How to Conjugate a Relationship

by Liketheriver

Summary

Steve and Danny flirt, seduce, share a bed, solve a case, and fall in love...but not necessarily in that order. Set midseason 8, but spoilers for anything up to that point.

Notes

This is what happens when my husband says, "Hey, I watched a couple of episodes of Hawaii Five-0 on Netflix." Two months later we had binged all seven seasons and caught up to season 8. This was supposed to be a simple little fic inspired by an article about young men preferring bromances to romances. It ended up being the planned 5,000 words... plus or minus an additional 40,000. New to the fandom, so no beta of the fic. I apologize in advance for mistakes, it's been a while since I've had a chance to write anything. If you're interested, the article that was the inspiration can be found here: time.com/4978727/bromance-male-friendships/

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by liketheriver

“I just don’t see what the big deal is about it, is all,” Tani insisted as she refilled her coffee cup.

Steve was obviously walking into the middle of a conversation he knew nothing about, and he frowned as he tried to come up to speed. He watched as Lou shook his head behind the woman who was pointedly not looking up from her task of stirring in creamer.

“‘The big deal, newbie, is that workplace romances are never a good idea.”
Tani rolled her eyes and threw up her arms. “It is not a romance.”

Lou didn’t look convinced. “It’s something.”

“What’s something?” Steve asked finally, although he had a good idea he knew what this was about. He and Danny had definitely seen a spark of a particular ‘something’ between Tani and Junior during their time in quarantine. Although, any thought beyond a quizzical exchange of, ‘what the fuck?’ between him and Danny was quickly overcome by the all-encompassing, ‘what the fuck!’ when Danny was fucking shot in the fucking lung. Not to mention, Steve had to stick his fucking finger in the fucking hole he had to fucking cut to keep Danny from fucking dying. The less fucking thought about that, the fucking better.

“Tani and Junior,” Lou told him needlessly, “and their burgeoning, ‘not a romance’.” Grover enclosed the last part in exaggerated air quotes.

Tani sighed, shot Lou a look that had, ‘thanks for dragging my boss into this,’ written all over it, before shaking her head. “Look, we’re friends; that’s all. We’re both new blood in a very tight knit team. It makes sense we’d bond with each other. Besides, something just sort of…clicked.”

Steve mouthed the word “clicked” at Lou, who raised a knowing eyebrow halfway up his otherwise smooth forehead, before both men appraised Tani with skepticism.

“Oh, come on!” Tani half laughed. “You guys know what I’m talking about. I mean, you two clicked.” She waved a finger between the two men before addressing Steve directly. “You clicked with Danny. It’s team clicking.”

“Clicked?” Steve considered the word as he looked to Lou. “Would you say we clicked when we met?”

“I don’t know,” Lou pondered. “Does lodging a complaint against you with the governor count as clicking?”

Steve pursed his lips. “I’m going to have to say, no, that doesn’t count as clicking. Although, to be honest, it went a lot better than when Danny and I first met. We drew our weapons on each other.”

Tani was looking a little less sure of herself. “Seriously?”

Steve nodded in confirmation. “And later that day, Danny punched me in the face.”

“I could relate to that sentiment the first day we met,” Lou confessed. When Steve frowned, Lou challenged, “What? You know I love you, man, but you make a lousy first impression.”

Tani apparently saw this as her chance at escape, as she started for her office. “So you guys didn’t exactly hit it off early on. Doesn’t mean Junior and I can’t.”

“There’s a thin line between hitting it off and hitting on,” Lou pointed out as he followed her.

Tani made it as far as the tech table before she turned around and shook her head vehemently. “I am not hitting on him!”

“Okay, okay,” Lou appeased with raised hands. “Will you at least admit you’re flirting?”

Spreading her arms to protest further, Tani stopped and sighed. “Fine. Okay. Maybe we are flirting…a little bit. Where’s the harm in that?”

Steve had been avoiding this conversation, but seeing as Tani had provided the opening, he figured he should take it. “Flirting can lead to emotional entanglement,” he said in his best caring boss voice—the one that conveyed, ‘I genuinely feel for you, but you still need to respect my authority on this subject’.

“And turmoil,” Lou added.

“Exactly. Emotional turmoil,” Steve agreed, keeping that same tone. “And that isn’t good for the
team dynamic.”

So much for the respect, given the way Tani laughed in his face. “Are you actually being serious right now? You were going to propose to member of the team.”

“Technically, Catherine wasn’t on the team when I was going to propose.” And, yeah, that sounded as weak when he said it out loud as it had in his head.

Tani, however, chose to ignore him. “Not to mention you and Danny flirt. All the time.”

Steve’s eyes widened in surprise, and he actually leaned back. “Flirt?”

“Yes,” Tani insisted.

“Me and Danny?”

“You and Danny,” Tani affirmed.

“Danny and I flirt?” Steve looked to Lou, who was keeping conspicuously silent with his hands stuffed in his pockets and apparently finding the light fixtures fascinating.

“All. The. Time,” Tani repeated.

Steve opened then closed his mouth, shifted, crossed his arms across his chest, before finally managing to say, “Did you miss the part where I told you we pointed guns at each other and he punched me?”

“I can honestly say, having known the two of you these past several months, that was probably when the flirting began.”

Steve wasn’t often left speechless, but he had no fucking clue how to respond to that particular accusation. Of course, the one person who was never speechless in his life chose that moment to join them.

“Who’s flirting?” Danny asked, even as his fingers beckoned to Steve and he demanded, “Keys.”

Steve ignored the request, although he filed it away to follow up on where the hell Danny thought he was going after they settled this whole flirting thing.

“Tani and Junior,” Steve supplied.

At the same time, Tani blurted, “You and Steve.”

The responses didn’t seem to faze Danny, who simply tapped Steve’s bicep. “Okay, good to know, now give me the keys.”

“We don’t flirt,” Steve insisted, as he pointed between he and Danny, which would have been a lot more convincing if Danny wasn’t digging into his cargo pants pockets.

“Gee, I have no idea why I would have ever thought that you did,” Tani noted with rolled eyes.

“You flirt,” Steve told Tani, even as he slapped at Danny’s hand. “You flirt, and he flirts, but we don’t flirt.” Steve swatted at Danny again. “Will you quit it already? I’m trying to prove a point.”

“Oh for the love of…” Danny gave an aggrieved sigh as he motioned a hand between the members of the team gathered around the tech table. “She flirts, you flirt, they have flirted, we are flirting. Now give me the keys.” When everyone just stared at him, Steve most dumbfounded of all, Danny said, “What? Are we not conjugating here?”

Steve had reached his limit. First, he had Tani and her accusations, then Danny getting all handsy and going who the fuck knew where, apparently without plans to include Steve in the trip. And what the hell? Did he just hear Danny say they were flirting?
First things first. “What is so important that you cannot wait two minutes for us to finish this conversation so I can pull out the keys and hand them to you?”

“You realize that in the amount of time it took you to ask that question, you could have simply reached in your pocket, retrieved the keys, and handed them over to me.”

Steve stepped back out of reach when Danny went for his pocket again. “You still didn’t answer where you are going.”

Danny rocked back, arms flying. “Oh, so now I have to check in with you every time I want to drive my own goddamn car?”

With hands on his hips, Steve shifted a step into Danny space. “So now you can’t answer a simple goddamn question?”

Tani had moved to stand beside Lou. “I’m starting to see the point about the emotional turmoil in the work place.”

Lou rested one large hand on the smaller woman’s shoulder. “I have only your best interest and my sanity at heart.”

Before Steve could argue that he and Danny were most definitely not flirting, Danny pinched the bridge of his nose. “Lunch, Steven, I am trying to go pick up lunch.”

Steve checked his watch. “Thought it wasn’t supposed to be picked up for another twenty minutes?”

“Yes, but there’s construction on Keeaumoku, and you know that it’s a mess in that area at lunchtime anyway, and nearly impossible to find parking—”

“Then we’ll take Piikoi. We’ll be there in like ten minutes. I’ll circle, and you can run in and pick it up.”

“See this? This right here is why I, A,”…Danny used his hands to form a small box out of air to his right to enclose his A point… “wanted to drive myself, and B,”…Danny mimed a similar sized air box to his left… “didn’t want to tell you where I was going.”

And what was the purpose of putting those ideas in imaginary boxes anyway?

“What does the route to lunch have to do—”

“You always do this, Steve, always. You always think you know the best—“

“I can’t help it that I know the best way to get—“

“Think you know the best way,” Danny stressed. “Think. Actually, no, I take that back. You believe you know the best way, because you don’t think before you do anything.”

“We’ll leave in ten minutes, and the food will be waiting for you on the counter. You’re in. You’re out. Done deal.”

“And that’s another reason I want to leave now. I don’t want it to be waiting on the counter. I want to watch them pack it up. That way I know they got everything we ordered, so I don’t have to either eat something I didn’t order, or have to fight the traffic again to take it back and wait for my correct order. Ergo,”

Steve rolled his eyes at the use of the conjunction. Partially because it drove him batshit when Danny used the word, and partly because Danny expected that response, which, Steve was convinced, was the only reason Danny actually used the word. Steve hated to disappoint his partner, especially when he’d only been back on full duty a few days.
“Ergo,” Danny repeated, “I prefer to arrive early, have them walk me through the order as they pack it; otherwise, I have to have them unpack everything so I can double check it. Also, when they wrap the naan too soon, and put it in the bag with the containers of hot food, it get soggy. No one likes soggy naan, Steve. No one.”

Danny turned to the others for confirmation of what he saw as his very valid and logical argument.

“Is it too late to say I’ll just eat out of the vending machines?” Tani asked dryly.

“Yes,” Danny informed her succinctly.

Steve was having none of it, however. “You do realize if I hadn’t believed I was right about your liking Indian food, you wouldn’t even be worried about your naan.”

“Oh, Lord,” Lou moaned with a look heavenward.

And, yeah, okay, maybe Lou had a point, because really, there was no reason to keep arguing with Danny other than Steve liked arguing with Danny. It was a fucking endorphin rush on par with running a mile in a full out sprint. If he was honest with himself, he might even admit he was a little bit addicted to it. Especially when Danny’s voice went up about half an octave and a full decibel in volume, and his arms started slicing through the air like he was frantically dealing cards to everyone in the room, and the Jersey started slipping into his stance…hip cocked, chest out, head slightly tilted, and blue eyes gleaming. Kind of like it was at that moment.

“What did I ever do to deserve this? To deserve you as my self-appointed Handbook for Dummies for every single aspect of my life?” Danny demanded of the room, hell, the world, in general. “Why can’t we just leave now, or better yet, you take the time to pull the keys from your pocket, hand them over, and let me drive my car there myself? It’s not like we are in the middle of some major case here. Did I miss the governor calling to inform you of some nuclear bomb that can blow up the perfectly functional half liver I gave you, or at the very least irradiate the shit out of it again? No? Good. That’s good. Excellent. Because that means, not only do I not have worry about the lives of me, you, my children, this team, all of HPD, and every other fine, upstanding citizen who has chosen to reside on or visit this godforsaken rock, it also means there is literally, literally, Steven, nothing keeping you here in this office other than this argument.”

Steve watched Danny take a deep breath just to refill his lungs, and Steve found he had to do the same. Jesus, who needed a runner’s high when he could have a Danny high without breaking a sweat?

“I would like to finish my conversation with Tani,” Steve stated with exaggerated calm. “The conversation that you, Daniel, interrupted.”

Steve bit the inside of his cheek to keep from grinning at the small twitch the use of his full name caused in Danny. The slightly British lilt he put on it, that mimicked Rachel’s use of her ex-husband’s name, hadn’t helped matters.

Before Danny could object, Tani spoke up. “Alright, if it will get you to drop it, I’ll admit it; I’m flirting with Junior. It’s not like it’s going to go anywhere anyway.”

“Riiight,” Lou drawled, “Because what red-blooded, American man would be interested in an attractive woman flirting with him?”

“You do realize that a good chunk of men my age, straight men I might add, aren’t interested in emotional relationships with women? They prefer having that with their buddies. They even sleep and snuggle with them, minus the sex. Hell, given a choice between getting laid and hanging with his loser friends, my brother would probably choose his buds.” When the three men in the room blinked in confusion at what Tani was telling them, she nodded her head. “I shit you not. There are scientist out there doing studies on it as we speak, not that it does me, and my lack of a sex life, any damn good. So forgive me if I found one nice, attractive guy who didn’t seem to have a lot of male friends, that I thought I might possibly be able to hang with on occasion, without having to pry him away from his platonic cuddle buddies.”

Tani leaned back against the tech table, arms crossed, with a look on her face that was almost
daring them to challenge her on that.

After several eternal seconds, Lou finally spoke. “Well…thank you…Tani…for enlightening us on that subject. I, for one, was unaware that such a phenomena existed.”

Tani’s smirk showed that she was relishing the way she had obviously made the men squirm. “Yeah, totally sucks to be me.”

“Huh,” was all that Steve could manage in response. It was way too early in Tani’s time with Five-0 to be discussing her sex life, or lack thereof; although she didn’t seem to have any problem just laying it all out there like that. What was he supposed to say? The only thing that would have been more awkward would have been a discussion of her preferred brand of tampons.

Danny leaned in a little closer and mumbled, “I told you we should have left earlier.”

Steve took that as the lifeline it was, hooked Danny’s elbow to drag him along as he turned abruptly toward the door. “We have to go pick up lunch. Naan’s getting soggy.”

“Need any help?” Lou asked hopefully.

Steve’s free hand was already on the door. “Nope, we’re good.”

From beside him, Danny warned, “If the naan’s soggy, we’re sticking around until they make us a new batch.”

Behind him, Steve heard Lou say, “Oh, looks like Jerry’s calling me. Yes, Jerry, what can I do for you?”

Steve would have sworn before a judge and jury that Lou’s phone never rang.

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Danny climbed back into the Camaro with the two bags of Indian food, handing one to Steve in the driver’s seat while he fastened his seatbelt. “They were out of that lime pickle stuff you—“

“Achaara,” Steve clarified.

“Yes, right, achaara. How could I forget?” Danny shook his head in a long-suffering manner he knew Steve would recognize instantly before continuing. “They were out of the achaara that you like, so I got an extra mango chutney.”

“What about the raita?” Steve asked. “Did you get the raita?”

“Of course I got the raita. Did I get the raita?” Danny tsked in disappointment that Steve would even question such a thing. “What do you take me for?”

“Just, you know, double checking.” Steve’s tone was appeasing, which could either mean he was genuinely not trying to start something, or the exact opposite. With Steve, it was all a matter of context, and that context could be the subject at hand, the day at hand, hell, even the events of the last month.

What, pray tell, had happened in the past months? Oh, right, Danny had nearly died. Twice. Once from a biologic weapon, and the second from a bullet from a more conventional one. If Steve needed to bicker and argue to prove life was back to normal again, that Danny was back to normal again, then who was Danny to disappoint him? They’d nearly gotten into a screaming match on Christmas Eve over a cookie, for Christ’s sake, just so Steve could decompress, and Danny could feel a little less useless for his lack of participation in the case.

When the car behind them honked, Steve dropped the bag back into Danny’s lap, and hit the gas. The acceleration pressed Danny back against the headrest, only to jerk him forward when Steve stopped short when the brake lights in front of them shone red. The food teetered precariously in Danny’s lap, but he managed to stabilize the containers even as he snapped, “Seriously, did you
learn to drive behind the wheel of a bumper car?"

Steve’s mischievous grin rounded into a thoughtful purse of his lips.

“What’s with the face?” Danny asked, fully prepared to go a round of ‘what face? Your face. I’m not making a face. There’s definitely a face. There is no face.’ It was an oldie but goody, and they both had a thing for the classics.

Instead, Steve chewed his lip before finally saying, “So…do you really think this is flirting?”

Honestly, Danny had just wanted to get his lunch the quickest way possible when the whole flirting topic had came up, and he hadn’t been paying too much attention to what he was actually saying at the time. It was a patented Jersey skill passed down from generation to generation on his mother’s side. His father’s family had perfected the listening without actually hearing trait, which was why his parents were a match made in heaven. Since Danny couldn’t remember all the details of the conversation in question, he decided the best approach now would be to pull on his Williams’ genes and play obtuse.

“What? You mean you driving with all the discipline of a six-year-old jacked up on pixie sticks while I try not to dump butter chicken and achaara on my shirt?”

“No…. actually, yes…maybe,” Steve floundered.

“Way to be decisive, babe.”

Danny watched Steve work through his feelings, which was kind of like watching butter melt into toast. Steve’s emotions always started off cold and hard, slowly softening up until they were warm and running all over the place. If you weren’t there watching the entire process, they would just vanish into that hard, crusty exterior, and you’d never know those buttery emotions had been there to begin with.

“All of it, Danny. Everything we do…our back and forth thing. Do you think that’s flirting?”

Danny decided that if he was comparing Steve to buttered toast, he must be hungrier than he thought. He ripped off a piece of naan and started to chew, which also, conveniently, gave him an excuse not to answer right away.

Offering the second half of the bread to Steve, Danny bobbed his head. “Well, I’d have to say the answer to that question is yes. At least that’s as good a word for it as any.”

“Flirting?” Steve asked again around a mouthful of bread; and seriously, could the man not, for once, keep his mouth shut while he chewed?

“Yes,” Danny said with more conviction this time.

“You and me?”

“Those would be the two individuals under discussion at the moment, yes.”

“You and me? We’re flirting? Right now?”

“Again, I have to go with yes. Final answer.”

“Final answer?”

“Final answer.”

“And we’ve been doing this for, what? Seven, almost eight years?”

“I’d need to consult a calendar for a more definitive duration, but I’d say that sounds about right.”

“Huh,” Steve considered as he took another bite of naan. “We’ve been flirting for well over seven years, and we still haven’t had sex. Obviously someone isn’t doing something right.”
Danny raised a finger. “Ah, Steven, there’s your mistake. You’re confusing flirting with seduction.”

Steve seemed to genuinely mull over Danny’s point. “And there’s a difference?”

“There most definitely is a difference. I can see how the subtleties may be lost on a Neanderthal like yourself, so let me enlighten you.”

“Please, by all means, oh wise one, enlighten away.”

Danny ignored the more than familiar patronizing tone. “Seduction is a means to an ends, the ends being namely sex, and if done correctly, lots and lots of it. Flirting is more about the act itself. It’s the epitome of look, but don’t touch.”

“So flirting doesn’t lead to sex?”

“I didn’t say that. I said it’s not about sex. Flirting can be a gateway to seduction, but it doesn’t have to be.” Danny watched Steve ponder what he had just said, and quickly concluded his partner either didn’t understand or didn’t believe him. “Look, haven’t you ever flirted with a waitress to get better service?”

“Yeah, to get better service. That’s a means to an ends.”

“Okay, fine, bad example. How about flirting with someone in a waiting area… I don’t know, the airport or the bank, just to pass the time, with no expectation of sex?”

