice, a crack into the underworld. The space beneath was deep. The edges were roughly hewn, naturally curving open like an eye. There was a pot -- a fat-bellied urn -- tucked off kilter into the top corner. A large blocky shape wrapped in tarpaulin bound by ratty string was wedged on its side. A modern-ish rusted red lock box sat in centre place, the word ‘Champ’ was stencilled on the side.

“Holy shit, we found it,” Danny said.

“About time,” a cultured, unctuous voice interrupted them.

“Wo Fat!” Steve snarled.

~*~

Tbc
Co-operative Chapter Five [season II]

#107#

Wo Fat slowly emerged from the clear demarcation of Seolh’s woods, where wind and rain, and Hawaiian ocean-bred storms kept the trees and bushes from venturing onto the very tip of the peninsula. Once again, Danny was in the sights of a gun.

This had never happened until he had met Steve.

Wo Fat glowered at them, but there was a gleam in his soon to be racoon mask of black eyes. His punch -- Danny grinned inwardly -- judging by the new twist to Wo Fat’s nose, had broken bones.

“Your gun, Commander McGarrett, toss it over the edge,” Wo Fat ordered. “I don’t need to tell you what will happen to Mr. Williams if you don’t. Fingertips, please.”

Gaze flinty, Steve rolled up his trouser leg, revealing a hairy calf and a neat little holster strapped to his ankle. Using the aforementioned fingertips, he extracted a snub, grey gun that would be dwarfed in his large hand. Danny was, suddenly ridiculously distracted. That irreverent part of Danny that rarely shut up made a mental note to explore Steve and holsters at a later date.

Steve lobbed the gun over the edge with a simple flick of his fingers.

“Happy?” Steve said.

“Ecstatic,” Wo Fat returned dryly. “Knife. That black one.”

Danny didn’t want that knife to be thrown over the edge. He liked that knife.

“Slowly,” Wo Fat said.

Glacially, Steve drew the wickedly sharp blade from his left sleeve. Danny bit his bottom lip. Steve tossed it well out of reach, but it fell short of the edge.

“Do you want me to go get it?” Steve asked, insolently.

“No.” Wo Fat slid forwards. “But I do want you to sit on your hands, palms uppermost.”

“What?” Danny asked. The gun in Wo Fat’s hand was unerringly aimed directly at him. It was a little annoying at how easily he was always identified as the chink in Steve’s armour.

Steve shuffled and sat on the hard rock, hands tucked under his narrow butt.

“As Commander McGarrett knows,” Wo Fat said, “it is an effective method of curtailing a prisoner’s movements.”

“Do you want me to do that?” Danny asked. It actually looked uncomfortable.

“No. While Commander McGarrett is occupied, you will reach into that well and pull out the package.”

“The package?” The dirty green tarpaulin wrapped parcel was bound with fraying string. “Is this what you’re after?”
“Lift it out,” Wo Fat instructed. “Carefully.”

“Okay….,” Danny drawled.

The red metal toolbox was in the way. He crouched over the hole and hauled the box up and out. It was unwieldy, very heavy and badly balanced -- most of the weight on one side. Danny thumped it down on the rock. The package that Wo Fat was hunting was just under a yard long and as wide as two stretched-out hands. The tarpaulin had a faintly greasy feel, but the sharp edges where the shape was prominent were dry and flaking. The wrapping was supposed to be waterproof, but that protection was fading. It was heavy but not as heavy as the metal box. Cognizant of its importance to Wo Fat, Danny carefully lifted it out of the cist. If he had been closer to the edge, there would have been an opportunity to dangle the package.

“Open it,” Wo Fat directed, drawing closer and closer.

“Yeah. Yeah. Working on it.” Keeping one eye on Wo Fat, Danny picked at the knot that was a bow -- like on a pair of kid’s shoes. Doris McGarrett had tied this knot. The string parted, and Danny unwound it. She had used a lot of string. The tarpaulin was old, flaking under his hands, but it was a large piece of fabric, wrapped and wrapped and triple-wrapped around the prize inside. He had to lift it and unwrap and then set it down and re-lift the parcel.

There were a line of grommets and Danny guessed that the tarpaulin had been part of a tent originally. The further he unravelled the less damaged the material became.

“I think that it’s going to be okay,” Danny offered, possibly as curious as Wo Fat as to the contents. Assuming, of course, that Wo Fat didn’t know what it was. Danny chanced a glance at Steve, who was leaning forwards, mouth slightly open as he watched avidly. Steve had postulated that Wo Fat didn’t actually know what he was looking for. The final fold parted to find yet another layer but of the palest of the palest of fine beige-coloured material.

“Silk?” Danny rubbed his fingertips over the smooth fabric. It might have been white silk once upon a time. He glanced up at Wo Fat, who had again moved fractionally closer. The man was smiling, not a smirk, an actual smile.

“Danny,” Steve prompted, and nodded at the parcel.

“Oh, yes.”

Danny pinched the silk between his fingers and thumbs, and drew the folds away. Revealed was a long length of dark red wood carved with the most intricate of dragons, gambolling up and down an inset black plaque that bore Chinese characters. The dragons glistened in the sunlight, worn gilt catching the light. The workmanship was bogglingly elaborate from the dragonhead wreathed with flames at the top of the wood to the serpentine dancing dragons guarding the inner plaque. The long piece was set into a carved wooden base that resembled a house with a multitude of windows. There was a crack marring the front of the base. The corner looked as if it might fall off if Danny touched it.

“What is it?” Danny asked, because -- well, it kind of looked like a wooden tombstone.

“It’s an ancestral tablet,” Steve answered.

“So it’s a tombstone?” Danny asked.

“No,” Wo Fat growled.
“Whose is it? Your grandfather’s?” Steve asked, as he peered closely at the plaque.

“None of your business,” Wo Fat said shortly. “Wrap it up.”

“Excuse me?” Danny said.

“Wrap. It. Up,” Wo Fat said, as if talking to an idiot.

“Okay.” Eking time out like molasses, Danny carefully draped the raw silk back around the tablet. So this was what was so very important to Wo Fat? Danny could only guess the reasons. It belonged to the man’s family. How had it come into Doris’ hands? “The base is broken.”

“I know.” Wo Fat gritted.

Ooh, there was a story there.

“Right.” Danny rolled it up in the tarpaulin. The hairs on the back of his neck were standing proud. Steve was poised. “What now?”

“Open the toolbox,” Wo Fat ordered.

“Okay,” Danny drawled, as he popped the dual catches. The lid squeaked as he pried it loose, a little rusty, a little dented. The contents were a treasure trove of miscellaneous junk: old fashioned cassette recorder; tobacco tin; a floppy disc; business cards bound together with a frayed elastic band; a black ledger book --

“Shut it,” Wo Fat said tightly.

Danny shut it.

“Commander McGarrett, pick up the toolbox. Mr. Williams, bring the tablet.”

“Why?” Danny asked.

“Stop arguing,” Wo Fat said. And there was a deeply infuriated edge to his words.

Danny pushed the toolbox over towards Steve.

“The tablet,” Wo Fat ordered.

Danny tied the string tightly around the re-wrapped tarpaulin, going for a simple reef knot instead of a bow. He understood the instructions, he just didn’t get why Wo Fat hadn’t shot them both in the head and taken his prizes.

“Two handed, Commander,” Wo Fat clarified, in the face of Steve’s perplexed head-tilt, “support it on your head.”

With aplomb, Steve stood, brushing his dusty hands off. He eyed Wo Fat, and then crouched to heft the toolbox up. Wrangling its unwieldy weight for a moment, he then set it on his head as if he was a water carrier and sedately, and insouciantly, straightened.

Shaking his head inwardly, Danny picked up the long tablet.

“Walk in front of me. If you try anything, I will shoot you.” Wo Fat directed their path with the tip of his stocky black gun.
“And where are we going?” Steve asked, with the air of casual conversation, as he strode out.

Wo Fat was probably just going to shoot Steve because he was annoying. Attractive, but annoying.

“Beach.”

“Beach?” Danny automatically glanced at the crystal blue waters below. “Oh, you came by boat. That powerboat is yours.”

The boat was no longer offshore, but had come in and anchored over the rocky reef. A second, smaller dingy had come onto the beach. While it looked like one of Grace’s toys, that was a function of the distance; the powerboat was ostentatiously large.

“Walk,” Wo Fat ordered.

They walked, reluctantly, but they walked. In the dense vegetation, the bushes on either side of the path hemmed them in. The thick undergrowth prevented a fast escape, but it also was good cover — assuming that they could dive behind a rhododendron or two. He chanced a glance over his shoulder. Wo Fat was pacing them three people-lengths away, just out of reach. Danny could only think that Wo Fat thought that he needed hostages.

Wo Fat was drawn, cheekbones prominent, skin too pale for his natural colouring. He had been kicked by Steve’s size elevens into a window frame. A broken nose was probably only one of his injuries. He held himself taut.

Wo Fat lifted his chin, directing Danny to move on.

*Broken ribs*, Danny decided, or at least cracked. Picking up that toolbox would have been a bitch.

Wo Fat might be hurt but his aim was unwavering.

Steve’s jaw was clenched, the hollows in his cheeks defined by taut muscles.

Danny was there as packhorse and Steve-control. Steve was there because… Wo Fat wasn’t a cold blooded murderer? Wo Fat wanted Steve? Danny stumbled over a dip in the path, and straightened immediately.

Okay? Steve asked without saying a word.

*Yeah, sure. Just worried about you.*

*What?*

They emerged from Seolh’s woods at the fork in the path, where the main path would take you back to the House, and the other hair-pinned back, skirting the side of the rock face of the peninsula, winding all the way down the beach.

“Beach?” Steve double-checked.

The wave of the gun was Steve’s answer.

“You’re not going to get away,” Steve said.

“I think that you’ll find that we will. Speed up.”

When was Steve going to balk? Resisting was in Steve’s nature, when and where was soon.
“Don’t try anything, Commander,” Wo Fat said evidently reading Steve’s mind. “While you’re useful for ransom and, more lucratively, selling on the market as a Navy SEAL, I will shoot you if you try anything.”

“What?” Danny stopped dead. “You want to sell him! Like an object?”

“A very highly trained military intelligence officer, with knowledge of and access to many interesting things. I could easily sell—” Wo Fat smirked, “—Commander McGarrett for millions.”

“Eewww,” Danny spat, because that was vile. “I don’t think that the US Navy will let you do that.”

And where were Simons and his crew of errant Navy SEALs? Danny glanced at the garden seat, set at the top of the trail for weary hikers, half expecting Simons to jump out from behind.

“If you don’t stop talking and start walking, you’re going to find out how disabling a gut shot is,” Wo Fat said.

“Hey, hey!” Steve said, “Danny won’t do anything.”

“Walk or crawl, but you are going down to the beach,” Wo Fat said.

That Steve was just waiting for the right moment went unsaid. Steve stared at Wo Fat and Wo Fat glared back at him.

“Look to the beach, Commander.”

There were four men arranged around the dingy. They were all watching with disturbing intensity: one squatted, using the edge of the boat to balance something. Danny squinted, and figured that he held either a telescope or a sniper’s rifle.

Sniper rifle seemed more likely.

The hair on the back of Danny’s neck rose and abruptly Wo Fat was in his face, gun pressed against his forehead between his eyes. Danny froze. The man moved like a rattlesnake.

Shit.

“Don’t, Commander.”

Steve uncoiled, the toolbox once again rested on his head. He was indeed dangerous, Danny realised, and the false relaxation underscored the uncoiled violence that he had just been about to release. Danny hadn’t seen it. He had known in his bones that it was going to happen, but he hadn’t seen it in Steve’s body language.

Wo Fat had.

“Walk ahead of us, Commander. Two yards. I can’t miss from this distance.”

Steve turned on his heel, and began walking down the path.

“Turn,” Wo Fat directed.

And Danny turned under the scrape of the muzzle against his forehead, dragging through his hair and settling at the back of his skull. Evidently, Wo Fat had gone to a training school with the same type of instructors from which White had taken his training.
“Walk.” Wo Fat tapped his point home with the tip of his gun.

Danny walked. The pebbles and stones on the path were just enough to twist a walker’s ankle if they weren’t careful. Danny concentrated on getting down the trail.

What would happen if he threw Wo Fat’s prize over the side of the path? It wouldn’t survive the drop to the next tier without damage. Danny slowed, falling farther behind Steve, and angled to the edge. He had been up and down this path a hundred times since moving into the House. As the path curled back on itself, dropping down to the next level, the edge was sheer and scary, the barrier a mere row of wooden posts with a thickset rope spanning between the poles. Danny swallowed hard. He was going to do it.

“Stop,” Danny ordered and held the package over the precarious drop.

“Danny,” Steve gritted.

It was a straight drop to the path below. The tablet was already damaged; another drop, would probably break it in two.

Wo Fat lifted his chin, supremely arrogant. The man oozed confidence. It was off-putting. Danny stretched his arm out a little further.

“What’s your end game?” Wo Fat asked, and shrugged faux perplexed. “I think that this is -- what do you call it -- a Mexican standoff?”

“Only if you’re going to be really politically incorrect,” Danny said. “You shoot me, I fall and your tombstone is damaged. You shoot me and Steve jumps you.”

Steve’s teeth grated really loudly.

“So what’s your plan?” Wo Fat eyed Danny.

“You go down the next bit of the path, and I drop your tombstone,” Danny said. “It’s getting heavy.” It slipped in his hand, and dropped.

“No!” Wo Fat protested.

Danny had a hold of the string. It dangled.

“Geez, Danny,” Steve breathed.

“I drop your tombstone, and you catch it,” Danny continued, and swallowed hard around the lump in his throat. He deliberately did not look at Steve. “We go back up the trail, and your sniper doesn’t shoot us. At the top, Steve throws the box over the edge. You get your bankbook; the fall won’t damage it.”

It was a good plan. It was a solid plan.

The shot took Danny completely by surprise. He jerked away from the pain high in his arm.

The sniper.

“Danny!” Steve screamed.

Danny was down on the gravelly path, sharp stones digging into his knees and palms. Somehow the string was still wrapped around his wrist, digging, as the weight of the tablet pulled at him.
“Danny. Danny. Danny.” Steve was on his knees beside him, grabbing his bicep. “You’re okay.”

“Don’t!” Danny yelped. The bullet wound burned like a hot poker. Unreal, he had been shot!

“The ancestral tablet, Commander.” Wo Fat stood over them.

Grimacing, one handed, Steve yanked on the coarse string and hauled it up and over the edge, even as he worked to examine Danny.

“Stand,” Wo Fat ordered.

“I need to check his wound.” Ignoring Wo Fat, Steve leaned in close, gently parting the fabric at Danny’s sleeve.


“Graze? Graze! I’ve been shot,” Danny said, indignant. “Again!”

“As entertaining as this performance is -- get up, or you’ll be shot again,” Wo Fat said.

Steve curled a hand under Danny’s armpit and hauled him to his feet.

“Another suit ruined!” Danny groused.

“Toolbox, Commander. You threaten to drop my Grandfather’s tablet again, and you’ll be crawling down the path, Mr. Williams.”

Steve picked the tablet up and held it out to Danny.

“It was a good plan,” Steve said.

“Would have been, if it had worked,” Danny grumbled.

“Which it didn’t. Move!” Wo Fat spat.

*I hate everyone on the planet, but you most of all,* Danny thought, as he tucked the tablet under his good arm.

Steve scooped the toolbox up, setting it, once again, on his head.

The wound burned like the heart of a fiery volcano. The black suit didn’t show a stain but the fabric around the gaping rent in his suit was glistening in the sunlight. He felt a little weird, hot and cold and sweaty at the same time. Steve was standing close, matching every step.

“You’re okay, Danny. Shake it off. Don’t give Wo Fat the satisfaction.”

Danny jerked his head in a perfunctory nod. There was no damn way that he was giving Wo Fatty Pants the satisfaction.

Below them, two of Wo Fat’s men were striding across the golden sand. More guns. More thugs. They were in trouble.

Fuck.

“Can he really sell you?” Danny blurted.

“He can try,” Steve said, apparently unconcerned.
As they crossed the beach, the crew members by the dingy started to drag it back into the water. The two crossing the beach were now close enough to make out facial features. They were Asian. They were too well-dressed for a day at the beach. Wo Fat greeted them with a nod.

“Take the items,” Wo Fat told them.

Steve straight-armed the toolbox into the largest man’s arms, who took it with a grunt.

“Behave, Mr. McGarrett,” Wo Fat said.

“Commander McGarrett,” Steve corrected.

“Not any more.” Wo Fat smirked.

Steve’s dead-eye glare should have smote the terrorist to ash. A push of Wo Fat’s gun against Steve’s sternum set him off across the sand. Danny considered the tablet, tempted to drop it. As if reading his mind, the shortest of Wo Fat’s goons relieved him of its weight. Steve twisted on his heel and strode into the water as if wearing swim trunks and smoothly vaulted onto the dingy. Danny baulked. If they were taken to Wo Fat’s boat surely they were lost. Floating offshore, the boat was a massive two hulled monstrosity -- catamaran? Maybe it could even cross the Pacific?

“Get in,” the guy with the toolbox ordered.

Grimacing, Danny splashed into the shallows. First his jacket and shirt were ruined, and now his shoes and trousers, the combination of Steve and outings were a nightmare. His arm burned, and his sleeve was wet -- Danny swallowed -- but it wasn’t sopping.

“Here, Danny.” Steve offered his hand.

Danny let Steve haul him into the little dingy.

~*~

#108#

The catamaran was enormous. A white and blue, sharp-angled, sparkling monstrosity bigger than a house, it rose high out of the water on twin blades. It definitely, probably, could cross the Pacific. There was even a heli-pad on the top of the giant boat behind the wheelhouse. The helicopter was a little multi-coloured bubble with rotors. It was exactly the sort of helicopter that TC had flown in Magnum PI, Danny’s favourite programme when he was a kid.

Steve was scrutinising the vessel and its accoutrements as if studying pieces on a chessboard.

Wo Fat sat towards the back of the little dingy as it powered over the glass-like flat water to the catamaran. His hand rested possessively on the tarpaulin wrapped package by his side.

“So, was your dad taking it to be repaired?” Danny blurted, surprising himself with the question.

“Yes,” Wo Fat said, unusually forthcoming, “a minor accident. It was better to repair the chip before the base split.”

Translation, Danny’s inner dad voice supplied dryly, I broke it and my father did not trust me to get it repaired.

The guilt in the air was thick enough to taste. Wo Fat had been what, about twenty, when his father had died -- still a kid. Why had Doris taken the tablet? Misdirection, Danny supposed. The theft of
an important family item for ransom? Muddy the waters? Make an assassination look like a revenge attack?

It wasn’t like she could have returned the ancestral tablet.

Too soon, they crossed the calm water and were mooring beside the boat, and a crewman above was quickly and competently running ropes to secure the dingy. Charily, Danny eyed the ladder hanging over the side of the catamaran. However, they skirted the long side of the vessel, heading to the back. Steve’s hand was warm on Danny’s shoulder as the dingy swung around to a lowered lattice ramp, and putt-puttied into the innards of the boat.

The sides seemed to hem them in -- too high, too shear. The catamaran was massive. The dingy rocked as the ramp beneath them started to rise, lifting them, water drained noisily through the mesh work of the ramp.

The James Bond theme tune played mockingly in Danny’s head.

There was a final judder and they stopped dead, high out of the water. Danny eyed the sea surface some six yards below, visible through the lattice structure.

“Move,” Wo Fat ordered.

“Come on, Danny,” Steve said, as if it was all his idea.

His arm was really starting to hurt. Clenching bloody fingers over the wound, Danny swung his leg over the inflated tube that was the side of the dingy. Steve loaned a somewhat unnecessary hand. Walking over the ramp was like walking over a grate in the sidewalk in downtown New York City.

The catamaran was all white and blue and ostentatiously shiny. Danny deliberately rested a bloody hand on the frame of a doorway for support as they were directed forwards.

Danny was expecting a dank dark dungeon in the bowels of the boat, but they trooped up a set of steps rising up to the deck behind the helicopter pad. Once out on the wide-open deck, by a row of padded recliners, the gentle breeze disturbing the sweaty strands on the back of his neck was altogether incongruously sweet.

“I need a first aid kit,” Steve stated.

Danny followed his gaze down to the deck where a single splotch of bright red spread over the wooden deck boards, a perfect red sun like one of Grace’s paintings.

Wo Fat considered the request.

“Get them one,” he said, surprisingly.

The double engines roared and Danny almost lost his footing as the boat jerked forwards. Steve’s hand was on his unhurt arm, holding him steady. It would be easy to fold over and puke up the contents of his stomach on the pristine decking. Steve planted him on a deckchair and began to divest him of his jacket.

“Ow,” Danny protested.

Steve examined Danny’s white shirt, and then deftly rent the sleeve with his bare hands.

“Geez, Steven!”
Pain rocked up his arm, but Steve kept a firm grip on his elbow holding him still.

“Look, it’s an in and out -- more of a deep scratch,” Steve said.

“Scratch!”

“I just have to clean and dress it.”

“Here.” Goon one tossed a large red plastic box emblazoned with a white cross onto the padded deckchair. It bounced once. Steve popped the catches and grabbed the iodine -- Danny winced.

“Brace yourself; going to wash it out.”

“No!” Danny said, as Steve poured lava on the deep furrow slashing across the fleshy part of his upper arm. “Damn it!”

“I want it clean.”

Teeth gritted, Danny looked away, across the Seolh-blue aquamarine ocean, not at the meaty, gaping, half-cauterised gash on his arm. The catamaran picked up speed, rising high out of the water. Wind whipped up.

“Stop dawdling,” Wo Fat ordered.

Steve worked deftly, packing the gaping open wound and wrapping it with dry gauze. Glancing down at his arm, Danny watched Steve fight with tape and scissors to deftly bind up the bandage. Using an antiseptic wipe from the box, Steve meticulously cleaned his fingers.

“Enough,” Wo Fat said, and Danny wondered on his timing.

“Thank you.” Steve grated, and closed the lid on the neatly re-packed first aid kit.

It didn’t escape Danny’s notice that three of the four goons were caressing their guns as they watched. Why had Wo Fat allowed Steve to bandage the wound? A cat who liked playing with captured mice?

“Well, this is an interesting turn of events.” Wo Fat stood over them as they sat together on the deck lounger. “I didn’t expect that Mr. Williams taking my photograph down at the docks would lead to me recovering my father’s assets.”

“What,” Steve said between clenched teeth, “did Joe White have to do with this?”

Wo Fat absorbed the question with a slight tilt of his chin.

“I needed an inside man, and Commander White needed a retirement package -- *quid pro quo*. Yes.”

“Why White?” Steve persisted.

“As we watched you, and Navy Intelligence watched you. White was a little too diligent in his watching, but he wasn’t actually talking to you, when he could. It didn’t make sense. Commander Archer then sidelined him, and Jenna Kaye turned up a few interesting facts about his other activities.” Wo Fat made an about turn, and paced back alongside the length of the lounger. “And then Commander White and I had a chat.”

“Chat?” Steve echoed. “Chat. That’s a nice euphemism for a discussion that led to a man planning on betraying his country and his comrades–in-arms for money.”
“Well,” Wo Fat said, sounding impossibly amused, “Commander White -- although I guess he’s Mr. White now -- crossed that bridge twenty years ago.”

Steve sagged against Danny, head hanging.

“That doesn’t explain anything,” Danny said waspishly, because really. “How the fuck did you figure out that I dunno everything?”

“What?” Steve said, and looked as if he was going to check Danny for a head wound.

“It was all quite serendipitous. I knew Commander McGarrett as Hesse’s bête noire.” Wo Fat paced back and forth, cat-in-the-cream expression gracing his face. “But I had never linked him with the woman that my father had known.”

“My mother was assigned to the Noshimuri family,” Steve pointed out.

“True,” Wo Fat said, “and my family had ties with Noshimuri.”

Danny chanced a glance at Steve. He was now perched on the edge of the lounger listening with all his body.

“Ties?” Steve prodded, as he tracked Wo Fat’s passage back and forth, intently.

“Here you were on the island. Injured, but you’d survived Victor and Anton’s assassination attempt. And suddenly, potentially, you had incriminating photographs of me in your possession.” Wo Fat was lost in his own smug reminiscing. “Luckily, I have a trained CIA researcher on hand. Kaye is very thorough -- she provided files on your entire family. Most interestingly, your mother had worked for the CIA and she bore somewhat of a resemblance to a woman called Elisabeth Shelburne. Different hair colour, didn’t wear unflattering, horn-rimmed glasses.”

“Elisabeth Shelburne,” Steve echoed. His fingers twitched, as if holding a passport.

“Yes, Elisabeth,” Wo Fat said too neutrally, “Shelburne.”

*Ming the Merciless?* Danny wondered irreverently, riding on endorphins, because the villain explaining everything was so passé. Danny was, however, a little confused, because he had thought that Doris had been herself when she had been observing the Noshimuri family.

So, Danny picked his way through the tangles, unravelling as he thought. Doris McGarrett’s history had preceded marrying and starting a family, and that history included China.

And Korea -- the photographs.

Wo Yongfu had met Doris McGarrett, when she had been in China, under another name -- Elisabeth Shelburne. The CIA must not have known of the link between the Noshimuri family and the Wo family otherwise they wouldn’t have given Doris McGarrett the job of making friends with the Noshimuris.

What had Doris been up to in China so that when she met Wo Yongfu in Hawaii, assassination had seemed like the best solution? She had apparently been scared to murder when she had re-encountered Wo Yongfu.

“And Kaye uncovered that my parents had been murdered,” Steve said hollowly. Clearly, he was doing his own untangling.
“Well, yes, it’s not every day that a Honolulu Detective’s car is rolled over by a truck, which then leaves the scene of the crime, and it’s called an accident. And a CIA handler’s fingerprints are all over the case. And we all know that White had been Doris McGarrett’s handler. It made a neat little story.”

Steve swore under his breath.

“Shelburne, Doris McGarrett, your mother, murdered my father—” Wo Fat came to an abrupt stop, “- -and stole my family’s history.”

Steve’s jaw was firm. He didn’t say a word. It wasn’t as if he could deny the accusation. The evidence was cradled under Wo Fat’s arm.

“I like you, McGarrett,” Wo Fat said with false zeal. “It’s been very entertaining watching you the last three months. So much has happened, it’s seems like three years.”