Steve still had that thoughtful, yet confused, expression on his face, like someone had asked him to solve a quadratic equation in his head. Danny liked to think of it as Complex Math Face.

“That’s just being friendly,” Steve finally said.

“No, it’s more than that.” Danny took another bite of naan to give himself a second to find the right way to word this. “Sometimes… sometimes it’s nice to know other people find you attractive. Sometimes you just want to know that someone could want you, even if they don’t really want you. You know? You flirt because it makes the other person feel good, and in return, you feel good when they flirt back. You want to feel a jolt of something. I don’t know, endorphins maybe.”

This time Steve blinked, and he gave Danny an almost surprised look, as if he was shocked Danny would say something like that. So Danny decided to try again.

“I mean, I believe, that by most commonly accepted standards, I’m a fairly attractive guy.”

“I would concur with that assessment,” Steve added with a serious nod of his head.

“Thank you, Steven.” It was always good to reward Steve for positive behavior. “It’s nice to have that affirmation, it makes me feel good. So the flirting is fulfilling its purpose. And now, I would like to reciprocate the flirting so that you feel good, too. Not that I’m saying you need any sort of affirmation on your ridiculous good looks, because you are, well, you.” Danny waved a hand to encompass all the six plus feet of good-lookingness sitting next to him in the car.

Steve gave him a wicked smile. “You really think I’m ridiculously good looking?”

“I have a pulse, don’t I? And, you know, functioning eyes. Oh, don’t give me that bashful bullshit look of yours. You know how good looking you are; you flaunt it any chance you get. The way you come out of the water after you’ve been swimming, you’re practically swaggering in slow fucking motion. It’s like The Right Stuff meets Bay Watch.”

Steve lit up; whether from the compliment or the films, Danny wasn’t sure. “Now that is a great movie.”

“I certainly hope you’re talking about The Right Stuff, because in my opinion Bay Watch was…
“Damn straight I’m talking about The Right Stuff. Bay Watch?” Steve snorted in disgust. “I can’t believe you’ve even seen Bay Watch.”

“It stars Zac Ephron, and I have a teenage daughter. Of course, I’ve seen Bay Watch.”

“Okay, here’s the plan,” Steve said excitedly. “You, me, a six pack, a couple of steaks, and The Right Stuff, this Friday.”

Danny tapped at Steve’s knee with a fist. “I will accept your gracious offer of hospitality and even contribute some cookies.”

Steve’s eyes widened. “The ones you made on Christmas Eve?”

“For you, yes, I’ll make those cookies.”

“I’m starting to like this flirting thing,” Steve told him with a grin.

Danny thought he might need to have a discussion on Pavlovian responses and positive reinforcement versus flirting, but decided to save that for another time.

Besides, Steve’s thoughts had already turned back to the movie. “Chuck Yeager was the shit. You know, he was hands down the best test pilot out there, but they wouldn’t consider him for the Mercury missions because he didn’t have a college degree.”

“As a matter of fact, I did know that.” Danny informed him. “I read the book, as well as watched the movie.”

Steve’s smile just spread wider at that little tidbit, and Danny couldn’t help thinking he’d gained a few Steve points for that. The smile didn’t hurt the endorphin levels coursing through his blood, either, and he found himself saying, “I can also bring some of my Nonna’s special gnocchi for dinner.”

If possible, the smile grew. “With the red sauce?”

“Gravy,” Danny correct. “And yes.” Although, he had originally thought of a simple butter and parmigiana to save time, instead of a four-hour undertaking that was his grandmother’s signature dish.

Christ. Now who needed the Pavlovian discussion?

“You know, I thought about applying to the astronaut corp,” Steve told him.

“Why didn’t you?” Danny asked.

Steve shrugged. “I guess SEALS just seemed a better fit.”

“I can see that.” Danny nodded. “I mean, until the alien invasion comes, I guess there isn’t much to shoot or blow up in space, huh?”

“You know me so well.” Steve rolled his eyes, but the good humor was still there.

Danny offered Steve another piece of naan. “Just all part of the bromance, I guess.”

Steve took the flatbread and snorted. “Next thing you know, we’ll be snuggling and sleeping in the same bed for emotional support.”

Danny bit into his own bread, glad that he had ordered extra, because at this rate they’d eat one whole order before they got back to the office. “Wouldn’t have anyone else as my mancrush, babe.”

He’d said it in jest, but once the Great Cookie Argument of Christmas 2017 was out of the way, Steve had helped Danny set up Santa gifts, crashed on Danny’s sofa, and slept like a man who
had chased a ring of thieves across half of Honolulu. In the morning, Charlie had launched himself on top of the sleeping man with an excited, “Uncle Steve, Santa was here!” that was loud enough to make Danny’s ears ring from where he leaned against the kitchen door. Danny had watched the scene play out, watched as Steve feigned shock and amazement at the news, and felt his own smile that fought through the fatigue that came with a six year old waking him at 5:03 in the morning.

Grace had stumbled out of her room soon after that, snuggled into the uninjured side of Danny’s chest, and mumbled that it was too early. The disgruntlement turned into a reluctant smile when Steve dropped a quick kiss on the top of her head, and whispered “Merry Christmas, Gracie,” as he passed them on his way into the kitchen and proceeded to make pancakes.

After they took Grace and Charlie back to Rachel’s, they’d gone to Steve’s house and ate leftovers from the party the night before. They Facetimed, first with Kono and Adam, then Chin and Abbey while Sara showed them everything Santa had brought her. After that, Danny had watched Die Hard movies most of the afternoon, while Steve and Eddie bounced between Danny on the living room sofa, and Mary and Joanie on the beach.

It was probably the best Christmas Danny had spent since leaving New Jersey.

So, yeah, maybe those millennial guys were on to something getting their emotional support from their best friend.

Steve gave him a wink. “Feeling’s completely mutual.”

Danny barely heard him, however, because he was too busy bracing himself and yelling, “Car!” in warning.

Steve slammed on the breaks to avoid the sedan that had cut into their lane in front of him, sending cartons of food flying into the floorboard. The smell of Indian food from at least one open container instantly permeated the car.

Danny looked at the mess at his feet in disgust. “I told you the traffic on Piikoi would suck this time of day.”

“You said it would suck on Keeaumoku.”

“It sucks everywhere! It’s Honolulu!” Seriously, how bad did traffic have to be to miss the Turnpike during rush hour?

“It’s not the traffic, its one car!” Steve defended.

“If that’s my food that opened, I’m eating yours.”

“Oh, so someone cuts me off, and now I don’t get lunch?”

“It’s all still in the bag.”

“I get to eat out of a plastic bag? Gee, thanks so fucking much.”

“Your favorite meal is an MRE. You voluntarily eat out of plastic bags all the time. How is this any different?”

“Are you kidding me?”

Yeah, Danny thought, as Steve was finally distracted from the argument by his phone ringing; there was a lot to be said for their flirting.

“McGarrett,” Steve barked into the phone, then straightened as if speaking with a commanding officer. “Yes, Governor.”

“So much for lunch,” Danny mumbled, knowing this probably meant it would be a while before they had a chance to eat anything they couldn’t hold in their hands as they drove from one side of the island to the other.
Steve gave few clues to the nature of their next case, since all he said was a series of “yes, Ma’am,” and “understand,” and “I’ll notify my team, and we’ll be right there.”

When Steve disconnected, Danny raised an eyebrow at Steve’s serious expression. “I take it we caught a case.”

Steve nodded once. “Missing five-year-old. Son of the housekeeper of one of the governor’s friends.”

A missing kid. Christ. Danny felt his stomach knot, felt a ghost of the all-encompassing terror he’d lived when Grace had been taken, felt the need to call Grace and Charlie and make sure they were okay. He settled for pulling his phone and texting a quick heart and monkey emoji to Gracie instead. She’d be on lunch break at school and would probably have her nose in her phone like usual.

“Guess we better find him then,” Danny said with a tension that only eased slightly when he received a text in response from Grace a few minutes later.

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To say it had been a shitty couple of days was an understatement of massive proportions, which went a hell of a long way in explaining why Steve was standing next to the Camaro making a phone call instead of dealing with the perp. Besides, Danny wasn’t done with his ‘dealing’ just yet, and Steve wasn’t ready to step in, no matter how many skeptical looks Junior shot his way.

The phone rang twice before a concerned British voice answered. “Steven?”

Now that he had her on the phone, Steve realized he hadn’t exactly thought this through all the way. Fuck, he was tired. “Hi, yeah, Rachel, it’s me.”

“Is everything alright?” She asked with more worry seeping into her voice. “Is Danny okay?”

Oh, hell. Steve never considered that basically the only time he ever called Rachel was when Danny was injured. Although, that wasn’t too far from the truth now.

“Yeah, no, Danny’s fine…at least physically he is.” Steve took a breath and scratched at his buzzed hair. “Listen, Rachel…”

“You found him, didn’t you?” Rachel asked, more of a statement, really. “The little boy, Matthew; you found him.”

Steve should have known she would be familiar with the case they’d been working for the past three day. Whether Danny had told her, or he’d told Grace and she’d passed it along, or Rachel had put two and two together from the news, Steve wasn’t sure.

“Yeah, we found him,” Steve stated simply.

After the governor’s call, Danny and Steve had gone back to the Palace. They’d snarfed down their lunches while standing around the tech table with the rest of the team, as Jerry briefed everyone on the major players, and what they knew about the abduction so far. The friends of the governor were Sharon and Jacob Warren, both in their mid-sixties, both born and raised on the islands. They ran a very high-price realty company they had built from the ground up, and Steve got the impression that they were not only friends, but also large contributors to Mahoe’s reelection campaign. They had two grown sons— one on the mainland with a family, who was expanding the family business on the west coast, and the other single and living here on Oahu, mainly responsible for the rental properties on some of the other islands and their expansion into commercial property.

They also had a housekeeper, Theresa Ocampo, late twenties, who had worked for the family since she came to the states when she was eighteen on a work visa sponsored by the Warrens, and
whom Sharon thought of almost as a daughter. Theresa had no family on the island, and she and her son, Matthew, often joined the Warrens for family gatherings, including the recent holidays.

Danny had gone quiet and sat down his lunch container when Jerry told them the kid’s name was Matthew. Steve was probably the only one to notice the change in mood of his partner, not to mention Danny never touched the rest of his food. As if it wasn’t going to be bad enough they’d be dealing with a missing kid who happened to be just a little younger than Charlie, they had to throw in the memory of the younger brother Danny hadn’t been able to save.

Theresa, a single mother, was apparently well compensated by the Warrens, given the small, but nice, home she shared with her son. Steve wasn’t immune to the sickening sensation of déjà vu he felt walking into Theresa’s home filled with so many familiar markings. There were toy truck and Matchbox cars scattered on tables and under chairs, and even the same racetrack Santa had brought Charlie a few weeks ago set up in the middle of the living room floor. He found Danny in the kitchen looking at the drawings Theresa had posted on her refrigerator Matthew had obviously drawn for her.

Danny had always had a running gallery of children’s artwork in his house, first from Gracie and now Charlie. Steve had his own collection, including one very similar to the hand print turned into snowmen that Matthew had given his mom with a carefully printed ‘Merry Christmas’ in a child’s blocky handwriting. The one Charlie had given Steve before Christmas had Santa driving a familiar blue pickup truck and a very formal ‘To: Uncle Steve From: Charlie Williams’ painstakingly printed across the top and bottom. Eventually, when he received a replacement piece, it would make its way into the drawer where Steve stored all the drawings Grace and Charlie had made him over the years. Steve cherished every single one of them, treated them as the treasure they were to be acknowledge as worthy of such a gift by the giver.

Steve would do anything, anything, to keep those kids safe. Now another little boy, one, who like Charlie, was loved more than life itself, was missing. Steve had always known Danny had projected those feelings onto every child who had been a victim in one of their cases. Somewhere along the line, Steve had started doing the same thing; it just made this case all the harder. Add to that the kids name was Matthew, and Steve knew he was going to have to keep a close eye on Danny, because there was no way in hell his partner would be willing to lose another Mattie on his watch.

Whoever had taken Matthew Ocampo had snatched him from the front yard of the neighbor’s house where he was playing. The boy usually stayed with the older lady after kindergarten let out while his mother finished up at work. None of the neighbors had seen or heard anyone, and Matthew had never screamed as if he was in trouble. Danny believed that meant Matthew probably knew his abductor, and Steve agreed. The kid's father, a marine currently stationed in Afghanistan, was out of the picture entirely, a casual relationship who Theresa had never pressured for support of any kind. There had been an ex-boyfriend of Theresa’s who she had ended it with badly about six months before. They’d tracked him down in Waianae, hauled the guy in for questioning, but he’d alibied out, leaving them with no other leads.

By this time, almost forty-three hours had passed since Matthew was reported missing. None of the team had slept more than a handful of hours through any of it, although Steve did his best to keep them rotating home to snatch some rest here and there. With nothing more to go on at the moment, Steve had caught a few hours sleep on his office couch, having ordered Danny to do the same. Steve had woke with itchy eyes, and a dull headache building, and to find Danny had spent the entire time Steve was napping going over any potential suspects in the neighborhood, yet again. Everyone knew the longer a child was missing, the less chance there was of finding him. With no ransom demand coming in, and no leads to speak of, time was not on their side. That didn’t stop Steve from trying once again to get Danny to sleep.

Marching into Danny’s office, Steve took him by the arm. “Come on, let’s go.”

“What?” Danny asked hopefully, but at least he stood and was following Steve out of his office, “Did Tani find something in the bank statements?”

“I sent Tani home two hours ago to try to get some sleep…kind of like you were supposed to do.”
Danny stopped and dug in his heels, refusing to take another step. “I’m not going home, Steve.”

“I’m not asking you to go home, although I think everyone would appreciate you taking a shower and changing clothes. But first you need some sleep, and since I can’t trust you to do it in your office, you’re going to do it in mine.”

“I’m fine,” Danny argued. “I went longer without sleep during finals week in college.”

“Well, if you only had to pass a macro economics exam, then I’d say have at it. But this case is a little more important.”

“Thank you for making the exact point I am.” Danny had pressed his palms together, as if he were praying; only he used them to gesture at Steve instead. “This is too important to waste time sleeping. It is a child’s life we are talking about.”

“It’s too important to make a mistake, Danny. Mistakes are made when you get sloppy, and you get sloppy when you’re tired.” Steve could see he was starting to wear Danny down, so he pressed harder. “Just a couple of hours, man. I swear I will wake you if anyone finds anything. But you gotta do this, Danno. Do it for me. I can’t think about the case the way I should if I’m worrying about you falling out on me.”

Danny slumped in defeat and waved for Steve to lead on.

Not giving him a chance to back out, Steve quickened the pace the last few feet into his office. “Thank you. Sincerely, Danny, thank you.”

Danny pulled his arm free from Steve’s grasp then flopped down on the couch. “Enough. How do you expect me to sleep with you yammering away?” He rolled over so he was facing into the sofa cushions.

Steve took it as a victory ad turned off the overhead lights in his office. He left long enough to take a piss, splash water on his face, and grab a cup of coffee and a stale sandwich left over from lunch…dinner…hell, he honestly couldn’t remember. But food was food, and he made a mental note to make Danny eat one when he awakened. By the time he came back, Danny’s soft snores were filling his office. Steve flicked on the small task lamp, sent a quick text to Lou to see if Eric had found anything new in the forensics lab, and went back to reviewing the past week’s worth of TSA logs of arrivals onto the island against anyone of interest in the case.

Meanwhile, Jerry had poured over every traffic camera in a mile radius of the Ocampo home, and had a partial license plate that had four numbers the same as a car that belonged to the younger Warren son. Joseph Warren had also taken an island hopper flight to Maui two days before. True to his word, Steve woke Danny after he’d only been asleep about two and a half hours to tell him about the break in the case. Danny had stretched to work the kinks from his back, then chugged his fifth Red Bull of the day. Steve would have been worried about potential cardiac arrest if he hadn’t felt hypocritical for bitching at Danny while drinking one of his own.

Steve and Danny had gone to question the Warrens about their son. When pressed, the Warrens admitted that Joseph had been in and out of rehab numerous times since his teen years, and they had finally cut him off financially over Thanksgiving when they learned he was using yet again. Lou and Tani eventually tracked Joseph Warren down in Maui at one of the rental properties the family owned, but Matthew was nowhere to be found. Considering that there hadn’t been a child on the flight Joseph had taken to Maui, odds were Matthew was still somewhere on Oahu. They’d dragged Joseph back, and Steve and Danny had taken over the questioning.

They had been working under the assumption that Joseph planned to ransom Matthew back for money to fund his drug habit, but the truth was much worse than that. Joseph had sold Matthew to human traffickers. His instructions were to lock the boy in a shipping container where the traffickers had left him his money, which he had done. When Danny took him by the shirt collars, Joseph swore he’d left the boy with food and water before he locked the door and then promptly skipped town. That had been three days ago, the same day he snatched Matthew by telling him that Mrs. Warren had sent him to pick up Matthew because his mom was really sick. Matthew had known Joseph from his time in the Warren household, so he had gone with him willingly.
It had taken everything Steve had to pull Danny off of Joseph in the interrogation room. The only thing that had kept him from joining in on the beating was that they still needed Joseph to help them find the traffickers. Ends up, they didn’t need to find them to find Matthew, because for some reason, they had never come for the boy.

Junior had cut the lock on the shipping container Joseph had shown them, and the stench of human excrement hit Steve as the door swung open. Matthew had been lying on the floor near the back of the container, a gallon jug of water and bag of chips Joseph had left with Matthew before he shut and locked the child in the dark sat beside him, both long empty.

Steve was standing right behind Danny when the door swung open, close enough he felt the shudder that passed through his partner as they took in the miserable site. Steve’s heart was pounding hard, fighting to control his own emotions, as he couldn’t help but think they had been too late. Neither of them could seem to make their legs carry them into the container. Beside him, Junior stood stock still, pulled in one ragged breath, and a second. Steve knew Tani and Lou were behind them, but neither made a sound, and he couldn’t seem to pull his eyes from the horrific stillness of the small body lying before him to look back at his other two team members. It was like they were all too stunned by their heartbreaking failure to move.

Then the child had weakly raised his head, squinting against the quickly fading light of the sunset outside.

“Jesus fuck,” Danny had exhaled, moving instantly inside to scoop the boy up in his arms.

That action was enough to propel them all into motion.

Lou was on the phone calling for an ambulance, as Steve ordered, “Tani, in the trunk of the Camaro there’s some towels and some water. Junior grab the first aid kit from Lou’s truck.”

Danny was already out of the door and into the fresh air. Christ, the kid looked tiny in Danny’s arms--tiny and frail and back to being way too still.

“How is he?” Steve asked anxiously, crowding in close to try to see for himself.

“I don’t know.” Danny’s voice was tense, and he was heading toward the Camaro, as if he planned to take off in it with the boy. “Not good. He needs a hospital.”

“Ambulance is on its way,” Lou promised, moving to join them.

Steve managed to get a hand on the kid, and swore under his breath. “He’s too hot.”

“I know, I know, heat stroke,” Danny agreed, on the edge of panic as he looked around helplessly. “We need to cool him down.”

“Wet the towel and wrap him up,” Junior said.

“There’s more water in my truck,” Lou offered, and he, Tani, and Junior moved quickly in that direction.

“Jesus, Steve, how is he even still alive?” Danny sounded like he was about to shatter into a thousand pieces.

“I don’t know, but he is; that’s all that matters right now. Okay?” Steve could do this; he could hold it together for Danny. “The ambulance will be here soon. In the meantime, we’re going to do what we can to cool him down.”

Junior jogged back over, the towel dripping water on the asphalt of the shipyard, and they wrapped it around the small frame of the child Danny still held protectively against his chest. Junior then poured more water over Matthew’s head, soaking the light brown hair until it was plastered against his head.

Matthew’s eyelids fluttered and frightened brown eyes slid slowly from Danny to Steve and back again.
Danny did his best to smile reassuringly. “Hey, buddy, I bet you want to see your mom, don’t you? She’ll be here real soon.”

Leave it to Danny to think about Theresa being the best thing for the child right now. Steve had glanced over to Tani, and she’d pulled her phone to make the call to have HPD bring Theresa to see her son. In the distance, Steve had heard sirens gratefully closing in fast and realized maybe, just maybe, the nightmare of the past few days was finally coming to an end.

“Is he…?” The dread in Rachel’s tone brought Steve out of his memories and back to the here and now.

“Alive,” Steve told her, keeping to himself how near a thing it had been, how Matthew still wasn’t completely out of the woods. “But you know, it’s been rough, these past few days, this case, especially on Danny.”

“On all of you, I should think.”

“Yeah, well…” And what else could he say, because she was right. Steve rubbed at dry, tired eyes, felt the ache of sore muscles as the adrenaline of the past three days bled out and exhaustion filled the empty spaces left behind.

“What can I do to help?” Rachel asked.

Steve thought he had good reason to dislike Rachel over the years. For all the times she’d tried to take Gracie from Danny, for all the years Danny had missed with Charlie because of her lies, and for the time she tried to take Danny from Steve and back to New Jersey, there hadn’t been a lot to find appealing in Danny’s ex-wife. Right now, though, he maybe saw a glimpse of why Danny had fallen for her in the first place.

“I know it’s not Danny’s night to have the kids, but do you think, maybe…even just for dinner…”

She paused for a moment before asking, “When do you think you’ll be by to pick them up?”

It took Steve a second to realize she’d included him in the plans, but he didn’t correct her. Hell, he hoped she was right to assume he’d be there, too. “We should finish up here in about half an hour.”

The ambulance had left about ten minutes prior, and as soon as the sirens had faded, Danny had dragged Joseph Warren out of the back of the Camaro, shoved him into the shipping container, and closed the door behind him. Junior had looked to Steve and Lou as a grunt of pain, which obviously came from the kidnapper, echoed inside the container. “Shouldn’t we stop him?”

Lou had shrugged; after all, he was a father, too. “We need to see what we can find out about the human traffickers before HPD takes him to lock up, and he lawyers up.”

When Junior had turned his questioning gaze on him, Steve had decided to skip the whole full immunity and means discussion. Instead, he’d pulled his phone from his pocket and announced, “I need to make a phone call,” even as he had dialed Rachel’s number.

At the time, all he had been thinking about was trying to bring Danny out of the hell that had been the past few days and back to the stability and reality of his life, to show him his children were alive and safe. He couldn’t deny there was a part of him that needed that same reassurance about Charlie and Grace.

“I’ll pack them an overnight bag and try to get Charlie in and out of the bath before you get here,” Rachel informed him.

Steve slumped in exhaustion as much as relief against the hood of the car. “Rachel, thank you.”

“There’s no need for thanks, Steven,” She assured.
“Actually, could you do one more thing? Could you maybe wait five minutes then call Danny and ask him if he can take the kids tonight?”

There was a pause. “He doesn’t know you called, does he?”

“I just don’t want him to think I think he needs this.”

“But he does need this,” she pointed out in what was her rational voice, which drove Danny nuts.

Steve could understand why it had that effect on Danny; it was currently having the same effect on him.

“Look, I know that, and you know that, and I’m sure even he knows that; but, I don’t want him to know I know he knows it. You know?”

“I’m starting to think I know more than apparently the two of you dolts do,” she huffed. “Very well, I’ll put Charlie in the tub and then call.”

“Thank you, Rachel. Seriously.”

“Yes, yes, you already said that. Goodbye, Steven.”

Steve put his phone away and headed over to where Duke stood with a frown watching Lou, Junior, and Tani standing guard in front of the shipping container. It looked like Junior had chosen to stand with his team on this one, despite his previous misgivings.

“Steve,” Duke cautioned, “I think it’s time we took Warren back to the precinct.”

Steve patted the older officer on the shoulder. “Think you’re right, Duke. I’ll get him for you.”

When Steve hitched his chin, Lou moved aside, and Junior opened the door. Danny stood sucking in harsh breaths over a cowering and bloody Joseph Warren in nearly the same spot they’d found Matthew Ocampo.

Placing a firm hand on Danny’s shoulder, Steve motioned for Tani. “Get him out of here.”

“With pleasure,” Tani said, hauling Warren to his feet as she began, “Nice to see you again, asshole. By the way, you have the right to remain silent…”

Danny started forward, and Steve squeezed on the shoulder he held to keep him in place. Danny stayed where he was, but flexed his fingers with a wince.

“Let me see your hands,” Steve ordered.

Danny shook his head in dismissal. “They’re fine,” but he held them out for Steve to examine.

The light in the metal room was crap, so Steve wrapped a hand around Danny’s wrist, felt the way Danny still vibrated with silent, seething rage, and led him outside. The sun had long set, but the lights from the patrol cars were enough for him to see the busted skin on the knuckles.

Steve grimaced in sympathy. “You need to get some ice on those.”

“Oh, is that you’re professional opinion?” Danny snapped.

“Well, I was once a professional UFC fighter,” Steve started, just to rile Danny up, because a snapping, snarling Danny was better than a quiet, fuming Danny any day.

On cue, Danny rolled his eyes. “One match, Steven, one, for charity. That does not make you a professional. Unless you mean being a professional at getting your ass kicked.”

Well, that was hardly fair. Steve almost felt guilty when Danny winced again as Steve pressed probing fingers against the raw skin on Danny’s knuckles.

Almost.
“Stop touching it!” Danny tried to pull his hand back.

Steve held tight, feeling Danny’s trembling slowly subside.

“I’m not examining; I’m examining,” Steve reasoned.

“You’re examining it by touching it!” Danny opened his mouth to argue further, but his phone rang with Rachel’s ring tone. He sighed, but pulled it out, and turned it toward Steve to show him who called, as if Steve didn’t know the ring tone already. “Yes, Rachel. It’s actually not a good time right now.” The aggrieved expression morphed slowly into one of surprise then excitement. “Of course I can take them for the night. I can be there in less than an hour….. Great….see you then.”

Steve did his best to feign confusion. “What’s up?”

“Rachel forgot she promised a friend she’d go to dinner and asked if I’d take Grace and Charlie tonight.”

“That’s great. With as busy as we’ve been, I know you’ve barely had time to even call them.”

Danny leaned against the Camaro. “You have no idea how much I want to see them.”

Steve gave him a happy but understanding smile. “I’m sure you do, buddy. I’m sure you do.” He moved over to the driver’s side, and spoke as casually across the roof of the car as he could manage. “Hey, why don’t you guys come over to my place? We’ll pick up the kids, order a pizza, find an old movie to watch…You have to drop me anyway, no reason to backtrack all over town.”

A puzzled look flashed across Danny’s face before he nodded. “Sounds like a plan.”

Steve doubted seriously that he was hiding the relief he felt with his smile.

Time started doing strange things in Steve’s mind about then, and he was pretty sure it was because he kept falling asleep, sometimes while standing up. They somehow made it to Rachel’s house, although he would never admit to Danny that he didn’t really remember the drive. The rest of the trip to his house was a steady buzz of chatter from the backseat, and questions from Danny about Grace and Charlie’s week. He listened to Grace’s rant about a pair a shoes she’d bought on line that the local store refused to take back, sounding remarkably Danny-like in her grievance that they had the exact same pair right there in the store, in the size she needed, and they wouldn’t exchange them. Then Charlie launched into a series of ridiculous knock knock jokes that Steve found hilarious even though they made absolutely no sense. He was almost certain he was delusional from sleep deprivation at that point, but he didn’t care because the car was so alive it was like a shot of adrenaline straight to his heart.

Once at his place, Steve ordered pizza while Danny showered. With dinner on the way, he tried to help Grace with some geometry homework while Charlie and Eddie entertained themselves with a tennis ball on the lanai. He woke with a start to find he was sleeping with his head propped on his hand at the kitchen table, and Grace giggling at him and sharing a conspiratorial grin with Danny, no doubt over some smartass comment Danny had made about him. He didn’t realize until that moment that Danny’s hand was on his shoulder.

Danny was dressed in a pair of sweats he typically left at Steve’s place for just such occasions, occasions like tracking a kidnapper for sixty-five hours with little food, and less sleep, and no desire on Danny’s part to drive the short distance home to shower at his own place. It was becoming a disturbingly common occurrence.

“Shower’s all yours, babe,” Danny told him, then leaned in closer when Steve stood and staggered slightly. “I think I actually fell asleep while I was getting dressed. Took me three tries to put on my t-shirt.”

Steve knew the feeling. He contemplated shaving and decided sharp metal near his jugular probably wasn’t a good idea given his current state, especially when he realized he’d been staring into his reflection in mirror for several minutes. He settled for a quick shower and his own pair of
sweats. By the time he was back downstairs, the food had arrived, and the Williams’ had taken over his sofa and television. Danny had Grace on one side and Charlie tucked on the other. He had a paper plate with three large slices of pizza sitting on his lap and a beer held in his hand. Steve’s own beer Danny had opened for him was sitting on the coffee table. Steve snagged it, clinked it with Danny’s over Charlie’s head, before settling into the space they’d saved for him on the sofa on the other side of Charlie.

They ate while watching one of Charlie’s favorite cartoons, Charlie and Steve taking turns stealing pepperonis from each other’s pizzas. At some point, there was an argument over which movie to watch that hummed warmly around Steve, and he realized he’d drifted off again when Danny asked his opinion, reaching over to tug at his ear.

“Hey, if you want to go crash, don’t worry about us,” Danny told him. “In fact, if you want, we can head out…”

By now, Charlie had sprawled out, head in Danny’s lap, and his feet propped across Steve’s legs, his hand dangling over the edge of the couch to absentely pet Eddie where the dog lay on the floor. Looking down, Steve realized he had his hand wrapped around Charlie’s ankle, and at the suggestion they might leave, he instinctively tightened it. “And miss watching Guardians of the Galaxy again? I don’t think so.”

He was out again by the time Groot and Rocket made their first appearance, waking when the credits were rolling, and Grace headed into the kitchen with the dirty dishes. Danny and Charlie were sound asleep on the couch, so Steve followed her with the empty beer bottles.

“So you want to take Mary’s room tonight?” he asked her as he filled a glass of water for himself. When she nodded, he asked, “Need help getting settled?”

Grace gave him her best eye roll. It almost made Steve glad he hadn’t known Danny as a teenager.

“I know where everything is, Uncle Steve.”

He smiled at the thought that after nearly eight years she would. “Yeah, I guess you do, don’t you?” At this point, he should probably start thinking of it as Grace’s room instead of Mary’s.

She moved in easily, and wrapped her arms around his waist. “I’m glad your case turned out okay.”

Steve hugged her back tightly, breathed in deep to smell her shampoo and jasmine scented lotion she liked to wear, felt a little more of the case fade away. “Me, too, sweetheart.”

“Good night, Uncle Steve. Love you.”

“Love you, too, Gracie. See you in the morning.”

He watched Grace climb the stairs, with Eddie sitting and looking up at Steve in anticipation.

Steve hitched his head at the dog. “Well, go on. You know you want to.”

At the command, Eddie bounded up the stairs to join Grace in her room.

Steve went back into the living room, debating whether or not to wake Danny and offer him and Charlie a bed, or just let them sleep.

Either Danny sensed him watching, or he heard Grace’s bedroom door close, because he startled awake, looking around in confusion. “Grace?”

“I just sent her upstairs to bed,” Steve reassured him. “You want me to put Charlie in my old room?”

Danny leaned back again, his hand resting on Charlie’s chest that rose and fell steadily in sleep. The kid was still at the age you could manhandle him over your shoulder, haul him upstairs, plop
him on a bed, and he’d never even wake up.

“Not just yet,” Danny said, his voice and smile both soft and hazy with sleep. He threaded his fingers through Charlie’s hair. “I mean, I should. He’d be more comfortable. Guess I’m just being a selfish bastard right now.”

“Yeah, I know the feeling,” Steve admitted. “Thanks for letting me, you know, be a part of this tonight.”

The thing was, Steve had learned a lot about family from Danny, things that had turned his view of what that meant on its head. Steve’s father had sent his kids away to protect them, and his mother had left them all for the same reason, then Joe had given Steve the skills to protect himself. For a long time, Steve thought that the willingness to sacrifice being with your children to keep them safe was what defined a good parent, that being safe and being happy at the same time was a luxury.

Danny, however, had done just the opposite of every parental figure Steve had ever had in his life. Danny had pulled up roots and established new ones just to spend a few days a week with Grace, fought tooth and nail for every extra hour he could get with her then Charlie. He didn’t leave; he crossed an ocean to be with them. He didn’t push them away; he nearly emptied his bank account to make sure they stayed here with him. Sure Steve could kill a man a dozen different ways with just his bare hands, but he’d never truly felt safe or happy, the way he had before his mom supposedly died and his life went to shit, until he met Danny.

For that alone, Steve loved the hell out of the guy.

“What? Are you kidding me?” Danny shook his head to dismiss the idea. “You are such a goof. Of course, you’re a part of this. I know you love these kids almost as much as I do.”

“At least as much,” Steve corrected, just to give Danny shit.

“Almost as much.” Danny stressed. “Nobody loves them more than me. Nobody.”

Steve grinned. “Rachel might disagree with that assessment.”

“She usually does with most things,” Danny shrugged. “But at least she let me see them tonight. Christ, I needed this.”

“Lucky thing she had that dinner tonight.”

Danny gave him a knowing look. “Yeah, pure luck, that.”

“What?” Steve demanded, hoping Danny couldn’t see his cheeks redden in the dim lighting.

“You know my brain may be addled—“

“Addled?” Steve rolled the word in his mouth, as if trying it for the first time.

“You know my brain may be addled—“

“Addled?” Steve shrugged the word in his mouth, as if trying it for the first time.

“Yes, addled. It’s a word, in the dictionary even, look it up. And stop trying to change the subject.”

“Who’s trying to change the subject?” Steve tried, once again, to change the subject.

Danny ignored the comment and barreled over him. “My brain may be addled by lack of sleep, but I’m still a detective. Grace could have easily watched Charlie tonight while Rachel went out, if she even had plans.”

Steve shrugged. “Maybe the kids asked to come to see you. They love you as much as you love them.”

“They love you, too, babe,” Danny told him sincerely, before adding, “Almost as much as they love me.”

Steve shifted uncomfortably at the acknowledgment that made his chest ache. As much as he
wanted that to be true, a part of him still had trouble accepting it. It made him a little dizzy every
time Danny pointed it out to him.

“At least as much.” He tried to cover the swell of emotions trying to cut off his airway, and fuck
his voice for threatening to crack.

“You know what, screw you,” Danny snapped, even as he beckoned with the hand not resting on
Charlie’s chest. “Now get over here, you big doofus.”

Steve furrowed his brow, but didn’t hesitate to take up the space where Gracie had been sitting
next to her dad.

“I know you called Rachel,” Danny informed him, even as he took Steve by the wrist, “but I also
know it wasn’t as altruistic an act as you think it was. You needed this as much as I did.”

Danny pulled Steve’s hand and placed it on Charlie’s chest; the steady thrum of Charlie’s
heartbeat reverberated against his palm. Steve felt like his bones were going to melt at the
sensation.

“Feel that?” Danny asked him quietly. “That’s all I need to know the world is still turning, and the
sun is going to rise tomorrow.”

Steve took his free arm and draped it on the back of the sofa behind Danny’s head, so that he
could move in a little closer and rest his hand on Charlie without having to reach so far. Then he
closed his eyes and just felt it, felt it all—Charlie’s heart, the boy’s lungs expanding, Danny’s
thankfully doing the same from where he pressed in close against Steve’s side. Steve realized,
belatedly, that just feeling Danny’s lungs actually functioning sometime during the past couple of
months would have gone a long way in getting rid of some of his residual shooting-related
anxiety.

“Thanks, Danno,” he said genuinely, quietly. So quiet he wondered if Danny had even heard him.

He felt a head come to rest on his shoulder as Danny leaned back once again, a puff of breath
warm against Steve’s neck when Danny mumbled, “Any time, babe,” already falling back into
sleep.

Absently, Steve thought, this should be weird, sitting here on his couch with Danny and Charlie
sound asleep snuggled up beside him, but it wasn’t. It felt so damn natural and normal, that as
Steve started drifting off to sleep himself, he wondered why they didn’t do this more often.

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

“Okay, try it again,” Steve yelled from beneath the hood of his Silverado.

Danny, from his spot in the driver’s seat, gave a mumbled plea of, “please, please, please,” to any
deity that might be listening. Hell, he’d even take that freaky Hawaiian pig god at this point. He
turned the key in the ignition, only to hear a depressingly familiar, clickclickclickclick in response.

Danny exhaled in frustration as he dropped his forehead to the steering wheel. He wondered, for
what had to be the one-millionth time, what the hell he’d done to deserve Steven J-Fucking
McGarrett in almost every aspect of his life, even his goddamn day off. Because this was
somehow Steve’s fault, no doubt about it.

The voice of the offending man was closer. “Battery’s dead. Think it must be the alternator.”

Danny looked up to see Steve outside the window, wiping his hands on a rag.

“Alternator, he says.” Danny just dropped his head back against the seat. “Don’t suppose
there’s an auto parts store anywhere near here.”

Of course, Danny knew the answer to that question, seeing as they were in beautiful, downtown
Bumfuck Nowhere, current population the two of them plus whatever wildlife was lurking in the
jungle surrounding them.
Steve hitched his head back down the dirt track that passed for a road that they’d followed to the trailhead this morning. “Sure there is-- twenty miles back to the highway and another five into town.”