“So what now?” Danny demanded, because, chatting was all well and good, but Wo Fat was a terrorist, and seaside chats seemed out of character. Although, Danny didn’t know the man, Wo Fat seemed to be getting a kick out of baiting Steve. He could hardly bait Steve if he had them locked up in the engine room or somewhere else grim and dark, and crawling with rats.

Wo Fat had just retrieved the tablet that he had been looking for fruitlessly for decades. He was probably feeling indulgent and wanted to bask in his cleverness.

It was kind of annoying.

“As Danny said: so what now?” Steve stood, smooth and leonine.

Weapons clicked.

“You are, as I said: an asset, a valuable asset, Lieutenant Commander McGarrett. Highest bidder.”

“Well, you’ll only get pocket change and fluff, for me,” Danny said testily. Really, for fuck’s sake, Wo Fat was deluded.

“Danny.” The look that Steve shot him was frankly insulting.

“You’re more valuable than Commander McGarrett, at the moment.” Wo Fat’s smirk was back.

“You’re the tool that allows me to control Commander McGarrett.”

‘Tool’. That’s just rude. I’m not a lever. I’m his partner.”

“Danny,” Steve said lowly, “he gets it, he doesn’t understand it, but he gets it. And it’s not a vulnerability, it’s a strength.”

“Really?” Wo Fat said. “Remove your hearing aids, Commander McGarrett.”

“What? Danny said.

“And this is merely grandstanding, and tactical.” Steve pinched the aids from his ears, and put them into his little carrying case.

“The remote.”

“Excuse me?” Steve said, and canted his head to the side -- the ass.
“The remote,” Wo Fat said loudly, over enunciating.

Steve swapped the case for the remote in his pocket and tossed it over. Wo Fat snatched it out of the air. He flicked the off switch like a Bic lighter.

“Hands behind your back,” Wo Fat said again, with that patronising over enunciating way.

Steve folded his hands behind his back. One of the goons took it as an order to zip-tie his hands.

“Mr. Williams?” Wo Fat said falsely polite.

“What?” Danny said, not giving an inch.

“Stand. Hands.”

Putting his hands behind his back so that they could be secured was going to smart. Taking his lead from Steve, Danny stood in his own time and presented his fists forward. The stretch made his bicep burn. The goon was rough, tightening the zip-tie so that it dug into his wrists.

“Take them down below. Put them in the starboard crewroom,” Wo Fat ordered, as he stroked his ancestral tablet in his arms as if it was a Persian cat.

Well, shit, they were going to be put in a dungeon.

~*~

As dungeons went, it wasn’t too bad: no manacles or dripping pipes, Danny thought, his ears ringing with the slam of the heavy door.

There was one set of bunk beds, and evidently an en suite bathroom. Danny had been pushed onto the lower bunk and told not to move. Steve had been forced against the bunk bed ladder and further zip-tied into submission. Danny didn’t take it personally; Steve was dangerous. Almost absently, Danny had had his ankle tethered to the frame. He wasn’t insulted, he definitely wasn’t insulted -- patronising bastards.

It wasn’t comfortable, but Danny at least got to sit.

The slam of the crewroom door had been loud. The part of his brain that never shut up, wondered what Steve had heard. Danny gave his leg a violent yank, and it only tightened the heavy-duty zip-tie.

“So now what?” Danny asked as footsteps echoed.

“I can’t hear you, Danny.” Steve said. He stood above Danny, strapped to the ladder in a standing position as if on a medieval rack. “Well, I know that you’re talking, but I can’t make out what you’re saying.”

It was horribly candid for Steve.

“Plan?” Danny said in his deepest, lowest voice.

“Plan?” Steve said tentatively.

Danny kicked him with his free foot -- once for yes.

“Was that a yes?” Steve said indignantly.
Danny kicked him again. “Yes. You’re really fucked when you can’t see. Any rate, plan?”

“Plan? The plan is simple, we get out of here.”

“How?” Danny said deliberately restricting himself to one word. It was difficult.

“And we’ve got to move quick. I don’t know Wo Fat, but he’s going to stop basking in his success and remember who I am.”

“What? What does that mean?”

“It means that at the moment he’s looking in that Champ box, sorting through the contents, finding his father’s bankbook. He’s probably also going to get his ribs seen to, and maybe take some pain killers. His ancestral tablet is secure. Then he’s going to remember that he’s an intelligence agent in the Chinese MFS and worked in Counter Intelligence in the Sixth bureau. Can you reach my left jacket pocket?”

“Pocket?”

“Danny! We don’t have time for you to argue through every instruction. Try to reach my pocket.”

Danny shuffled across the mattress to stretch as far as he could. While groping around Steve was always fun he couldn’t reach the pocket. He couldn’t get his hands around the ladder slats. Steve twisted as much as he could, which wasn’t even half an inch.

“Bast--” Danny swore. He squeezed the tangle of Steve’s entwined fingers secured at the small of his back. Steve froze for a moment, and then returned the squeeze. “Now what?”

“Get my shoelace.” Steve waggled his right foot.

“What?” Danny said automatically.

“What?” Danny said automatically.


“Okay.” Danny bent over. Stretched out, he could just reach Steve’s shoe. There were even zip-ties around Steve’s calves. Hands zip-tied together, Danny worked at the double-knotted, double-wrapped bow securing Steve’s ridiculous boat-like shoe.

“My shoelace is paracord; you’re going to use it as a friction saw and cut your zip-tie. It’s lucky that they bound your hands in front of you.”

The words individually made sense -- apart from ‘paracord’? -- but together they were nonsensical. Okay, that was an exaggeration. Danny kind of guessed what Steve was getting at.

By dint of double-wrapping the bow, and feeding the black shoelace back and forth through the eyelets, Steve had over a good yard of tightly woven paracord hidden in clear sight in his shoe.

“We make a loop at either end,” Steve instructed, as Danny finally freed the cord. “Loop them over your feet. But thread the paracord through the zip-tie.”

Steve craned his head as much as he could, trying to see, but he couldn’t really move much. Danny worked his way through the instructions, figuring foot-cord-angle-foot. Working two handed was difficult, but feeling the pressure of Steve’s concern, Danny worked fast.

“Less haste, more speed,” Steve advised.
Generally, Danny figured out things as he did them. Steve’s instructions weren’t that clear. Finally, he got the paracord looped through the zip-tie, and each end of the cord secured around his feet.

“You done?” Steve asked, for the second time.

“Yes,” Danny said tightly.

“Yes?” Steve growled in frustration. “Saw your feet back and forth.”

“My right foot is tied to the bedpost. Under certain circumstances it could be fun. But I’m not enjoying it at the moment,” Danny griped, as he figured out how to bicycle one foot back and forth.

“What?”

Was this ever going to work? Danny wondered, bicycling his free foot and dragging his wrists over the cord. Heat was being generated.

“This isn’t-- Holy shit!” The zip-tie around his wrist parted with a loud snap. “Yes! It works.”

“Keep it down!” Steve ordered loudly, because his volume control was abysmal when he didn’t have his aids.

“Oh, sorry.” Magical paracord in hand, Danny looped it over the zip-tie around his ankle, between his leg and the bedpost. He had the pattern of it now, and firmly clenching the cord in his fists, he rapidly sawed through the plastic strap. It parted ridiculously easily. “Hee.”

Danny bounced up before Steve, grinning at his success, paracord saw stretched between his hands. Steve was very firmly tied up. The goons had gone overboard securing Steve to the ladder. Evidently, they didn’t underestimate Steve McGarrett, the Navy SEAL. No wonder he couldn’t move much. They had zip-tied his arms and legs to the slats of the ladder. It was lucky that they hadn’t had a long enough zip-tie to go around his neck.

“Okay.” Danny contemplated the problem. He could --

“Left pocket -- scissors,” Steve said.

“Scissors?” Danny asked -- oh, in the pocket that he couldn’t reach. The scissors from the first aid kit; Steve had deftly palmed them.

They were wickedly sharp medical scissors that snipped through the hard plastic as if butter. Pragmatically, Danny freed Steve’s right arm first. Steve immediately twisted so that Danny could get to his wrists. Steve was actually half-out of the zip-tie around his wrists by sliding one tightly folded hand through the loop. Danny snipped through the plastic. Deep red dents marred the flesh of Steve’s wrist and hands.

“Babe,” Danny began, but it wasn’t the time. He set to the other zip-ties. “What’s the next stage of your nefarious plan?”

“What?” Steve asked, as he impatiently worked on the zip-tie strapped over his thigh, while Danny leaned over him to free his left arm.

“Plan?” Danny simplified the question. The ‘nefarious’ had been unnecessary.

“We get out of here. Head to the pilot house, get a signal out, turn the vessel around or stop it.” Wiggling his little fingernail in the locking mechanism of the zip-tie, Steve stripped it free.
“How did you do that?” Danny paused in his snipping.

“Why are you stopping?” Steve asked.

“Sorry.” Danny continued releasing Steve, cutting the penultimate and then the last tie around his calf.

“Finally.” Steve stepped away from the ladder, and shook himself, hitching his belt up at the waist.

“I’m guessing you’ve got a lock pick or something,” Danny said, but addressed his comments to Steve’s back, as he crouched to re-tie his shoe.

“Scissors, Danny,” Steve asked almost politely.

Danny passed them over Steve’s shoulder, making him startle.

“Geez,” Steve shuffled around. “Don’t come at me like that.”

“Sorry.” Danny apologised, but Steve had turned his back on Danny, which said a million of things about his state of mind.

It took several saws with the now blunted scissors, but Steve cut the paracord, and with the shorter length, secured his shoe in a neat bow. Standing, he set a knot in the centre of the longer stretch, and pulled the length taut between his fists, scrutinising the length.

“This is a crewman’s quarters. Look through the drawers, Danny, for anything that might be of use. Knife. Lighter.” Orders given, Steve slipped into the tiny adjacent bathroom. It seemed inappropriate timing, but now that Danny had thought about it, he really needed to go.

Rattling through the drawers stowed snugly under the bunk bed, Danny found a stash of pungently smelling cigarettes and a Bic lighter. There wasn’t a knife to be found.

Steve came back from the bathroom with an aerosol can.

“What’s that?” Danny asked over-mouthing the words, he didn’t recognise the brand, or the writing.

“Deodorant.” Steve shook it, the contents sloshed heavily.

“Ah, flamethrower,” Danny was fully capable of putting one and one together, and coming up with many movie tropes. He tossed the Bic lighter over. “Does that really work?”

Steve paused, attempting to parse the question, and shrugged -- either not answering, or not understanding the words. He stuck the can in his pocket along with the lighter.

“I’m going to open the door. I’m going to take point. The pilot house is on the topmost deck, aft of the liferafts.”

There was the distinctive snick of a door lock turning.

“Steve!” Danny said, without a breath of volume. He jabbed towards the door with both forefingers. “Someone’s coming!”

~*~

#109#
Steve ghosted -- there was no other word for his passage -- to the side of the door, as Danny vacillated between joining him or returning to sit on the bunk bed to pretend to be still tied up. Between debating and deciding, Danny ended up being a frozen distraction.

The goon didn’t even have a chance to speak as Steve whipped the paracord bootlace around his neck, and twisted. Horrified, Danny watched the man’s neck jerk to the side. There was a sharp bone-breaking crack. He flopped, broken -- and when Steve released him, he merely slithered to the floor.

It hadn’t taken a single breath.

Steve patted the body down, extracting a knife and a large Clint Eastwood like Magnum.

“Well, that’s different. Smith & Wesson Model 29,” Steve said, as he spun the cylinder. “Must be old school.”

He worked through the man’s pockets, scowling when he clearly didn’t find something. Bullets, Danny guessed.

It was methodical, controlled, and as cold as Hell.

“Danny?”

There was a nasty smell; Danny glanced at the bathroom, wondering at the state of the boat’s drains.

“Danny,” Steve said sharply, “it’s them or us. Neither of us wants to be sold. I especially don’t want you to be used as collateral. We’ve got one chance. Come on, sailor.”

“I’m not a member of the military,” Danny protested, and moved after Steve.

~*~

Nerve wracking didn’t begin to describe it. Honestly, Danny was really regretting not using the bathroom. He kept his hand on Steve’s shoulder, ready to squeeze if he heard anything.

The boat was massive, but there appeared to be only a skeleton crew, based on the lack of encounters. Steve scrutinised each and every turn, corner, and corridor. Belatedly, Danny realised that he was scanning for surveillance cameras.

Danny patted Steve’s shoulder, stopping him dead.

What? Steve mouthed, as he turned.

“Wo Fat --” Danny struggled to put his nebulous thoughts in order, “--is an important, terrorist crime lord?”

Steve wrinkled his nose up as he worked through Danny’s careful wording. “Yes?”

“He has kept the hunt for the ancestral tablet and the bankbook very quiet. He didn’t even tell his own people.”

“Yes,” Steve hazarded, listening and watching, very hard.

“This big boat is practically empty.” Danny swung his hands apart. “A crime lord only brought a handful of people on this … mission.”
Steve’s mouth dropped open as he started to connect dots.

“Why?” Danny asked, and backed up the question with an emphatic shrug. So, Wo Fat was hung up on his family’s history, but why the massive secrecy? Embarrassment that his father had lost the ancestral tablet? Possibly, but the guy seemed über self confident. Honour had to be satisfied -- clearly, based on his absolute pleasure on retrieving the ancestral tablet. But a terrorist manipulator, an international crime lord, should have been significantly more straightforward in retrieving the tablet. Wo Fat had deliberately not told Hesse what he was looking for, ultimately, driving the psychopath to operate independently (and unsuccessfully) to retrieve the lost items.

“Something,” Danny said, echoing words that Steve had said days before, “is rotten in the State of Denmark.”

“We need to retrieve that Champ box,” Steve decided.

“What? That’s not what I meant….” Or was it? The box held secrets? “Let’s call the cavalry, first? Eh?”

“Too fast, Danno,” Steve bent in closely, scrutinising Danny’s mouth.

“Call reinforcements first,” Danny belaboured each word, and also, heroically, resisted the temptation to kiss the goof.

Steve pondered and nodded tersely. He turned sharply and darted up a steep set of stairs. Danny dogged his heels. Pausing at the top, Steve glanced through a doorway onto an open deck.

“I would have never designed a vessel with this layout,” Steve said testily. “Catamarans are supposed to be aerodynamic.”

“Bitch, bitch, bitch,” Danny muttered, because really.

“We need a distraction to get across that open deck,” Steve said, almost to himself.

They had been lucky encountering no one en route to the top deck, but there would, by necessity, Danny guessed, be a guy in the control room. Danny peered around Steve’s hip. The prominent control room sat to the back of the top tier of the catamaran, and had wide curved windows that provided a clear view of the world.

“Control room? Wheelhouse?” Danny checked, because he didn’t think that that was the right term. “Guy? Captain, maybe?”

Steve wasn’t listening. He was fiddling with one of the two fire extinguishers at the top of the stairs. The paracord garrotte was being put to another, no doubt, lethal use. Steve tossed aside a metal pin and it bounced down the stairs, ping, ping, ping. He lassoed the paracord around the extinguisher’s trigger-like handle.

“What the--?” Danny began.

Crouching low, Steve launched the fire extinguisher over the lip of the metal doorway, and across the pristine white deck. The paracord stretched tightly squeezing the trigger, and dense, white smoke erupted from the nozzle as the extinguisher streaked across the deck. The hollow clang as it hit the matching metal door directly opposite them, echoed. Propelled by the gushing carbon dioxide the fire extinguisher spun on its axis. The gas flowed straight down the deck, following the wind as the boat rushed towards the horizon. Dense white fog rippled up and over the glass wheelhouse.
“Steve!” Danny snatched and missed as Steve crouched low and ran across the deck to the wheelhouse. “Damn it.”

Danny raced after him.

He was Steve’s ears.

Almost on top of each other, Steve just beat Danny into the wheelhouse. The shocked expression on the guy at the ship’s wheel in the centre of the bridge was almost comical. The gun that he hauled out from his shoulder holster -- was not.

“Steve!” Danny yelled.

The goon fired. Steve magically had the Clint Eastwood gun in his hands. The shots were loud in the enclosed space. The goon was flung back, arms starfishing as he hit a bench. He dropped to the deck, charts toppling over him. More blood, more gore, and the alarm was definitely given.

Steve raced across the bridge, pushing between a chair set high on a podium and the ship’s wheel. He grabbed a headset and leaned over the semi-circular consol, fingers extended as he scanned the setup. Darting forwards, he rotated a dial until the adjacent red LCD display showed Ch 16.

“Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. This is Lieutenant Commander McGarrett, US Navy. On an unidentified multihull vessel. International terrorist threat. I repeat this is Lieutenant Commander McGarrett, US Navy. I am with Daniel Williams. We are in need of rescue by Naval or Coast Guard services only due to the nature of the terrorist threat.” He squinted at a bobbing globe set centrally on the dashboard with a grey display providing a raft of oscillating digital readouts. “Coordinates: 21.311389, -157.796-- Shit! Down!”

Danny went down under Steve’s flying form as the bridge’s array of overlooking glass windows shattered inwards.

“Holy shit.” The back of Danny’s head smacked off the rubbery deck, and he saw bright pinpricks of stars.

The headset, stretched to the length of its curling cord, pinged off Steve’s head and bounced away.

The noise of automatic weapons firing at close range was like nothing that Danny had heard before. Glass shattered over them. Danny’s nose was mashed up against Steve’s chest.

“Idiot,” Steve berated, “this is the wheelhouse!”

“You wanted to stop the boat,” Danny said as sparks set off above their heads like fireworks.

“Come on.” Steve slithered over Danny, brushing shards away.

“Geez.” Danny flipped over onto his hands and knees and skittered after him.

There were glass bits everywhere. However, the round fragments didn’t cut Danny’s palms as he scuttled after Steve. Using the protection of a second chair on a pedestal, Steve bounced up, and fired back through the windows. The bullets passed through the remaining glass, but left large holes with shattered areoles expanding across the pane. The noise was loud in the enclosed space. As Steve dropped back there was a momentary lull in the shooting.

“When I shoot again, grab that!” Steve pointed with his elbow at a stocky orange and grey cylinder bracketed next to the door through which they had entered.
“Why?” Danny asked.

“Danny!”

“Okay. Codpiece!”

Steve rolled his eyes, and set off another volley through the pockmarked windows. His body was angled so Danny was covered when he reached up and wrenched the cylinder out of its cradle.

“Now follow me,” Steve said and crouched low, went for the steep staircase at the back of the wheelhouse.

Like Danny was going to do anything else.

Playing hide and seek from a bunch of thugs with guns was not on the list of things that Danny ever wanted to do. Propelled by sparks and the possibility of being shot and killed, Danny barrelled after Steve down the stairs. Steve looked left and right, and darted off down a short corridor. Red lights were flashing at each intersection and the alarm was deafening. Steve swung an abrupt right, and dodged through a door. They stepped onto a narrow balcony running the length of the ship. The wind whistled through Danny’s hair. Outside -- the now muffled noise of the reverberating alarm was a skin-tingling relief. The sun was descending to the horizon, turning the ocean into molten amber.

The catamaran was a warren, but Steve seemed to instinctively know his way around. Massive Magnum clenched between his fists, Steve skirted along the narrow balcony, scanning left and right. They were heading to the back of the boat.

“Where are we going? Engine room?” Danny asked Steve’s back, and didn’t get an answer. They were going to run out of balcony. Ducking under a wibbly, wing-like protrusion -- Danny really didn’t know any boat terminology -- their only option now was to dive off the back of the boat. It was quite a drop, two storeys down to the back entry ramp, and the water was churning threateningly as they powered towards the horizon.

Stay on the boat, Danny decided.

Steve pulled Danny behind a large white canister as big as a garden shed, covered in yellow labels, and drew him into a crouch. A line of a sharp shadow from above bisected the deck. Steve checked his gun, and scowled. Deftly, he flipped out the cylinder. Empty; no bullets. He tucked the weapon in his belt.

“Give me the EPIRB.” Steve reached through the shadow.

“Excuse me?” Danny asked.

Steve snatched the orange cylinder from Danny’s hand. There was a curled-over strip on the top that Steve unfurled to a good foot’s length.

“Antennae.” Danny realised.

Flicking back a cover and sliding a switch with his thumb, Steve jabbed the revealed yellow button ferociously.

“Beacon?” Danny asked limiting himself to one, clear word. A bright yellow light flashed.

“You’re evil.” Danny mentally applauded.

“Didn’t get that.” Steve leaned forward and smacked a kiss on Danny’s lips. “Need to hide this somewhere.”

Danny licked his bottom lip, and resisted the temptation to kiss back. The kiss had been absent and unconscious, a response to a moment’s safety. The aerodynamic wings rose above them, making a little protective enclave behind the shelter of the canister. Danny patted it on the side.

“What about this thing?” He shifted his crouch, because his knee hated this position.

“Under the liferaft?” Steve checked.

“Liferaft.” Danny tapped the casing with his knuckles. It was a hard shell. “Why don’t we get in the liferaft and wait for the Navy to come get us?”

It seemed eminently reasonable to Danny. Throw the liferaft over the side, get in it and wait for rescue.

Steve eyed Danny with an expression that could only be described as bamboozled: mouth a little open, jaw slacked, eyes scrunched. It wasn’t Steve’s most attractive expression.

“Liferaft.” Danny tapped it again, mimed throwing it over the side, and then palms together almost praying, Danny kind of indicated a little dive into the deep blue ocean.

“There is so much wrong with that plan. I don’t actually know where to start,” Steve said tightly.

“Boat, water, us.”

The dip between Steve’s eyebrows begged Danny to reach out and smooth a thumb over the stress mark.

“Large ocean, tiny boat, no power, no resources,” Steve said. “Wo Fat coming back around to the raft and recapturing us -- end of argument.”

“This thing is going like a bang out of clappers,” Danny pointed out, tap, tap, tap, against Steve’s chest. “It’ll be over the horizon before they realise we’ve gotten off the boat and we’ve got the EP-BURP thingy.”

“What?” Steve shook his head. “Was that even English? Bang what?”

“I had an English wife; it’s contamination. It means going fast. Working in England was the longest nine months of my life. Staying on the boat is a stupid risk.”

“You are talking too fast.” Steve clenched a fist in frustration. “I do not understand what you’re saying.”

“Raft.” Danny patted it. “Ocean.”

“No,” Steve said frustrated. He bopped his clenched fist against his mouth.

“Okay. Okay. Okay.” Danny reigned himself in -- slowly, clearly, was his new mantra. He forgot sometimes, and knew that Steve parsed words, faces and motions into incomplete sentences and filled in the gaps with guesses, but without his aids Steve was in a bad place. “How long before the Navy rescues us?”
Steve shrugged, bottom lip down turning.

“Estimate?” Danny asked.

“I can’t calculate it.” Steve scanned the scope of the horizon. The churning waters of their passage, the molten gold of the ocean under the dominion of the setting sun, the multihued horizon, and the dark cloudiness of the sky high above was almost a distraction from their situation. “Ten minutes to two hours.”

“Okay -- so we hide.”

“What? Hide?”

Danny rolled his eyes in the face of Steve’s affronted gasp.

“Yes, Babe. Hide. This boat is an ostentatious, over-compensation to a terrorist’s massive ego. There appears to be only a handful of people on it. We hole up somewhere.”

“Did you say ostentatious?” Steve checked.

“Big boat. Let’s hide.”

Steve processed that like a computer trying to reboot after a Microsoft download. Suddenly, he brightened, system restarted.

“Yes, you should hide. I’ll --”

“Idiot.” Danny smacked Steve’s chest with the back of his hand.

“We don’t have time for arguing,” Steve said, gesturing with the EPIRB.

“Okay, let’s hide it. “ Danny looked left, right, up and down.

Steve dropped down onto his bony ass, and rolled under the housing of the liferaft. The drycleaners were never going to be able to clean his suit, Danny thought, because his brain went weird places at times.

Danny scuttled to the side, to keep watch while Steve did whatever he had to do under the liferaft canister. Hiding seemed like a good plan, but also stopping the boat seemed like a good idea. The wheelhouse was shot up, but they seemed to be powering through the ocean without slowing.

Danny guessed that the engine room was their next stop.

~*~

#110#

Danny had the distinct feeling that their luck was going to run out.

They were lucky that the boat was basically deserted, but they had to bump into someone soon. Steve had already taken out one of the four goons in their dungeon, the guy that had been at the wheel of the catamaran, and maybe even whoever had shot up the wheelhouse.

Three goons, an unknown number of staff, and Wo Fat -- as odds went, Danny still thought that hiding was the way to go, especially if the Navy was picking up their signal and speeding towards them.
Hiding and Steve were, basically, mutually exclusive.

Steve wanted the Champ toolbox.

Trailing in Steve’s wake as he crept forwards wasn’t a good place to be. Danny had spotted an axe in an emergency compartment, but he couldn’t bring himself to take it. Really, he knew that he couldn’t swing an axe at someone. However, on consideration, he was quite copasetic about clubbing anyone who wasn’t Steve with the fire extinguisher that had been beside the axe.

He should have brought the fire extinguisher.

Danny wanted to go to the engine room and fuck up whatever the Hell worked to propel them further away from ‘Oahu and Grace.

“Should have brought the axe,” Steve said, annoyed at himself.

“What?” Danny nervously scanned up and down the corridor. The creep, creep, creeping was worse than watching *The Ring* or *Psycho*. The alarm was no longer going off, and the reddish/yellow lights were no longer on. Regular strip lighting illuminated the corridor.

Dropping onto his haunches, Steve flicked up a recessed ring in a carpet tile, twisted and lifted a neatly camouflaged hatch. The revealed space wasn’t a secret passage, but a multitude of cables and tubing marked with cable ties and tape running underneath the flooring. Bottom lip caught between his teeth, Steve fingered the wiring cables.

“I don’t need to get to the engineering room to stop this vessel.” As if by magic the pair of first aid scissors appeared in Steve’s hand.

Surgically, Steve snipped one, two, and a final third, blue plastic-wrapped wire. The lights went off. There was a hiccup, and then the lights came back on. He stood up, and then stamped, with all his firm, toned weight on a wide yellow tube. It dented under the focused point of his heel. Steve stomped on it again, grimaced, and stomped down hard and fast. It buckled. Oily fluid gushed out.

“Hydraulics.” Steve grinned.

Knowledge and execution was very sexy.

The boat juddered, and made an abrupt lurch to the side. Steve went down -- bang -- to the floor. Danny tried to grab him and missed. He froze, standing over a glowering Steve beneath him.

“Damn it all to Hell.” Rolling immediately to his knees, Steve smacked the side of his fist against the corridor panel. Scowling, he got his feet under him, and breathed, staying in a low crouch.