Twenty-five miles back to civilization, and the sun minutes away from setting. Danny looked once again at his cell phone, hoping, with the same futility he’d had the truck would start, that he’d see service bars. As he fully expected, there were none…same as the last dozen times he’d checked. Truth be told, Danny would have happily skipped the outing with an excuse that he still got winded easier than before thanks to a bullet to his chest. Sure, he was on the road to full recovery, and Steve had definitely slowed the pace from his normal Bataan Death March speed to accommodate Danny, which was why they were the only ones left in the parking lot so late in the day.

However, the Ocampo case had run dry on leads over the past week, and Steve felt they needed to take a day away from obsessing over it. Not that they were giving up entirely; Jerry was still following up on a theory that the reason why the traffickers never showed was because they had been picked up on other charges or in a car wreck or some other interruption to their plans. They had paid for the kid in advance; no way they wouldn’t collect unless something kept them away. As a result, he’d been running all the criminals HPD had picked up during that twenty-four hour period against any known traffickers. So far, there was nothing, and it was obvious Steve needed to get out and hike away some of his frustrations. Danny was a sucker for making sure Steve stayed sane; it was his way of contributing back to society at large.

Steve looked up at the sky. “Too late to start out now. We’ll have to camp here for the night.”

“Camp? Do you have a tent in one of those many ridiculous pockets of yours?” Danny demanded, not sure if he was hopeful or not of the prospect of spending the night in a tent.

“No, but I have some blankets and a couple of emergency MREs stashed under the seats. We can bunk down in the bed of the truck to stay off the ground.”

Off the ground was good, Danny decided, not knowing exactly what was hiding out in the foliage, but knowing enough to know it wasn’t something he wanted sniffing him in his sleep. Still, inside a building with four solid walls would have been better.

“There will be more hikers showing up in the morning.” Steve continued, no doubt seeing the dread on Danny’s face. “We can get a jump from one of them.”

It was true the crude parking lot that marked the trailhead had been nearly full when they’d arrived that morning. And yes, the waterfall Steve had dragged him to had been as spectacular as promised. Same for the petroglyphs even higher up the mountain. The thing was, every damn waterfall on this island was spectacular, which made Danny wonder why they’d had to spend all day hiking to reach this one when they could have just as easily gone to one of the bazzilion other spectacular waterfalls that were a quick mile in from a paved parking lot with a coffee stand. When Danny had asked Steve that exact question halfway up the trail, Steve had pointed out that those shorter trails were crawling with tourist. Locals were familiar with this one, but it was still secluded enough you could go miles on the trail without ever seeing another person.

“How you liking the seclusion now, Steven?”

Steve rolled his eyes. “It’s one night, Danny, mild temperatures, no rain in the forecast—“

“We’re in a rainforest.” Danny made an all-encompassing gesture. “There’s always rain in the forecast.”

“I have a tarp,” Steve reasoned.

“Oh, a tarp. Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place?”

Steve shook his head at Danny’s sarcastic tone. “We’ll be fine.”
“Fine would be at home where I could take a hot shower to wash off all the sweat, as well as the dirt that is stuck to me by said sweat, not to mention calamine lotion for my vast and varied collection of bug bites. The situation could even increase to good if it included a couple of beers to drink afterwards, followed by a bed to sack out in for eight to ten hours. But, you know, we have a tarp, so who am I to complain?”

Not that Danny had slept that long since… hell, how old was Gracie now?... but it all came down to the principle that he could sleep that long if his body would just cooperate.

“You do have a bed, Danno,” Steve said with a smartass smile as he pounded his fist on the back end of the truck.

Danny just glared. “Sometimes I hate you so much, McGarrett, you have no idea.”

“I’ll take that as a warning to sleep with one eye open,” Steve said dryly, already rooting around in the back seat for the supplies.

Danny was all sorts of confident that if he ever tried to smother Steve in his sleep, Steve, with his super-stealth-ninja-SEAL training, could kill him without even waking fully and immediately fall back into REM sleep again once the deed was done. He was also fairly certain that his children would never speak to Steve again if that happened, the threat of which was an effective safety buffer. Problem was, Danny was also fairly certain his children would never speak to him again either if he tried to kill Steve in his sleep. As a result, they were kind of at a forced detente. Danny pragmatically decided he would call it a draw, to ease any wounded pride he might have at possessing a certified, government-trained killer as a best friend, when all he had to offer were killer meatballs his grandmother taught him to cook.

Danny climbed out of the driver’s seat and started taking the gear Steve was handing back. “All I’m saying is that this sort of thing happens to us all the time, so either we should come better prepared, or stop taking these outings.”

“Once, Danny, it happened once before. We found a dead body, and I fell and broke my arm.” Steve’s tone had that annoying, unspoken, ‘what’s the big deal’, it often did when Steve was discussing one of the many, many times he could have just as easily died.

“And you had to be med-evaced out,” Danny reminded.

“And I state again, that was once, seven years ago. That does not make a trend.”

Danny tossed the blankets in the back of the truck. “What about the fishing trip that ended with us in a sinking raft?”

“First of all, technically, it was a leaking dinghy—,” Steve started.

“Okay, aye, aye, Captain,” Danny interrupted with a mock salute, “whatever you say.”

“Lieutenant Commander,” Steve corrected.

Danny pinched the bridge of his nose, willing the growing headache to just hold the fuck off a few minutes more because, based on previous experience, Steve would finish correcting every fucking thing Danny said soon.

“I know your rank, Steve.”

Not to be further deterred from his unwavering need to be right every goddamn minute of the day, Steve returned to his original point. “Technically, the sinking dinghy was in the middle of the trip. The disabled yacht and mistaken arrest by the coast guard was at the end.”

Danny spread his arms to the surrounding jungle and its inhabitants. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I give you exhibit B.”

“So what are you saying, Danny? You think we’re cursed? Or you don’t want to hang out and do this sort of thing anymore?”
“No, Steve, I’m not saying that at all.” Danny gave a small shrug. “Honestly, I tend to enjoy these outings of ours that we, you know, take together, just the two of us.”

“So do I.” Steve admitted.

“Right up until the time they go to hell,” Danny finished. When Steve shot him a truly stellar Aneurysm Face, Danny continued. “They’re kind of like really fun dates, only without the sex… and more life or death situations.”

Steve pushed past him with the MREs. “I’ve been in the recovery room at the hospital after some of your dates, Danny. Trust me, knife wounds qualify as life or death, as well.”

“I’ve traveled to a country with a Level 4 travel advisory from the State Department after one of your romantic outings, so you really don’t have room to complain.” Danny shuddered internally at the memory of seeing Steve beaten and bloody as the medics carried him off the transport in Afghanistan.

Steve propped his arms on the truck bed, hung his head, and actually chuckled. “We really do have some pretty crappy luck, don’t we?”

“I didn’t even mention the whole being hunted by pirates on your first date with Lynn.”

Steve climbed up in the truck bed and started spreading the blankets. “Yeah, thanks for not bring that up, Danny.”

Danny leaned against the truck and watched Steve work. “Now, if that had been me, I never would have seen her again. You? You probably got laid that very night.”

“Nope,” Steve said with a shake of his head. “I have a rule—never have sex immediately after a near death experience.”

Danny’s eyebrows rose. “The fact that you find it necessary to have that rule should tell you something about your life choices, my friend.”

Steve gave him a grin in the quickly fading daylight. “I chose to have you in my life, so maybe you’re right.”

“Chose, conscripted for life…” Danny made a weighing motion with his hands. “I guess it all comes down to semantics.”

“Admit it, Danny. You’d be bored out of your mind if you didn’t have me to drag you out on adventures now and again.”

“Bored you say?” Danny stuffed his hands in his pockets and rocked back. “I think you meant happy with my peaceful, stress-free existence.”

“Thought you said you liked it when we flirted. The whole, I flirt, you flirt, we are flirting…” Steve patted at the blankets with a tilt of his head.

Danny couldn’t help but grin back. “See, now you’re just trying to get me into bed with your mad conjugating skills.”

“I’ll even make you dinner.” Steve waggled the two MRE pouches at him enticingly.

“Cold food out of a Mylar bag, how can I say no to that?”

“I’ll warm it up for you under my armpit,” Steve offered.

“Don’t let anyone tell you that you’re not a romantic, babe.”

They ate their dinner, which wasn’t nearly as bad as some of the food Danny had eaten his first year on the island, at least until Chin had indoctrinated him on the best local places to eat, and he’d taken up cooking for himself. Not that he’d ever, in a million years, and even under extreme duress, admit that to Steve. Besides, if he didn’t bitch and moan about crap, Steve got worried,
Danny hadn’t missed the sideway glances Steve shot at him all through the Ocampo case. As infuriating as they had been, Danny couldn’t help but be relieved that someone else understood how shitty the whole situation really was. He also knew Steve would keep him in check and not let him kill the motherfucker who left a small child in a metal tomb in a shipyard. There was a reason scumbags who hurt kids didn’t do well in prison. Even murderers and drug dealers and gunrunners were fathers who loved their kids, and they missed the hell out of seeing them. Danny could relate; he’d spent a couple of months without Grace waiting for the transfer to come through to HPD, and had plenty of time to fear he’d only be able to see Gracie a few times a year, that or give up being a cop and find some other occupation in Hawai’i. If some of the most morally depraved criminals around missed their kids enough to beat the hell out of other shitbags who hurt kids, how did anyone expect any less from a cop? Steve had managed to make an art form out of letting Danny work out his anger, while also keeping him from crossing too far over the line when it came to cases involving children.

So, yeah, Danny wasn’t exactly helping matters in the lower-Steve’s-stress-level campaign the past few months, which just increased his own stress level, leading to not sleeping well, which Steve could tell and just made him worry about Danny more. Danny was man enough to admit it really was a very unhealthy, highly codependent, relationship trap they’d fallen into.

Except, for the fact, that is wasn’t.

Unless they both planned to quit their jobs, the stress wasn’t going to go away. Sure, the restaurant was the escape plan, the life without shooting and exposure to bioweapons and nuclear bombs. However, given their track record on even recreational outings, Danny wasn’t fooling himself that crap like sinking dinghies and broken arms wasn’t going to keep happening. That fact alone was why that unhealthy, codependent relationship trap was the best fucking thing to happen to either of them.

Just like now.

“So how’s your knee?” Steve asked from where he lay beside Danny in the truck bed.

Danny was lying on top of his blanket to provide at least some cushioning against the corrugated metal beneath him, and using his backpack as a pillow. When the temperature dropped, he’d wrap it around him. For now, it was comfortable out, almost pleasant, and he didn’t need anything else.

“It would be better with some ice and a cold beer,” Danny told him honestly, “but it’s fine.” Also the truth.

They’d strapped the tarp over the truck bed in preparation for any rain or the heavy dew of the morning, but right then it was pulled back enough to let in fresh air and reveal the night sky spread in all its glory above them. Danny had seen pictures of the Milky Way before moving to Hawai’i, but he’d never seen it as more than a hazy smudge in real life until he’d come to the islands. Back this far, away from the lights of civilization, it was overwhelmingly beautiful. There was still enough of a glow from Honolulu to block out the more subtle greens that would show in a truly dark sky, but the pinks and magentas of the gas clouds were faintly visible even here.

“There’s a lot to hate about being trapped in a rainforest with you, my friend, but the view isn’t one of them,” Danny admitted.

Steve rolled his head on his own backpack to look over at Danny. “What? Are you saying this is better than the New Jersey starscape?”

“The closest things to stars we had in Newark were the police helicopters,” Danny admitted. “But once you got upstate a little ways, you could start to see them. Not like this, obviously, but enough to pick out the constellations.”

“When I was in…” Steve started, then reworded, “when I was on a mission once—“

Oh, Jesus, the classified thing again.
"You do realize I’ve been on classified missions with you now, as well. Not that I wanted to, necessarily. Not like I woke up one morning and said, ‘you know, I really wish I could go to North Korea today,’ but I did. I went to North Korea, on an unsanctioned, disavowed-all-knowledge, mission."

"I am painfully aware that you went to North Korea, Danny,” Steve told him. “Not only was I there at the time, but you remind me of that almost as much as you remind me that you gave me half your liver."

“Well, apparently it bears repeating because you continue to claim things are classified—“

“They are classified,” Steve insisted.

“And so was the rescue mission to North Korea—“

Steve shrugged. “Then you shouldn’t talk about it.”

“I shouldn’t talk about it?” Danny demanded in outrage that Steve would even suggest such a thing.

“You shouldn’t talk about it,” Steve reiterated. “You don’t talk about classified matters. Those are the rules.”

“It’s not fight club, Steven,” Danny scoffed.

Steve ignored the smartass comment. “I’m just telling you, those are the rules.”

The rules?” Was he fucking kidding? “Are you fucking kidding? I tell you the police manual rules all the time, and you completely ignore them.”

“That’s not the same thing,” Steve argued.

“How is that not the same thing? Rules are rules.”

“Then stop breaking the rules by talking about classified missions and trying to get me to talk about classified missions.”

“First off, we were both there in North Korea, so I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know. Secondly, who the hell is going to hear us out here, other that whatever wild animal has been moving around in the trees for the past half hour?”

“It’s a wild boar,” Steve informed him simply.

“A wild boar?” Danny sat up and looked around anxiously, “Are you serious? A goddamn wild boar is out there rooting around a few fucking feet from us? Those things have killed people!”

“We’re in the back of the truck,” Steve tried to reason. “We’re perfectly safe.”

“We’re in the back of a truck with an open top.” Danny flailed his arms around to demonstrate how wide open it was.

“A boar is not going to jump into the back of the truck, Danny.”

“Oh, and now you’re the expert on wild boar behavior? Did one of them show up in one of your classified missions, as well?”

“Actually, yes, it did. And the way you’re yelling and carrying on, I’m sure you’ve scared it away by now.”

“Then good riddance!” Danny yelled into the jungle before lying back down and shifting to get more comfortable. “And you’re welcome.”

In the starlight, Danny could see Steve shake his head in disbelief.
Danny waited a beat before asking, “So where did you run into a wild boar on a mission?”

Steve exhaled heavily and scrubbed at his face. “Danny, I swear to God…”

“Fine, fine, don’t tell me. I don’t even care.” He so did care. He so very fucking much did. “Tell me about the stars you saw from that highly classified location that shall remain redacted.”

“You’ve kind of ruined the mood.”

Was he pouting? Was Steven J. McGarrett actually pouting about the mood?

“I’m sorry,” Danny said, trying to sound sincere, but knowing it came our more patronizing. Because seriously, was Steve pouting?

“I was just trying to share something,” Steve continued…pouting? “You’re always on me to share, and that’s one of our counseling session exercises, then you’re trying to get me talk about things I honestly am not allowed to talk about, no matter how much I trust you to keep it classified, too.”

Danny reached out and rested his hand on Steve’s forearm, because Steve did trust him, he knew that, and Danny was just being a dick for being-a-dick’s sake. “Hey, hey, you’re right. You made a commitment to the Navy, and I’ll respect it. You redact, they redact, the government has redacted. I get it.”

“Conjugating will get you nowhere,” Steve grumped.

“Look, I’m being honest here. I don’t want you to tell me anything the United State’s government doesn’t believe I have a right to know.” Danny squeezed Steve’s arm he still gripped. “Besides, I’m a detective; I’ll use my highly honed skills of deductive power to figure out what you omit anyway. So, share.”

Steve took a deep breath. For a moment, Danny thought he was going to refuse to talk about it anymore. Surprisingly, that wasn’t the case.

“This one mission, we were probably two hundred miles from the nearest town with electricity. Just nothing but maybe a few clusters of farmhouses, and goat herders here and there. But the skies at night…man, there were more stars than empty space. You could almost read by the light from the stars alone.”

Danny threaded his fingers over his chest and turned his attention back up to the sky. “Grace had to watch a documentary for school that had time lapse video from Chile that was like that. Were you in Chile? I mean there hasn’t been much politically going on there since Pinoche, and unless you joined the SEALs in middle school…oh! You know the Sahara Desert was another location they talked about in that show. Was it Egypt?”

“Okay, we’re done,” Steve huffed as he sat up abruptly and launched himself out of the truck bed to secure the rest of the tarp in place to cover them fully.

“Come on, I’m just giving you shit,” Danny tried to placate as the night sky was suddenly blocked by the blue poly tarp. However, given the response, he was pretty sure he hit close to home with the guesses.

Steve finished up with tarp in silence, although he tugged more aggressively than necessary to get it in place. Then he climbed back in, belly crawling from the tailgate to the cab under the tarp. Danny couldn’t help thinking that he had probably crawled in a similar manner to retcon some secret compound on that classified mission in either Chile or Egypt.

“So,” Danny attempted to soothe Steve’s hurt feelings again.

“Good night, Danny,” was the only, and very final, response Danny got in return as Steve turned onto his side facing away from Danny.

Danny sighed, trying to think of a way to make it up to his partner. Sharing something; of course,
that was the obvious answer, but what? If Steve was willing to share some pieces of somewhat classified information with him, maybe Danny should share some stuff he’d been keeping to himself that he had been too embarrassed to share before.

“Okay, look, you want some classified information from me, here goes. When I was shot in quarantine, and on the verge of dying…” Danny paused, just the memory of the shock and pain from the bullet piercing his lung still made his heart race. “Christ, I was terrified.”

“You weren’t the only one,” Steve murmured, back still turned.

“I know, babe. I really do.”

Danny had seen the look in Steve’s eyes when he’d come around in recovery. Even groggy and looped out of head on painkillers, it had been impossible to miss that haunted shadow lingering behind Steve’s smile of absolute relief to see Danny awake. So, yeah, Danny knew he wasn’t the only one who had been scared shitless that day.

“But when I was hurt, and you guys were working on me, I was, hell, I don’t know… hallucinating, dreaming, whatever… but I saw Grace and Charlie grown and happy and making these great lives for themselves. And I saw us; you and me. Running our restaurant, celebrating with my kids, sitting around in the chairs on your beach, like fifty years from now.” Steve didn’t comment, and Danny gave a soft chuckle as he stared at the blue fabric stretched a few inches over his head. “Can you believe that? Me, of all people? Mr. Negative, literally on my death bed, and I’m dreaming about the best future I could ever have—happy kids, a successful business, and you still alive and not dead of cancer or some spectacularly stupid heroic stunt, and still flirting with me on a beach.”

Steve remained silent long enough that Danny decided he wasn’t going to say anything at all. Long enough that Danny started to think he had been right not tell Steve about the visions before, because Steve apparently thought they were stupid hallucinations, and not a sign of some life affirming change that Danny had made somewhere along the way with Steve in his life.

Finally, Steve called, “Hey, Danny?”

“Yeah?” Danny answered warily.

“It wasn’t Chile,” Steve said.

Danny thought the lack of any mention of Egypt had been intentional.