Coolly, Danny offered Steve a hand. He stared for a long moment, before accepting the help. Danny squeezed Steve’s fingers, and then pulled him upright. And held on as Steve weaved.

“Damn.”

“We could get you a walker?” Danny offered cheekily, as Steve spread his feet, rooted like a tree and stilled.

Steve’s eyes narrowed.

“One of those sexy canes with a sword inside?” Danny offered, twirling an imaginary cane à la Charlie Chaplin.
“I’ve revised the plan. I’m going to hide you in the bilges,” Steve said, but a smile flickered on his lips.

“Bilges? That’s gotta be the dungeons, eh?”

“Too fast, Danno,” Steve said fondly, “and not a structured sentence.”

It really, really, really wasn’t the time for kissing, but Steve’s lips were soft and nibbly. It was sweet and gentle like Steve could be. Danny curled a hand around the back of Steve’s neck and squeezed gently. Steve breathed against Danny’s mouth and rested his forehead against Danny’s -- it was intimate and special.

“Love you,” Steve whispered.

“Love you, too.” Danny lightly stroked Steve’s now stubbly jaw line with his fingertips, and released. “Hiding is still the best idea.”

Steve slumped. “You’re right.”

“I am?” Danny stepped back in mock shock. “Of course, I am. But--”

“Can you put the cover back, please?” Steve asked.

Momentarily perplexed by the polite request, Danny crouched and put the panel back in place. Oh, he realised, Steve didn’t want to bend over.

“You okay?”

“Come on.” Steve caught Danny’s hand, and pulled him upright and down the corridor.

At the corner was one of the ubiquitous emergency stations: fire extinguishers, eye wash station, exit indicator, and there was also a “cutaway” complicated map of the catamaran that, judging from the vile green-yellow background, promised to glow in the dark. Danny knew that the catamaran was enormous, but the map brought it home. It was a warren, thankfully, because that fact had helped them so far.

Steve’s finger went unerringly to the principal stateroom right at the front of the boat, with curving windows that promised amazing views. The stateroom was almost as wide as the breadth of the deck.

“Wo Fat’s?” Danny said unnecessarily.

A voice close by grumbled, frustrated. Danny didn’t recognise the language. Spinning around, he honed in on the sound. Behind them: more than one person, possibly? Doors were banging as two or more people looked into rooms, unerringly moving closer and closer.

“Danny?” Steve whispered loudly.

Danny spun back, finger to his lips, and then with the same finger stabbed in the opposite direction. He pushed Steve ahead of him, urging speed. Steve grabbed his hand, and towed just as fast.

Steve definitely had a goal in mind. How long could they play hide and seek? Up another set of stairs they ran. A pause here, and glance at another doorway, a chanced sprint across a corridor, and they entered an open plan dining room with a central oval table and ornate chairs. Danny guessed they were smack in the middle of the catamaran. Steve pulled Danny straight across the room to a
closed door.

“The stateroom?” Danny realised. “Wo Fat’s stateroom.”

Steve released Danny’s hand and, the empty Magnum primed, opened the door to slip in -- leaving Danny at the threshold.

“I don’t believe this.” Danny looked around the dining room.

“Clear.” Steve popped back through the door, grabbed Danny and yanked him into Wo Fat’s opulent suite. Pain jerked up Danny’s sore arm.

“What?” Rubbing at his bicep, Danny put all his objections into one frustrated word.

“Wo Fat’s out there looking for us.” Steve grinned toothily as he closed the door behind Danny. “Perfect hiding place.”

“You sneaky shit,” Danny said, impressed.

Steve waggled his eyebrows.

“Champ box.” Danny pointed at the red tool-chest sitting prominently on a low coffee table before what looked like a wood stove. The silk-wrapped ancestral tablet lay beside the toolbox.

Steve looked at it, to Danny, and then to the door, indecision wrought in the teeth clamped on his bottom lip.

“Stay by the door, Danny, listen for anyone coming back.” Unexpectedly, Steve didn’t go to the toolbox, but moved to pace across the living room. He checked the door on the far side of the room, poking his head through the doorway, but not entering. “Bedroom.”

He looked upwards, scrutinising the ceiling.

“What are you looking for?” Danny asked.

Steve glanced at him quizzically, clearly not catching the question. He skirted the edge of the windows curving across the breadth of the living area.

“Ahah.” He crouched, fingerling a panel. It clicked and swung open. A heavy duty metal door with a handle was revealed. Setting hands to the lever, he opened the door with a grunt. “Emergency exit. Lock your door. You hear anything, you tell me. Straight out through this exit.”

“Okay.” Danny turned the flimsy latch on the door that he was guarding. It was tempting to stay by the door with his ear glued to the mock wood panelling, but Danny also wanted to know what was in the Champ box.

Kneeling by the coffee table, Steve set the gun aside and flicked the catches on the red box. The dual clicks were loud. Lifting the lid, he pawed through the contents, and picked up the narrow black ledger book. The leather cover was a little cracked. Decades in a box on a windswept peninsula had not been the perfect storage container. Gingerly, Steve opened the book. The distinctive columns of writing proclaimed that this was the book that Doris McGarrett had photographed.

“Can you hold this?” Steve handed it over, as Danny crouched beside him. “Hide it?”

Danny turned it over in his hands, dubiously. Old book smell tickled his nose. He flipped through the pages, but there was nothing that was legible to him. Chin had translated one of the pages in Doris’
photographs as a family tree. Pages and pages of writing -- the book was almost filled.

“Danny?” Steve asked.

“Yeah?”

“Have you found something?”

“Just thoughts,” Danny said. The ledger was a little too big to stash in a pocket of his trousers. The book could have probably fit in the breast pocket of his jacket at a push -- the jacket that was somewhere abandoned on the top deck. He settled for tucking it under his shirt, against the small of his back, secured by his belt.

“Oh.” Steve sighed, and held up two blue passports. “Dad and Mary’s false passports.”

“Did you think that your mom didn’t have passports for your Dad and Mary?” Danny asked, puzzled at his relief.

“I wondered.” Steve shrugged, a little abashed.

“And it does mean that there probably isn’t a third box stashed somewhere.”

Steve turned his attention back to the contents. Removing the stolen can of deodorant from his jacket pocket, he pocketed an old-fashioned cassette recorder and a floppy disc. An old cigar tin rattled as he picked it up. He stuffed it in another pocket.

“Why don’t we just take the whole box?”

“What?” Steve asked.

“Steal the box.” Danny mimed picking up the box by its handle.

Steve lifted the top tier of the toolbox aside, putting it on the coffee table. Danny leaned over to better see. There was a potbellied clay statuette taking up most of the base. A folded cloth cushioned it from the sides of the box. A silvery, square rectangle about five inches long caught Danny’s eye.

“Whoa, heavy,” Danny said as he picked it up. The smooth metal block had significant heft. The mass was what made the toolbox unwieldy.

Intrigued, Steve held out his hand. He nodded as Danny deposited it on his palm. His hold dipped, until he compensated for the weight.

“Huh? You know--” Steve turned it over, and it caught the light of the setting sun, “--I think that this is platinum.”

“Or silver?” Danny offered.

“Nah, twenty years in the toolbox, it would have tarnished.” Steve shook his head. Two handed, he angled one face towards Danny. “Credit Suisse. Yes, definitely platinum.”

There was a stamp on the underside of the ingot: Credit Suisse; 1kg, and an engraved diamond with Pt embossed in the centre.

“Pt means platinum?” Danny hedged.

“Yes, the chemical symbol. And platinum is a noble metal; non-reactive.”
“Chemistry?”

“You said chemistry?” Steve cocked his head to the side.

“Yeah, I did. Why have a lump of platinum? Is it worth a lot?”

“My Masters was in Chemistry.”

“Science nerd.” Danny grinned. “How much is it worth?”

“Worth?” Steve shrugged, and passed it back. “It’s a rare metal. Stick it in your pocket.”

It weighed a good two pounds; Danny didn’t think that his pockets could cope without tearing.

“Why are you weighing me down? I’m not your pack horse. I’m injured, you know. Shot arm. Remember?”

Steve took the block back, hefting the weight like a black jack. He rocked back on his heels, and contemplated the open box, lips pursed. The thoughts were almost tangible -- heavy thoughts, heavy thinking, Danny noted, giving Steve a moment to put them in order.

Danny glanced to the cabin door and its flimsy lock. He didn’t think that it would survive a single kick. Quietly, he moved to the emergency panel under the windows. Steve had known that there was one in the room. Perhaps, emergency doors were standard in vessels? On the other side of the curved window, there was a lip, which clearly an escaping passenger was supposed to traverse. Pushing his head against the window, Danny peered along the line of glass, to the blade of the right-hand catamaran wing, where there was a recessed ladder.

“Danny.”

Danny turned.

“My mother assassinated Wo Yongfu and took the ancestral tablet, because it was with him when he died?”

“Yes.” Danny nodded backing up the words from across the breath of the cabin. “He was taking it to be repaired.”

“So where did all this stuff come from?”

“You said it yourself; it’s her bug-out stash. She probably built it up over years.”

“Yeah,” Steve said slowly. “Wo Yongfu knew mom, and mom knew Wo Yongfu -- if Wo Fat’s telling the truth. I suspect he is; it fits the facts. The ledger is the thing that he’s really after? You know, he wanted the tablet, but he needs the ledger.”

“Remember I told you that Chin thought that it was an account book? The record he translated was in 1988 -- or thereabouts. White figured that it was about Wo Yongfu’s Swiss Bank accounts? So Wo Yongfu always had it in his pocket -- your mom took it, when you know, she --” Danny left ‘killed him’ unsaid. “Wo Fat said that he was after a bankbook back at the House?”

“What?” Steve shook his head, frustrated.

“We think that the ledger is important,” Danny said clearly -- detail would wait for later.

“Or the ceramic pot, or the old-school floppy disc.” Steve nodded at the open toolbox. “Wo Fat
doesn’t strike me as the kind of guy to tell the truth.”

“Yeah,” Danny glanced abstractly up at the crystal-dripping light fixture on the ceiling, “but the ledger is in your mom’s photographs. It was never a star in Orion.”

“Repeat?” Steve ordered, a dint of focused concentration between his eyebrows.

“We’ve so gotta learn sign language,” Danny grumbled moving closer to Steve.

“What?”

“The bankbook—” Danny mimed opening a book and then taking a snapshot with an imaginary camera, “—was photographed.”

“Yes,” Steve said sibilantly, “you’re right.”

“Told you: I’m always right.”

Steve let that ride.

“Look, let’s take the box with us,” Danny said, and started gathering up the contents that Steve had set over the coffee table -- packet of Top Trumps and a stack of business cards bound together with a grubby elastic band. He pointed at the space by the idol. “Put the platinum brick back. You can hardly lug it around in your pocket.”

The block chimed melodically as Steve obeyed orders.

“Can we barricade the door?” Danny wondered suddenly.

“What?” But Steve glanced to the door. “Most heavy furniture is going to be secured. You don’t want a wardrobe or a bookcase falling over in heavy weather.”

The hairs were rising on the back of Danny’s neck. He did not want to stay in Wo Fat’s stateroom.

“Oh, we’re idiots!” Realisation was like a smack on the back of Danny’s head.

Steve startled, jerking back from the coffee table.

“What? The door?” He was poised, eyes darting warily from door, to windows, to Danny.

“The helicopter. There’s a helicopter on the roof behind the wheelhouse. Why aren’t we in the helicopter flying back to dry land? You can fly it, can’t you?”

Steve chewed on the inside of his cheek.

“Steve?” Danny drawled, because Steve had evidently thought about using the helicopter and dismissed the plan. “Steven? You wanted to stay on the boat, didn’t you? That’s why we didn’t go straight to the helicopter when we escaped from the cabin.”

Danny batted Steve with the back of his hand -- Bad Steve. He glowered at Steve, but Steve regarded him, a bright flush on his cheekbones. The contrast of the flush with his pale skin was stark.

“We’d been on this vessel about two hours before we got out of the cabin,” Steve reported staccato. “A mega-catamaran has an average cruising speed of seventy five miles per hour, plus planing conditions have been excellent. I suspect that the vessel has been pushing the envelope. Therefore, we’ve travelled circa one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles.”
“The helicopter is a Bell 47-G and has a range of two hundred miles, assuming that it’s fully serviced and fuelled. The helicopter does not have pontoons if we had to ditch.”

“So it was too risky?”

“I didn’t like the odds.” Steve glanced away. “And I haven’t flown anything since… you know.”

*Since I got my ears blown out,* Danny translated.

“My vertigo meds are going to wear off. I took them at breakfast.”

*Oh.*

That was hours ago. He had already fallen down. Danny guessed that today was the first time that Steve had been on a boat since he was hurt. Luckily, the weather was perfect.

“Shit,” Danny said succinctly.

“Shit,” Steve echoed.

“We’re on a boat—” Danny thought hard, “—maybe there will be travel sickness meds in a first aid kit?”

“Excuse me?”

“Meds.” Danny pointed at Wo Fat’s bedroom, and followed his finger.

The room was opulent, all matching masculine neutral colours and coordination. Only one pillow was dinted on the double bed, which pointed to no companion. There was a door that led to a compact en suite. Danny rifled through the mirrored cabinet above the sink, tossing toothpaste, brush, shaving foam, and deodorant onto the top of the unit. He didn’t recognise the brands, but the catamaran was ocean-faring, so they could have been picked up anywhere. A single, small plastic bottle contained dual coloured capsules, but Danny didn’t recognise the script on the bottle. There were a couple of boxes. The contents of the boxes were blister packs of tablets, but they could have been anything. Danny would have given his left nut for Dramamine.

If Steve started getting sick, they were going to be in trouble.

---

#111#

“What are you doing, Danny?” Steve demanded from the doorway.

“Looking for travel sickness meds.” Danny handed over two small boxes.

“What?” Steve automatically took the cardboard boxes, turning them over in his hands. “What are these?”

“I dunno.” Danny shrugged.

“Hmm, clearly Wo Fat’s got digestion problems,” Steve said, reading the back of one box. “I think that this stuff is the same as Zantac.”
A click and a thump interrupted them. Someone checked a door handle and then rapped knuckles on a wooden panel.

“Shit. Door.” Danny forced Steve out of the tiny bathroom.

Steve didn’t need any instruction. He ran swooping by the coffee table and snatching up the Champ box.

Voices spoke, the tones querying. Maybe the goons on the other side were wondering if their boss had locked the door to his cabin? A heavier thump of someone putting their shoulder against the wood disabused that notion.

Steve had the emergency exit wide open and was gesturing for Danny to go through the small space first. Over protective idiot -- rather than wasting time arguing, Danny ducked and shuffled through the exit.

Danny’s eyes immediately teared up; they were rushing face first into the wind. The wind was chilling. His bloody jacket was somewhere on the sheltered deck behind the helicopter.

Boats sucked. Shot up arms sucked more.

Steve jack-in-the-boxed up beside Danny, clanging the emergency exit shut behind them. He chivvied Danny along the thin stretch to the recessed ladder in the catamaran’s superstructure. The ledge was very narrow; a fall would drop them straight into the water below, and hopefully, into the space between the prominent blades of the catamaran and not into any churning engines.

Visions of a wobbly Steve falling and plummeting into the water propelled Danny to the ladder.

“Up or down?” Danny pointed in each direction. Decisions, decisions.

“Up.”

“Okay.” Danny set hands to the rungs and started to climb. The burn of his torn bicep separated into a razor sharp bite, and as he climbed Danny saw blood afresh staining the bandage.

The impetus of terrorists on their heels propelled Danny upwards, Steve right behind him. The ladder emerged back on the top deck before the shot-up wheelhouse. Danny froze, peering over the lip. The open plane of the deck before the wheelhouse was intimidating. They had come right back on themselves. Danny peered under his arm looking back down the ladder. Manhandling the toolbox under his arm, Steve was climbing one-handed.

What? Steve mouthed.

There’s no cover, Danny returned.

Steve scowled, and looked back down the ladder, contemplating climbing back down. Beneath them the emergency exit clanged open, and a bulky, crouching form squeezed through the tight trapdoor onto the ledge.

“Shit. Come on!” Danny scrambled up the final rung and rolled onto the deck. He skidded around on his butt, reaching down to relieve Steve of the unwieldy Champ box. He yanked toolbox, and dragged Steve, by dint of Steve holding tightly to the box, onto the deck.

The man below was shouting, instructions or abuse -- Danny didn’t know. He didn’t speak Mandarin or Cantonese, or any other language than English, for that matter.
“Come on.” Steve scrambled unsteadily on hands and feet, as if a sprinter at the start of a race. There was a haste to his motion that tasted like terror in the back of Danny’s throat. Coltishly, he found his feet and sprinted directly towards the wheelhouse.

They were running out of time, Danny knew. Adrenalin could only take a body so far. Someone was in the wheelhouse, a spider in the centre of the web.

“Freeze, Commander!” Wo Fat rapped, as he stepped out of the wheelhouse. His raccoon mask of bruised eyes and band aid across his nose did not distract from his lethal air. He drew guns from the dual shoulder holsters crisscrossed across his chest.

Steve skidded to a stop halfway between Wo Fat and Danny standing at either end of the long deck. The sun, on the cusp of evening, set long shadows over the deck from the blades of the helicopter stowed behind the wheelhouse.

A line of darkness bisected Steve.

“Hands up,” Wo Fat ordered.

“I don’t know what you’re saying.” Steve shrugged, insouciant in the face of Wo Fat’s threat. “All I’m getting is the roar of the wind.”

Steve’s coattails flapped.

“Put the toolbox down, Mr. Williams,” Wo Fat’s said.

Danny glanced back down the ladder, considering dropping the box on the guy slowly clambering up.

“Don’t!” Wo Fat said sharply.

Danny carefully set the box down by his feet.

“You’re a very annoying man, Commander McGarrett.”

“Seriously, you’ve got my ITE remote control. Don’t you get it? Deaf. Extremely hard-of-hearing if, you want to be accurate.”

“Secure the box,” Wo Fat said. The instruction wasn’t fired at Danny but the guy who had made it up the ladder, and was regarding the tableau.

Wo Fat slowly sauntered across the deck.

The ass.

“Honestly, I remember your mother from my English Language School… fondly. She was a good teacher. My father was besotted.”

Eewww, Danny thought. He figured that Wo Fat’s Dad wasn’t the only one who was besotted.

“What is it with your family’s penchant for stealing from my family? My father’s bankbook and my ancestral tablet -- not once but now twice.”

“Why so interested in the bankbook?” Danny piped up. Mentally, he punched the air with both fists, because all their suppositions were accurate. “Just curious, you know, it’s been missing for almost two decades. If it’s about drugs they’ve gone off, I guess? You know, I don’t actually know. Does
cocaine have a sell-by date?"

Danny would ask the questions and relay the answers back to Steve later -- when they were safe and this stain of humanity was behind bars.

"You’re very much like your mother." All of Wo Fat’s interest was on Steve.

Oh, Danny thought. Steve had wondered a few times why he hadn’t been assassinated, thinking that it was partly because his investigation was the mechanism to find the stolen items. It appeared that the second reason was that Wo Fat had a hard on for McGarretts of all varieties.

Danny couldn’t blame Wo Fat, but in the words of the seagulls in Finding Nemo: ‘Mine!’

“I’m going to have to separate you and Mr. Williams. And I do have some pharmaceutical samples that I’m going to have to use to chemically restrain you.”

“What’s that a euphemism for?” Danny demanded. “Are you going to drug him out of his gourd?”

“Heroin is very addictive. I think that--”

The scream of a predator screeched over the top of them close enough so Danny hit the deck in pure reflex. Frozen for the space of a gasp, he then managed to lift his head off the deck to see a delta wing aircraft execute a tight turn off the left hand side of the catamaran. Steve hadn’t ducked.

Steve attacked.

Wo Fat pivoted on one foot kicking at Steve faster than Danny could map. Steve caught his foot, and Wo Fat back flipped out of Steve’s hold. There wasn’t a moment’s hesitation -- Steve ran at Wo Fat punching hard. They wheeled together in a macabre tango. Wo Fat kicked and Steve dodged and punched. The violence contained in every strike was stunning. Each hit was matched and countered. It wasn’t stylish. Hands, fingers, knees and elbows hit to gouge, slash, and cut. Blows drew blood.

Standing, Danny tried to guess the millisecond where he could wade in and help.

Snake fast, Wo Fat dropped low under Steve’s defence, and jabbed two fisted against Steve’s ribcage, unerringly going for his left side. Jarred, Steve fell back, stumbled and went down -- smack -- on the deck.

“No!” Danny yelled.

Before he moved an inch, the goon with the Champ box drove into Danny, hard. Danny went down with the man on top of him. He fought like a wrestler, capturing Danny’s wrists and pinning them above his head. He was an anvil on Danny’s chest -- a massive bald-headed ox of a man. But Danny had been smaller than his peers since High School, and he had a ton of brothers, sisters, and cousins.

Danny bent one knee up, and kept his other leg straight. Whipping his hands round and down, Danny dragged the goon’s hands with his movement. Twisting to the side, Danny levered the bastard right off his chest. Completely unbalanced, the man went over like a boot-kicked rat. Danny rolled free, needing to get away from the Ox’s long reach. He came up bruisingly against a sharp edge of the Champ box.

Shaking his head angrily, the goon sat up to free his gun from his shoulder holster. A gun, another gun! Terror congealed and Danny reacted. His only weapon was the heavy, unwieldy toolbox. Danny grabbed it two handed and swung it like a battering ram at the man’s head. The bloody smack of contact was viscerally spongy. The heavy platinum brick inside the box shifted and the weight
pulled the box right out of Danny’s hands.

The Champ box sailed through the air, right over the edge of the deck. Its arc was almost poetic as it plummeted downwards. It made quite the splash.

“That’s Danny!” Simons rapped. “Kessler, you ass!”

“Sorry, sir,” Kessler said cheerily to Danny, and kind of teleported around him, both shielding Danny, and assessing all and conceivable threats. He whipped out a handful of zip-ties and set down to secure the Ox. Judging by the blood puddle by the goon’s head, Danny didn’t think that he was getting up soon.

Simons was identifiable despite his black clone armour. Danny recognised his gangly limbs after a couple of months living in the House. He had Wo Fat on his stomach, knee between his shoulder blades with his arms twisted painfully at his back. A second ski-masked Navy SEAL had the muzzle of a machine gun pushed in the back of Wo Fat’s skull, as Simons zip-tied his wrists.

The catamaran started to slow. Another SEAL was at the helm

“Oh. My. God,” Danny breathed. He had to just take a moment to put all his mental cards in order.
“Do you need a medic?” Kessler asked, scrutinising Danny.

“It’s over,” Danny said, clapping his palm over his mouth. “Huh, it’s over. Holy shit.”

He laughed. He couldn’t help laughing.

“Danny? Are you okay?” Impressively, Steve bodily moved the hulk-like form of Kessler aside.

The sudden adrenalin dump made Danny want to throw up. Steve was in his face. And a new emergency stopped any possible nervous breakdown on Danny’s part.

“Are you okay?” Danny got his hands on both of Steve’s cheeks holding him still. There was a nasty, nasty gash on Steve’s forehead. There was blood in his hair, running down the side of his face and colouring the collar of his previously pristine white shirt and the knot of his Seolh blue tie.

Steve pulled his face free from Danny’s hold like a disgruntled kid.

“Head wounds always bleed.” He brushed at the corner of his eye clumping his eyelashes together.

“It looks worse than it is.”

“Doofus.” Danny reached out, and grabbed Steve’s tie and reeled him in.

“What?”

Danny silenced him with a soft kiss. Steve froze for an impossibly long heartbeat and then yielded, lips softening. His large hands bracketed Danny’s cheeks, as he kissed and kissed. Danny was semi-hard against Steve’s thigh. Steve pulled back and breathed, resting his bloody forehead against Danny’s.

“Now’s not the time, Danny,” he said softly.

Reality impinged. They were standing on the top deck of a terrorist’s catamaran surrounded by a team of US Navy SEALs.

True. Steve had a point. Danny didn’t think that their relationship was a secret. As near as he could guess the security team had more than one video of him and Steve in their lighthouse bedroom. But there was indeed a time and a place for everything.

Ski mask pulled off, Simons was grinning at them.

“I don’t believe that you threw the toolbox over the side.” Steve shook his head.

“It was the platinum brick.” Danny jerked his thumb over his shoulder. “The weight pulled it right out of my hands.”

“Geez.” Steve sighed heavily staring at the wide blue ocean. The delta wing airplane nearly skimmed the surface as it circled them. “I suppose if we’re lucky we could be over a reef. We might be able to retrieve it.”

“Hey. Hey. Hey, Babe, it’s all right.” Danny reached to the small of his back, pulling out the ledger tucked between his belt and shirt. “Voila!”

“Yes! You have it. I gave it to you!” Steve hauled Danny in, and kissed him fiercely.

_Fuck the watchers_, Danny kissed back, happily and enthusiastically. If they were back at the House they would have been celebrating for hours.
“Guys? Guys?” Simons interrupted. “Commander?”

“What?” Steve straightened, an endearing flush on his cheeks.

“I’m guessing that book is important?” Simons asked.

“Wo Fat’s dad’s bankbook.” Danny opened it carefully, cognizant of the thin yellowing pages, to show the last couple of pages to Simons. “Doris McGarrett stole it when she was working for the CIA.”

“Huh. Can I?” Simons held his hand out.

Danny slid a checking glance at Steve, who nodded. Strangely reluctant to hand over the bankbook, Danny made himself pass it to the young Navy SEAL.

“So you read… Chinese?” Danny said unnecessarily.

Simons didn’t answer, focused on moving through the book from back to front. He scowled at the pages.

“Chin thought that it was in code?” Danny offered helpfully, but he didn’t know if Chin was fluent.

“You showed Mr. Kelly this book?” Simons asked.

“No -- we had photographs of some of the pages. He thought that one page showed accounts and another page showed the Wo family history.”

“Photographs,” Simons echoed. “Did Commander Archer know about these photographs?”

“Kinda.” Danny hand waved that question. “Can you read the book?”

Steve was watching them as if at a tennis match.

“Okay, yes it is coded, but I think that really it’s just the author’s own shorthand. The last entry is--” Simons picked through the tissue thin pages, “--February 1988.”

“Which we knew,” Danny said.

Simons didn’t snap, but Danny could tell that the younger man was really tempted to say something sharp.

“But what exactly is in the book, Simons?” Steve said, brow crinkling.