“But when I was hurt, and you guys were working on me, I was, hell, I don’t know… hallucinating, dreaming, whatever… but I saw Grace and Charlie grown and happy and making these great lives for themselves. And I saw us; you and me. Running our restaurant, celebrating with my kids, sitting around in the chairs on your beach, like fifty years from now.” Steve didn’t comment, and Danny gave a soft chuckle as he stared at the blue fabric stretched a few inches over his head. “Can you believe that? Me, of all people? Mr. Negative, literally on my death bed, and I’m dreaming about the best future I could ever have—happy kids, a successful business, and you still alive and not dead of cancer or some spectacularly stupid heroic stunt, and still flirting with me on a beach.”

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“The sound of rain woke Danny, and he found himself alone in an empty truck bed. “Steve?”

“Here,” Steve answered from outside. “Tarp was leaking. Think I’ve got it now.”

As if on cue, the light patter of rain increased to a steady thrum.

“Shit,” Steve cursed, then an instant later was crawling back into their makeshift tent with a flashlight in his mouth.

“Christ, you’re soaked,” Danny noted needlessly.

Steve shrugged. “Definitely wet, but not completely soaked.”

They were at a high enough elevation that the air temperature had dropped into the 50s as the night had worn on, and the rain had made it feel even cooler. Cool enough that being ‘definitely wet’ was causing Steve to shivering.

“You need to dry off before hypothermia sets in,” Danny told him.

“Was much colder and wetter than this during BUD/S,” Steve dismissed. “Besides, sun will be up in about four hours. I’ll be fine.”
“Great, you’re a big, strong, brain-damaged, Navy SEAL who thinks the bare minimum concept of ‘not going to die before morning’ is good enough,” Danny scolded. “But, you know, call me an overachiever, but if it were me, I’d go for ‘relatively warm and comfortable’ if given half a chance. Also, I’d like to get a few more hours of sleep, which will be impossible with you shivering beside me.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but stripped off his t-shirt…because, of course he did… and used it to soak up the worst of the standing water on his body. Then he wrapped himself in his thin blanket as a shudder ran through him.

“Oh, for the love of…” Danny opened his own blanket wrapped arms. “Get over here.”

Steve hesitated. “Are you sure?”

“No. I’m already regretting making the offer,” Danny griped. “But what’s one more classified operation that will never, ever be spoken of again between friends?”

Steve didn’t wait for Danny to ask a second time, just rolled onto his side and right into Danny’s space, face pressed into Danny’s chest. “God, you’re like a furnace.”

“Rachel used to say the same thing,” Danny admitted, as he wrapped his arms around Steve and rubbed briskly along his back to warm him.

Rachel, who would snuggle in against Danny on cold New Jersey nights, in a manner very similar to how Steve was currently. Rachel, who Danny envisioned divorcing the day they married, while he pictured himself growing old with Steve by his side. Yeah, don’t think Danny hadn’t rolled that realization around in his head a few times since being shot.

But, Steve was Steve, and they had this unspoken ‘I’ll do anything for you, including dying, because I know you’ll do the same for me’ pact going on. Nothing short of that would have compelled Danny to land a fucking plane on a beach, to give Steve even a slim chance of survival, knowing Danny could have just as easily died in the crash.

Compared to that, what was sharing a little warmth in the middle of nowhere in the back of Steve’s pickup truck during a rainstorm? Small potatoes in the grand scheme of Steve now filling every void spot Danny had ever had in his life, kind of like those Egyptian stars filled the blackness of the night sky.

“Warming up?” Danny asked, noting that the shivering had already subsided.

“Yeah,” Steve exhaled against Danny’s recent addition of scar tissue. “Yeah, a little.”

“Good. Now go to sleep.”

It had to be a military thing, because Steve took one deep breath, then a second, and on the third his head was a heavier weight against Danny’s chest. By the fourth, Steve was already asleep.

Surprisingly, Danny wasn’t far behind him.

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

Danny had this habit of picking the absolute worst times to have meaningful conversations. Steve had learned this very early on, and over the years had just come to accept it. Want to have a conversation about your relationship insecurities, Danny? Sure, just let me keep giving this high-value asset CPR, so we have half a chance of getting us, and everyone else in the Palace, out of this hostage crisis. The main reason he accepted these minor inconveniences as easily as he did was because Danny also had a habit of turning to Steve with his deepest, darkest fears, the doubts he wouldn’t talk to anyone else about. Steve wasn’t an idiot, no matter how many times Danny called him one, and he knew the honor Danny was bestowing on Steve every time Danny opened up, bared a little more of his soul, and asked for Steve’s advice. Which was the only reason why Steve had taken a call from a frantic Danny while setting a booby trap in the woods for a would-be assassin.
Jerry’s persistence on the Ocampo case had finally paid off. He’d come across a police record from the day of the kidnapping of a hit and run wreck about two miles from the docks where they’d found Matthew. The description of the car that had been involved, with its customized paint and bodywork, was enough for Kamekona to make a few contacts, and find out where the driver took it for repairs. Tani and Junior had convinced the owner of the body shop to give them a name—Ricky Thammavong, a low-level punk in a low-level gang that had been making a move into other areas since the whole round up of organized crime members on the island. Losing the leaders of the major players on the island had caused a series of hierarchical shifts, and significant power plays by some up and comers. With new alliances forming, as well, Five-0 discovered groups previously content selling drugs or chopping cars were now branching out into gunrunning and human trafficking, among other things.

Thammavong had kept quiet during the interrogation, confessing to the hit and run, but denying any involvement in the kidnapping. The team, however, wasn’t buying it. Adam had managed to track down a possible base of operations, Lawe’ana Trucking, a mid-sized transport company based in an industrial park near Hickam Air Force Base. Financial records showed a few recent purchases, including several refrigeration trucks. When Jerry ran the records against their payments from customers, nothing stood out that would require any refrigeration, much less three trucks worth. They’d decided to tail one of the trucks as it left the yard to determine its final destination, and determine what the gang had their fingers in now.

Steve had been hanging back several car lengths behind the refrigerated truck, not wanting to draw any attention to the Camaro. The truck was large enough he could keep it in view easy enough on the Punchbowl, even with the variety of cars and trucks filling the crowded street between them and their target. The surveillance had been going fine until another car between them and the truck cut across two lanes of traffic, causing a wreck on the Punchbowl, and bringing traffic to a standstill.

Steve had called back to HQ to have Jerry locate the truck on traffic cameras, even as he drove onto a sidewalk and around the accident to speed down the road in search of the truck. Jerry found the truck merging onto the H-1, the exit for which was now a good mile behind Steve and Danny. Steve made a U-turn in the middle of the intersection, but within a few blocks ended up in the traffic congestion on that side of the street that was backed-up due to the same wreck. Using Jerry’s directions, he took some side streets that would lead him to another onramp onto the H-1, crossing into oncoming traffic at least twice to pass some slower moving vehicles. He was on the shoulder, gravel flying, as he headed onto the onramp to the H-1 in pursuit. Jerry had lost the truck on the H-1, but promised to call back if he located it.

Danny had remained uncharacteristically calm through the entire event, doing little more than warning Steve to watch the motorcyclist on his left when Steve ran a red light to reach the ramp. Steve knew all the telltale signs of one of Danny’s impending confessions—the uncomfortable shifting in his seat, the inhale of breath as if he were about to speak but didn’t, the twitch of his hands as if he were running through a mock conversation in his head before diving in with Steve. Danny had been exhibiting all of them for the past five miles, at least.

Given permission by Steve’s inquiry, Danny opened the floodgates. “Okay, here’s the thing. Twice now in the last few weeks we have slept…at the same time…in close proximity to one another.” As if to demonstrate how close, Danny slowly brought his hands together.

Steve swerved to avoid a minivan in his lane, trying his best to spot the refrigeration truck that was somewhere up ahead. The truck had a significant head start thanks to the traffic delays, but the Camaro had the horsepower to catch it, and Steve was pulling out all the stops. Danny didn’t even bitch, or grab the Jesus-fuck-you’re-going-to-kill-us bar, which meant this sleeping situation was really bothering him. Danny also remained silent waiting for Steve to contribute to the conversation.

“And?”

Yeah, not a big contribution, but Steve had been thinking about the whole sleeping in close
proximity situation, too. Thinking how much he liked it, liked it probably way more than he should.

“And,” Danny continued. “It was…kind of…you know…nice. I mean, I slept better than I have in months. Years even.”

Steve wove between two cars and finally caught sight of the truck about a half mile ahead.

“Me too,” Steve admitted.

And, wow, he hadn’t planned on telling Danny that. Instead, he’d been trying to stealthfully find a way to make it accidentally happen on purpose again. Unfortunately, there hadn’t been any more convenient rain showers to soak him right before bedtime. In the long run, this was a much better way to handle things.

“Good, good, I’m glad we’re in agreement on this.” Danny seemed to be relaxing a little bit.

Steve, however, was thinking something along the line of, ‘Thank God! Thank God! I’m not the only lonely loser who wants to sleep with my best friend; my best friend is a lonely loser who wants to sleep with me, too!’ Unfortunately, that line of thought wasn’t going to get Danny snuggling up in bed anytime soon…like tonight.

Instead, Steve asked calmly. “So, now what?”

“Well, I was thinking. You remember how Tani was talking about the whole millennials sleeping together without sex trend?”

A semi changed lanes, effectively blocking Steve’s view of the refrigeration truck and slowing his pursuit. Steve cursed and downshifted, ignoring the honking as he cut off a pickup in order to skirt around the semi. He looked desperately for the truck they were after, only to see it belatedly on the onramp to the H-2 they were currently passing.

Steve executed a bootleg turn, and headed the wrong way on the freeway’s shoulder. “Yeah, I remember.”

“It seems to me, that if twenty-something guys with manbuns and an affinity for flannel can do that,” Danny reasoned, “then we should be able to do it, too.”

“Seems reasonable,” Steve agreed, flooring the Camaro. He pulled the emergency brake to spin the back end of the car around so that they were now heading onto the ramp to the H-2.

“But here’s the one snag that I see,” Danny continued. “Morning wood.”

Steve brought the fishtailing of the car under control with a brow furrowed in confusion. “Morning wood?”

“Yes, Steven, morning wood. A spontaneous erection most men get in the morning—“

Steve cut off Danny’s explanation. “I know what morning wood is, Danny. I’m just not sure what it has to do with the conversation.”

“Ah, but see it’s very relevant to the conversation, because morning wood comes with certain, shall we say, urges. Urges like taking matters into one’s own hands…” Danny made a rather crude gesture to demonstrate exactly what he meant. “…or dry humping a pillow, or even dry humping the closest warm body…like say, someone platonically sharing a bed. Someone who may also have morning wood and the associated urges.”

Steve nodded, most definitely not thinking about dry humping Danny. He’d have to save those thoughts for later. As much of an accomplished multitasker as Steve was, a high-speed pursuit, combined with talking Danny out of talking himself out of more co-sleeping with Steve, left him very little time for anything else.
Keeping his mind firmly split between locating the truck up ahead and his conversation with Danny, Steve offered, “So, mutual morning wood.”

“Mutual morning wood,” Danny agreed with a philosophical nod of his head.

“Which,” Steve continued, trying to decipher Danny’s thoughts, “will, in turn, lead to the whole men with needs dilemma?”

Danny jabbed a finger into Steve’s bicep. “Yes, exactly! Men with needs! Only instead of being in prison, the men are happily sleeping together in each other’s beds.”

Steve caught sight of the truck climbing a hill in the distance. Hitting the gas to pass an RV in front of him, he had to slam on the brakes again when he found a sedan in the lane he’d merged into. With a semi on his left and the RV still on his right, Steve found himself effectively trapped with no place to go.

“So the way I see it,” Steve started rationally, even as he scouted the shoulder situation up ahead, “is the way to avoid the men with needs dilemma is to avoid the whole mutual morning wood situation by not waking up together.”

“What?” Danny didn’t seem pleased with the suggestion. “You mean one person leave in the middle of the night? That kind of defeats the whole purpose of getting a full night’s sleep.”

“Not the middle of night,” Steve clarified, hitting the brakes harder to allow the RV to pass him, and then floored it as he passed the RV on the shoulder, “in the morning.” When Danny gave him a skeptical expression, Steve continued, pulling back onto the asphalt in front of the RV.

“Look, I typically wake up a good hour or more before you anyway, so I can swim and go for a run before work. Whoever wakes up first gets out of bed. If only one person is awake in the bed at any given time, it’s not mathematically possible to have mutual morning wood.”

“So the person who wakes first just leaves?” Danny seemed to be considering the idea. “Just gets up, and goes about their day, and leaves the other to keep sleeping?”

Steve had a clear run to the truck now, and he set to closing the distance between them. “Yeah, I mean that’s the point, right? Getting a chance to sleep when you need sleep.”

“No obligation to stick around and say goodbye, or anything like that.” It sounded like the idea was growing on him.

“No obligations,” Steve confirmed.

Danny pondered the idea momentarily before slowly nodding his head. “You know, Steve, I think that could work.”

Steve raised a questioning eyebrow. “So it’s a plan?”

“It’s a plan,” Danny concurred.

“All settled?” Steve had positioned himself directly behind the refrigeration truck, safely tucked into its blind spot.

“All settled.”

“Good. Because I need you to do something for me now, Danny.”

“Anything you need, babe,” Danny offered, obviously happy they’d worked out a solution to his problem. “Just name it.”

“I need you to climb over here into the driver’s seat and take the wheel.” Steve was already rolling down the window.
“What?” Danny exclaimed. Apparently, he finally realized they were in the middle of car chase.

“Where are you going?”

Steve motioned at the vehicle in front of them. “Into the back of that truck.”

“Are you out of your goddamn mind?!”

Steve did his best to maintain his rational voice. “Look, we need to get eyes on the inside that truck.”

Danny apparently wasn’t buying into the tone. “And we will, when it stops moving, you moron!”

“We don’t even know where it’s going.” Steve argued. “What if it goes into a heavily armed compound? We don’t have any backup with us—"

Danny threw up his hands in disbelief. “Oh, like you’ve ever waited for back, other than me, in your entire time running this fucking task force.”

“So now you don’t mind going in totally outnumbered—“

“No, I don’t like either idea.” Danny shook his head vehemently. “It doesn’t have to be an either/or decision when they both are horrible, idiotic, suicidal, ideas.”

“This could be our only chance to see what is so special that they need refrigeration.”

“No,” Danny stated simply, arms crossed across his chest. “It is not happening, Steven. Not in a million years.”

“Look, all I need to do is climb on the roof—"

Danny scrubbed at his face and tried to sound as reasonable as possible. “Steve, we are in a perfectly good car. I know it’s a perfectly good car because I bought it for that very reason. It is safe in here, with seatbelts, and airbags, and doors to keep you from falling onto the pavement while you’re going seventy miles per hour. Why the fuck would you want to leave all this,” he waved his arms to encompass the inside of the vehicle, “to go out there?”

Steve glared indignantly. “You know, all you do is bitch about me never letting you drive your car, and now I’m asking you to, and you’re refusing--“

“Oh ho ho! No, no, no! Don’t even go there, McGarrett! I mean it. Don’t even start with me with that bullshit. But, I will say, points to you for having balls of steel for even suggesting it. Kudos. Nice try. Nice fucking try.”

Steve would admit that was a Hail Mary attempt, a last ditch effort before he didn’t give Danny a choice. As it was, he unfastened his seatbelt.

“What…what are you doing?” Danny demanded.

Steve took his hands from the wheel, keeping his knees pressed under it just in case Danny really refused to take it.

“You idiot! Jesus, fuck, you’re going to kill us!” Danny screamed, and yeah, he definitely was fully invested in the chase now. As expected, though, he grabbed the steering wheel to keep the car on the road. “Something is wrong with you. Something is seriously broken in that fucked-up head of yours.”

When Steve took his foot off the gas and climbed to sit in the open window, the car started to slow, but they were going downhill and still moving fast enough to keep up with the truck. “You’d be able to hold it a lot steadier for me if you were in the driver’s seat, buddy.”

Concluding that Steve was going to climb out of the car regardless of what he did, Danny wiggled his way across the center console, growling in frustration when he made it. “I can’t even reach the damn pedals. You’re a few inches taller than me, you know!”
“Don’t be ridiculous,” Steve yelled over the roar of the wind, “it’s six inches at least.”

Danny slapped at Steve’s shins pressed against his shoulders, trying to make room to reach the seat controls. When Danny did lean down to slide the seat forward, the car swerved; not a lot but enough to have Steve scrambling for something to hold onto as his unstable balance teetered.

Danny’s hand shot out, and he grabbed the front of Steve’s tac vest to steady his partner. “I hate you so goddamn much right now.”

Steve squeezed Danny’s wrist he hadn’t even realized until that moment he was gripping. “I know you do. I love you too, Danno.”

“I swear to God, Steve, if you die, I will never forgive you.”

Steve could hear the truth of the statement in Danny’s voice, so he squeezed his wrist again. “What happened to those positive thoughts of us growing old together?”

“You and your idiotic ideas happened. That’s what.”

“Well, everybody needs a hobby.” Steve patted Danny’s hand and released it. “Going up.”

Steve pushed up to the roof of the Camaro, wind rushing in his ears and causing his eyes to water, but Danny held the car steady like Steve knew he would. He slid down the front windshield and onto the hood. Danny moved the car up as close as he could to the back of the truck, and Steve looked back to give him a thumbs up. Danny responded by flipping him off. Steve grinned, had a brief thought that Danny was either going to be too pissed to sleep with him tonight, or too relieved that he was alive to not sleep with him, then Steve leaned forward enough to grab the handle to the roll up door on the truck.

The truck was similar to a moving van in design, with not much to grab onto, but it did have a small platform on the bumper just wide enough to stand on while you raised the door. He was just about to try to unlatch the locking mechanism when several things happened at once. A tricked out Mazda came flying up beside the Camaro, and Steve heard a series of rapid gunshot. His seat on the hood of the car suddenly vanished, and he instinctively lunged forward, gripping even tighter to the handle on the door. His feet were dragging on pavement, and he scrambled to pull his legs up so he could squat, first on the tow-hitch then on the platform of the truck, and still hold tight to the handle. He did his best to stretch his neck to see behind him to make sure Danny was okay.

The Camaro had fallen back, it looked to be where it had first come under fire, and it swerved onto the grass of the median then back into the travel lane, as if Danny was fighting to get it under control. It quickly straightened and was gaining on the truck again. Steve was vaguely aware that the surrounding traffic on the highway had fallen back, apparently deciding not being shot at or involved in a collision was better than arriving to their destination on time.

The chase car still kept pace with the truck, but it came to a stop in the road so fast that black smoke rose from the tires. The truck, however, continued on without slowing, in fact, it felt like it might be speeding up. For a split second, Steve was afraid whoever was in the Mazda planned to go back and finish off the job they started with Danny, but then he noticed a body rolling to a stop on the shoulder, a body that had come from the driver’s side of the truck.

Well, shit; that couldn’t be good. He was starting to think Danny may have been right about the reasonableness of this plan.