“Money,” Simons said succinctly. “Conversion of assets -- drugs, slaves -- into hard cash, and in the form of high priced items: antiquities, artwork, and metals.”

“Like platinum?” Danny said brightly, mapping an imaginary brick flying through the air.

“We lost one over the side,” Steve explained, in the face of Simons’ perplexed expression at Danny’s splayed, splashing fingers.

“An ingot of platinum?” Simons clarified.

“One kilogram,” Steve said.

“No,” Steve said slowly, pondering. “Conservatively, I’d estimate 25K, but that’s just a guess.”

Never had it been so apparent that Steve was as rich as Midas.

“How many bricks?” Danny asked, undeniably interested.

“Does it state where Wo Yongfu’s caches are?” Steve overrode Danny’s question.

Mouth pursed, Simons leafed through several pages, long fingers separating the book into sections, before finally closing the ledger. He sent a speaking glance at Steve and then cut eyes towards Wo Fat, prone on the deck.

“Multiple, secure storage areas,” he said carefully.

“So this was all about money?” Danny summarised.

“It usually is,” Kessler pointed out cheerfully.

“Kess, go with Grossmann’s team and finish clearing the vessel,” Simons ordered.

Kessler trotted off.

Steve held out his hand and Simons passed the bankbook back. He turned it over, contemplatively. And then he marched across the deck to the hogtied Wo Fat. First carefully resituating the creases of his trousers, he crouched down on his haunches by Wo Fat’s head.

“I have your bankbook. And I know what’s in it. Your assets are going to be confiscated. I guess some are going to be empty, but not all of them. Your father might have lost the book, but he would have known the whereabouts of his own caches. But without codes and passwords there are some accounts in this world that are unassailable.” Steve eyed Wo Fat. “I’m looking forward to redistributing your wealth to worthy causes.”


“Liar.” Steve leaned in close. “It’s still valuable, otherwise you wouldn’t have worked so hard to find it. And having a roadmap to the best, most secure places in the world to hide concrete assets is invaluable. I wonder how many terrorist cells and unscrupulous bankers this book is going to destroy?” Steve closed the book with a snap.

“I will escape and you will pay for this insult.” Wo Fat glowered.

“No, you won’t.” Steve stood. “Oh, and by the way, thanks for the intel.”

Steve stalked back to Danny’s side, smug. If he had had a tail it would have been slashing from side to side in absolute satisfaction.

“Hey, Babe.”

Steve smiled a deeply content smile.

“Now. Now.” Danny wagged a finger under Steve’s nose. “None of that. We’re going to have a debrief.”

Steve cocked an eyebrow as he listened hard, primed to respond to the word ‘debrief’ like a good Pavlovian soldier.
“We did not need to undergo all these shenanigans, Steven.”

“How?” Steve did his head-tilt of clarification.

“Exactly,” Danny confirmed.

“Shenanigans.” Steve grinned crazily.

“If you had displayed a modicum -- a modicum -- of restraint--” Danny held his finger and thumb a millimetre apart, “--we could have found your mother’s stash with a fully armed US Navy SEAL team as a protective detail. The same team that just had to travel hundreds of thousands of miles to rescue us.”

“Excuse me?” Steve parsed and then offered, “Three hundred miles?”

Danny gave him a flat look. Steve held his hands up in surrender.

“Yes, Danno.”

“Don’t ‘yes, Danno’ me.” Danny growled. “We need to find the remote for your hearing aids.”

“Remote?” Steve checked.

At Danny’s nod, he made to move, either to search Wo Fat or head down below to search for his ITE remote. Danny pounced and pinched the fabric of Steve’s jacket sleeve before he could get away.

“Nope.”

“What?” Steve peered down at his sleeve. He could have easily pulled his arm free.

“Stand down, sailor. There’s Simons’ team and there’s Grossmann’s team, and maybe another team, judging by the number of ninjas climbing all over this boat. You’re going to stand here with me under the protection of Barnabas and the giant helicopter hovering beside us.”

“Giant helicopter?”

“It’s over, Steve. You don’t have to risk yourself. You realise that, don’t you? We got Wo Fat.” Danny laughed out loud. “The Navy sent a giant helicopter to come and rescue us.”

The grey helicopter still hovered at the back of the catamaran. Its angles and the scope of the tilted rotors made Danny think of a giant, poised mantis.

“It’s a V-22 osprey, probably operating out of Kaneohe Bay, the Marine Corps Base,” Steve said pedantically.

“Hah. You mean that the army rescued us? How will you live it down?” Danny laughed at Steve’s affronted expression.

“Marines, not army. Careful what you say, Danny. Friendly fire -- isn’t.”

~*~

#112#

The trip back in the V-22 osprey had been an experience. Danny had thoroughly enjoyed being
hoisted up into the hold of the helicopter. He looked forward to telling his grandchildren and greatgrandchildren about the experience -- minus the gut clenching terror and projectile vomiting. Steve, however, was going to hear, at great length, about how memorable the entire experience was for the rest of his god-damned life.

Danny would have much preferred to have been returned to Pearl Harbour-Hickam using the very stable, quiet boat, rather than the noisy, rattling terror machine. However, apparently, the catamaran was -- courtesy of Steve’s sabotaging the hydraulics -- trapped into sailing around in a large circle in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Steve had simply pocketed his newly found remote; Wo Fat had still had it on his person. He left his aids in his carrying case. Pointing vaguely to indicate the raucous rotors, Steve had then slumped into the frankly mechano-like seat bolted into the side of the helicopter, shut his eyes, and fallen promptly asleep. Kessler had managed to wrap a massive dressing around Steve’s head -- it had been the sort of mess that Grace bestowed on her dolls -- without waking him up.

Danny had not slept.

Now Danny was in the Tripler Emergency Room having the ghoulish gash on his arm cleaned and stitched, where possible. The scar was going to be impressive, because it wasn’t a slice, but a gouge.

Steve was having an MRI under the direction of Dr. Magnus, checking on his head in light of the small sub-arachnoid haematoma that he had suffered from the IED attack when he had been injured six months earlier.

Danny was going to have words with Steven J. McGarrett about holding back pertinent information.

Danny was exhausted. Dwelling on his exhaustion made him feel more tired.

“All done.” The doctor, a tall white guy wearing a fetching floral print bandanna, secured the bandage around Danny’s arm with a piece of tape. “Keep a close eye on the wound. Any undue redness or seepage, I want you straight back here. I don’t like prescribing antibiotics prophylactically. You’ll be back in ten days to get the stitches out.”

“I will?” Danny snarked because he was tired, he hadn’t eaten since the chicken satay skewer hours ago at the wake, and there wasn’t a molecule of adrenalin left in his body.


“Cod-- understood, doc.”

“Here.” The doctor gave him a wet-wipe. “You’ve got blood on your forehead. No wound.”

“Oh.” Danny scrubbed at the skin, and stared at the crusty, rusty flakes, bamboozled. “Have I got it all?”

“Smudge on the left.”

“Thanks.” Danny folded the wipe over to get a clean piece and scrubbed again at his skin. It was Steve’s blood. He remembered resting their foreheads together in the aftermath of Wo Fat’s capture.

“I saw a sweatshirt lying around,” the doctor said. “I’ll go find it.”

Danny slumped on the edge of the gurney, trying to dredge up the energy to move. Despite the
lateness of the hour, he was just going to have to beg coffee from the Tripler Staff, because he doubted that the day was over.

~*~


“Wha--” Danny blinked. He was lying twisted on his side, feet hanging off the edge of the bed, as if he had just toppled over.

“Danny?”

“Yeah?” Danny knuckled at his eye, sleep creased and uncomfortable. “Steve? You okay?”

Steve had an impressive white dressing plastered over his forehead. A grey-green t-shirt hung off his frame.

“Fine.”

“Fine?” Danny echoed, because that didn’t look fine by any definition of the word.

“Yeah.” Steve lifted his shoulders in a shrug. “No concussion or bleed.”


“No.” Steve sighed, and rocked from foot to foot. “Magnus was just being Magnus.”

“What?” Danny persisted.

“I think that Magnus was really just trying to see how the bleeds had resolved since, you know. Science.”

Finally, a sentence. Steve’s diction was clear and crisp, and his volume precise -- all which signalled that he was wearing his hearing aids.

“So no headache?” Danny asked “Cos the size of that bandage tells me you’ve probably got a big headache.”

“It was a slicing kick.” Steve automatically raised his arm in a blocking motion. “Wo Fat’s hard shoe heel just caught the skin on my forehead and peel--”

“Stop. Stop!” Danny held up his hand. “I don’t need to know. I’m guessing that you’re bruised from head to toe?”

Steve patted his pocket.

“Painkillers.” Danny interpreted the action. Steve was skirting the non-verbal, which was a clear indicator that he was beyond tired.

“Can we go home?” Danny asked. He hoped that they weren’t going to be debriefed.

Steve stared, eyes too big, and smudges under his eyes too dark.

“Look, Wo Fat’s not going anywhere is he? I don’t have a clue what time it is.” Danny automatically looked to his empty wrist. His watch was back at the House on their bed where White had thrown it. “We’re closer to home than Pearl.”
“Not true,” Steve said.

“Okay, but if we go to Pearl, we’ll be much further away from the House. Home. Let’s go home. Seriously, will Archer mind?”

Soberly, Steve nodded. “I have to give him the ledger.”

“Damn it all to Hell.” Danny thudded back on the pillows. He wanted to go home to bed.

~*~

“Commander, you look like Hell,” Archer said candidly as he shook Steve’s hand. “Mr. Williams.”

“It’s been a long day,” Danny said.

“But successful. You and I are going to have words, Commander. But I will say: good work.”

“Sir?” Steve said, perplexity tinged by tiredness.

“It hadn’t escaped my notice that you weren’t telling me the whole story. You can’t lie for shit. And you never returned to the photography unit on Base after developing the last set of photographs. Did you expect Corporal Oh to not report your sudden absence? Or that I wouldn’t connect the dots?”

“You kept pretty mum about White,” Danny riposted, because Archer had no power over him. “And we’ve been bait for the last two months.”

“Danny,” Steve murmured.

“Don’t ‘Danny’ me, I’m not in the Navy, am I?”

“If I was going to be pedantic, I would point out that you’re a contractor,” Archer said dryly.

“Okay. I think that I deserve Hazard Pay, then.” Danny mentally counted lots of dollar signs dancing around a red tool chest.

Archer didn’t seem to have much of a sense of humour. Putting on a Naval uniform seemed to switch off any sense of humour in its wearer. Archer had a lot of blocks of colour over his breast pocket -- the more blocks, the more serious the officer, Danny assumed.

“How’s Commander White?” Steve asked softly.

“Surgical ward at Tripler, being monitored,” Archer answered Steve’s question and ignored Danny’s additions. “Initial signs point to a good recovery. He’ll then go to Leavenworth.”

Steve nodded brusquely.

“And Wo Fat?” Danny asked, because he might not have badges and stripes, but his questions were relevant.

“We’ll have some face-to-face meetings,” Archer said euphemistically, “and then he’ll be pacing a very small cell with inadequate en-suite facilities as well.”

“Sir.” Steve reached into his jacket pocket. “Wo Fat’s focus on Seolh was to find two items: a family object and this ledger. Both of which my mother stole from his father, Wo Yongfu, when she was working with the CIA.”
“And this is?” Archer asked as he opened the bankbook.

“Roadmap of hard item caches. It will have to be translated.”

Archer raised an eyebrow: clearly.

“This is old, presumably? Doris McGarrett was active in the 70s and 80s,” Archer said.

“We believe that the caches contain plunder, otherwise why would Wo Fat have spent so much time and effort into retrieving it? He called it a bankbook, but we also assume that Wo Yongfu wrote other information in it.”

“Why?” Archer leafed through the ledger.

“It’s not all tables and accounts judging by the format. I can pick out a few words.” Steve stood a little taller. “Check out the front pages.”

Danny leaned over to better see the aforementioned pages. The hanzi were crabby, and not drawn into distinct columns. It could possibly be the Wo Family history page, although the writing was precise, not in a child’s hand.

“It’s not as if I ever got to see an unredacted version of my mother’s case files. Perhaps, you have a better idea of what might be contained within the pages, Commander Archer,” Steve said precisely.

Danny winced, because that was sharp.

Archer met the passive aggressive jab with a raised eyebrow.

Danny kind of wished that they had stopped by a handy photocopier somewhere in the labyrinthine Tripler, and taken a few scans.

But they did have some photos of the pages.

“Good work, Commander.” Archer closed the book with a snap. “You too, Mr. Williams. Thank you.”

“Sir?”

“You’re dismissed, Commander. Go home. You look like a reject from Miami Vice. Get some sleep. We’ll talk later.” Archer nodded, cold and austere, and offering no room for argument.

“Yes, sir.” Steve nodded back, equally soberly. Neither man saluted, but Danny could tell that they wanted to. The lack of salute probably had something to do with the fact that Steve wasn’t wearing a uniform – but wore a borrowed t-shirt, his unbuttoned vest and tailored suit jacket.

“I do hope we get to know what’s in that book,” Danny said, “cos, you know, we’re invested.”

Archer regarded him, immutable, but the rigid, inflexible cast broke. He inclined his head fractionally. Danny took that as a ‘yes’.

“Come on, Steve.” Danny plucked at his elbow. “Home.”

“Good night, Sir,” Steve said.

~*~
“Oh, my god. Oh, my god. Oh, my god. Steve! Danny!”

They were surrounded. Exhaustion had settled into a migraine-like beat behind Danny’s eyes. But they were home, and surrounded by family. Steve had Mary enfolded in his long arms, and Kono smelled amazing wrapped around Danny. Mamo watched from the top of the steps on the veranda, like Kamehameha I on his pedestal.

“Dudes!” Toast yelled. “You scared the shit out of us. The radio call, man.”

“You picked that up?” Danny asked.

“Me and everyone else who monitors Channel 16.”

“Sorry,” Danny apologised sincerely. If he had been on the other end of that radio, he probably would have had a stroke from the stress.

“Are you all right?” Auntie Maru was eying Danny’s arm hidden under the over-large Navy sweatshirt.

“Bruised and battered,” Steve answered, uncurling to sling an arm over Mary’s shoulders. “But we got Wo Fat. He’s in federal custody. The Navy has the evidence that Wo Fat was after.”

“So it’s over?” Chin asked.

Steve blew out a heavy sigh, jaw working.

“That’s a no,” Mary said, astutely.

“It’s a ‘we still need some answers’,” Steve said, “but they’re going to be forthcoming.”

_Forthcoming_, Mary mouthed, and rolled her eyes.

“Oh, keikis,” Mamo said, “bed. We’ll talk about this tomorrow.”

~*~

“We should be having sex,” Danny said.

“What?” Steve’s jaw dropped.

“You know.” Danny gestured, arms windmilling to encompass the whole of their experience, and almost knocking his fingers off the corner of Steve’s diamond bookshelf. His arm hurt -- everything hurt, including his hair. “The villain's caught, the treasures found, the triumphant heroes return home and have celebratory sex against the wall.”

Steve blinked.

“Or, you know, we can have a hot shower and sleep for twenty-four hours,” Danny said responding to the exhaustion written all over the planes and angles of Steve’s face. He couldn’t see his own face, but he certainly felt grey.

“Is it sad that I would probably fall asleep if I leaned against a wall?” Steve said, shoulders slumping.

“Pathetic. Let’s shower before we die of exhaustion.”

“Pathetic,” Steve grumbled, as he stumbled after Danny.
“Do you think that Archer will tell us anything?” Danny asked over his shoulder as he trooped up the spiral staircase to Steve’s sybaritic bathroom. He wanted a shower more than food or sex.

“He’ll tell us something."

“But not everything."

Steve lifted a shoulder in a tired, long-suffering shrug.

“We have to know. You get that, don’t you?” Danny persisted. A fillip of anger took him into the bathroom. “We should have kept the ledger.”

“No, we shouldn’t have. We can’t use it. We can’t translate it. We can’t empty the Wo Family coffers. Navy Intel will be able to use the resources.”

“But they’ll only tell us what they think we need to know.”

“True. But I am an Intelligence Officer and a Navy SEAL, and I need to know a lot. Archer and I will come to an understanding.”

“How?”

Steve waggled an eyebrow.

“Steven.”

Flamboyantly, Steve twisted his fingers in mid-air, and an old-fashioned three inch floppy computer disc appeared between his finger and thumb.

“That,” Danny said, staring at the black plastic square with its distinctive silver shutter, “was in the Champ box.”

“Yes.” Steve patted his jacket pocket and plucked out an old-fashioned SONY hand held recorder. “Along with this and a tin.”

He placed the floppy disc on the vanity unit and got a rattling old cigar tin from another pocket.

“Oh,” Danny said succinctly. “Clearly stealing is a family trait.”

Steve huffed at him.

“So,” Danny continued unaffected by any expression that Steve could fire at him, “even if the Navy SEALs can’t find the Champ box in Davy Jones’ Locker, we still have some of your mom’s stuff. That disc is old, though.”

“And luckily we have a computer expert on staff.” Steve grinned cheesily.

“Well, well, well. You deserve a gold star.”

“Is that better than sex?”

“No, but close.”

“Shower, first,” Steve said hopefully.

“That’s so sad. We want a shower more than anything else in the world.”
“Simple pleasures.” Steve wriggled out of his jacket, without moving too much, and tossed the bloody coat into the laundry hamper. He was probably bruised from head to toe, and the painkillers were wearing off. His tailored vest followed the jacket with a clank.

“What was that?” Danny asked.

“What?”

“Something heavy in the pocket of your vest?”

Steve squinted, and then volunteered, “Pocket watch; great-grandfather’s. I’ll get it tomorrow. Suit has to go to the dry cleaners, anyway.”

“What a pair.” Danny shook his head, as he shucked off his trousers and underpants. “So tired.”

Steve toed off his shoes, and pulled off one sock, by standing on the toes. Bending over wasn’t on his list of things to do. Pulling the other sock off, he picked up his socks, one after another, with his long toes and lifted them into the hamper.

“Dexterous.”

“What?”

“You’re like an orang-utan. Can you pick up pens from the floor?”

“Yeah. Sure.” Steve unfastened his pants, and they puddled around his ankles. It was ridiculous the way that he was a long line from hips to feet. Ridiculous, but also attractive. His boxers joined the pants. His cock hung loose, the tip poking out under his too-large t-shirt.

They stood opposite each other, only wearing a Navy t-shirt and a Navy sweatshirt.

“I think I’ve seen movies starting like this,” Danny observed. “Navy Boys HooHar – Hooyah? Yeah, that was it: *Navy Boys Hooyah*.”

“What?” Steve bristled, indignantly.

Danny grinned. He’d seen a lot of movies in his time -- that one had stuck in his mind.

Aloofly, Steve peeled out of his t-shirt.

“Ouch.” Danny winced on Steve’s behalf. New, developing bruising overlaid the old, yellowed bruising from various recent escapades over the network of scarring and burns on his left side. Wo Fat had been ruthless, targeting the vulnerable side. “That’s gotta hurt.”

“Going to hurt more tomorrow.” Steve had cleaned up somewhat at the hospital, but it had been cursory at best. Head wounds did indeed bleed messily. His sparse chest hair was clumped into spiral bloody twists.

“Shower.” A shower was definitely the order of the day.

Danny wrenched the sweatshirt over his head, and froze as his arm flared in pain again.

“Hey. Hey, let me help.” Steve wrestled with the material, pulling Danny’s head free, and carefully working at his arm. “We better wrap this in plastic.”

“And your head,” Danny said truculently.
“You want to put a plastic bag over my head?”

“Yes,” Danny snarked, because he was at the end of his tether. He folded the sweatshirt into a tight ball and fired it into the hamper.

“Nice.” Steve dipped down and kissed Danny high on the cheek. “I love you too.”

“I love you, you rule-obeying, doofus,”

“You say the nicest things.” Steve nuzzled his nose through Danny’s hair. “I’ve got a cast protector that will work on your bandage.”

“When the fuck did you break your arm?” Danny caught Steve’s elbow.

“Years ago. Training exercise.” Steve wriggled out of Danny’s hold. “It’s in the first aid kit.”

The first aid kit under the sink that Steve had probably stolen from the Navy. Danny crouched to get the backpack, because Steve wasn’t bending at the waist without provocation.

“We should be able to get your hair washed without getting that band-aid wet.”

“What? You’re facing away from me. I am so tired,” Steve admitted uncharacteristically.

“Sorry, Babe.” Danny stood holding the cast-protector. “Let’s get clean.”

~*~

Honestly, Danny tried -- his brain chittered away, supplying more than a few useful images. The line of Steve’s back was amazing. His curiously neatly turned out feet, attractive. But Steve yawned in Danny’s face just before Danny tried to kiss him. Sadly, Danny contemplated his cock because nothing was happening down below. The mind was willing because it thought that it should, but the body said bed – now.

Steve let Danny wash the blood out of his hair so that the dressing on his forehead didn’t get too wet. But it was inevitable that they were getting wet, and would have to put new band-aids on. The cast protector kind of worked. But the intimacy in their future was smoothing on antibiotic ointments and rebinding wounds.

Steve staggered out of the shower dripping water on the tiled floor. He dried with the vague efficiency of the well-practiced and the practicality of someone who couldn’t be bothered to dry off completely.

Danny wound a towel around his waist.

They lived in a tropical hell hole -- air drying happened.

“Sit.” Steve pushed Danny to sit on the closed toilet seat. It was his sole direction before he peeled off the bandage around Danny’s arm.

“Hwad n-xt,” Danny mumbled around a massive yawn.

“I don’t care what you said.” Steve dumped Danny’s bandage in the sink beside the little bowl where his aids sat.

Practiced, with experience and training that Danny didn’t like to contemplate, Steve rewrapped the wound.
“Come on.” Bodily, Danny caught Steve’s hips, thumbs setting in the grooves, and turned him around.

“What?” Steve protested, and Danny swapped places to plonk him on the closed toilet seat.

Carefully, Danny scrubbed Steve’s hair dry with a towel. His own, he would condition and comb back to dry. Neat, precise, tiny stitches in a handful of places and surgical glue closed a horseshoe shaped cut spanning the curve of Steve’s temple and forehead. A deft hand, a plastic surgeon’s hand, had placed those stitches. The scar should be razor narrow and faint when healed.

Steve peered up at him wearily. Sitting was probably a mistake; Steve looked as if he could snooze sitting on the can. Danny slapped -- carefully placed -- a large band-aid over the wound.


Teeth gritted, Steve stood. Danny chucked the towel around his waist onto the floor. The cleaning up of the detritus of bandaging and showering was going to have to wait for tomorrow.

“Beeeedddd,” Danny intoned again, liking the sound.

Wearily, Steve pressed his fingertips against Danny’s shoulder. He rolled with the movement, knowing where they needed to be -- upstairs and horizontal.

The bedroom window leading to the roof was still wide open. Unbothered by his nakedness, Steve padded barefoot over to the wide swath of windows and stared out over Seolh’s woods. Were the surveillance guys still out there? Too tired to care, Danny waved absentely at the perverts before scooping their watches, Blackberry and long, sharp knife off the bed and setting them on the side table. Danny made a mental note to make sure that Archer got his cell phone off Wo Fat or his henchmen. There were photos of Grace on that phone, and it was his phone. They also needed to retrieve Steve’s black blade from the peninsula, and rebuild the cairn.

Steve pulled the covers back and face planted on the sheets. There wasn’t any decorum. He lay down, stuffed his head under a pillow, and -- flick of the switch -- he was out for the count. It was impressive.

Danny slid in on the other side, leaving a little space between them, and pulled the covers up. Grabbing one of the many pillows he punched it into submission, and stuffed it behind his head. The ceiling fan wasn’t switched on. Danny couldn’t find the energy to get up. The window was open. He should be asleep. Steve was -- snuffling a little bit.

~*~

Hours later, or maybe twenty minutes -- perhaps Danny had dozed? He wasn’t entirely sure because the twilight of sleep made time run weirdly. Bizarrely, he was now sitting bolt upright. Steve grumbled, sleep talking, and muttering about a road. He rolled over and slung an arm over Danny’s waist. Steve, Danny realised, had sought out comfort, curling into his warmth. He hadn’t resorted to his pillow fort.

The world outside the lighthouse windows was dark. Pinpricks of starlight promised a cloudless night. Moonlight illuminated a stark line across a quiet ocean. Danny thought that he might have watched the lambent moon move across the horizon.

Steve grumbled again, lips smacking as he scrunched his nose. Danny smoothed a hand over his shoulder, soothingly.
“Hey, hey,” Danny breathed.

He shifted under Steve’s loose hold until he reclined, propped on pillows. Steve butted his head into Danny’s armpit, huffed, and relaxed into a new stage of sleep. Danny shuffled down the bed a little more. A dream fritted elusively at the edge of memories. He couldn’t remember. Slick sweat covered his skin. Danny swallowed.

*It’s over. It is.*

Steve shifted and draped his large hand over Danny’s chest. Contemplatively, Danny weaved his fingers through Steve’s fingers, interleaving them together. Steve had big hands, broad with long fingers. They were disproportionately a little too large for his frame. Steve should have narrow hands like his feet.

They were hands that could twist a cord and easily break someone’s neck.

Danny didn’t think that he was going to be sleeping tonight or possibly ever again.

~*~

#113#

It was an awful sleep, an intermittent attempt at sleeping, the sort of sleep that tasted of dried hair in your mouth, but Danny opened his eyes to the swath of dark blue curtains and realised that, at some point, he had succumbed to the Sandman.

He was alone in the bed. All the curtains were pulled, including the one overlooking the Pacific that Steve habitually left open. Steve had created the dark cave that he avoided, and Danny preferred. A light wind wafted the curtain.

Danny contemplated the now-turning fan on the ceiling. He didn’t want to move -- movement promised pain. Danny wasn’t a great fan of pain. His stomach grumbled. He needed breakfast. Most importantly, he needed a vat of coffee.

Reluctantly, Danny rolled out of the bed, cradling his arm against his chest. The doctor at Tripler with the fetching bandana had offered Danny a sling, for the wound that Steve insisted was only a scratch, but it had seemed overly dramatic.

Danny moved deliberately; stretching, shifting, and wincing, fractionally. He worked to wake up and warm up strained and bruised muscles. The keen of the burn promised that, probably, Tylenol and coffee would get him on a more even keel.

Grumbling, Danny padded down the spiral staircase to cadge yet another pair of shorts and t-shirt from Steve’s drawers. Danny, deliberately, did not choose anything with a Navy bent. His hair was a nightmare, practically standing on end. But the siren scent of coffee drew him all the way to the House kitchen.

“Bam!”

Danny came to a complete halt before a plump, brown haired, brown eyed toddler, maybe three–three and a half, wielding a wooden spoon as he guarded the kitchen doorway.

“Hey,” he greeted. The little boy was a new face.

“Haulani, let Danny in,” Steve said, from out of sight.
The kid glared at Danny suspiciously.

Danny could have easily just stepped over Haulani, but he waited patiently, resisting the temptation to crouch down and tickle his fat little tummy poking between his sky blue t-shirt and bulky diaper.

Desultorily, Haulani clipped Danny’s knee with his spoon, and then toddler-wobbled back into the kitchen, scurrying around the fridge-freezer.


Sitting at the kitchen table, Steve had the smallest member of their ‘ohana cradled in the crook of his forearm as he held a bottle to Little Daniel’s mouth.

“Morning. Afternoon, Danny.” Steve stretched his neck, lips pursed, duck-like.

Danny contemplated the picture, and then smacked a closed-mouth kiss on the idiot’s lips because there were kids in the room.

“Afternoon?” Danny glanced at the wall clock and it was almost twelve thirty, so accurately afternoon. “You been awake long?”

Steve was dressed in his normal fashion of cargo shorts, but he wore a collarless, button-up white shirt instead of a t-shirt. Easier to get on, if you were bruised from head to toe. He had a faint brush of bruising around his left eye -- a purely spectacular black eye hadn’t developed.

Haulani ran past Danny on his third or fourth loop of the kitchen table.

“Couple of hours,” Steve judged. He was focused on the bandage poking out of Danny’s t-shirt. “How are you feeling?”

“Tylenol,” Danny said succinctly.

“Top of the fridge.” Steve said.

There was a little canister in the bowl where Steve stowed his aids when he went swimming. Tylenol wasn’t normally rolling around the bottom of the bowl.

“I brought it down so I could have a couple with my oatmeal, and then when Nani came by, I put them up there, out of Haulani’s reach.”

Toddlers were usually surprisingly mobile and scarily capable of climbing, but the top of the fridge was almost out of Danny’s reach. It was typical of Steve’s careful over-the-top attention to detail.

“I thought that the doc gave you some good painkillers?” Danny said as he popped the cap and decanted two into the palm of his hand.

“I can mix and match: high-strength ibuprofen, then a couple of hours later, Tylenol.”

Danny hated that Steve knew this stuff, intimately.

“How are you feeling?” There was an industrial-sized carafe of perking coffee on the counter. That was a little unusual -- they normally used the French press or the old espresso machine, sticking with small, freshly-prepped doses. A streak of missed dust marred the housing, so it had been unearthed from somewhere in the bowels of the House. The pot was just about filled with a final drop about to drip from the mechanism. A second, filled pot sat on the top hot plate keeping warm. Danny helped himself to the newly perked coffee. The final drop sizzled against the hot plate.
Steve was watching him, eyes hooded under the brazenly white band-aid on his forehead.

“How are you feeling?” Danny asked again, making sure that he turned to face him.

Steve absorbed the question, and then shrugged, which prompted Little Dee to lose his hold on the bottle nipple, and immediately protest.

“Sorry.” Steve joggled the baby. A milk bubble blossomed on Dee’s lips, popped and then dribbled down his cheek into his fat, little jowls. He mewled.

“How are you feeling?” Danny asked again, making sure that he turned to face him.

Steve absorbed the question, and then shrugged, which prompted Little Dee to lose his hold on the bottle nipple, and immediately protest.

“Sorry.” Steve joggled the baby. A milk bubble blossomed on Dee’s lips, popped and then dribbled down his cheek into his fat, little jowls. He mewled.

“Here.” Danny retrieved a cloth from the baby provisions set helpfully at Steve’s elbow and draped it over Steve’s shoulder. “Better burp him before giving him the rest of the bottle. He definitely swallowed some air there.”

“Nani!” Haulani was at Steve’s hip, glowering.

“It’s okay. Danny’s here to help now. Danny’s got a little girl, he knows babies,” Steve soothed the toddler. He deftly set Dee over his shoulder and delicately patted his back with two, extended fingers.

“Mmmmm,” Haulani grumbled distrustfully, and narrow-eyed, gave Danny a frankly assessing stare.

“Honestly, my credentials are impeccable,” Danny said to a three year old, because he felt wanting under the toddler’s scrutiny.

“Haulani’s pretty much decided that Little Dee is his,” Steve said trying to intentionally lower his volume. “He’s very protective, and, well, it’s good for him to... come out of his shell.”

“Nani’s also fostering Haulani?” Danny stroked Dee’s cheek with a finger, as he smiled down at the baby’s little protector.

“About a year now.” Steve craned his head trying to see if Little Dee had burped up anything.

He might not be able to hear a tiny baby burp, Danny realised.

“Pat him a little harder.” Danny demonstrated a hollow pat against his own chest.

Steve’s overly careful pats with two fingers weren’t going to disturb any trapped burp. Gingerly, Steve tapped maybe a drop harder.

“Babe, he’s not indestructible, but, you know, he’s not breakable.”

Little Dee had put on a few pounds in the past few months, but he was still dwarfed in the shadow of Steve’s paw spanning the breadth of his back. Steve held him with such care.

“Here like this.” Danny patted Little Dee’s delicate back with just the right pressure. The burp was impressive. Steve would have heard that belch.

“Good!” Haulani summarised.

“Thank you,” Danny returned seriously.

With the utmost concentration, Steve manoeuvred Dee back into the cradle of his hold, and set the bottle back to his lips. Dee latched on immediately, sucking vigorously.

Haulani continued to scrutinise, judging them. He still held his spoon ready.
“Everything is good.” Danny nodded, backing up his words.

Danny took that Haulani started running around the kitchen table as a good sign.

“You want a coffee?” Danny asked Steve.

“Yes.”

“I thought—” Danny got a second coffee, doctored it, and sat beside Steve. He threw two Tylenol in his mouth and washed them down with a mouthful of his own coffee. “Uhm, what’s the story with Haulani? Is he Dee’s brother?”

“Nani’s fostering them both.”

“So they’re not related?”

“Found Family,” Steve said.

“But Nani adopts short term?” Danny absorbed that, thinking on Haulani and Little Dee, separated.

“Yeah.” Steve cocked his head to the side. Clutching the doorframe, Haulani stood on the kitchen back step watching the big scary world outside the safety of the kitchen. “Haulani has been with Nani a few times the last year or so. Yeah, uhm, that’s Nani and Haulani’s story. I think that Nani’s now thinking about long term fostering or adopting, and Nani is Haulani’s constant.”

Danny sometimes forgot that Seolh existed before he had found the Co-operative. He could easily imagine Mamo writing voluminous letters to Steve deployed overseas of all the ins and outs of their extended family. Steve would have gobbled them up.

“Haulani’s latched onto Dee, and,” Steve continued, rubbing a circle on Dee’s tummy with his forefinger, “Dee’s complicated. His mom doesn’t want him; can’t cope.”

Haulani was back at Danny’s side watching him warily. In a fight, Danny figured that Haulani would probably win.

“How come we’re babysitting?” Danny asked. The family knew that they were battered and bruised. Babysitting didn’t seem to be a good plan, but holding Little Dee did keep Steve sitting quietly.

“We’re babysitting?” Steve said pointedly.

“Hey, you’ve already needed my advice and guidance.”

“Nani came by, and Mrs. Keawe was going to look after Haulani and Daniel. But they ended up going into town together. Mamo volunteered, but then a client came around. And voila.” Steve plucked the empty bottle away from Dee’s determined sucking and set it aside. “Do I give him more? He finished that really quickly.”


“No, I want advice and guidance.”

“Burp him, first. If he falls asleep, then you don’t need to feed him.”

“Okay.” Concentrating hard enough to defuse a nuclear bomb, Steve resituated Dee, little chin hooked over his shoulder, and patted, gently but firmly.
Dee deposited a nice, chewy mouthful on Steve’s shoulder.

“Awesome.” Steve scrunched his nose.

“It was caught by the cloth.” Danny captured the edges of the burp cloth and scooped up the contents and wiped Dee’s mouth in the same motion. Professional. He then lobbed the cloth into the sink.

Dee blinked at him sleepily, and did that baby-thing: falling asleep between one breath and the next.

“Stay still, Steve, he’s out.”

“O-kay.” Steve froze.

“Just let him go deep and then we can put him down in his cot. Nani brought a carrier or something?”

“It’s in the rec-room.”

Danny hauled open the fridge and stared. Milk and more milk cartons, juices and smoothies, and three of Mrs. Keawe’s cakes. The three tier affair with the scarlet red strawberries perched on top of swirls of cream would be a lot tastier than toast for breakfast. Or maybe the lemon meringue pie with a perfectly smooth lake of lemon jelly? Danny kind of needed to stick his finger in that faultless surface.

“Are we having a party?” Danny asked.

“Huh?”

“Cakes?” Still holding the fridge door, Danny leaned back to better see Steve. “Lots of cakes. Big cakes.”

“They’re for the kids.”

“Dee’s too small. And, well, he’d explode.”

“The workers. The workers repairing the Hall.”

“Huh! I totally forgot.” The students from the Technical College. Seolh was evidently paying them in cake.

The mundanity of life. Amidst all the shenanigans, the Hall was still being repaired, Mrs. Keawe was happily spoiling them all, and Danny was having cake for breakfast.

“It would really be brunch,” Danny pointed out.

The non sequitur threw Steve. Perplexed, he watched Danny ferry the lemon meringue and bowl to the table.

“Lemon’s a fruit, that’s healthy.” Danny moved to root through the drawers for a cake slicer and spoon.

“You okay, Danny?” Steve asked. He turned in his seat, Little Dee cradled against his chest.

“Sure.” Danny brandished the cake slicer. “So who’s around for lunch? We probably should be thinking about setting the kitchen table.”
“Toast’s at college. I think that Mary went with Nani and Mrs. Keawe. She yelled something from the hallway and a door slammed.” Steve’s expression darkened fractionally. Danny could easily guess that he did not appreciate Mary not telling him of her plans face-to-face. Given recent events they didn’t need the buddy system anymore?

“Chin? Malia?” Danny took his customary seat beside Steve, and helped himself to a generous portion of pie.

“Malia’s at work. Chin is meeting her for lunch.”

“So you, me and Mamo, maybe Kono? And a horde of kids in the Hall?” Danny mapped the expanse of the large kitchen table with a swirling gesture.

“Mrs. Keawe put together trays of sandwiches for the students and the teachers. They’re in the cold pantry.”

“Ah! The coffee.” Danny pointed at the two carafes of coffee with his spoon. “They’re for the workers.”

“Pie.” Haulani’s beady little eyes were bright. He brandished his wooden spoon at Danny’s side. Without prompting, he grabbed the fabric of Danny’s shorts and hauled himself onto Danny’s lap and the immediate vicinity of the meringue.

“Oh, now I’m your friend.” Danny held Haulani carefully with his sore arm around his tummy. “Okay.”

Haulani wriggled in, getting comfortable. Fascinated by the hirsute swath of pale golden hairs on Danny’s arm, he stroked against the grain ruffling them up, then smoothing them back down, and then again. He fingered a light brown freckle on Danny’s forearm, matching the colour to his own splayed hand.

Danny let him explore, and got a good mouthful of meringue. Pie was significantly more interesting than fluffing up hair and Haulani peered up at Danny expectantly. Obediently, Danny fed the little boy a teaspoon full of pie.

Steve smiled at them as Danny alternated between feeding himself and Haulani tiny mouthfuls of lemony goodness. Haulani beat out a happy rhythm with his wooden spoon on the table.

“Okay, gonna put Dee down.” Steve stood with the care of a geriatric sufferer of arthritis.

Danny watched his walk, wincing in sympathy. Steve was only human, he wasn’t a superman; he was bruised and sore after his run in with Wo Fat.

“Peese?” Haulani interrupted Danny’s thoughts.

“Sorry.” Danny gave him another thumbnail-sized piece of pie.

Grace could visit this weekend, he thought, contemplating the weight of the toddler on his lap. It was over, wasn’t it? There should be no repercussions, because Wo Fat, apparently, hadn’t told anyone what he was up to in his clandestine attempts to retrieve his treasures. An anxious, cold weight congealed in Danny’s gut.

“It’s over, kiddo,” Danny said to Haulani.

“Pie.”
“Well, you’ve got your priorities straight.” He couldn’t help himself, he hugged the kid. Haulani chortled, his voice very deep for a toddler.

“Keiki.” Mamo’s bulk blocked out the light from the kitchen doorway.

“Hey, Mamo.” Danny greeted the family patriarch.

“How are you feeling, son?” Mamo tromped around the kitchen table going for the coffee maker. There wasn’t going to be any left for the kids.

“Okay,” Danny said automatically.

“Stevie said you got shot?” Mamo stopped and looked straight at the bandage poking out from Danny’s t-shirt sleeve.

“Apparently, it’s just a scratch,” Danny said waspishly.

“Hmm.” Mamo helped himself to a small cup. “I think that a scratch just needs some Neosporin?”

“You tell Steve that.”

“Ah.”

“How?” Danny echoed.

“I don’t pretend to understand a lot that goes on in Steve’s head, but training as a SEAL taught him some things that I wish that he hadn’t learnt.”

“You’re not kidding,” Danny said lowly.

“Kaniela?”

“Nothing.” Danny focused on sharing his pie with Haulani.

Mamo sat directly opposite Danny across the dark wood table. His large hands dwarfed his coffee cup.

“Danny.”

“Mamo,” Danny returned.

“Talk to me, keiki.”

Mamo’s careworn face promised understanding and empathy. It was impossible to resist.

“I don’t know where to start, Mamo. It’s been insane for so long. And—” Danny deflated. The whirlwind of his thoughts encompassed: the House; firebombing; photographs; mysteries; ‘ohana; shootings; terrorists; Seolh; fear; terror; lemon meringue pie; and Steve.

“Are you okay?” Mamo persisted.

“Yeah.”

“Keiki,” Mamo’s tone dropped more than a couple of scales.

“Fuck, Mamo. Sorry.” One-handed, he tried to cover both of Haulani’s ears. “My head’s just—I… Mamo, we were taken. They were going to sell Steve, because of what he knows, and who he is. I
was collateral. It wasn’t like watching television or the movies. It was terrifying.”

Danny didn’t say anymore because Haulani had turned on his lap and was regarding him, with his little brow furrowed with concern.

“It’s okay.” Danny kissed Haulani’s forehead.

“They were going to sell Steve like a slave?” Mamo whispered, horrified.

Danny nodded.

“What…. What about you? Collateral? What does that mean?”

“They used me to control Steve. It didn’t work. He was resourceful.” The image of Steve wringing that man’s neck blanked out everything else before him. The stench Danny belatedly realised had been the guy, his bowels voiding as he sagged into death’s grasp. A voice was speaking.

“Keiki. Danny?” Mamo was talking.

Danny took a fortifying slug of coffee.

“You’re safe now, Danny. You’re home.”

“Home?”

“Yes, Daniel,” Mamo used his given name, “Home.”

Danny nodded. “It was just….”

“You’re safe,” Mamo repeated. He echoed Danny’s earlier thoughts. “It’s over.”

He stood and came around the table to swoop arms around both Danny and Haulani. A kiss brushed Danny’s hair. Danny sighed. He was an adult not a kid, he didn’t need to be cosseted like a child.

“Thanks, Mamo.” He patted a sturdy arm, wrought with muscles from years of planing wood.

“A’ole pilikia.” Mamo kissed the top of his head again. “We need to get the family around -- make sure that you remember that you have an ‘ohana.”

“A family gathering is your answer to everything, isn’t it?” Danny said a little meanly. It was also his mother’s answer to everything. Danny was programmed to acquiesce.

“Come, I know that you are hurt, but you can help me take the coffee to the workers, yes?”


~*~

Carrying one of the coffee pots, Danny wrangled the toddler like a soccer ball along the corridor. Steve hadn’t reappeared. Danny suspected diaper duty, and decided not to investigate. The expanse of the long reception rooms’ corridor proved irresistible to Haulani. The kid broke away from Danny, sirening at the top of his lungs. Exuberant chortles bounced off the walls; the kid had some energy.

“Stop at the door, Haulani,” Danny called. There were likely heavy tools being used in the Hall on the other side.
Haulani stopped, a good little boy, waiting patiently. Danny had called it correctly; the Hall was a hive of activity. Oh boy, the students had been busy. The replacement wood panelling on the far wall was almost completed. Danny didn’t spot Addison, but there were a couple of older guys, sharing the blunt curve of a square jaw and similarly dark curly hair shot with grey -- brothers, Danny guessed -- overseeing the kids. Mamo had said that he knew a couple of guys that could act as foremen. No doubt they were cousins of some degree to Mamo and Maru.

The elaborate dance floor was pretty much the same as the last time -- a gaping fire-marred insult. So Uluwehi hadn’t started his reconstruction.

“Hey.” One of the kids, a gangly girl with long limbs giving her a stork-like quality, came over. Hands on knees, she stooped over Haulani. “Hey, kiddo, you stay over by your--”


“Uncle Danny?” Haulani questioned. He digested that, and then offered, “Daniel.”

“Big D.” Danny put his hand on his head, and then pretended to rock a baby. “Little Dee.”

“My baby!” Haulani got that point over with every iota of his being.

“Sure,” Danny agreed. Charge reassured, he offered the carafe of coffee to the student. “We’re ferrying the food over. Where do you want to eat, though?”

“We normally go out through the doors and sit outside on the steps. It’s too nice to be in the House. I’m surprised that this place doesn’t have deckchairs and stuff.”

“Oh, there are some around. We have barbeques on the beach. There’s even a pavilion, somewhere.”

“Cool. It must be great living and working here.”

Working? Danny couldn’t remember the last time he had taken a photograph.

“So more food?” Danny jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the vague direction of the kitchen and the cold pantry. “You want to collar some troops, and we’ll carry the sandwiches and cakes through?”

“Sure. Has Mrs. K made cakes?”

“Chocolate thing, lemon meringue and a strawberry cream cake.”

“Awesome.”

~*~

Once the troops were fed, or more accurately eating and lazing on the Hall steps leading to the gardens and Mamo was looking after the toddler, Danny went hunting Wabbits, Elmer Fudd style. He, himself, had had a couple of fortifying sandwiches. Cake was all well and good for brunch, but a man needed a tasty ham sandwich with cheese and tomato after a hard day.

The rabbit in question was conspicuous by his absence. Steve had, however, been in charge of Little Dee, so where the baby slept, Steve was probably close. As hunting expeditions went it was as straightforward as a ruler.

Steve had lain down on the large living room sofa. Sleeping was inevitable. If the man was prone or supine, the man slept. The difference was, this time, Little Dee was fast asleep on the centre of his
chest, tucked in a comfortable little ball. He had nuzzled through Steve’s shirt buttons, and his little face was snuffled up against Steve’s sparse chest hair.

Now that was a photograph.

So, of course, Danny went to get his camera from his studio. His old faithful Canon was where he had left it, on the ridiculously ornate escritoire repurposed from one of the reception rooms to be a camera table. He grabbed the Canon and the Nikon confiscated from the governor’s paparazzi.

The Canon, as he suspected, was almost out of charge. Steve slept through Danny setting up the shot. But Danny saw his nostrils flare and settle.

It was like a drug, taking photographs. Danny sometimes forgot everything around him other than the photograph. As settings went, it was kind of trite, but undeniably attractive, even if Steve did have a colossal bandage on his forehead.

*I’ll process these in black and white*, Danny decided, scrutinising the LCD screen.

He crouched, forgetting his arm, forgetting everything, to capture the rounded curve of Little Dee’s cheek smushed against Steve’s chest hair. The clean line of Steve’s jaw, and his scrupulously straight nose cornered the shot.

Steve was watching him, under hooded lids.

“Hey,” Danny said to that sleepy face.

“What you doing?”

Danny held up the camera in response.

“Sure,” Steve said, shrugging wryly. He cupped a hand around Dee’s diapered butt, securing him.

“You know, you shouldn’t sleep like that. If you roll over you could smother Dee in your sleep.”

Steve regarded him, dubiously. Danny leaned over slightly to check that his aids were plugged in his ears.

“Let me put him in his carrier.” Danny set his camera down by the dark blue capsule on the coffee table, and reached for the baby.

Steve lay perfectly still, as Danny scooped up Dee’s pocket-full of weight. The puff of talc and sweetness of aloe vera wipes made him think of Grace so many years ago. So vulnerable, so small. Danny held Dee a little closer. Danny didn’t know the problems that Dee faced, the stuff going on that needed surgery or what had happened with his birth mother, but he knew that he was going to have a family who would help him.

“You okay, Danny?” Steve asked.

“You should never sleep with a baby like that,” Danny said, cantankerously. Angry, but not too sure with whom he was angry, Danny focussed on tucking Dee safely in his baby carrier.

Finally, he turned back to Steve, who hadn’t moved a muscle.

“My situational awareness is top notch. I was not going to smother Dee,” Steve said.

“A minute’s inattention and it could happen,” Danny said flatly.
Steve’s measured gaze scrutinized him. Danny met the weight of his cool consideration. Chillingly, Danny was reminded that Steve was a very intelligent, experienced, highly trained predator.

“What?” Danny finally snapped.

“Don’t you trust me, Danny?” Steve asked.

“Of course, I trust you!” Danny snapped. “It’s just that babies….”

“Are not indestructible, but, not breakable?” Leonine, Steve swung his feet around off the sofa and to the floor, and settled facing Danny.

“What does that actually mean? I said that before didn’t I?” Danny paced the length of the coffee table. “I know what that means.”

“Danny. Danny.”

“Don’t ‘Danny’ me.”

“Babe!” Steve snapped. “Sit.”

“Babe? Danny echoed, because emphatically that was his term of endearment. And, he bristled -- “Sit? Sit?”

“Geez.” Steve palmed his face. “This is easier in the Armed Services.”

“What!” Danny stopped his pacing dead. He said, piercingly, “Armed Services?”

“Can you listen for two seconds?” Steve held his hand up. “I know, I know… Red flag to the bull. Danny, sit, please.”

Danny sat with a thump on the coffee table directly opposite Steve, knees almost touching. Plainly mulling over a mouthful of words, Steve regarded him. It was almost painful to watch him cogitate. He straightened in his seat, almost at attention.

“What?” Danny prodded, because silence wasn’t in his dictionary.

“I first saw active service when I was twenty three.” Steve licked his lips. “I took command of my first platoon when I was twenty six. I was then made responsible for SEAL Team….”

Danny crossed his arms and waited as Steve’s words came to a faltering halt.

“I can’t give you details, you know that, Danny!” Steve blew out a sigh. “But I know that look in your eyes. If I was your commanding officer….”

“Jesus,” Danny whispered.

“You’re in shock. You’re in pain. And you’re trying to process what happened in the last twenty four hours.” Steve addressed his words to a point about three inches left of Danny’s ear. “All of your reactions are perfectly understandable.”

“Understandable?” Danny echoed.
“You have no frame of reference.” Steve’s gaze finally slid to lock on Danny with the inevitability of an Arctic glacier grinding down a valley. “You have had no training. You have not been primed to deal with the kidnapping, the terrorists, being attacked, shot, and what we had to do to come through safely.”

A chill walked up Danny’s spine on hobnail boots.

“It was about survival, Danny. It’s as brutal and as basic as: them and us. Could we have knocked people out, tried to shoot to injure and scare? Maybe? But they weren’t going to treat us with the same consideration.”

“We’re supposed to be better than them,” Danny said grudgingly.

“We can discuss philosophy.” Steve almost managed not to roll his eyes. “But do you honestly believe that Wo Fat would have even thought of letting us go? No, he wouldn’t. He didn’t have to take us on the catamaran. He was going to sell me to the highest bidder. You, he was going to kill when he had no more use for you. I was not going to let that happen.”

Danny swallowed hard.

“We watch action movies and horror, but that’s not real,” Steve continued intently. “There’s horrific acts reported on the News. But you haven’t experienced death. And by death, I mean, death at close hand. And I’m sorry that you had to. And, you know—”

“You know ‘what’?” Danny pounced on the stutter in Steve’s delivery.

“What you’re feeling is real.” Steve pursed his lips momentarily. “It makes you human. And it’s not emasculating.”

“Emasculating?” Danny echoed, because his brain hadn’t gone there.

“Doesn’t matter if you’re a man or woman or a kid,” Steve continued, chewing over every word with cautious deliberation. “You wouldn’t be you if you weren’t upset.”

Steve blew out a deep, long breath, and stared at Danny.

“You finished?” Danny said, a little sharply.

“No,” Steve said, and Danny could almost visualise him sitting in his uniform, the rank and file of blocks of colour over his breast pocket underlining his deeds and actions as an Officer in the Navy. “Tell me what you’re thinking.”

“Thinking? Thinking? I don’t know what I’m thinking.” Danny threw his arms out, and yelped. He pulled his arm in tight against his chest, hand clamped over the bandage. “I got shot, Steve, not once, but twice since I met you. I’ve went my entire life without getting shot! If I hadn’t been wearing your flack jacket thingie when Hesse shot me I would probably be dead. And my arm -- the doctor says that it’s gonna scar. But that’s not what’s bothering me -- it’s… it’s….”

It was too hard to put into words. The rollercoaster ride of learning about Seolh had been so dynamic, and fast and terrifying. At the heart of the whirlwind stood Steve, tall and austere, but contradictorily so very, very needy and alone. Danny sucked on the inside of his cheek. Words were his tools, being stymied was physically painful.

“Danny,” Steve said with deliberate sharpness breaking into the morass of Danny’s thoughts. He closed his eyes for a heartbeat, and then opened them to regard Danny. “I might not be the person
that you need to talk to because I’ve done this--”

“What? You think that I’m PTSDing or something?"

“You’re not ‘PTSDing’, but you’ve got to--” Steve pulled a face, “--process what you saw and what you experienced otherwise, yeah, you could become ill.”

“Just like that.” Danny clicked his fingers. Steve was definitely parroting Dr. Chowdhry, his therapist.

The face that Steve was pulling twisted more.

“No, not remotely ‘just like that’ because it’s not easy.” Plainly, that was an understatement. “You’re allowed to be….”


Little Dee squeaked and waved his arms, protesting at the rising volume.


Dee turned to suckle on Danny’s fingertip. Danny smiled down at the scrap.