The Mazda veered over to the shoulder, and the man who had apparently jumped from the truck climbed into the car, which immediately tore across the median and sped off in the opposite direction. Danny didn’t seem to pay the escaping perps any attention, if anything he was coming up on Steve even faster than before. The truck was still gaining speed, which probably meant the driver had propped something against the gas pedal before he jumped. Steve could feel the truck drifting onto the shoulder, scraping against the concrete barriers marking the edge. He held tighter to the handle as he felt his unsteady stance slip when the truck tilted dangerously.
Then the Camaro was back in view, Danny pulling it as close as he could, frantically motioning for Steve to jump. Steve pushed off the back bumper of the truck and landed hard on his shoulder on the hood of Danny’s car. He immediately started rolling forward, his hands scrambling for anything to hold onto to no avail. Danny slammed on the brakes, the car skidding as Steve tumbled off the hood. He continued rolling onto hot asphalt that bit painfully into the bare skin of his arms, knowing he was going to have a nasty case of road rash when this was all over. Steve came to stop and had just enough time to curl instinctively into a ball as the tires of the Camaro squealed on the pavement to stop less than a foot from his head.

Seeing that he wasn’t going to be smashed by a car in the foreseeable future, Steve turned onto this back with a groan and tried to catch his breath. He felt like he was one big bruise, but didn’t think anything was broken. It was a short reprieve since Danny was already darting out of the car, bracing himself against the hood in obvious relief when he saw Steve lying in the middle of the road alive.

“You okay?” Steve asked, trying to check Danny for any new bullet holes from where he lay.

“Am I okay?” Danny repeated in amazement, straightening and pacing a few steps in an all too familiar way that meant he was trying to decide what to punch first. “Am I okay, he says. Are you fucking kidding me? You’re the one with blood running d--”

Danny’s rant was cut short by an explosion, one strong enough that Steve could feel the concussive wave that had him once again curled into a ball on the ground. When he straightened this time, his ears were ringing, and Danny was squatting beside him, also tentatively lowering his arms he’d put up for what little protection they’d offer.

About a quarter mile down the road, flames completely engulfed the remnants of the refrigeration truck. Danny looked from Steve, to the truck, and back to Steve again, visibly paling as he put two and two together and came up with how close Steve had been to being on the truck when it blew.

“You son of a bitch!” He yelled loud enough Steve could hear it through the muffling effects of the blast on his hearing. “That could have been… you could have… I could have run you…” Danny pointed an accusatory finger at Steve, took a deep breath, turned his back and ran his hand through his hair, paced a tight circle and pointed once more, then stormed back to the car.

By the time Steve had regained his feet, he could see Danny on the phone in the driver’s seat, no doubt calling back to HQ. Steve felt the blood drain from his own face when he saw that the gunshots had blown out both the passenger and driver’s side windows. The bullets must have missed Danny by a matter of inches. He used his gloved hand to brush away as much of the safety glass scattered in the passenger seat as he could, then climbed in.

“You sure you’re okay?” Steve asked hesitantly.

“Don’t speak to me,” Danny ground out, as he stared straight out the windshield and watched the truck burn. “And stop bleeding on my seats.”

“Danny, man, I’m sorry about…” The truck, the gunshots, the nearly getting himself killed. Hell, Steve didn’t even know where to start.

Danny was white knuckling the steering wheel. “I’m serious. Do. Not. Speak.”

Steve nodded silently, and they both sat there in the car abiding by Danny’s wishes. Whatever had been on that truck, the transporters been willing to destroy it to keep the authorities from getting their hands on it. It had also been important enough that they had a chase car accompanying it. He hoped like hell forensics would find something to let them know what it was. He also hoped like hell what they found wouldn’t be the bodies of trafficking victims.

A few minutes passed, and Danny climbed out of his seat, disappeared behind the car to open the trunk, and returned with the first aid kit. He tossed it through the busted passenger window into Steve’s lap. Steve took it as a good sign that Danny wasn’t willing to let him bleed to death.
After Steve fumbled with the gauze, trying to wrap it around his shredded forearm, Danny even
snatched it out of his hand and wrapped it for him, glaring daggers every time Steve opened his
mouth to say something.

The fire truck and ambulance arrive a few minutes before Lou, Tani, and Junior did. Steve was
sitting in the back of the ambulance, letting the paramedics cleaning and rebandaging his arm,
when Tani walked over.

“How you feeling, boss?”

“I’m good,” Steve assured her. “Just a scratch.” When Tani raised an eyebrow, he amended, “A
really big scratch.”

Steve’s attention was on Danny, who was briefing Lou, arms waving in a way that said he was
giving the whole Danny Williams version of the story that involved his moron partner doing
idiotic things, and nearly getting both of them killed. By the frown that Lou shot Steve’s way,
Danny wasn’t the only one who thought Steve was a moron. Lou said something to Danny and
patted him on the back. Danny nodded to Lou, gave one quick glance in Steve’s direction, got
back in the Camaro, and left.

“Looks like I’m catching a ride back to HQ with you guys,” Steve noted in resignation.

Tani grimaced. “Yeah, I don’t think I would want to ride with Danny right now, if I was you.”

The logical side of Steve said he should agree with Tani’s assessment, but the illogical side, the
side where his stupid, traitorous heart resided, said his logical side could go suck it. He wanted to
be with Danny because Danny was upset, really upset, and Steve had developed this bone-deep
compulsion to make sure Danny didn’t stay that way for long. Besides, Danny always made the
adrenaline crashes bearable for Steve, especially after a case went to shit as spectacularly as this
one had today.

It was definitely that illogical side in control when he pulled up in front of Danny’s place at ten
o’clock that night with a six-pack and a bag from the pharmacy full of antibiotics and painkillers
for his arm.

Steve had let the ambulance transport him to the hospital, where he got the full once over. Junior
and Lou had met him in the waiting room, while Tani had stayed at the scene with the evidence
team, but he couldn’t help looking for one teammate in particular who was conspicuously absent.
Lou had driven him home while Steve had fielded a terse phone call from the governor. One of
the owners of the transport company, Tadami Aoki, had contacted her office directly, and he was
threatening legal action against the state for the destruction of his truck by her own elite task
force. Only Steve’s assurances that the owners were somehow involved with the human
traffickers behind Matthew Ocampo’s kidnapping was enough to keep her ire in check, but she
made it very clear she expected proof, and soon.

Once home, he fed Eddie and took him to the beach, managing a few games of fetch as best he
could with his bum arm. Tani called to let him know that, as far as they could tell, the truck that
blew had been empty, but the lab had identified the explosive residue acetone peroxide. Steve
was familiar with the compound, highly unstable, but a favorite with terrorist because it could be
easily produced with common household ingredients, and didn’t have nitrogen, so it was almost
impossible to detect with explosives monitors. Steve was ready to raid the transport company that
night, but with Aoki playing hardball, the governor was insisting on a warrant, which wouldn’t
come until the next day at the earliest. By then, Steve knew any evidence would be long gone.

He showered, ate a quick dinner, tried to sleep, and failed miserably, even with the help of the
pain meds. He kept hearing Joe’s voice in his head, echoing back from his training days, “Son,
you have precisely ten seconds to unfuck yourself.”

Because, yeah, today had been a true goat fuck of a mission.

After an hour of tossing and turning, he’d grabbed the beer from his fridge and drugs off his
kitchen table, and headed to the only place, the only person, who he knew could help with the
insomnia. Because fixing things with Danny was the first step to unfucking this mess.

Danny opened his door dressed in his pajama pants and t-shirt. He didn’t look surprised to see Steve standing there, although he did let out a heavy sigh.

Steve silently held out the beer as a token of apology, still abiding by Danny’s orders not to speak.

“I swear to God, Steve, you make me question my own sanity as much as I do yours.” He stood aside to let Steve in.

Heading into the kitchen, Steve dropped the drugs on the counter and put the beer in the fridge. He offered one to Danny, who shook his head no. Steve decided he’d pass on one, as well. He really didn’t want to drink, he just wanted to fucking sleep.

Danny was studying the small orange prescription bottles. “Did you take these yet?”

Steve took the question as permission to break his silence. “When I got home I did.”

Danny opened the painkillers and shook one out into his palm. “You’re overdue for one of these by two hours.” He handed over the pill and a bottle of water.

Of course, Danny would know exactly what the doctors had said at the hospital and when Steve had gone home. He was sure he had Lou to thank for those updates.

“Come on.” Danny placed the antibiotics on the counter, but held onto the bottle of painkillers, and tapped at the bottle of water Steve still held. “You might need these if you wake up later.”

Danny headed back toward his bedroom, and Steve followed him, feeling the tension already bleeding from his body. Once there, Danny placed the drugs on a nightstand, then he crawled into bed on the opposite side, and flicked off the side lamp.

Steve lay down beside him, wincing a little as he shifted to get more comfortable, automatically moving toward the center of the bed, not touching Danny, but close enough that Steve could feel the heat of him along his side.

“You do realize,” Danny finally mumbled, back still to Steve, “if I hadn’t stopped the car when I did…If I’d been the one to…”

Steve winced again, this time the pain wasn’t from his arm. “I know, Danny.” If the worst had happened, and Steve had been the one behind the wheel with Danny on the road, Steve knew there would be no coming back from that. “I’m sorry. Really. I swear I won’t put you in a situation like that again.”

Steve wasn’t sure, but he thought he heard a snort of disbelief from Danny’s side of the bed. “Good night, Steve,” was all Danny said.

“Good night, Danny,” he answered quietly.

He didn’t get a response, but he was here in Danny’s bed, and that was all the response he needed.

Sometime in the night, Steve woke with Danny’s hand resting lightly on his chest. It reminded him of the night they’d both slept with the feel of Charlie’s heart beating reassuringly beneath their hands, and he wondered if Danny was getting that same sort of reassurance now with him.

Danny evidently sensed Steve was awake, inhaled deeply, and murmured, “Need another pill?”

Steve had a sudden fear that Danny was going to take his hand away, so he covered it with his own. “I’m good.” And Jesus, with Danny only inches away, his head close enough that Steve could feel soft curls brushing his shoulder, it was a little terrifying how true that statement was.

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

Danny had worked some really batshit crazy cases since he’d come to Hawai’i, taken down some
real nutcases over the year; but this guy, Richard Hollis, was going into the wackadoodle hall of fame. That was if they finally caught him here on the Big Island before he made a sacrifice to the goddess Pele. The crackpot was planning an honest to god…goddess, volcanic sacrifice. Seriously, Danny could not make this shit up.

In actuality, the murders had started nearly a month ago, but it was only in the past week that Jerry had noticed the connections between the four seemingly unrelated murders and Hawaiian deities. The murderer had left a totem for each of the gods… a carotid artery sliced with a sharks tooth for Kamohoali’i, the shark god; a mouthful of dirt for Papa, the earth goddess; a stomach full of seawater for Namaka, the sea goddess; and the last was for Kane in the form of a real estate developer speared to a large tree in the rainforest.

Eric had been able to pull a partial print from the sharks tooth, and it was enough to hit on Hollis, a radical environmentalist HPD had arrested several times over the years on trespassing charges related to environmental protests. Based on what they found at his home, however, his radicalism had turned to a twisted form of religion. The manifesto Jerry pulled from Hollis’ laptop outlined his plan to restore the world to the realm of the old gods, who, Hollis believed, were the only ones who knew how to care for it properly. Next on his list to please with a ritual killing was Pele, and considering he’d flown to the Big Island that morning, it wasn’t hard to surmise what he planned to do. Fortunately, Hollis wasn’t smart enough to use an alias when he rented his car, or maybe he thought the gods would protect him. Who the fuck knew? All Danny did know was that Jerry had a lock on the GPS from Hollis’ rental car, as well the rental car he and Steve were currently driving through the Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park, and was using both to track their relative movements. Hollis had apparently stopped at the visitor’s center at the main crater to Kilauea, whether he was planning to carry out his sacrifice there and decided there were too many tourists, or he was simply checking the warnings to locate where the active lava flows were in the rest of the park, they didn’t know. They did know he was on the move again, heading along Chain of Craters Road; Jerry was providing directions by satellite phone since cell phone coverage was for shit in this area.

Danny disconnected from their latest update from HQ and informed Steve, “Jerry says Hollis is about ten miles ahead of us. Seeing as this is the only road for him to take, and a fifteen-year-old lava flow blocks the road in another twenty-five miles, we should catch up to him soon. ‘Tani and Junior are already airborne and should be in the area in about ten to fifteen minutes.’ They were coming by police helicopter from Hilo, where they’d been following up on the abduction of a woman at a gas station, possibly the planned sacrifice.

“Good,” Steve nodded. “I think we’ve got him. There’s no way he can reach an active volcanic vent by road. He’ll have to hike in several miles, and we’ll catch up to him before then.”

“It would be nice if we caught him on the road, without having to hike anywhere.” Danny bemoaned as he watched the scenery race by outside the car. The late afternoon sun shining through the haze caused by the volcanic gases seemed to ignite the air itself into a dazzling gold sheen; it was a stark contrast to the ropey strands of black volcanic rock stretching as far as the eye could see. Danny pointed at a road sign for Nene crossing as they passed it. “Grace told me to get a picture of one of those Nene ducks—”

“They’re a type of goose,” Steve corrected.

“So now you’re an ornithologist?”

“I’m just saying, there’s a difference between a duck and a goose.” Steve had that expression, the one Danny thought of as the Mr. Know-It-All-Douche face. “Nene’s are geese, not ducks.”

Danny exhaled in exhaustion over a conversation that had only been going on for about twenty seconds. “Fine, since you’re the expert, you shouldn’t have any trouble spotting one.”

“Nene are pretty rare,” Steve warned.

“Yes, I’m aware of that, but this park is one of the more common places they are found, hence the request for a photo. And since I’m supposed to have the kids tonight, it would be nice to at least give her a photo of the state bird of Hawai’i to make up for not getting home before midnight. So
“Keep an eye out.”

“That’s right,” Steve said with a shake of his head. “I forgot what day it was. Guess Eddie and I will be hanging out on our own this weekend.”

Steve grinned, but Danny could see the disappointment behind it.

They’d been doing the whole sleeping in the same bed thing for a little less than three weeks now, and Danny could honestly say he slept better now than he had at any time since he’d graduated the academy. There were always the cases that kept them up for days at a time, like this one, but even after those long stretches of sleeplessness, it was a relief to collapse into a bed with Steve already snoring. More than that, the mornings hanging out with Steve weren’t bad either.

That first morning after Steve had showed up on his door looking as miserable as Danny had felt, Danny had awakened to find himself alone in bed. Not that he was surprised Steve wasn’t there; he knew Steve was an early riser compared to Danny, and the agreement had been the first to wake was the first to leave. What was surprising was that he felt a twinge of disappointment that Steve wasn’t there. He’d rolled out of bed with a yawn, taken his morning pee, and shuffled into the kitchen to make coffee…

…only to find Steve, still sweaty from his morning run, rummaging through his refrigerator. “Do you not have any butter?”

“Uh… what?” Not exactly the most coherent statement, but Danny was still trying to reconcile that not only had Steve not gone home, but he’d left on a run and came back to be here when Danny woke up.

Steve held out the empty butter dish for Danny to see. “Butter, Danny. Do you have any more?”

Danny gave a small shake of his head to try to clear the morning fuzz. “Yeah…maybe. Grace finished it off last time she was here. Think there’s more in the freezer, though.” Danny opened the freezer to search for the requested dairy product and buy himself a little more time to figure out what the hell was going on here.

Steve was familiar enough with his kitchen to know where most everything was stored, and he had already put the French press to use. Pushing the plunger, Steve asked, “So do you think we could stay at my place tonight? I actually discovered a nice running trail this morning that cuts through the park down the street, but I’d like to get in a swim tomorrow.”

Danny blinked a few times in the cold air of the freezer, deciding he really needed caffeine if he had any hope of keeping up with this conversation. “Sure, we can do that,” he agreed, because… sure, what the hell, he could do that. He finally found the butter under a bag of frozen peas and behind a container of ice cream.

Steve frowned at the box Danny handed over. “I guess this will do this morning, but you need to get some grass fed for my coffee.”

That, finally, was enough to snap Danny out of his morning fugue state. “No, I don’t think so. There is no way I am paying an extra three dollars a pound—”

Steve ignored Danny’s point completely as he pulled a second mug out the cabinet, filled it with coffee, and handed it to Danny. “I’m telling you, Danny, you can taste the difference.”

“How can you taste anything?” Danny took the offered cup and spooned sugar into it. “You suck it down so fast it bypasses your taste buds completely.”

“You can taste the grassiness,” Steve informed him, taking the milk from the fridge.

“Then put grass clippings in your cup.” Danny shook his head at the ridiculous idea of finding anything appealing about something that tasted grassy, and poured the milk into his coffee. “I can get you those for free.”

Seeing Danny was finished with the milk, Steve returned it to the refrigerator. “This from the man
who wants to import tap water for the restaurant.”

Belatedly, Danny remembered Steve didn’t even take milk in his coffee, since he used fucking grass-fed butter instead, and had retrieved the carton just for Danny’s use.

“I have explained this to you a million times, Steve; it’s the minerals in the water. They are the secret to a great pizza dough.” Danny watched Steve attempt to cut the frozen butter with a butcher knife, crowded into his space, and shooed him away. “Here, come on, stop, give me that before you cut your hand off.” He popped the frozen block in the microwave for ten seconds to soften it.

Steve leaned back against the kitchen island, waiting for the microwave to ding. “Next time I stay over, I’m bringing my own butter.”

Danny decided that statement shouldn’t have made him nearly as happy as it did on so many different levels.

So, yeah, the sleeping over was going really well. The only problem…and it wasn’t really a problem, more an inconvenience, and seriously, no big deal at all…was they had both decided, without even talking about it, that they shouldn’t be sharing a bed when Danny had Grace and Charlie. It was only a couple days each week and every other weekend, so nothing to even waste time thinking about, just a small hassle, that was all.

Which did nothing to explain why, when Danny had picked Grace up after cheerleading practice earlier in the week, he’d asked her, “So, what would you think about Uncle Steve spending the night sometime when you and Charlie are at our house?”

Grace hadn’t even bothered to look up from her phone. “He does that already.”

“Well, yes, you are correct, he does do that from time to time,” Danny conceded. “But instead of sleeping on the couch, maybe he sleeps… in my bed…with me.”

Grace put down the phone and looked at him. “Are you two dating?”

And, really, why was her face lighting up like he just told her they were going to a Bruno Mars concert?

“No, no, not dating. Nothing like that,” he corrected.

She crinkled her nose. “So you’re just hooking up and having sex?”

“Hooking up?” Danny’s face twisted in shock, not to mention a bit of panic. “What do you know about hooking up?”

When she rolled her eyes like Danny was a complete moron for even asking that question, he told her, “You know, I’d feel a lot better about you going out on dates with Will if you didn’t have that reaction every time I question you about how you’re gaining your knowledge of stuff related to sex.”