“Yes!” Steve planted a hand on the arm of the sofa and levered himself up to his feet. “You’re allowed to be upset.”

“I’m allowed, am I? Thank you for your permission, Mr. Benevolent Dictator,” Danny snarked over his shoulder. It was certainly nice to have permission. Danny made a mental note to punch Steve right on the end of his long nose at the next opportunity, when he wasn’t nursing a tiny baby.

“You know,” Steve grated, “I can get you an appointment with Dr. Chowdhry, if you like?”

Danny froze. He stared up at Steve, who was a contradictory twist of concern and defensiveness.

“You suck at this,” Danny noted. “Counselling.”

“I do not!” Steve lifted his chin in umbrage.

“You think?”

“If I sucked at it we wouldn’t be having this conversation. Ahah!”

Danny laughed straight in the face of his indignant satisfaction. In fact, it was difficult to argue with that assertion, because, ‘sucking’ would have meant sticking their heads in the sand and ignoring the kerfuffle twisting up Danny’s thoughts. However, Danny had done the counselling thing -- pre-divorce, as he and Rachel had tried to save their marriage. The counselling hadn’t brought Rachel and Danny together, but he had found the tools to better achieve détente.

“No. No. No. No.” Danny waggled the finger on the hand that didn’t have a baby suckling on like a pacifier. “You’re doing this like you’re reading off a mental checklist. Tick, I’ve asked that question. Tick, Danny’s responded this way, therefore I should now ask this question.”

“And?” Steve stuck his bottom lip out. “The questions are relevant. If I’m using an imaginary checklist that is irrelevant. What do you want me to say? Buck up, Lieutenant?”
“I’m not your lieutenant,” Danny riposted immediately.

“How’s,” Steve said precisely and hilariously, “me not frogmarching you off to the doc, or finding you a bottle of scotch and getting you drunk. And trying to be….” Steve twisted his fingers in a perfectly Williamsesque gesture of frustration.

Danny had to laugh. Steve was trying so hard, and he was way, way, way out of his depth. The feeling was probably very alien to a Navy SEAL.

He was adorable.

All six foot one, lithe muscle and tendon, killing machine that he was.

“Danny?” Steve peered at him. “What’s that expression?”

Danny carefully popped his finger free from Little Dee’s mouth. The baby smacked his lips, but didn’t protest, hovering on the edge of his nap.

“Babe,” Danny said as he slowly stood up. Pivoting on one heel to face Steve, he opened his arms. “I need a hug.”

“Oh, okay.” Steve rocked back a little. He stood almost at attention. “Yes? I can do that.”

“Okay.” Danny waggled his outstretched fingers a fraction.

Steve enfolded Danny in.

He guided Danny’s head to nestle in the crook of his neck with a massive hand. Danny didn’t let that happen; hooking his chin over Steve’s shoulder. He gently squeezed his arms around Steve’s waist and held on. Steve’s breadth and height encompassed Danny, the weight of his entire being a comforting bulwark. Steve was warmth personified. Danny could happily bask in that warmth.

“Danny?” Steve said softly. “Is this good or bad? Is there anything else I need to do?”

“Shush,” Danny said sibilantly, emphasising all the Ss. They were men; they didn’t talk about this sort of shit. There was something fundamentally reassuring about Steve’s mass. It was strange to be in that position. Danny was the protector. He had a kid.

“Wish I knew what you were thinking,” Steve grumbled.

“Quiet,” Danny said. “I’m thinking.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

“Doofus,” Danny said affectionately. Undeniably, he was conflicted. Hugging helped.

“I was thinking,” Steve said, because for once he was the person that simply couldn’t shut up. “We should see if Grace could visit? I mean, she can, now.”

“Can she?” Danny pulled back a fraction.

“Why wouldn’t she?” Steve peered down at him.

“I dunno. I just feel like there’s more?” Danny craned back to better see Steve rather than just his long nose. The anxious twist in his gut disturbed the lemon meringue. Was he anxious just because he was anxious – a feedback loop that was feeding back on itself? Thinking it made him anxious.
Steve did his head tilt of perplexity.

“Wo Fat’s in custody. We got what he was after,” Steve said. He huffed noisily. “Look, I gave Toast the floppy disc. Do you want to go see if he’s managed to extract anything from it?”

“Yeah.” The more information that they had the better.

~*~

“Dude, this is awesome. I’m revisiting the Jurassic. Maybe. Maybe? That’s not fair. Pyramid epoch. Was there a pyramid epoch?” Gleefully, Toast swung around in his chair.

“So you’ve read it?” Steve asked, as he pushed a set of text books aside on a relatively clear table and set Dee’s carrier in the space.

“That’s a no. Your Mom had an Atari 8-Bit computer. Bless.”

Toast was in Nirvana or a state of Nirvana, Danny wasn’t too sure. He eyed the array of computers and wondered if he should move Dee’s carrier to the door, away from the radiation.

“She had a couple of computers. A BBC Micro that she didn’t let us touch, but, yeah, an Atari -- more than one.” Steve said. “She upgraded. I remember playing on ones that she didn’t use any more. Cartridge games.”

“Did you play the game with the castle and dropping boulders on the orcs climbing up the ladders?”

“You mean ‘Orc Attack’,” Steve said dryly, and mimed dropping a boulder.

“Old school, brah! Your Mom must have been awesome. Computers in the 1980s; she was cutting edge…. Seriously, a BBC Micro?” Distracted, he turned back to his array of computer screens. Three of them were blue with pale yellow or off white angular text. “Retro. I wonder?”

“Toast!” Steve rapped.

“Okay.” Toast came back to Planet Earth. “Okay. It’s just going to take me a little time. I’ve figured out this is Old School Atari, we’re talking Atari DOS. The disc has bytes on it which I figure are text. However, we’re missing the disc operating system which is required to assist in organising file system-level disc access.”

“Geez,” Danny sighed. Gobbledygook, for the win.

“I have to get the right emulator. I picked up a couple through the open source environment on the ‘net, and they got me this far.” Toast pointed at the three screens. “But if your Mom has a BBC Micro -- how the Hell did she get that? -- she was programming. So I figure that I might have to be creative… build one.”

Steve was standing tall, studying the screens, mouth a downturned line.

“Toast,” he finally said, “why don’t you see if one of the old Ataris in the museum office is still working?”

“What?” Toast froze. His eyes widened like a dragon given a map to a hoard of gold. He bounced to his feet. “Oh my god! I’m an idiot.”

He blew past them like the Road Runner.
“Kids.” Steve automatically set a hand on top of Dee’s carrier in case the wake of Toast’s passage rocked the cot.

“You guys just don’t throw stuff out, do you?” Danny said shaking his head.

“There’s two old Ataris stacked on the shelves with a couple of boxes of game cartridges. You’ve seen the old computer on the office desk? That’s an ancient IBM machine. Mom did the first data-catalogue on it of the museum. You know, she liked to organise things. You’ve seen her photo albums.”

Every photo was neatly annotated and perfectly aligned to the margins of each individual page.

“So why didn’t you immediately try the disc in it?” Danny asked.

“It takes the eight inch black discs.” Steve drew a large square in midair. “And, well, Toast is the computer expert. I provided the intelligence and direction when he updated me with his progress-to-date.”

“Because,” Danny said sarcastically, “it wasn’t as if your mom wasn’t going to make things difficult.”

Steve rocked slightly back on his heels.

“The disc is undeniably interesting. But the cache was put together sometime between 1988 and 1990. Mom had to know that the tools to view the data on that disc would become obsolete. Or maybe not,” Steve said ruefully, “it’s amazing how computer science has evolved.”

Danny marvelled at the thorny mess that was Steve’s brain.

“So—” Danny clapped and rubbed his hands together, “—how about we find some batteries and see if there’s anything on the micro-cassette?”

~*~

“When he was five years old, I asked my son Steve what he wanted to be when he grew up. “I want to be a cop dad, like you.” I told him, “Be anything but that.” The life of a cop is not easy. It’s not that I’m not proud of the work that we did, but more than anything, I have… regrets. The toll that it took on my family, the way it hurt them, it’s something I think about everyday.”

Steve listened to the tape as if he was a poker player, but his eyes gave everything away to Danny. When was the last time that Steve had heard his father’s voice? Fighting with his mother as they drove towards their deaths? Murder in an orchestrated car accident arranged by their so-called best friend Joe White?

“Why,” Danny said, striving to say something to distract Steve, “does your mom’s cache have your dad’s tape recorder in it?”

“What?” Steve clicked off the micro-cassette player, and set it on the sofa cushion by his hip. The scrunch of his face spoke of heavy concentration.

“Can you hear that okay?” Danny asked, because it was a tinny, old cassette tape with a lot of background hiss.

Steve scowled. “It’s not easy,” he admitted, and shifted a little further back on the sofa into the shadows cast by the boarded up semi-circular windows.
Gnawing on his thumb, Danny contemplated the matchbox-sized player on the cushions between them. The man’s voice was slow and measured as if contemplating all the wrongs in the world.

“How’s about I write out the words as we listen? You got a pen and paper?”

Steve absorbed that offer for a long, long moment.

“Ohkay.” Steve did his arthritic-lever motion using the arm of the sofa to get himself to his feet and wobbled off.

“It’s just gonna be like listening to Old Professor Atwell at college,” Danny told Dee, whose carrier was now set on the knitted rug in front of Steve’s ostentatious television and gaming set up. They had been toting Dee around with them all afternoon. Another feed and diaper change and the baby was sleeping off another round of warm milk.

Behind Danny, Steve rooted around the diamond bookshelves. He came back around the sofa with a hardback notebook and a couple of pens -- a roller ball and a ballpoint.

“Perfect,” Danny said.

“Blue or black?” Steve said, referring to the pens.

Danny accepted the black roller ball pen and the notebook. The book was pristine, never used, and each page was crisp. The back of the book cracked as Danny opened it wide and set it on his knees. Pen at the ready, he waited. Steve hovered, watching.

“Babe?” Danny asked.

Steve sat with a thump, disturbing the cushions. Danny bounced slightly. The cassette player disappeared down a crack.

“Thank you,” Steve said quietly.

“What for?” Danny asked, primed to start writing once Steve retrieved the damn player and pressed play.

“For being you.”

“Well, you know, I am who I am,” Danny responded. Damn, that was a stupidly profound statement. Steve was Steve. Danny contemplated him; shadowy smudges under his droopy eyes, too long nose, morose expression, and white bandage on his forehead. He looked tired. The avenging angel was actually human. Danny knew that already.

“Wish I knew what you were thinking,” Steve said ruefully.

“I’m just thinking -- I’m always thinking. I think a lot.”

“Normally, you share,” Steve mumbled as he rooted between the cushions to find the cassette player.

For once in his life, Danny let that pass, because they needed answers.

“Shall we begin?” Danny said primly, notebook on his knee, pen in hand, as Steve sat up, tape recorder in his hand.

Answers.
“I can’t continue the investigation in the police department from the inside. I don’t trust the people I work with, so I’m gonna have to do this with Doris.”

Steve clicked the cassette off, violently.

“Did I hear that right?” he demanded.

“Yeah.” Danny underlined ‘Doris’ three times.

“Dad was working with Mom?” Steve sagged back and winced as his ribs complained. The painkillers that he had taken earlier had to have worn off.

The journal on the tape was disjointed and fragmented. Danny figured that it was sliced together from several tapes. There had been a lot of random stuff about John McGarrett’s feelings and fears.

“More,” Steve ordered imperiously.

Danny deliberately gave him the hairy eyeball before continuing.

“Doris’ contacts in the CIA will be able to surveil the Noshimuris without drawing attention to the few colleagues that I have to protect. I hate this. Doris hates this. I don’t want her to work with the CIA again. But how else can we keep the islands safe?”

Danny paused the tape. Steve -- a long line of warmth at his side, breathing literally down Danny’s neck as he read the writing -- fired a glance in his direction. Danny was tempted to flick his nose.

“You realise that this proves that your Mom wasn’t running surveillance on your dad, but Noshimuri. They were working together,” Danny said, remembering Steve’s first reactions to his mother’s photos of his dad with Koji Noshimuri.

Incandescent was the perfect word to describe Steve’s smile. Mamo’s memories didn’t present the best picture of Doris and John’s relationship with them dropping off Steve and Mary at their grandmother’s after fights, but it appeared that it had not been as simple as family spats. They had been working an investigation together.

“So much happened,” Steve breathed.

“Steve.” Danny tapped his nose with the tip of the pen. “You carried on the family tradition. Protecting the islands. Capturing Wo Fat. Taking down the Hesse Brothers.”

Steve actually blushed. Cute, undeniably cute, it was the only way that Danny could describe his expression.

“You’re such a contradiction,” Danny blurted. “Jesus.”

Steve’s eyebrows crinkled together in question.

“How can you be so many things? So vulnerable and then -- Bam--” Danny clicked his fingers together, “--you can break someone’s neck with a shoelace?”

Steve worked his jaw as if he was chewing on a giant mouthful of gum, but he didn’t speak.
“Steve?” Danny prompted, because he needed an answer. The image of an avenging angel burned in his thoughts. Steve’s inherent dichotomy? Was this the man that Steve had been before being injured? The Steve that he knew was a man who had been hurt and was working towards something close to recovery. It had been very seductive looking after a vulnerable Steve. Danny breathed hard. His brain was a morass of thoughts that he could barely track.

Avoidance wasn’t in his nature.

“Danny. Danny, I don’t know what to say to you….” Steve swallowed hard. “Damn it. I protect. I’m trained to protect. I’m a soldier. I make decisions based on my expert judgement.”

Steve lifted his hands and clenched his fists as if holding an imaginary garrotte. He jerked his hands, and Danny jumped.

“I don’t get off on it. I’m not a psychopath.” Steve got himself painfully off the couch. “Or a sociopath.”

“I never said you were!” Danny followed him up.

Steve turned away -- shutting off the conversation.

“No. No. No.” Danny reached to grab his arm, and Steve eeled out of his grasp with a pained hiss. “Don’t run away.”

“Clearly you need some space to put things in perspective,” Steve said clinically.

“I don’t need freaking space. I just need to talk things through, to get it straight in my head.”

“Get what straight in your head? That I can kill people with my bare hands?”

“Are you trying to piss me off?” Danny said. “I knew that. But I saw that -- I saw you do it! It’s kind of a new experience to have to process!”

Danny grabbed for Steve’s hands, but Steve was a ninja. They were going to be running around the sofa like Haulani if this continued.

“Stop it. Don’t touch me.” Steve was like a wet cat.

“Babe, stop.” Danny held his hands up.

“I’d do it again, Danny. I wouldn’t hesitate. I shot Hesse and he fell to his death. I shot White and I put him in ICU. I broke Anton Hesse’s neck and he’s paralysed for life. I broke that guy’s neck and he’s dead. And I did it to protect those that I know and love.”

Danny let his hands fall. That was what he had needed to hear. The tight curling ball in his guts relaxed.

“Yeah, you’re the fuckin’ Terminator.” Danny found some humour. “Not the first one, but the second Terminator.”

“What?” Steve shook his head. “Danny, do you think that I liked doing that?”

“No, that never occurred to me.” Danny froze, momentarily blindsided. “You can’t imagine--”

“Danny!” Steve rapped stopping Danny’s words dead. “I can imagine. I can imagine it a lot more closely.”
Oh, that was sharp. Closely as in actually feeling someone dying under your hands. Danny looked at Steve’s hands again.

“Steve.” Danny held out his right hand.

“What?”

“Steven.” Danny stretched out his fingers, appealing, and waited.

Carefully, gingerly, Steve set his larger hand over Danny’s, encompassing its span. His little finger didn’t sit just right, broken many years previously and re-set, just not quite correctly. It was the only flaw. Steve’s nails were carefully maintained, clipped and the edges smooth; groomed, no doubt, for Governor Jameson’s funeral. His hand was large, but the proportions were perfect. Quietly, Danny mapped a prominent vein running over the back of his hand. Steve’s fingers weren’t short and stubby. Danny aligned their palms together. Stillness spoke loudly, as Danny wove their fingers together. Steve watched, not giving anything away. Danny’s much vaunted empathy failed him.

He had to use his words. He didn’t look at Steve, addressing their clasped hands.

“I have to admit, I’m freaked. I’m sorry about that. I think, though, that anyone would be freaked out. I think a lot of things all at once. You didn’t choose any of this -- it was Wo Fat’s machinations. You stepped up to protect us -- your ‘ohana, when Sang Min set fire to the Hall, when Hesse invaded the first time, and the second! You didn’t make Wo Fat herd us and manipulate us, you didn’t make Wo Fat take us to the catamaran. You could have been a little more sensible, though.”

Steve squeezed his fingers a little painfully.

“You killed someone with these hands.” Danny gripped tightly, not letting Steve escape at the words.

“Danny?” Steve said very softly.

“Shush. I’m not going to forget that you’re a soldier. But that fact doesn’t change what I know: you’re a good person; you look after your ‘ohana; you do your absolute best in untenable situations-..” Danny lifted his head, “--and I love you.”

“Oh,” Steve said, with all his heart and fears in his shining eyes.

“Babe. It’s okay. I freaked out. Shoot me — bad choice of words.” Danny winced a smile at Steve, who was smiling so very affectionately. “It was a freaky situation, Babe. And not one that I ever want to be in again!”

“And it’s not going to happen again,” Steve said immediately. “Wo Fat is captured. His network is being dismantled. We’re tying up the loose ends and then it will be over.”

“I get it.” Danny swallowed.

Telegraphing his movement, Steve slowly leaned into Danny’s space. He planted a deliberately chaste kiss on Danny’s forehead.

“I love you too,” he said.

“Okay.” Danny lifted his head, moving to return the kiss with a little more pizzazz. Steve made a needy little sound that curled warmly in Danny’s guts and kissed back. Danny needed this -- life affirming sex. Kiss away all the bruises that Wo Fat had inflicted on Steve’s body. Move beyond the
events of the last few days with good, old fashioned sex. Reaffirm with heart and soul that Steve was Steve and not an avenging angel.

His Steve.

“Baby,” Steve groaned against his lips, and stopped kissing.

“Baby? That’s new.” Danny opened his eyes, and regarded Steve from a mere inch of distance. Steve went cross-eyed.

“Dee,” Steve grated, and reluctantly moved back.

“Oh, you little voyeur,” Danny said. Dee was awake, and entranced. He had one bare foot in his mouth as he contemplated the interesting world around him.

“Little cock-blocker, more like,” Steve grumbled.

Danny snorted. “You do realise that, one, he can’t focus on us from over there, two, he doesn’t know what we’re doing, and, three, he doesn’t care.”

“I care.” Steve tugged the short collar of his shirt straight. He glanced at the baby. “You couldn’t, could you?”

“Nah.” Danny had to admit. If Dee had been asleep, maybe, but actually… definitely, not. Grace had always been in her bedroom, behind closed doors, fast asleep when he and Rachel had had sex. Danny shuffled back and readjusted his pants.

“I wonder where Mamo is?” Steve was a little wild-eyed.

“Geez.” Danny bit his bottom lip, ‘cos, wow, he was engaged.

“Excuse me,” Steve said hilariously, and did a painful body twist out of Danny’s grasping hands.

“You going to?” Danny made an obscene gesture with his fist, expressively also managing to indicate the downstairs bathroom.

“No.” Steve bristled, affronted. “I’m going to get a glass of cold water.”

“Bah,” Dee contributed.

“Oh, I need one too.” Danny followed.

Steve chugged down a glass of water straight from the tap dispensing with his filter. Teasingly, Danny snuggled in tight and took the glass from his hands when he finished, and poured his own water.

“Aren’t we responsible adults?” Danny said over-brightly, as he pressed the sweating glass against his forehead.

Steve glared at him, unimpressed.

The bell rang. There were no lights on in the eyrie apartment to alert Steve. Squinting, he looked upwards; detecting something.

“Yes? No?” he asked, meaning is it dinner time? He answered his own question, consulting his heavy wrist watch.
“Yep, dinner,” Danny confirmed. It was slightly earlier than normal, but it was after six o’clock. They had actually been busy all afternoon looking at the floppy disc and working through the micro-cassette. “I think Mamo was thinking of having a family meal?”

“Family meal? Isn’t it always?” Steve said confused.

“You wanna eat?” Danny asked, wondering about Steve’s erratic appetite. He had been eating more, and more consistently. But the last day or two could have resulted in a setback in his eating habits.

“Yeah.” Confusingly, Steve shook his head. “Do you want to take Dee down? I’m gonna grab a couple of ibuprofen to bring down. I need something on my stomach before I take them. You need some more Tylenol? I have some Tylenol three.”

“How do you have them? Aren’t they prescription only?”

Steve shrugged offhandedly, like a corner drug dealer. Danny had an active imagination.

Experimentally, Danny manipulated his arm. The weight of the discomfort dragged at him, but he didn’t think that he needed Tylenol with added codeine.

“Nah, I’ll grab some Tylenol from on top of the fridge.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll be down in a--”

Danny caught his hand.

“Steve. Things are always complicated. You get that, don’t you?”

Steve was doing his wide-eyed meerkat impression. He nodded fervently.

“I’m gonna promise you something, okay?” Danny said. “I need your words, Big Guy.”

“I don’t understand,” Steve blurted, and then flushed, embarrassed. He clamped his teeth together with a click, surprised by his own inadvertent honesty.

“What don’t you understand, Babe?” Danny said patiently, and waited.

“I thought that you were really upset. I get that, I do. But I had to protect you. I had to do what needed to be done. I thought that you were really upset. And now you’re okay?”

“Hey, you always said I’m like riding a rollercoaster. Look, Babe--” Danny took a deep breath. “I am upset. What we had to do on the catamaran should be hard to swallow. We’ve got to promise each other one thing.”

“Okay,” Steve said very slowly, gaze fixed on Danny’s lips.

“Promise me that we never go to bed angry.”

“But you weren’t angry. You were the opposite,” Steve said confused. “You were off kilter. You weren’t talking. Alarm bells. Woo Hoo.”

He actually starfished his hands and fingers.

“Okay, we have to promise always to talk to each other. Okay?” Danny revised.

“And never go to bed angry? I like that one, you know. Mom and dad went to bed angry.”
So the State of McGarrett Land clearly wasn’t perfect, despite the revelation that Doris and John had worked together.

“Yeah, we never go to bed angry. Promise.” Danny stretched up at the same time as Steve bent to kiss.

~*~

The family, as Mamo had promised, had all shown up for the evening meal. They ranged around the gigantic Hawaiian wood table, elbowing for access even though there was plenty of room.

The warmth of the room was palpable, and it had nothing to do with temperature.

“Danny!” Kono carolled.

“Oh, there’s my little Dee.” Nani came around the table, hand outstretched to accept the baby’s carrier.

“My baby.” Haulani sat on Mamo’s lap at the head of the table.

“Our baby,” Nani revised easily.

Haulani accepted that, settled back against Mamo’s girth, and continued to scrutinise everyone suspiciously.

Nani returned to a seat beside Toast. She released Dee from his straps, and balanced him neatly in one arm, well-practised at eating with one hand. Intrigued, Dee pulled his big toe into his mouth, and settled down to watch, his mien completely different to his older brother’s scrutiny. A pacifier might be a good idea, Danny thought, ‘cos the kid seemed to really like the taste of his toes.

“Bah,” Dee informed everyone.

Danny moved around the table to his setting. The choice of food was as wide as the world. Japanese cuisine for Steve. And Danny could only smile; a bubbling-hot, golden-crisp lasagne sat centre place, a plate of pungently smelly garlic bread and a bowl of salad on either side. Steve’s mostly unidentifiable bowls of Japanese dishes were dotted around the tasty Italian goodness like tugboats around a cruiser.

“Guys, you went all out.”

“Lasagne.” Auntie Maru smiled proudly.

“We followed the recipe in your printed out folder,” Kono said with ingenuous pride, pointing at the recipe folder that Danny had put together on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

“It smells awesome.” Sitting on his hands, Toast was eying the garlic bread.

“Where’s Steve?” Mary piped up.

“Getting something from his apartment. He’ll be down soon.” There was another person missing from Mamo’s family gathering. Malia was at the end of the table in Chin’s normal place. The seat on her left was empty.

“Where’s Chin?”

“I think--” Malia lifted up slightly in her seat to better peer out of the kitchen window, “--he’ll be
here any second.”

Steve’s large truck drew past, the crunch of its tyres speaking loudly of home.

“He had to pick up the final member of our ‘ohana.” Mamo smiled at the other end of the table.

“Who?” Danny asked, but he already knew the answer. He didn’t know how Mamo had wrangled it, and he wasn’t going to ask. He moved quickly as he was able to the kitchen door.

“Monkey!”

“Danno!” Grace pelted across the winding path, arms outstretched, ponytail flying in a straight line behind her.

Danny got down on one knee and braced himself. This was home; this was Family, with a capital F. Grace hit him with the force of a tsunami, but Danny was impervious to pain.

“Monkey, I missed you.” He held her close.

“Uncle Chin said that the bad man had been captured, and everyone was safe.” She clamped around Danny like the monkey she was from the day she had been born.

Chin stood over them, holding Grace’s ridiculously pink rhinestone backpack that went everywhere with her.

“I can’t believe that you got Rachel--” Danny censored himself.

“Remember--” Chin shrugged, “--Mrs. Edwards and I met when she visited the House. So I’m not a stranger.”

Clearly, there had been some words. Regardless, Danny now had his Monkey in his arms.

“I was so sad that I couldn’t come the last time. But mummy let me come for tea,” Grace told Danny, unconsciously mimicking her mother.

“That’s great news, Monkey,” Danny gave his baby his full attention.

“Uncle Chin said that we’re having a party.” She inhaled mightily. “I can smell grandma’s lasagne? Is grandma here?”

Grace peeked around Danny into the kitchen.

“Only her lasagne.” Danny wanted to carry her, but he was a little sore and Grace was starting to get big. His heart thumped.

“Garlic bread?” Grace’s eyes gleamed.

“Yep.”

“Awesome.” She unpeeled from Danny’s grasp and ran into the golden warmth of a family kitchen.

Chin offered his hand to Danny, and Danny took it. Arm bent, surprisingly strong, Chin stood firm as Danny rose to his feet.

“Thank you.”
“I’ll drive Grace back so you can have a glass of wine,” Chin said, bowing his head in acknowledgment of Danny’s words.

A glass of Chin’s superlative red wine sounded -- as Rachel would say -- like an awfully good idea.

“Did you use the special secret sauce ingredient?” Grace was asking, perched on her knees on her chair to look over the repast.