Grace started ticking items off on her fingers. “Sex education in Health class, movies, Sense8 —“

“Okay, I’m going to stop you right there and tell you something. The day you were born, and I held you for the first time, I looked down on you, this tiny, precious, innocent baby, and thought you were the most beautiful miracle I could ever hold in my arms. At that magical moment, however, I never thought, in a million years, that one day I would have to say the words, ‘Grace Williams, you are never, ever, under any circumstances, to participate in an orgy—’ “

“Ewwwww!” Grace exclaimed. “Oh my God, that’s disgusting!”

“See? That right there? That should be your response any time the topic of sex comes up.”

There was the eye roll again. Danny felt he should probably call his mom and apologize for the entire duration of his teen years.
“Mom and I had ‘the talk’. Grace’s use of air quotes wasn’t making life any better in Danny’s book.

“The talk?” Danny asked. “The talk about sex?”

“Yes, about sex,” Grace confirmed with an aggrieved sigh. “And mom says that sex is a beautiful experience when it’s shared with the right person.”

“She did, did she?” Danny frowned, thinking maybe he and Rachel should have a talk about ‘the talk’. “Was she drinking at the time?”

Grace ignored the comment. “She also said that I needed to be mature enough to decide who that right person is.”

“Did she also tell you that you won’t be mature enough to make that decision until you’re in your thirties?”

Grace gave him a familiar look, and picked up her phone again, obviously done with the conversation. Danny knew that look, and it was neither Danny nor Rachel inspired; it was pure Steve through and through.

“Okay, okay. Your mom’s right; it can be a wonderful experience with the right person.” Danny felt a little queasy as he asked, “So you and Will aren’t…?”

“No, of course not.” Much to Danny’s relief she sounded a little disgusted by the idea. “Are you and Uncle Steve?” Much to Danny’s consternation, she sounded more curious than repulsed when asking about him and Steve.

“No. No, we most definitely are not,” Danny assured her.

“Do you want to?” Grace asked simply.

“Why would you ask a question like that?” No, that wasn’t a deflection. It most definitely was not a deflection.

She gave a little shrug. “You just, I don’t know, sounded a little disappointed when you said you weren’t.”

“I did not sound disappointed, Grace, I absolutely did not sound—”

Grace ignored his denials. “And you two, you seem happier when you’re together. Even when you were both dating other people, you always seemed more like yourselves when you were around each other than when you were around the people you were dating. And when it’s just Uncle Steve with us, neither of you seem like you’re trying to choose who to pay attention to, me and Charlie, or your date.”

Danny felt his heart crack a little at the implications of what she was saying. “Sweetheart, you know you and Charlie are far and away the most important people in my life. Miles and miles ahead of everyone else.”

“I know, Danno,” she told him, and he relaxed a little to hear the certainty in her voice. “I guess it’s just that when Uncle Steve is with us it’s more, I don’t know, natural. He just fits in really easy.”

“Well, nothing’s easy about your Uncle Steve,” Danny protested, but he couldn’t argue about her observations.

“So if you’re not having sex, why are you sleeping together?”

Now it was Danny’s turn to shrug. “I don’t know. We both just sleep better when we sleep together. I guess you can think of it kind of like having a slumber party. I mean, you had one with Kylie last week and enjoyed it, right?”

Grace didn’t seem to buy into the comparison. “We stayed up until two in the morning watching...”
“Okay, so maybe not like a slumber party,” Danny conceded. “But I’ll tell you, one of the things I missed most after Mom and I split up was having someone in bed with me. It wasn’t always about having sex, a lot of time it was just nice to sleep next to someone.” The thought, ‘someone you love’ slipped unbidden into his mind, but he didn’t say that out loud.

“Maybe that’s why you divorced,” Grace mumbled under her breath.

Danny’s eyebrows flew up. “Excuse me?”

Grace wisely changed the subject. “If Uncle Steve wants to stay over and just sleep, I’m fine with it. If he wants to stay over and just have sex with you, or be your boyfriend, I’m fine with that, too. I just like having Uncle Steve around.”

Danny sighed dramatically then grinned at her. “You know what, Monkey, for some insane reason, so do I.”

Danny looked over at Steve, who still had that forced grin plastered on his face after implying he would be staying home tonight. “Funny you should mention that; I talked to Grace about our whole sleeping arrangement.”

“You talked to Grace?” Steve had a hint of dread in his voice. “About us sleeping in the same bed?”

“I did, I talked to Grace about us sleeping together, specifically in the same bed,” Danny confirmed. “And she’s very open-minded about it. Almost disturbingly so, thanks to some Netflix original programming.”

“So she doesn’t mind?” The dread had morphed into hopefulness in Steve’s tone.

“She does not mind.” Danny bobbed his head. “In fact, she encourages it…among other things.” He mumbled that last part.

“What?” Steve asked. By the look on his face, Danny thought he might have heard what he said, and understood the implications.

Danny had never been so glad for the sat phone to ring in his life. “Jerry, what’ve you got for us?”

“He’s stopped,” Jerry told him. “About two miles ahead.”

“We got him,” Danny conveyed, “Two miles up.”

As expected, Steve floored the rental, and within a few minutes, they saw the Hollis’ empty car pulled off to the side of the road.

The wind up on the lava flats was insane, the gusts well over forty miles an hour and fucking cold. Steve had warned him about the temperature change at the higher elevations of the Big Island, but Danny had assumed he’d been talking cold relative to the constant eighty degrees of Oahu. This was closer to Newark in late October. Danny wished he’d put on a warmer coat than the light jacket he wore under his vest. He tried to push his hair back, quickly concluded it was an exercise in futility in the cyclone howling around him, and resigned himself to Steve giving him shit about the mess of curls it would be when they finally got out of the wind.

“Who knew Hawai’i could feel like Jersey in the middle of a nor’easter?” Danny yelled to be heard over the wind.

“I tried to warn you,” Steve reminded, although he wasn’t wearing anything any warmer than Danny. “Do you see them?”

Danny used a hand to block the blinding glow of the sky and scanned across the lava. With the wind whipping, it was hard to discern shadow from rock across the field of black, but he thought,
maybe, he saw one of those shadows move in the distance. “Steve?”

Steve retrieved a small pair of binoculars from his vest and looked in the direction Danny had indicated. “That’s them,” Steve informed him, putting away the glasses and pulling his sidearm.

Danny did the same, and they headed out across the rocky terrain. The going wasn’t easy; the pahoehoe lava formations were smooth but twisted into irregular bands in a way that made it easy to lose your footing, and the wind wasn’t helping matters. Danny did his best to keep pace with Steve, who skimmed over the rock like it was flat asphalt, while trying not to slip and wrench his bad knee. As a result, Steve had sped ahead of Danny about a hundred yards, and was quickly gaining on the man they were tracking and his hostage. Hollis hadn’t even realized they were behind him until the woman he was dragging along looked behind, saw Steve, and screamed for help.

Steve was already close enough to Hollis and his terrified hostage to yell, “Richard Hollis, Five-0! Drop your weapons and get down on your knees.”

Hollis had a gun pointed at the woman. “Stay back or I’ll shoot her!”

“And you’ll be next,” Steve warned, gun trained on Hollis even as the man pulled the woman directly in front of him. “It’s over; just let her go.”

“You know what’s over,” Hollis yelled back, “this planet. Deforestation, over fishing, climate change…we need Pele to wipe it clean. Hot lava would have been the best alter, but we’re in Pele’s domain, and a sacrifice here should work just as well.”

Steve apparently caught onto the batshit crazy aspect of their suspect, and realized a typical threat of death by gunshot wasn’t going to work with this guy. “Okay, wait, let’s talk about this,” he offered, lowering his gun to the ground and kicking it away before raising his empty hands.

Hollis hadn’t even looked over to where Danny held his own gun on him, and Danny didn’t think the suspect even knew he was there, so he started slowly moving to come up behind him.

However, Hollis’ hostage apparently realized exactly what Hollis had planned for her and was having none of it. She slammed her head backwards into Hollis’ face, smashed her heel down hard on the inseam of Hollis’ foot, swung her bound hands to knock the gun free from her abductor’s grip, then took off running toward Danny.

Hollis blinked as he dabbed at the blood running from his nose, then bolted in the opposite direction.

Steve was already in pursuit as he yelled, “Danny?”

“Got her,” Danny assured, moving quickly to meet the woman. “It’s okay, you’re safe now. Are you hurt?” he asked, even as he ripped at the duct tape around her wrists.

“He was going to throw me in a fucking volcano!” she told him with wide-eyed terror. Her legs wobbled, and she dropped to her knees. “I mean, seriously, what the fuck? I’m not even a virgin!”

“Yeah, I don’t think he cared so much about that,” Danny told her, kneeling beside her as he finally freed her hands. “You did good. Real good.”

“Self defense classes,” she informed him. “I thought I might need them at the ATM or something, not to take out a psychopath wanting to throw me in a fucking volcano!” That last she screamed at the retreating form of Hollis.

“Look,” Danny said, keeping an eye on Steve, who was closing in on the man fast, “do you think you can make your way back to where the cars are parked? Our car is there, just get in, and lock the doors. Okay?”

The woman, however, was on the verge of hysteria. “What would Pele even want with me? I’m a Presbyterian.”
“I get that you’re upset. I really do. But that’s my partner chasing that nutjob, and I’m his only backup.” Danny motioned in the direction of Steve and Hollis, and looked up just in time to see Steve lunge to tackle Hollis.

Danny wasn’t worried that Hollis had anywhere near the training Steve did in hand to hand combat, but the guy had a few inches and several pounds on Steve, which was probably why he was able to flip the two of them over and right off a cliff.

“Steve!” Danny screamed, forgetting all about the woman as he stumbled to his feet. He didn’t think about the uneven terrain, the wind, hell, anything beyond, ‘Shit! He just went over a fucking cliff!’ as he ran to where the two men had disappeared from sight.

He skidded to a stop at the edge of the drop off. Looking down, he saw that there was about a twenty-foot long slope, ridiculously steep and covered in loose gravel. At the bottom of the slope, there was a narrow ridge of volcanic rock, maybe two feet wide, before it dropped off again into a sheer cliff face. Several stories below that, was a jagged outcropping that jutted out into the ocean. Hollis lay in a broken heap down there, the waves rolling over his dead body. Steve, however, dangled by his fingertips from the ridge.

“Jesus, Steve, hold on!”

“Danny!” Steve yelled, “Get…” He attempted to pull himself up, and the rock crumbled under his left hand, leaving him hanging only from his right. “Get a rope!”

A rope? Where the fuck was Danny supposed to get a rope? They were in a rental car, for Christ’s sake.

Steve pivoted his weight and swung his body, grabbed for the ledge again, only to have the rock break away once more.

Danny decided right then that, even if they had a rope in the car, there was no way he’d be able to retrieve it and make it back in time. “Hold on, I’m coming down.”

“No!” Steve ordered. “It’s too steep!”

Danny was already sliding down the slope, digging in his heels, and clawing into the rock with his gloved hands in an attempt to slow his descent. It wouldn’t do Steve a damn bit of good if Danny went flying off the edge and joined Hollis in the ocean below. The trip down the slope sent a shower of small rocks tumbling over the edge, no doubt pelting Steve where he dangled.

Steve cursed, even as he reached up to grasp at the ledge once more. Instead of rock, he found Danny’s hand, and he gripped it desperately tight.

“Okay, babe, I got you,” Danny ground out between his clenched teeth, straining against the sudden weight of Steve, who was currently supported by nothing other than Danny and open air. Danny managed to get his other hand looped around one of the straps on the back of Steve’s vest, and held on for all he was worth.

Steve’s other arm wrapped around Danny’s shoulder, clinging to Danny’s vest in return, and he was practically using Danny as a pull-up bar. Shifting his own weight, Danny leaned back as far as he could to provide more leverage away from the cliff, until Steve managed to get his knees up on the ledge and tumble forward. They landed in a mass of arms, legs, and tactical gear on the rocky slope, both shaking and breathing heavily.

“Christ, I think I herniated something,” Danny groaned into Steve’s shoulder, “like everything.”

Steve rolled over to sprawl on the gravel beside Danny. “That was a really stupid thing to do,” Steve accused, “coming down here like that.”

Danny shrugged where he lay. “Been hanging around you all these years, some of your stupid was bound to rub off eventually.”
Danny realized he still held Steve’s hand tight in his… or maybe Steve still held his… regardless, their clasped hands resting on Steve’s chest, and neither seemed inclined to let go. It was probably a good idea, seeing as where they lay was fairly unstable, and either one could start to slip at any time.

Yeah, Danny was going to go with that rationalization instead of the fact that he didn’t think he could let go of Steve right now even if ordered to at gunpoint.

“I think you mean my heroism has rubbed off,” Steve corrected.

Danny grinned. “Are you saying I’m your hero, Steve?”

As much as he was trying to fight it, Steve couldn’t help but grin in return, which just made Danny giggle. Of course, Steve couldn’t stop himself from joining in. Danny recognized the symptoms of an all too familiar adrenaline dump when he felt one. For some reason, it just made him laugh harder, then groan when he felt a twinge in his side.

“Fuck,” Danny said with a grimace. “Seriously, can you rupture your spleen from over exertion?”

“You probably just pulled a muscle.” Steve looked like he was about to try to sit up and somehow examine Danny’s spleen.

Danny was about to tell Steve to lie still before he killed them both when he heard an anxious, “Sirs?” from above them.

Looking up, Danny saw Junior’s face peering down on them from the top of the cliff. “Oh, hey, Steve.” Danny used his free hand to tap at Steve’s shoulder. “Look who decided to join the party.”

“Junior,” Steve said in relief to see the young man, “we could use a little help getting back up.”

Junior nodded in understanding. “There’s a harness system in the chopper. I’ll be right back.”

“Whoa, Junior,” Danny called when Junior started leave. “The woman Hollis kidnapped, did you find her up there?”

“Yes, sir, Tani is with her now,” Junior assured him. “Just hold tight, sirs.”

“Not going anywhere,” Danny offered with a wave as Junior disappeared from view. “Seriously, still with the ‘sir this’ and ‘sirs that’.”

“It’s a work in progress,” Steve dismissed. “Some military habits are hard to break.”

“Like three minute showers, I know.” Danny gave an exaggerated roll of his eyes at that long-standing argument. “Can’t you get him on some sort of deprogramming regime or something?”

“I could pair him with a loud-mouthed cop from New Jersey, but we don’t have an extra one of those lying around anywhere.”

“Not willing to give up the one you have?” Danny asked with a quirk of his lips.

“Not willing to traumatize the kid for life,” Steve said with a grin of his own. “Besides, I’m still working the deprogramming regime with that one myself.”

“You could have him work with Eric for a few weeks,” Danny suggested. “That will loosen him up.”

Steve scoffed at the idea. “There’s a difference between loosening the kid up and doing keg stands during lunch.”

“True. Although, now that I think about it, you did pair him up with Tani,” Danny noted.

Steve chuckled. “That actually might be close enough.”
“She definitely has the chutzpah to be an honorary New Jerseyan,” Danny agreed with a laugh of his own.

Steve just laughed harder, and Danny joined him. Damn, they were crashing hard. Somewhere above them, Danny thought he heard honking. “Is that a Nene?”

Steve had already pulled his phone from his vest, and he took a picture as two of the geese flew overhead. He showed Danny the image of two dark smudges against the yellow sky. Not exactly what Danny was hoping for, but beggars couldn’t be choosers.

Steve then turned the camera and snapped a picture of Danny. “That’s some hair you have going there, Detective Williams.”

“Fuck you very much, Lieutenant Commander Asshat.” Danny glared at Steve, who was smiling with a ridiculously goofy grin on his face. Adrenaline-Dump face, no doubt about it.

Steve was busy admiring the photo he had taken. “You know who can use some kind of hat? You.”

Danny opened his mouth to tell him where he could stuff that hat, which was a highly appropriate location for an asshat.

Before Danny could speak, however, Steve squeezed Danny’s hand still held in his. “So, can I stay at your place tonight?”

Danny rolled his eyes, but squeezed back. “I think that can be arranged.”

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

“Are you even listening to me?”

At least that’s what Steve thought Danny was saying. It was either that or, “Aardvarks been whistling to bees.” Seeing as Danny had a toothbrush in his mouth as he spoke, Steve couldn’t be entirely sure which it was. However, unless Danny was in the middle of having a stroke, Steve was going to go out on a limb and say Danny wasn’t talking about the aardvarks.

From where he lay face down on the bed, Steve could hear the water running in the bathroom as Danny rinsed and spit.

“Steve,” Danny called again, this time clearer.

“Whu?” Steve mumbled into his pillow, barely having the strength to open his eyes, much less lift his head to talk to his partner.

He seriously needed to stop volunteering for charity athletic events, especially when they inevitably took place after an all night callout for a murder case. The good news was that they’d caught the guy by ten that morning, so Steve had just enough time to race back across the island and spend the rest of the day rowing in a dragon boat tournament.

“Did you hear what I said about Aoki?” Danny tried again, apparently standing right over him.

Fucking Aoki with his fucking high paid lawyers who were making Steve’s life a fucking disaster. Steve was getting calls from the governor chewing his ass every time anyone from Five-0 even got near the man. The son of a bitch had even taken out a restraining order against Steve after he tried the direct route by confronting Aoki on his way to lunch one day. Steve wanted to take the piece of shit down so fucking bad and so fucking hard it made his teeth hurt from the way he ground them every time he thought about how the guy was getting away with… Hell, they didn’t even know exactly what it was he was doing, but Steve had no doubt it was really, spectacularly bad.
Right now, though, Steve could barely feel his face much less grind his teeth. Waving pathetically toward where he judged Danny was standing, he begged, “Danny, I’m so fucking tired. Just come to bed. I swear to God, I will listen to what you have to say in the morning.” Steve patted clumsily at the spot beside him. “Just, bed. Please. For me.”

“You are a disgrace to Navy SEALs the world over,” Danny tsked. “You spend half a day paddling around in the canals, and you turn into an unmovable blob.”

“I can move,” Steve argued morosely, proving his point by scooting over right next to Danny when he finally climbed into bed. “See?”

“Impressive,” Danny said dryly as he arranged his pillow to his liking. It was a routine Danny followed every night, kind of like a dog circling three times before it lay down. “Next time I see Joe, I’ll fill him in on your mind-boggling fortitude.”

Yeah, Joe would not have been impressed. To hell with Joe, Steve was wiped out. At least Danny was in bed now. Danny was in bed, and Steve was in bed, and the waves were crashing outside, and it was goddamn perfect, and he was finally going to get to sleep.

“Here’s the thing,” Danny said, sitting up.

Steve thought he might weep, partially because that’s all he had the energy to do, but primarily because he was too damn tired to choke Danny out and make him go to fucking sleep.

Danny, however, was on a roll. “Aoki is too slick for us to catch him at the really illegal stuff, so I’m thinking we go after him for little crap. We can’t get in the yard to inspect the trucks, but HPD can pull them over for a broken taillight or speeding. Maybe call the EPA, tip them off about potential illegal storage of chemicals.”