“Secret ingredient?” Auntie Maru gave Grace her full attention. “We followed your daddy’s recipe in his cookbook.”

“Danno has a cookbook?” Grace said, sounding surprised.

“Grandma sent us some recipes.” Danny scooped up the folder from the bookshelf, and brought it over, as otherwise, she would have had ants in her pants until she had leafed through the pages.

“What about the--?” Grace looked furtive.

“It’s either in there, or it’s still a secret.” Danny sat beside his daughter.

“Okay.” Grace hunched over the large folder, protecting it from view.

Everyone was nice; they didn’t laugh.

“Whoa.” Steve rocked back against the fridge by the door. “Full house.”

“Stevie. I was thinking that I had to come and get you.” Hefting Haulani against his hip, Mamo stood up.

Obediently, Steve came in for a gentle, one armed, back-slapping hug. He ducked away from further interaction, ruffling Haulani’s hair as he dodged around Mamo. The kid scowled at Steve as he arrowed to his chair beside Danny’s. It was strange that he sat beside Danny rather than opposite where they could talk more easily, but Steve always chose to be at Danny’s side.

“Grandma didn’t write it down,” Grace announced.

“Oh,” Danny said gravely, “I guess the secret has jumped a generation then, if she told you.”

He actually did know what the secret ingredient was, and he also knew that it wasn’t written down.

“I will have to help next time,” Grace said very seriously. “Okay?”

“Okay,” Danny said obediently, and paused, because, well… next time.

At the head of the table once again, Mamo toasted him with his glass of wine.

“Yes, toast!” Toast said. He rocketed to his feet. “We should make a toast.”

Kono stood, sweeping up a bottle of red, and, quickly enough to make Chin wince, dashed some into Danny’s glass. Everyone stood, and Steve followed a beat later. He selected the lightly sweating bottle of white wine and poured a glass.

“Can I?” Grace asked, as she stood on her chair. She proffered her wine glass to Danny.

Danny decanted about a tablespoon of his wine into her glass. Tickled pink, she added a generous glug of Malia’s sparkling water.
“Tradition,” Danny said in the face of the expressions around the table. Yes, he was an overprotective father, he could even admit that to himself, but this was a Williams’ family thing. And it reduced the mystique of alcohol.

“Tradition,” Mamo echoed, holding up his glass.

“To Danny and Steve. To our ‘ohana. Welcome Home. Safe and sound.”

“Home,” Steve echoed a beat behind Mamo, lifting his glass high.

“Home,” the Family chimed and drank.

The laugh was spontaneous.

“So, food!” Kono dropped back into her seat. How someone could stay so skinny and love food so much bamboozled Danny.

All piling in, dishes were passed back and forth. Mainly diners stayed with one variety of cuisine, but Toast had a plate full of a combination of lasagne, garlic bread, what looked like seaweed salad, and a single salmon nigiri balanced on top of the mound.

“Mommy said that I could come next weekend,” Grace said largely speaking to Kono, but including the table. “Will we be able to surf, please?”

Kono glanced at Danny (which he appreciated wholeheartedly).

“It depends on your daddy, and also the weather.”

“Danno?” Grace put her entire question into one word.

“We’ll see,” Danny said circumspectly.

“Dadd--” Grace began with an edge of a whine.

“Grace.” She might be his perfect daughter, but that whine wasn’t wonderful.

“It could be storming,” Mamo said sensibly, as he helped Haulani munch on a skewer of shrimps. “You won’t be able to surf if the conditions aren’t right.”

That actually wasn’t Danny’s sole consideration, but he decided not to get into the reasons why Grace might not surf. He was tired.

“Garlic bread?” Steve held the plate out to him. His gaze was a measured question: are you alright?

“Thanks.” Danny lifted his chin indicating Steve’s bowl. “What you got?”

“Noodles in broth, with everything.”

There was even a halved boiled egg in the bowl.

“Looks… nutritious.”

“Uhm, yes.” Steve picked out a plump shrimp with his fingers and popped it in his mouth.

*Complete opposites,* Danny thought as he munched on his garlic bread. *Complete and totally opposite.*
“Hey, try this.” Steve had a thumb-sized, dough parcel balanced between his ohashi.

“I’ve got a mouthful of garlic bread.” Danny mumbled.

“It’s okay,” Steve said, for once following a mumble.

Danny swallowed.

“Chin told me that it’s kinda rude to pass things with your chopsticks?” He slid a checking glance at Chin.

“You shouldn’t accept the food with your ohashi, if you were using your ohashi,” Chin said.

Danny had selected the knife and fork at his setting because he was going the Italian route tonight. His chopsticks sat on their rest. The mechanics of getting the morsel off Steve’s chopsticks with his knife and fork were difficult. He contemplated the little dumpling with its flared edge.

Steve raised an eyebrow.

Danny simply opened his mouth.

“Heh.” Steve carefully popped the little parcel in. “Yaki Gyoza with pork.”

Danny chomped. Savoury, it worked surprisingly well with the garlic bread. Fusion cuisine.

*Perhaps complete opposites aren’t necessarily a bad thing.*

~*~

Tired to the very marrow of his bones, and a little melancholy, Danny clicked his seatbelt free as Chin braked to a stop opposite the pottery kilns.

It had been an awesome evening: good food; good wine and good family. On one hand, returning Grace to Stan and Rachel’s mansion had been a downer, but, with Chin at his back, Danny had confirmed Grace’s presence at the House the following weekend.

The kitchen was quiet, the dish washer emptied, the coffee pot upside down on the draining board drying with Mamo’s tiny little espresso cup. The patriarch and matriarch of Seolh weren’t in the kitchen, so Danny guessed that one of their grandchildren had picked them up. No doubt Nani and her boys had gone with them.

Chin ambled through the kitchen following voices to the living room. Heads together, chatting, Kono and Mary sat on the sofa. Light from the television cast lurid, flickering shadows across the room as they huddled on the sofa.

“You weren’t very long,” Mary noted, turning in her seat.

“Hardly any traffic,” Chin said.

“Where is everyone?” Danny asked, checking the room from the doorway.

“Toast is programming a ‘telescope tracking path’. Apparently something interesting is happening in the vicinity of Betelgeuse?” Mary said, brow furrowed as she summarised Toast’s no doubt meandering explanation.

“He’s actually sending instruction from upstairs--” Kono pointed at the ceiling, “--to Mauna Kea on
the Big Island. That’s pretty impressive.”

“Malia?” Chin asked.

“ Took a pot of green tea up to your rooms about five minutes ago,” Mary said.

“Oh, that’s my cue. I will say goodnight.” Chin made a slight bow, and turned to leave.

“Thank you.” Danny held out his hand.

Chin shook it gravely. “Anytime, brother.”

“And Steve?” Danny asked, as Chin disappeared up the curving staircase two steps at a time.

“ He was doing that owl-eyed thing.” Mary mimicked her brother’s I’m-too-tired-to-be-awake expression perfectly. “I’m guessing bed.”

Danny contemplated that, but only for a heartbeat.

“ I will go check on him.”

“ Funny that,” Kono joshed, smiling sunnily.

“ We all have our crosses to bear.” Nose in the air, Danny trooped away.

#116#

Danny didn’t even have to think about wending his way up to Steve’s eyrie of an apartment. The route hardly even registered now. The door was unlocked. His way was a pockmarked path of moonlight and shadow cast by the partly boarded up windows.

The loft was quiet. He didn’t call out as he made his way up the staircase. A shaft of light from the bathroom door on the second level indicated Steve’s whereabouts.

Danny couldn’t hear the shower. He mooched around Steve’s draughtsman table, checking out his improbable lighthouse drawings in the pale moonlight. There weren’t any new sketches, but given the last few weeks’ entertainments, Danny wasn’t surprised. But one open pad showed a detailed drawing of the floor of the Hall. Danny drew his fingertip over the smooth paper, avoiding the precise pencil lines. He didn’t know if Steve had drawn the mesmerising floor or the kid, but the interlocking shapes were mathematical in their precision.

Danny glanced back to the bathroom door. If Steve was on the toilet, it was taking him a long time.

Danny wasn’t shy, and visions of an exhausted Steve slumped on the floor set him quickly over the room. Even knowing that it wasn’t the most effective way of communicating, he rapped on the door with his knuckles.

“Steve, you okay?”

Unsurprisingly, there was no answer, Danny cracked open the door, so he could check out the toilet. It was unoccupied. He peered around the corner. The windows of Steve’s grandiose shower cubicle were steamed up and there was a bubbling sound.

He drummed his fingers on the glass. They hadn’t had a bath, but the first time that he had seen Steve’s enormous, multi-headed steam shower unit it had occurred to him that they could have a lot of fun in the shower.

The door squeaked as Steve pushed open the sliding panel. He lazed in the bath portion of the shower basin, rocking slightly as the gentle pulse of jets of water from the Jacuzzi moved him. Steam billowed out the door.

“Very nice,” Danny said.

“There’s plenty of room.” Steve shifted over, and regarded Danny neutrally.

“What’s that face? I haven’t seen that one.” Danny skinned out of his shorts and underpants in one motion. A smile flickered over Steve’s face at Danny’s disrobing. So he was still a little uncertain of his place in Danny’s thoughts. Actions clearly spoke to Steve louder than words -- but Danny knew that already. Danny wiggled out of his t-shirt a lot less smoothly than his shorts, getting his arm free without jostling.

Steve shifted over a little more, clearing a better space on the submerged scooped sitting area. He didn’t really need to move since the padded bench was wide.

The water was warm and perfect. Danny could feel his hair curling in the humidity. He eased into the warm, borderline too hot, water with a happy sigh.

“Why haven’t we done this before?” Danny settled next to Steve, easing his wounded arm over Steve’s shoulders, and keeping his bandage out of the water.

“I’m not really a bath person,” Steve said, shuffling down a fraction under Danny’s arm. “I enjoy them when I want one. But…”

Uncertainty really didn’t sit easily on Steve.

“I guess when your muscles are hurting, it’s a good place to be?” Water therapy probably played a role in Steve’s early recovery, and sitting in a bath when you wanted to swim in the ocean probably galled.

“Yes.”

“We are totally going to be doing this again with champagne and chocolate covered strawberries,” Danny decided.

“What?”

“We need--” Danny shifted around so Steve could see his face, “--champagne and chocolate covered strawberries.”

“The chocolate would melt,” Steve said with total practicality and zero romance.

“Silicone lube,” Danny added to his shopping list.

“Why do we want--?” Steve shifted back slightly, wincing. His jaw dropped as he made connections. “Oh.”

Danny snorted, and kissed his doofus’ nose.

“Seriously, did you never romance your girlfriends?” Danny emphasised the never.
Steve considered the question.

“No,” was his honest and frank answer. “Well, a barbeque on the beach with a good red wine is romantic, isn’t it?”

“The fact that you’re asking tells me everything that I need to know.” Danny leaned in and kissed again with a little more feeling. Steve’s lips parted, and he sucked on Danny’s tongue. Cautiously, Steve’s large hand smoothed over Danny’s tummy, edging lower, fingers dragging over damp, hairy skin. Danny bent into the touch. Need thrummed in Danny’s groin. His cock rose. Fuck it -- he wanted a connection. Danny pulled back from kissing Steve. He wanted sex. “We really need some lube.”

“Lube?” Steve over-stressed the word, checking out its structure.

“Yeah, something that we can use in water. Loooooobe.”

“It would get into the Jacuzzi mechanism,” said Mr. Practicality.

“We can switch off the pumps.” Danny flicked off an imaginary switch.

“Oh.” Steve contemplated that solution. His nose scrunched as he thought hard. “We’ve got my silicone scar gel?”

“Hmmm.” Danny chewed over that suggestion. He didn’t know if silicone scar gel was the same as silicone lube, but they probably weren’t that different? He untangled from Steve’s questing hands, and stood, water sheeting off his body. “How sore are you?”

“What?” Steve’s confusion was cute, especially when distracted by Danny’s show.

“We’re not doing this--” Danny gestured at his bobbing cock, “--if you’re too sore.”

“I’m not sore,” Steve said very quickly.

“Really?”

“I’m relaxed.” Steve slid down into the water and stretched lithely. The movement did nothing to hide the array of bruising along his ribs, but he did indeed move without any apparent difficulty. Combination of painkillers and warm, blood-hot water, Danny judged.

Without another word, Danny slid open the door and got out of the bath. He closed it behind him, wanting to keep that luxurious heat contained. The ingredient list on the tube was short: four components. They were all multi-syllable chemical names. Nothing on the label indicated that the contents were for external use only, and given that it was to be used on damaged, healing tissue, Danny guessed that it could work.

He contemplated the toilet, but thanks to the four strong cups of coffee that he had had at lunch time, he didn’t need to go anytime soon. He rooted through the drawers for his boy scout’s tools of the trade. Steve was always prepared. He found what he was looking for in the bottom of the second drawer.

Danny shivered in anticipation.

He slipped back into the bath, closing the door firmly. Steve hadn’t moved an inch.

“Okay, Mr. Practicality, a bit of information before we start playing. You got your ears in?” Danny
didn’t think so.

Steve shook his head. Danny knelt on the non-slip mat submerged in the bottom of the bath, facing Steve so that he had all his considerable attention.

“You put any oils or anything in the water?”

“Oil? In the water?”

“Yeah.”

“No, it fucks up the jet pumps,” Steve said, providing much more information than necessary. “Okay. I added a couple of tablespoons of mineral salt.”

“Salt? Why salt?”

“Really? You’re asking me now? It makes the water… osmotically less harsh on the skin.”

“Osmotically, what’s that?” Danny questioned.

“I’ll answer your chemistry question later, if you like.” Steve sat up slightly, and reached out to stroke Danny’s thigh. “We’re salty, the water is salty; it’s about balance.”

“You done anal before?” Danny asked, setting his hand over Steve’s hand, preventing him reaching higher.

Flushing, and not just with the heat of the water, Steve shook his head again.

“Can we not just, you know,” Steve began.

“No, Babe.” It was always surprising how little Steve seemed to know about the intricacies of sex. He had just got by on his good looks and the missionary position. It didn’t really match the picture in Danny’s head. But if Steve was more gay than bisexual, and deep in the Navy closet, he probably hadn’t been that engaged in hetero-sex other than getting off.

“What are you thinking?” Steve said frustrated.

“Lots of stuff,” Danny said offhandedly, letting go of Steve’s hand. “Okay, lube, lots of lube, you can’t not use too little lube.”

“Lots of lube?” Steve went cross-eyed as he traversed that sentence.

“Yes.” Danny slowly twisted off the cap. The gel was satisfyingly gloopy on his fingers and contact sticky without being sticky. “Lots of stretching. Lots of lube. Slow and steady.”

“Lots of stretching. Lots of lube. Blow? Slow! Slow and steady,” Steve repeated -- good soldier boy that he was.

“Yep,” Danny confirmed and nodded.

“Stretching,” Steve internalised that instruction.

“Gotta do the stretching out of the water. I don’t want a lot of water up my butt. ‘Kay?

“‘Kay.”
“Steve? It’s kind of important.” Fundamentally, it was difficult. Danny knew that Steve negotiated the spoken word with a fillip of lip reading, following the cadence of the lower sounds, surfing the higher frequencies, and guesswork in an uncertain world where people weren’t always that accommodating.

“I have to make you relax,” Steve said obediently. “I’ve got to make sure that you’re ready.”

“It can be fun, you know.” Danny gave a little shimmy. “It’s all part of the experience.”

Steve watched him move, entranced. It was kind of flattering.

“Jesus, Babe. Focus.” Danny shook his head. “When we’re ready, I’m gonna sit on your lap.”

Steve’s irises dilated, wide. The head of his cock bobbed out of the water, slapping against his firm abs.

Danny leaned over him and kissed hard. He pulled immediately back before Steve could nip at his lips.

“You say stop if you want to stop. Okay, Steve?” Danny said sharply.

“Safeword, really, Danny?” Steve cocked an eyebrow.

“You’re not going to stop, if I ask you to stop?” Danny asked, very pointedly.

“Of course, I’ll stop.” Steve sat up straight on the padded bench. He shifted uncomfortably. “Sorry, Danno.”

“None of that. Danno’s off the table when we’re hanky pankying.”

“Hanky pankying?” Steve checked.

“Hanky panky. What we’re up to -- about to get up to -- must be a British term. Maybe not? I musta got it from Rachel. No, no, my Nana says hanky panky. But less on that topic! No Rachel in the bedroom. No mention of Nana.”


“Oh, we’re hanky pankying.” Danny kissed again. He knelt on the padded bench, knees either side of Steve’s narrow hips. Oh, someone had put some thought into the design of Steve’s Star Trek shower. Danny doubted that this use was on the specifications. He pushed the gel into Steve’s hand.

“Am I?” Steve gestured with the tube, sliding it between the ring of his thumb and forefinger.

“God, the romance is dead. You don’t just stick it up there!”

“I know that. I’ve watched porn!” Steve put the tube down on the side of the bath.

“Really?” Danny was frankly distrustful of that statement. “At any rate, I’m not a porn star. I haven’t done this for years. Well, toys, occasionally. They’re fun. Okay? Slow. Steady.”

Steve leaned forwards and kissed the flesh above Danny’s bellybutton. Humming, he cupped Danny’s butt in his hands and squeezed. The sound went right through Danny’s nerves in the best possible way. Bending over, Danny kissed the top of Steve’s head.
“A bit of foreplay, eh?” Danny offered.

Steve pulled back. “Talk. Talk. Talk. What about the condom? You said that we had to do this with a condom.”

Danny raised an eyebrow.

“We do, don’t we;” Steve said.

“Good boy.” Danny fanned his fingers, condom wrapper in hand. He set it on the side of the Jacuzzi.

“You know they don’t work in water, and silicone?”

“You’re not going to get me pregnant, Babe.” Danny kissed Steve’s forehead.

“It’s about protection from infection. Reducing the chance of infection.”

Steve sulked at him; hating the reminder. They were going to kill the mood any second.

“I know more about the effects of silicone on rubber than you,” Science-Steve said.

“I don’t think that they’re rubber anymore, Babe.”

Steve chortled.

“If we manage to do this it will be amazing.” Steve squeezed Danny’s butt again.

“Failure can be fun.”

“I don’t know the meaning of the word.” Steve grabbed the lube.

Danny laughed.

Steve slithered off the bench seat under Danny to sit on the bottom of the bath. The water was almost at his chin. He mouthed at Danny’s balls. Danny enjoyed the sensation. A gloopy finger pushed tentatively at Danny’s ass missing his target by a mile. The lube was icy cold against his skin.

“Go on, Babe.” Danny encouraged. Wiggling, just a little. He remembered this, it could be amazing.

Concentrating really hard, Steve wasn’t playing with Danny’s balls anymore. He was delving in with Naval Intelligence Officer focus. Danny shook his head in amusement. Belatedly, Danny remembered that thankfully Steve had recently pared his fingernails. Slickly smooth, Steve’s cool fingers trailed over Danny’s hairy butt.

“Romance is dead,” Danny observed.

“What?” Steve mumbled, which was rather interesting against Danny’s balls. He, hesitantly, found his target, pushing very slightly.

“Failure is not an option,” Danny intoned and giggled.

Steve stuck a finger up Danny’s ass.

“Mission accomplished,” Steve chortled.

“Doof—Oh.” Wide eyed, Danny bent into the breaching fingers. Closing his eyes, he worked to relax. He breathed low and hard, matching Steve’s focused breathing. He felt the relaxation, that
internal switch where he gave in to Steve’s efforts.

“More lube.” Danny instructed, pushing back on Steve’s fingers.

Steve obeyed. There was going to be squidging, but the fun sort of squidgy. His fingers slipped in easily the second time.

“Is that the--?” Steve cocked his head to the side, the edge of the bandage covering his temple going into the water, and fingered. Little flashbulbs sent electric currents up Danny’s spine.

“Get me off, Babe,” Danny said. “Make me more relaxed.”

Steve glanced up at him, peering around Danny’s cock, questioningly. Danny wished that he had his camera.

“Get me off, Steve.” He rocked his hips.

Steve wriggled up a little mouthing at the base of Danny’s cock, humming under his breath. His fingers probed. Danny was really, really happy that Steve could multi-task. He leaned into Steve’s touch, pushing down, hands clutching at the edge of the bath. Fun was building. Steve’s arm hooked around his thighs, holding him steady. In a perfect world, Steve would have been sucking his cock.

That was an amazing image.

Steve hit that spot that made Danny’s eyes roll back in his head and shoot cum over the top of Steve and splatter against the glass wall. Breathing hard, Danny rode the pulses, enjoying every long second of pleasure. He sagged down, bracing himself against the bath. Steve’s fingers were still up his ass.

“Oh, geez, I needed that.” He felt like jelly.

Steve kissed his inner thigh, soothingly.

His body begged him to sink into the water and loll, but, well, there was more fun to be had. Danny scrabbled for the condom wrapper, missing grabbing it the first time. As he shifted, Steve’s slipped his fingers free.

“My turn?” he said eagerly.


Steve got back up onto the bench. Hand under the water, Danny jacked off Steve’s cock. Steve had a nice long cock, not too thick and heavy, with a little curve to the left when hard. Danny drew his fingernail along a thick, twisting vein. Steve said something, but it wasn’t in English.

“Come on, Babe, up.” Danny tore open the condom wrapper with his teeth. “We can’t put this on underwater.”

“Do we really need it?”

“This is non-negotiable.”

Acting as if it was a major imposition, Steve arched his back. His cock breeched the water and the idiot laughed at the sight.

“You’re such a child.” Pinching the tip of the condom, Danny rolled the rubber down Steve’s length,
snapping it near his balls. Steve shivered.

“Please.” He scooped a hand around Danny’s neck and pulled him in for a needy, sloppy kiss.

Danny sucked lusciously on Steve’s bottom lip. Catching it between his teeth, Danny drew back slightly, and released.

“You wanna have fun, Babe?” Danny delved back in to nuzzle his jaw. He straddled Steve’s narrow hips. Squeezing, he forced Steve firmly back onto the bench. A line of heat pushed between Danny’s ass cheeks as he rocked back. This was going to take some mechanics. Steve’s pupils were blown.

Shifting up a fraction, Danny reached behind, fumbling around for Steve’s cock. He caught it, and guided it into position, just at entry. Steve was frozen. The sensation of water was strange -- some was going up his nicely relaxed ass.

“Come on, Steve,” Danny cooed. “It takes two to tango.”

Steve gripped Danny’s ass, squeezing the cheeks, and then pulling them slightly apart. Danny sat back, and let out a low, searing breath at the first breach. Steve squished his butt as Danny eased down. Steve’s hips jerked involuntarily, and -- oh boy -- Danny liked that.

“Again.” Danny ordered, and rode the wave down another inch of Steve’s length, and then again until he sat in the cradle of Steve’s bony hips.

“Holy Cow,” Steve gasped. “I’m in. I’m all the way in.”

He snapped his hips, lifting Danny in the water.

“Fucking hell.” Danny’s head fell back, lightning arching up his spine.

“Shit. Shit. Ohhhh,” was Steve’s litany as he jerked, pushing staccato into Danny. His hands ran up and down Danny’s ribs. “I love you. I love you.”

Impressively, Danny felt his cock rising to the occasion a second time. There was a half-mast sort of thing, but he was enjoying the ride.

Steve was gone.

His focus was on getting off. Constrained under Danny’s weight, he was jerking with every beat of his rapid heart. Danny rode the waves. Eyes rolled back, Steve’s hips stuttered, snapping. He froze, and then sighed.

Steve flopped backwards like a jellyfish.

Breathing hard, Danny bent into the aftershocks. Steve slumped under him. If Danny moved, he would probably eel off the bench and drown. What a way to go. Danny leaned forwards to kiss Steve’s slack mouth.

“Hey, Babe. I love you, too.”

“That was amazing.” Steve blinked stupidly. “That’s my new favourite thing.”

“Next time,” Danny decided, “we’ll get off together.”

“Kay,” Steve said. He wasn’t really listening.
Reaching behind, Danny kept a hold of the base of Steve’s cock, making sure that the condom remained in position as he pulled free.

Steve contributed nothing to the clean-up.

“Banana.” Danny kissed his temple, as he set the knotted condom on the side of the bath.

“Kay.”

Danny snuggled in next to him, tangling their legs together in the gently bubbling water. They had forgotten to switch off the pump. Never mind, Danny thought, it wasn’t like Steve couldn’t afford a new shower.

~*~

#117#

Another night of ceiling fan watching. Danny really didn’t like this new fillip in his sleep cycle. The impulse to poke the sleeping tiger sprawled beside him was almost irresistible. Manfully, he resisted.

Danny slipped out from under the thin covers, and padded over to the windows. The silence of the night was soothing. Danny rubbed his arms against the mild chill in the air. His fingers brushed his new, dry bandage. He smiled at the memory of the night’s activities.

People said that sex was life affirming-- it was.

Hot milk, Danny decided.

Steve mumbled and rolled into the centre of the bed, seeking out Danny’s warmth.

“Milk.”

A hot toddy might be the way to go, Danny thought, as he descended down the spiral staircase. The whisky bottle was stored somewhere in Steve’s nautically-themed study. Danny flicked on the wall switch, blinking against the flare of light, and considered Steve’s study, scanning for the liquor. The apartment was ridiculously spacious and lonely for one person. There were rooms that Steve rarely even entered. The bottle sat on a lower shelf on a floor to ceiling bookshelf on the far wall. Scooping it up, Danny considered taking a hit without using a glass. But that way lay madness. He would make Steve’s soothing hot toddy with whisky, honey, and warm milk.

Steve’s full fat, organic gold-foil topped milk was in the fridge and the jar of Manuka honey was standing, all forlorn and alone, on a cupboard shelf. Danny decanted whisky, milk, and honey into a pan, setting it on the burner. He stirred and stirred, because an agitated pan of milk wouldn’t curdle to form a skin. And he was bored and tired and unable to sleep; stirring was a distraction.

“D?” A sleepy Steve leaned against the diamond bookshelves and yawned. “You okay?”

“Yeah. Just making one of your hot toddies.”

“Tar?” Steve peered, perplexed.

“Your milk drink.” Danny pointed at the pan.

“Oh.” Steve yawned again, treating Danny to the curl of his tongue. “Toddy.”

The milk just started to simmer, and Danny cut the heat before the milk skin could form. The
honeyed aroma entwined with smoky whisky stroked his senses. Danny ignored Steve and poured the warm milk into a squat mug. He tested the temperature with his little finger and judged it perfect.

“Come on.” Danny swung by Steve, snagging his wrist.

Obediently, Steve trailed in his wake as if on a lead.

“You know,” Danny said, “you don’t have to follow me when I go wandering around. I just sometimes need another wall for a moment.”

Steve didn’t respond.

Danny simply towed him all the way up to bed.

“Okay?” Steve peered at him blearily, as he sank back down onto the mattress.

“Sure.” Danny clambered over the top of Steve and onto his side of the bed. Pushing the pillows one-handed, he got the perfect backrest set up, and settled down to sip his toddy.

Steve was already a relaxed curl of sleep, comfy under the blankets, head pillowed, fingers tucked under his chin.

Danny figured that Steve had essentially been sleepwalking.

“Doofus.”

~*~

“Guys! Guys!” Toast’s voice woke Danny all the way up.

“Holy shit.” Danny jerked and then froze.

“You guys decent?” Toast hollered.

“You guys decent?” Toast hollered.

Danny breathed hard, and finally sat up. Toast was conspicuous by his absence. Their resident computer geek and librarian was calling from the bottom of the spiral staircase.

Wincing, Danny rolled off the bed and padded to the top of the stairs. He peered around the slats and steps.

“Dude,” Toast said happily, as he poked his head over the banister.

“Is the House on fire?” Danny asked waspishly.

“No.”

“Potential murder and mayhem on the horizon?”

“Nope, Brah.” Toast rocked back on his heels out of sight, and bounced back.

“On a scale of one to ten: how important is it that you had to wake me up from the best sleep that I’ve had in weeks to bawl at me?”

“Uhm.” Toast cast about, scanning for answers in the air. “Steve would probably give it a ten. You, I guess, a two, three maybe. I’m thinking six. So, I’m thinking on average, six point three -- recurring,
of course.”

“Six out of ten?

“Six point three recurring,” Toast belaboured.

“We’ll come see you after breakfast.” Danny turned away and headed back to bed. He angled around to his side table and grabbed two Tylenol since that wake up had jarred him. There was a little milk left in the cup on the bedside table. He used that to wash down the painkillers. The whisky was an added extra.

Cocooned and protected by pillows and blankets, Steve slept on, oblivious. There were some benefits to being deaf, Danny noted, as he crawled back into his perfectly warm bed and stuffed his head under a pillow.

~*~

Steve, rolling out of bed some unfathomable period later, woke Danny up. He lifted his head, and blinked at Steve’s narrow butt, as he stretched beside the bed. Hands above his head, Steve was a supplicant to the sunlight streaming through his open windows. Danny made a mental note to get him to do that again, but in evening light, so he could get photographs. In the evening because, well, the morning light might be better, but bah humbug. Grumpily, Danny knew that this idea was an early morning shoot. Steve was still communing with the dawning sun. He moved surprisingly easily for someone with a Monet mosaic of bruises over his side.

“Toast,” Danny said, as a demand for food, and then remembered that Toast wanted to see them. In retrospect, it was probably something to do with the floppy disc.

“What?” Steve craned his head. He smiled luminously, ridiculously happy to see Danny awake.

“Morning.”

“Morning.”

Steve knelt on the mattress, and then slowly and surely prowled across the expanse.

“Like that, is it?” Danny scooped a hand around Steve’s neck and pulled him in for a kiss, with absolutely no effort at all.

Steve kissed open mouthed, with little panache and a lot of vigour, fingers tangling in Danny’s hair. Pinned under the blankets, as Steve straddled him, Danny returned his attempts.

“Gonna make a mess,” Danny strained against the taut covers, grinding his hips.

“What?” Steve backed off a fraction.

“Up, up. Up.” Danny pushed.

Steve swung off him, and Danny flung off the thin quilt.

“Ahah,” Steve said, irrepressibly, and dove back in.

Palming Danny’s heavy cock through the slit in his boxers, he pulled it out and bent over to suck. Danny thudded his head back against the pillows and shuddered. Clever fingers delved through his baggy boxers, playing and fumbling. As he nuzzled and sucked, Steve pushed with his shoulder, making Danny bend his knee up out of the way.
“What are you doing, Babe?” Danny managed to find a modicum of coherency.

Undeterred by the constriction of Danny’s boxes, Steve found his goal.

“Geez.” Danny arched his back as Steve probed.

Steve slipped free of Danny’s cock with a slurping pop. He backed off a fraction and regarded Danny from between his legs. What a picture, Danny thought. Not one that he would photograph, though. The band-aid over Steve’s forehead and temple made for a pretty weird photograph -- a little too sadomasochistic for Danny’s tastes.

“You’re still loooobey,” Steve announced, drawing his finger free.

“Haven’t been to the john, Steven.” Danny pointed out.

“Of course.” Steve said an instant later. “Hmmm, you sore? From last night?” he asked, just in case Danny had possibly forgotten.

Danny made a little wiggle, just checking. Yeah, he was sensitive, but he was also game.

“Get a condom.”

“What?” Steve made the scrunchy face.

“Condom. No arguments.”

Scrunchy face fixed, Steve shuffled over his bed to the bedside table. Danny skinned out of his boxers; this was probably the best way in the universe to wake up.

“You’re going to have to take off your boxers, Babe,” he pointed out, as Steve rooted around in a drawer, presenting his butt, and the sea tattoo that arrowed down to his crease.

“What?” Steve straightened with a foil wrapper in one hand, and what looked like a mangled tube of KY jelly in the other. He shuffled around on the mattress.

Danny twirled his own boxers on his index finger.

Hilariously, Steve checked that he was still wearing his tented boxers.

“Oh, yes.” Wiggling, he slipped the waistband over his cock and simply let them fall to his knees.

Danny sniggered as Steve then had to fight free of the boxers wrapped around his legs.

“Very smooth, Babe.”

Steve tossed them aside, with a flourish. They hit the window. Leonine, Steve came back over the bed on hands and knees, his full cock swinging lazily. Danny jacked his own cock, as Steve put on his show, arching his back.

“God.” Steve dove in, kissing Danny hard enough to mash his lips against his teeth. Danny returned his fervour.

“Come on, Babe. Come on, before I just cum from rubbing against you.”

Taking a deep breath, Steve pulled back.
“You’re not hurting?” Danny curled up slightly, to stroke his hand over Steve’s bellybutton. “Your ribs?”

“Young? My side?” Steve checked as he rocked back on his heels. “I’m kind of used to it. The pharmacy strength Naprosyn is good for twelve hours.”

“Jesus. No punching and hits for at least six months, okay?”

Steve shook his head and backed up his confusion by snapping his fore and index finger against his thumb. Danny didn’t know that sign; Steve had been checking out the YouTube videos again. He didn’t know where Steve found the time.


“It’s like that, is it?” Danny bent his knees and jacked his cock again.

Steve grinned toothily.

“Come on. Come on.” One handed, Steve pushed Danny’s knee up. Helpfully, Danny bent his other knee.

“Next time, I want breakfast in bed first,” Danny said as he splayed himself for Steve’s delectation.

“I don’t have my aids in, Danny. I can concentrate on what you’re saying or--” He held up his gel covered index and forefinger.

“Gimme,” Danny wiggled his fingers.

Cocking an eyebrow, bottom lip caught between his teeth, Steve set to work. Danny arched against the push. He was more relaxed than last night in the Jacuzzi. More willing, less nervous, and much more horny in the morning. Pre-cum beaded on his cock, smearing against the hair on his abdomen. Sweat beaded on his brow. His head thudded against his pillows as he arched his back.

“Come on, Babe, enough already, gimme,” he beseeched.

Steve pulled his fingers free with an audible squish. His cock stood proud, foreskin drawn back.

“Condom,” Danny pointed at the wrapper on the sheets.

Momentarily balking at the interruption in his thought processes, Steve froze a millisecond before scooping up the sachet. Fumbling with eagerness, he couldn’t get a purchase on the foil wrapping with his slippery fingers.

Danny laughed as he dropped it.

“Don’t laugh!” Steve snorted at him. He stretched over and wiped his fingers over Danny’s abundance of chest hair.

“Hey!”

“Needs must,” Steve said practically, and finally tore the corner of the wrapper.

Tongue between his teeth in concentration -- and wasn’t that endearing -- Steve rolled the purple condom down his cock.
“Purple?” Danny laughed.

“I think that it’s grape flavoured.” He inhaled mightily. “Yeah, grape.”

Shuffling on his knees, he moved over between Danny’s knees, brows furrowed as he contemplated mechanics.

“Isn’t it easier on your hands and knees?” he asked.

Danny arched his back in answer, feet firmly planted on the mattress.

“Heh.” Steve scooped his hands around the small of Danny’s back and lifted him slightly into his lap, crooning, “Hairy butt.”

“I’ll bite you,” Danny threatened.

Positioned to his satisfaction, and tongue still firmly poking out of the side of his mouth, Steve moved carefully and slowly. Penetration was easier since last night. Steve slid all the way in. Expression abstracted, caught in the moment, Steve rotated his hips. There was sparks, but it wasn’t right.

“No, Babe.” Danny lifted his head off the pillow. “Thrust. Thrust. I’m not a woman.”

“What?”

“Thrust.” Danny said clearly, as he hooked his ankles around Steve’s back and pulled him closer.

“Thrust?” Steve jerked his hips and his eyes rolled back in his head.

His hips snapped again, and Danny felt starlight. Danny’s cock smacked against his abdomen making sticky trails. Uncoordinatedly, he grabbed his cock, determined to get off. He flicked his fingernail in the leftover well of his Prince Albert piercing under the head. Lightning built.

“Oh, shit. Oh, shit.” Steve jerked, staccato.


“Ooooooh.” Steve pulsed, and Danny came.

It was awesome. Lightning sparked up Danny’s spine, and his legs went to jelly. Steve was an opened-mouthed statue, breathing hard as if running a marathon.

“Holy shit,” Steve breathed, and sagged. He slipped free, holding the base of his cock. “That was better than last night. Oh, boy.”

He rolled to the side, half-mashed against Danny. He kissed Danny’s nipple, the only point he could reach.

A frisson of delight echoed through Danny. Nipples had always been a sensitive erogenous zone. He’d thought about getting barbells, but piercing might have made them a little too sensitive.

“Love you, Babe.” Danny craned his head and kissed the sweaty curls on the top of Steve’s head.

“That was awesome,” Steve mumbled halfway to sleep. “Awesome.”
Danny just wanted to lie still and bask.

A nap sounded like an excellent idea.

~*~

Danny really enjoyed his shower. He felt a little chaffed. Soothing cream was the name of the game. There was an element of ‘men didn’t pamper themselves’, but Danny gave people who believed that sentiment the finger. Steve moisturised, admittedly for medical purposes.

His stomach clamoured for attention. So needs must. Earlier, Steve had padded downstairs; Danny’s big ball of energy unable to spend too long lolling around in bed. Danny wanted pancakes and bacon with maple syrup. Steve had had his aids in when Danny had made the order.


Steve was by the stove, regarding a frying pan as if it was a landmine about to go off.

“Hey, Babe? Everything okay.”

“Yeah. Yeah.” Steve’s focus was on the pan.

Danny sidled up. There was an oval pancake in the pan, a bit squished on one side.

“Having fun?” Danny asked.

“Yeah, I’m just making sure they come out right.”

“Where’s the bacon?”

“Bacon?” Steve glanced at him. “Did you want bacon?”

Danny had said bacon, but, well, it hadn’t happened.

“Nah.” Danny shrugged. “Do you wanna start on the fresh fruit and I’ll take over?”

“Sure.” Steve pushed the spatula into Danny’s hand and abandoned the pan without looking back.

The pancake tore as he tried to flip it over. Steve hadn’t used enough oil. Danny grabbed the vegetable oil and set to work. Steve ferried strawberries, mangoes and oranges to the table and sat down to chop.

“Dudes. Finally, you’re up!” Toast ran in to the kitchen, loaded down with print outs. He dumped a heavy sheaf of paper onto the kitchen table with a slap and thrust a tablet at Steve.

“Stop.” Fastidiously, Steve wiped his fingers on a cloth. Carefully, he accepted the tablet and picked up the printed sheets. Unbound, they curled over his fist like a dead thing. “Paper copies?”

“It’s ASCII print. No matter what I tried, I couldn’t get it on the tablet,” Toast said. “Well, I can, so it’s backed up, but the formatting is atrocious. It would have given anyone a migraine trying to read it. The oldest stuff is the print out.”

“How far back does it go?” Steve said, regarding the pages. It was as if he didn’t want to read the content.

“Have you read it?” Danny asked Toast.
“Well, yeah, I’ve been up all night,” Toast said pointedly. “The early stuff are all mission reports.”

“Mission reports?” Steve set the papers on the table, and smoothed his hand over the top page.

“I--” Toast reached out, his nail-bitten fingers scraping the sheaf into distinct sections separated by torn bits of paper. “First mission account entry is 1972.”


“The early stuff is, I guess, your mom running around Asia with her training wheels on? That Joe White guy is mentioned. It doesn’t really get interesting until late 1974 through 1976.”


“All of it. She’s deep undercover.”

“Seriously?” Steve jerked his chin back, affronted.

Toast turned a pile of papers around and separated out the last few pages. The text was pushed to the far left side of the sheet of paper. Tiny text and numbers writhed across the pages. They needed a magnifying glass. The date on the top page was November 1976.

“Why’s that weird?” Danny asked. November 1976?

“Because my mother was four or five months pregnant--” Steve was pale, “--with me.”

“Wow,” Danny blinked. “She was going on CIA missions while pregnant? Where was your dad?”

“In the Navy,” Steve said robotically. “Mom and Dad met when Dad was in the Navy in Sri Lanka.”

“Good cover,” Toast interjected, and then shrugged when Danny turned on him. “Who would suspect a woman with a bun-in-the-oven?”

“No!” was the only way that Danny could sum up his distaste. Steve had been going on covert missions before he was born. It struck Danny as seriously irresponsible. Danny wondered if Wo Yongfu had thought that the baby was his.

“What?” Steve asked, watching Danny’s expression closely.

“What was this deep undercover mission?” Danny deflected, as he wondered when Doris and John had married.

“Uhm, teaching, bizarrely. There was this creepy school where kids were taught English. Creepy because it’s also about teaching them about the West.”

“Training camp,” Steve summarised, returning to matters at hand, even as his brows furrowed in question at Danny.

“When does she meet Wo Fat’s dad?” Danny asked, a little distracted by the training camp comment.

“She meets Wo Fat’s daddy for the first time in 1975, when he brings Wo Fat to the school.” Toast took the individual sections and started to lay them on the table. He pointed at the middle sheaf.

“So she was identifying future agents and military assets,” Steve judged.

“What? What?” Danny set the frying pan aside on the stove and came around the table. Breakfast
could wait.

“You best train your agents young. Children are malleable. They learn languages easily. Absorb all manner of information.” Steve selected the papers that Toast had indicated and flicked through a couple of pages. “And, in general, this sort of training stays within the family in some cultures. A father will indoctrinate his son.”

“So dad brings his kid, and Doris identified both kid and parent?” Danny figured.

“That’s a good idea!” Toast enthused. “It’s like a James Bond plot.”

“We got names?” Steve asked levelly.

“More names than you can throw a stick at.” Toast danced on the spot.

“That’s not what this is all about, though, is it?” Danny nodded at the separate sections of paper one after another, and finished pointing at the tablet that Steve was still holding. “She would have given the CIA the names of the potential agents decades ago.”

“She did loads of stuff. Your mom was the Black Widow, Brah. Well, without the marrying and killing people. I mean, she wasn’t a spider with a history of cannibalism, she was an agent. Black Widow from the Marvel comics without the history and the Red Room.”

“Toast,” Steve interrupted, in a tone so flat you could have used it as a spirit level.

“Yes, Steve.” Toast almost came to attention. Perspiration was darkening the collar of his t-shirt.

“Are there details about her mission regarding Wo Yongfu in China other than the undercover work at the training school?” Steve said.

“That’s just like the heaviest stuff, ever.” Toast stretched across the papers, to the last of the pile and tapped it -- tappity tap. “So your mom was assigned to assassinate Wo Yongfu. He was so high up in the MFS it wasn’t even funny.”

“MFS?” Danny asked.

“Chinese Intelligence agency,” Steve explained.

“Wo Yongfu had a rep for playing things really close to his chest,” Toast continued enthusiastically. “So Doris was to… uhm… ingratiate herself in the family, steal any intel and then assassinate him.”

“Geez,” Danny could only say.

Steve was a silent, watching statue. He was sucking all of the energy out of the air.

“You have to remember that this is mostly pre-computer, and definitely no internet and easy, hackable data sources. Its microfiches and--” Toast gagged, “—paper notebooks. So assassinating him would have put a real kink in their operation.”

“And she failed,” Steve summarised, breaking through Toast’s enthusiasm.

“But for the right reasons, Brah!” He snatched up the last pile out from under Steve’s fingers.

“Right reasons,” Danny echoed, because, well, that didn’t make sense.

“She was gonna kill him and everything.”
“And everything?” Danny wondered, thinking, what does that entail?

“I mean assassinate him, like dead.”

“Toast, what happened?” Steve clicked his fingers, demanding Toast to hand back the papers that he was nominally reading from, but in fact seemed to have memorised.

“Doris knew the layout of their family home, she’d been there. She, well, uhm, was going there late at night.” Toast coughed suggestively.

“Continue,” Steve said icily.

“So like, Doris broke in to kill Wo Yongfu and steal anything that she could lay her hands on. But Wo Fat and Wo Fat’s mom, Lei Kuan Fat, were there. She was there and everything. The report’s really dry, but I can tell. She couldn’t do it, she couldn’t kill Wo Yongfu. She couldn’t do the whole family. So she left -- escaped.”

“Wow,” Danny could only say, and then his brain engaged. “How? Wo Yongfu knows that she’s an agent, and she’s in China? How the Hell did she escape? Oh… Oh, right.”

“What are you thinking?” Steve asked directly.

“I kind of guessed--” Danny swallowed, and then barrelled straight on, “--Wo Yongfu figured that Doris’ baby was his, so he kind of let her go. He couldn’t kill the mother of his child.”

“You’re talking about my mother.”

“Sorry,” Danny said, and sat down hard on his seat.

“Uhm, Black Widow, man,” Toast said. “It’s… she used the tools available.”

“Euphemisms for the win,” Steve snapped angrily. “Say it: my mother had sex with Wo Yongfu, as part of her mission to identify important operatives in the MFS, and threats to the United States of America.”

“I’m pretty sure that Wo Yongfu’s not your dad,” Toast said, a little uncertainly.

“Clearly.” Steve pointed at his own face. “You knew my paternal grandmother.”

“Oh yeah, you and Audrey have the same eyes and that pale, dark haired thing. And, you know, same authoritarian shit.”

“So,” Danny interrupted, because he didn’t want to dwell unnecessarily on Steve’s paternity. He had seen photographs of Audrey McGarrett, and Steve was his grandmother’s grandson. Also Steve might thump Toast. “Doris failed her mission, and was identified as an agent, and essentially was no longer able to work in China. And she was also going to have a baby. She started her caches? Maybe she got the platinum from Wo Yongfu? She needed stuff to ensure that she had bargaining power with Wo Yongfu and, maybe, even the CIA?”

“Sensible,” Steve said, voice rich with experience.

“So we now know why Doris got to know Wo Yongfu,” Danny said.

Toast coughed.

“Doris comes to Hawaii to start a family,” Danny continued ignoring Toast and focusing on Steve.
“Wo Yongfu might know her face, but doesn’t know her real name, he only knows her as Elisabeth Shelburne. She’s still an operative. Your dad identifies that the Yakuza are a threat. Doris is assigned to the Noshimuri family, keeping an eye on the Yakuza big boss. Wo Yongfu meets with Hiro Noshimuri, ten years after Doris failed to kill him. Maybe he’s not too sure it’s her? She’s changed her hair? She’s older. Put on weight? Lost weight? It’s been ten years.”

“And she assassinates Wo Yongfu to protect her identity and her family, and takes Wo Yongfu’s ledger and ancestral tablet,” Steve finished Danny’s summary.

“Exactly.”

“Hard core,” Toast said.

~*~

“Are you okay, Babe?” Danny asked.

He had tracked Steve to the bench overlooking the Bay of Seolh. Steve had pulled his disappearing act about thirty seconds after they had finished breakfast. Danny had only turned his back long enough to wash the dishes. He had given Steve his me-time. In similar circumstances, Danny would have had to bury himself away to decompress.

Steve’s eyes were a little red-rimmed. Tears were, however, unshed. He patted the bench at his side and Danny sat.

“Just thinking,” Steve said.

“About what?”

“Everything.” Steve turned a cigar tin over in his hands. “It’s hard to digest that my mom was a CIA agent and assassin. All this history….”

“And?” Danny prompted when Steve fell silent.

“Here.” He cracked open the tin. A collection of old faded Polaroids fell out onto his lap.

Carefully, Danny picked them up. They were family photographs. Candids of Doris and John, Steve and Mary, a picture of Audrey and a man, who Danny guessed was Steve and Mary’s paternal grandfather, and, finally, a school picture of Steve, smiling a gap-toothed smile. Family memories squirrelled away in Doris’ cache.

“My dad worked with mom,” Steve said. “So he must have been embedded to some extent. They met while she was an agent, and he was in the Navy. He hardly could have been that naïve. Joe White. The Hesse Brothers. Wo Fat. I wonder if he thought I might have been his younger brother? Or if Wo Yongfu wondered what had happened to the kid who he thought was his own.”

“That’s… charitable of you?” Danny hedged.

“That’s… charitable of you?” Danny hedged.

“Your mind goes weird places, sometimes.” Steve shifted slightly on the seat to better watch Danny’s lips.

“I don’t know, Babe. I sort of assume that if you’re a bad guy, you don’t care about anything other than yourself. The guy was a Chinese Intelligence Officer cum Chinese drug boss. Do bad guys think about that sort of stuff? How does that work: agent and a criminal?”
“Just because you’re a criminal or a terrorist doesn’t mean that you don’t care about your family. Or an agent….” Steve finished pensively.

“Hey.” Danny leaned in closer. “Your mom might have been an agent, but she wasn’t a criminal.”

“Criminality and Intelligence Operations aren’t always that far apart,” Steve said clinically. “And working for the government sometimes gets you a transferable skill set that is difficult to apply in the so-called real world.”

That statement sent all kinds of weird tangents through Danny’s head.

“You want to use your powers for evil?” Danny finally asked. Surfing this conversation with Steve was a veritable mindfield. He needed to derail Steve’s thoughts; he was deep in a dark well of pondering, and it didn’t feel healthy to Danny.

“I don’t need to.” Steve regarded Danny sideways. “I don’t feel any sort of urge to be evil. I’m lucky. I have a loving and supportive ‘ohana.”

“True.” Danny pushed his shoulder into Steve’s comfortably.

“Come here.” Steve shifted and slung his arm over Danny’s shoulder to pull him in tightly. “This is what is important.”

“What, the view?” Danny asked, being purposely dense.

“Yeah, the view.” The bay was a clear aquamarine hue -- the Seolh blue. Belatedly, Danny realised why the colour meant home.

“Yeah, the view.”

“I’m kind of glad that we have all the answers,” Steve said. He pressed an absent kiss into Danny’s hair. “I’m glad that you found Seolh. If you hadn’t, we wouldn’t have gotten to the answers.”

“In all honesty, if Kono hadn’t introduced me to Seolh, you would have never even known that there were any secrets to uncover,” Danny pointed out.

Steve mulled that over, arm tight around Danny.

“It’s for the best. Secrets don’t help anyone. You finding Seolh was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“Awww,” Danny said mock-bashfully. “It was the best thing to happen to me too.”

~*~
Danny made the last turn around his studio.

He had taken a lot of photographs since arriving at Seolh. He was old school. There was something fundamentally better about a hard copy of a photograph that you could hold in your hand. He stuffed the folder of hard copies of the photographs that he had printed out into his laptop bag. Only one of his most recent photographs had been given a frame. Danny smiled at the photograph -- Steve had fallen in the rock pool when he had been wearing a translucent, white shirt. Steve’s frustrated, furious expression was all kinds of adorable. The memory of that day was crystal -- the day that Danny had realised that he was attracted to the big lump. Swallowing hard, he carefully slid the frame into the bag, and manoeuvred the backpack onto his back.

He had his camera bags ready: the two cameras that he had ‘acquired’ from paparazzo, and his own Canon. He criss-crossed the straps over his chest, settling the blocky camera bags at his hips. All his clothes mashed into a little wheeled suitcase. The camera tripod that Steve had given him was a little unwieldy, but it also had a strap. He felt weighted down as if he was going on safari. He tucked it under his arm.

He had one hand free to gather up his photo of Grace that he kept beside his bed.

Yep, he had everything that was important.

Fumbling, he got the door open, and dragged himself and all his worldly possessions out of his hodgepodge studio. The wheels on his suitcase went clickity-click as he towed it down the corridor. Manhandling everything up the stairs was a bit of a production, but he managed. He got everything up on the top landing in one fell swoop.

He paused, took a deep breath, and then knocked on the door as hard as possible. The sound reverberated.


There was a long echoing silence and then footsteps tapped across a wooden floor. The door opened.

“Danny?” Steve froze, taking in Danny weighted down from head to toe. Colour drained from his cheeks. “Danny, what’s happening?”

“Oh, you banana,” Danny said exasperatedly. He thrust his photo of Grace into Steve’s hands. “I’m moving in.”

“What?” Steve turned the photo of Grace over, and automatically smiled at her angelic face.

“I’m moving in, Steven. Your apartment is too big for one person.”

“Oh.” Steve looked him up and down. A smirk crossed his lips. “Is that the only reason?”

“I have very specific shampoo and conditioner needs, and they need to be where I am.”

“Okay. We can do that.” The smirk was slowly changing into a smile.
“I figure that the bedroom on this level can be converted for Grace, for when she visits. Okay?”

“We’ll have to redecorate. It’s kind of dull at the moment,” Steve said, agreeably. “Anything else?”

“Well,” Danny said, faux conversationally, as he passed over the tripod, which Steve took automatically, “I happen to love you.”

“I love you too.” Steve’s smile became a beaming grin. He stepped aside, swinging the door to their apartment wide open. “Come on in.”

Danny stepped inside.

The end

End Notes

Steve was injured during an undisclosed mission in Afghanistan. Whilst this incident is not *graphically* discussed or illustrated in the majority of text, it is often alluded to and may be upsetting. Steve is still recovering from the attack and is permanently deaf/hard of hearing.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!