“You want to give Aoki a speeding ticket?” Steve asked from under the end of Danny’s pillow that he was unsuccessfully trying to use to block the light from the lamp Danny wouldn’t turn off.

“No, Steve, that’s not what I’m saying. It’s like Al Capone. He went to prison over tax evasion. He was this horrible, ruthless murderer, and they got him because of accounting irregularities.”

Steve really didn’t understand what the hell Danny was talking about, probably because his brain was fried mush at the moment. “You think he’s hiding something in his books?”

“Jerry already scrubbed those,” Danny informed him, “at least what he could get his hands on without a warrant. He’s either really good, or he’s hiding it in plain sight somehow. But, if we can use something small or mundane, like a problem with a shipping manifest, or an environmental complaint, then we have a legal excuse to dig deeper. It’s a way to get our foot in the door.”

Steve flopped his hand onto Danny’s chest and patted sloppily at the ridiculously soft t-shirt Danny was wearing. He was going to say something, but he became distracted with lazily curling and uncurling his finger against the fabric.

“Steve.” Danny sounded a little annoyed.

Oh, yeah, that thing he was going to say. “Talk to Jerry ‘bout it ‘morrow.”

“I already have. He’s thinking maybe storm water discharge permits…”

About that time, Steve’s brain stopped registering words as having any meaning. They just became a low buzz of sound, and an echoing rumble vibrated soothingly in Danny’s chest against his fingertips, until even that was fading into oblivion.

He could still hear the waves, feel the mattress under him, cool sheets above, but there was also the call to prayers in the distance, and a hard floor against his cheek.

“Steve?”
That was Danny’s voice, rough with sleep, but the face glaring into his didn’t have the blue eyes he was expecting, there was no mess of blond hair. The eyes were dark, like all the man’s features, and his hair was hidden under a turban.

“Babe?”

Danny was here, somewhere, he was absolutely here, and he sounded worried. Steve pulled in a breath and choked on the dirt he’d sucked into his lungs from the floor. He managed to cough out a weak, “Danny?”

Pushing up to look around the room, he felt the mattress give beneath his hand, felt the concrete cold against his palm, felt the disorienting panic growing. They were in bed; he and Danny were definitely in bed. So where was Danny? All he could see was the camera set up in the middle of the room, the one to tape his execution. The man before him sneered as he yelled an order in Pashto to someone outside the room, and shit, he knew what was coming next, the fucking sword.

“Do you remember the first time we met?”

For an instant, Steve had a flash of Danny by his one side, Chin on the other, both of them supporting Steve as they walked him through the jungle, with Joe and a SEAL team as escorts. He was barefoot, every step hurt, but Danny was talking the entire time, asking him that same question.

The same question the man was asking him now.

Steve scrambled back from the terrorist until his back hit a table…no a headboard. The headboard to his bed. He and Danny were in bed. Steve rubbed at his forehead. He was in bed, and Danny was here, too. So why the fuck couldn’t he find him?

“Danny?” he called again hoarsely, a little more desperate this time, because maybe they planned to behead more than just Steve. Danny was in Afghanistan too, wasn’t he? Wearing a blazer and sweater, of all things.

“Do you remember the first time we met?”

Why did he keep asking that question? Why did it sound so familiar? Steve thought he should know it, like it was something rote, something he’d memorized as a kid. Maybe a Shakespearean soliloquy. Friends, Romans, countrymen…. Once more unto the breach… To be or not to be…

No, that wasn’t right. It wasn’t a monologue; it was dialogue. He was supposed to interact, to give a response. Maybe more like ‘Who’s on first’ from Abbot and Costello. His dad loved that skit. His dad had died.

Danny had been the one to tell him that. Not the first time it happened, but at least a dozen times after that, when Steve was in another bed, a hospital bed, and Wo Fat’s drugs were still playing fast and loose with his memories. Danny sat beside him then, looked gutted every time he had to tell Steve his dad had died four years before, and every time he’d told him that horrible news, Danny had asked him the same questions.

“Steve, do you remember the first time we met?”

Danny’s voice was calm. Danny was almost never calm; he got worked up if Steve drank the last of the milk. If he was calm now, he must not be in imminent danger. Steve clung to that thought, saw a flash of blue where there had been brown eyes before, and didn’t dare look away.

“My dad’s house…” No, Danny didn’t like that answer last time. “My house…in the garage.”

“That’s right,” Danny agreed. “And what did you do?”

“Same thing you did, I pulled my gun.” In his garage. His garage that was right downstairs… he knew that, he knew it, even though he was seeing the walls of a building on the other side of the world.
“And then you stole my case.”

Danny. Danny. Focus on Danny. Danny, who had climbed in bed earlier bitching about Aoki. Danny, whose blue eyes were watching Steve closely through the face of another man.

“Asked…asked you to join my team,” Steve countered, because that’s what Danny expected him to say.

The walls around him shifted, settled into something more familiar with his dresser and nightstands. The table at his back was gone, only the fucking camera still stood at the foot of the bed.

“Conscripted me for life, you mean.” Danny lay in bed, propped on one elbow, brow furrowed over worried blue eyes, his blond hair tousled by sleep.

Steve huffed in relief to finally see him.

Danny’s eyes softened when he saw the recognition in Steve’s face. “Hey,” he said, as if greeting Steve like he hadn’t seen him in a while. “And then what did you say when I said we should wait for backup?”

“You’re my backup.” And thank God for that, Steve thought, afraid to look away in case Danny disappeared on him again.

“I’m your backup,” Danny stressed, moving slowly to sit with his back to the headboard beside Steve. “For life, Steven. I’m your backup for life.”

Steve nodded, slumped against the headboard, and leaned into Danny so that they were shoulder to shoulder. He was real, Danny was real, and solid, and here in his bed. His bed that was in his room, his room that was in his house, his house that was in Hawai’i with the ocean outside, and the desert thousands of miles away.

Steve glanced at the clock on the nightstand past Danny that read 4:18 a.m. in red block numbers. So much for sleeping in.

It had been a while since Steve had had an episode like this one. The dreams, sure, those happened now and then, but not being able to tell memory from the here and now were much rarer. Extreme exhaustion had been a trigger in the past. He should have known it could happen tonight, should have found an excuse for Danny to stay at home so he didn’t have to deal with Steve like this. Only, Danny was the one who had helped him find his way back from the nightmare. He didn’t want think what it would have been like without Danny here.

Normally, after either dream or disorientation woke him, Steve was up for the rest of the night, out of bed and running, or swimming, or scrubbing his toilet… anything to try to erase the lingering taint of fear or failure.

This morning, however, he wanted to stay right where he was, all up in Danny’s personal space.

“Danny?” he asked quietly.

“Yeah, babe?”

“Do you remember when we first met?”

Because he could still smell the remnants of spiced stew that had been cooking in the kitchen upstairs, still taste the salty grit of sand on his tongue, still see the hazy outline of the camera in the dark.

“In your garage,” Danny answered.

“My garage.” Steve closed his eyes, focusing on the warmth of Danny beside him, and pictured the route. “Downstairs, to the right, and through the kitchen.”

“Remember when we were in there last?”
“Yesterday afternoon. Offloading the new trim saw to replace the one stolen from the restaurant.”

“Our restaurant,” Danny stressed, tapping Steve’s knuckles to reinforce the idea, then left his hand resting lightly on top of Steve’s.

“Our restaurant,” Steve repeated, liking the sound of it, because that meant Danny wasn’t going anywhere without him. Not next year, not ten years from now, and definitely not tonight, because they were in this together, because Danny was his backup. Without much thought, he spread his fingers, an invitation for Danny’s to slip between. “You’re my backup.”

“For life,” Danny promised again as he interlocked their hands.

Steve took that as invitation to slump down a little further and rest his head on Danny’s shoulder. “Thanks for that.”

“You’re welcome,” Danny told him, resting his cheek on top of Steve’s head, “but I need you to do something for me.”

Steve froze, fully expecting the lecture on Steve’s need to get some professional help, that he could be a danger to himself and others, or at the very least, another visit with the stress management lady.

“Anything, Danno,” Steve promised. He was dreading the hell out of any conversation about the whole incident, but he owed Danny that much for tonight alone. Besides, he wasn’t willing to risk Danny refusing to sleep with him again if he didn’t.

“I need you to grow your hair out again, babe. It’s like sleeping on Astroturf.”

Steve laughed, didn’t smell anything but the faint scent of fabric softener from Danny’s super soft t-shirt against his temple, didn’t see a video camera anywhere in sight.

“I’m serious here, Steven. Your beard scruff is literally longer than your hair.”

“How about I grow it out, and then we’ll both go see Odell for a trim.”

There was a pause before Danny said, “You know what? We can talk about this in the morning. Right now, I think we should get a few more hours of sleep.”

Steve knew that wasn’t going to happen for him, but maybe Danny could fall back to sleep.

“Good deflection,” Steve said with a grin, scooting to lie back down. He rolled onto his side, keeping hold of Danny’s hands to pull him along, so that Danny pressed close behind him, and Danny’s arm wrapped snugly around Steve’s waist.

Danny used his free hand to poke Steve’s ribs. “I’m sorry; I don’t think I heard you correctly?”

“I mean idea, good idea,” Steve amended.

“That’s what I thought,” Danny grumped behind Steve’s ear. He gave a small squeeze to Steve’s hand. “You going to be able to sleep?”

“Probably not,” he admitted. “But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t. Don’t worry about me; I’m good, really.”

Danny yawned. “You want to talk about it?”

Steve blew out a breath. “It was Afghanistan, with the Taliban.” Steve said it matter-of-factly, keeping it at a distance. “Second time now you’ve brought me home from there.”

Danny was there for the hard stuff, the really hard stuff, when the bullets started flying and shit got real, and he’d done it since the first day they met. Steve remembered the hell out of that. The fact that Steve was thinking this while Danny rubbed his nose against Steve’s shoulder, like he was just scratching an itch in the most endearingly mundane manner, really got to the dichotomy of
Danny Williams in Steve’s life. He was the one Steve wanted at his back during the bad times, and the one he wanted at home when it was all said and done and the beer and barbecues started. When it came to Danny, Steve found him very multipurpose. Not for the first time, it made Steve wonder how he’d gotten so fucking lucky when he found the man.

“On second thought, forget the hair,” Danny said. “What I need you to do is make sure the next time you get snatched for your annual ass kicking, you maybe do it someplace that doesn’t have a State Department travel advisory issued on it. Like, say, Amsterdam, or even, perhaps Vancouver? I hear the Canadians are a very nice people. Very polite.”

Maybe lucky was an overstatement.

“It’s not annually.” And yeah, even Steve found that to be a weak argument.

“Fine, your, on average, twelve to eighteen month ass kicking. The point is, Steve, they don’t take place in top vacation destinations. And if you say, Hawai’i is a top vacation destination, I will punch you, because I guarantee a fucking warehouse in Sand Island is not on any Fordor’s-rated, must-see list.”

“It’s not like I choose these places, Danny. Evil people don’t tend to hang out with these very polite Canadians you’re talking about. They’re evil.”

“I’m just saying, it couldn’t hurt to ask, is all.”

“Go to sleep, Danny,” Steve ordered with a roll of his eyes.

“Even just avoiding an active war zone—“

“Good night, Danny,” Steve said with finality.

Danny blew a huff of warm air against Steve’s back, but he settled down and stayed quiet. Within a few minutes, his breathing had evened out into a soft, soothing rhythm.

Steve never slept, but he might have a dozed a bit. Mainly, he just drifted in his thoughts, good thoughts this time.

He thought about what he had always wanted, and what he really wanted, and how those two had transformed over the past seven and a half years. He thought about what he had lost, and what he had gained over that same period of time, and how there was a remarkable amount of overlap between what he wanted and what he had now. Then he thought about some of the things he still didn’t have-- a family of his own, kids to raise and eventually grandkids to spoil, someone to grow old with—and decided maybe he had those, as well, just not exactly how he’d always pictured it. And that? That was okay, in fact, he thought it might be fucking incredible.

As the sun rose, he turned his thought to how to get those last few things he still wanted, but still didn’t have. Mostly he kept thinking the same thing—‘I am alive, Danny is alive, we are living’, and they were living a great life. Steve knew they would live an even better one as long as they kept doing it together. They’d been conjugating a relationship, hell, a goddamn life together, all this time and never even realized it.

He knew he should get out of bed, go for a swim, or even just down stairs and make coffee. It was part of the plan, the agreement, the ‘no mutual morning wood’ deal he’d worked out with Danny several months back. The problem was, he didn’t want to leave. Danny still pressed into Steve’s back, his forehead a welcome weight between Steve’s shoulder blades, his arm draped across Steve’s waist. It felt goddamn amazing, and Steve’s growing hard on had nothing to do with spontaneous morning erections.

The pinks hues that filled the room slowly melted into a golden glow as the sun climbed a little higher. Steve imagined watching Danny sleep, watching the pink of sunrise tint Danny’s skin, then the yellow set off the highlights in his hair, but he didn’t dare roll over to see for himself for fear of disturbing the man so warm against his back. Eventually, Danny pulled in a deep breath and stretched as he started to wake. Steve released the loose hold he still had on Danny’s hand to trace his fingers lightly up Danny’s forearm and rub a small circle on the soft skin below Danny’s
elbow.

In response, Danny flexed his hand that rested on Steve’s stomach, found a patch of bare skin where Steve’s t-shirt had ridden up, and slowly crawled his fingers under the hem in search of more.

Steve rolled back slightly, just enough to feel Danny as hard as he was. Danny tilted his hips forward into the pressure, let out a sound something between a moan and a sigh, and lazily ran his nose up Steve’s neck until he pressed his lips behind Steve’s ear, not quite a kiss, just a point of heat that sent a shiver through Steve’s body. The action had Danny’s palm pressed flat against Steve’s stomach and pulling him in tighter.

Sliding his hand back down Danny’s arm, Steve found Danny’s hand again, interlocked their fingers, and moved their joined hands down to dip under the waist band of Steve’s sleep pants, so he could wrap Danny’s hand around his length. Steve inhaled sharply at the electric sensation of Danny’s skin on his, and with his hand still holding Danny’s, started pumping with long, slow strokes, just the way Steve liked it.

“Fuck, Steve,” Danny groaned at his ear, his voice rough with more than just waking, “you are such a goddamn control freak.” The complaint didn’t stop Danny from thrusting against Steve once more.

Steve grinned. He should have known Danny could find a reason to bicker even during sex. “Then you show me what you like,” Steve said, rolling over, hands still joined, to place Danny’s hand on his own erection, starting his hand moving when Danny just closed his eyes and bit his lower lip. Danny gasped, tilted his head back, and Steve wished he’d turned over sooner, because Danny was fucking gorgeous to see like this.

“Can feel my own hand anytime,” Danny managed to grind out, but he twisted his wrist on the upstroke in a way Steve put to immediate use, as soon as he released Danny’s hand and replaced it with his alone.

Danny wasted no time tugging Steve’s pajamas down, almost frantic to touch Steve again. Either Danny didn’t pay attention to what Steve was showing him before, or he didn’t care. Honestly, neither did Steve, because what Danny was doing was causing Steve’s eyes to roll back and had him making sounds that were downright embarrassing to be coming from a grown ass Navy SEAL.

Danny was making some spectacularly obscene noises, too, interspersed with a few, “Jesus, Steve,” and “Babe…fuck yes…like that.” Each outburst sent a jolt of heat to the base of Steve’s spine.

Steve tugged at Danny’s sleep pants, as well, pushed them down far enough to grip an exposed ass cheek, and pull Danny in closer until their knuckles were banging against each other. Danny got with the program pretty damn quick and maneuvered until he had his hand wrapped around both of them.

Steve could only drop his head on Danny’s shoulder with a loudly groaned, “Fuck…Danny,” and wrap his own shaking hand around Danny’s to squeeze, before trying to set a faster pace. Danny, for once in his goddamn life, didn’t argue, and obliged. Steve held on for dear life.

Steve could feel his orgasm building, knew he wasn’t going to last much longer, when Danny exclaimed a guttural, “Oh, Christ…Steve…,” and spilled hot over their hands. There was no way Steve could hold out after that. He tried to say Danny’s name, but choked on the first letter, and made some inarticulate sound into Danny’s neck instead as he came like a fucking teenager on prom night.

They lay panting, neither speaking nor moving, both their hands still wrapped around their slowly softening erections.

When he caught his breath, Danny released him, rolled to his back, and stared up the ceiling. “Well, so much for that plan.”
Steve always knew this was a possibility, that Danny would say no to begin with or have a minor freak out afterwards. Steve figured, if it came down to it, he could always blame the stress from the night before, beg it off as bad judgment from the remnants of the dream, and hopefully, move past it.

Danny tilted his head to give Steve a wary look, but Steve saw something more, something that made his stomach flip, and he dismissed any idea of trying to excuse away what just happened.

“It was a stupid plan,” Steve told him honestly, not even trying to hide the open affection he knew was showing on his face.

“It was a very stupid plan,” Danny agreed eagerly, already rolling back over and reaching for Steve again. “So goddamn stupid.”

It wasn’t until Danny’s tongue was in his mouth that Steve realized this was their first kiss, and man, was their breath rank. He didn’t give a shit, because it was Danny, and they were kissing, and it was the best kiss of his life for that reason alone. Steve mentally crossed off yet another want from his list.

“Okay, new plan,” Danny said, running his thumb along the stubble of Steve’s jaw when they finally parted. “First, we get up and brush our teeth, because seriously, it’s like something died in both our mouths during the night. Second, we come back into bed and spend the rest of the day proving how stupid the first plan was.”

Steve grinned, already leaning in for another kiss. “That’s a much better plan.”

“Remarkably better plan,” Danny agreed between kisses.

Steve had his hand twisted in Danny’s t-shirt to pull him even closer, but stopped. “Okay, where did you get this fucking shirt? It is the softest thing I’ve ever felt in my life.”

“You like that, do you?” Danny asked with a roll of his eyes. “It took you long enough. I bought it just so you’d want to touch it while I was wearing it.”

Steve shook his head in disbelief. “How did we ever come up with such a stupid plan to begin with?”

“Well, you, obviously, are an idiot,” Danny informed him.

Steve was too busy nuzzling into the fabric on Danny’s chest to argue the point. Of course, that’s when his cell phone rang. He’d given the team not only their normal Sunday off, since they’d lost most of Friday night and part of Saturday to the murder investigation, but also Monday, as well. Steve had been looking forward to two whole days with Danny even before the morning sex. Still, it could always be the governor calling, so reluctantly, he sat up to answer it.

Danny apparently knew it, too, since he sighed in exasperation and released his hold on Steve.

Leaning over to retrieve his phone from the nightstand, Steve ordered, “That shirt stays on.” Checking the number, he saw it was Jerry. “Everything else comes off, but that stays on.”

“Jerry,” Steve greeted. “What’s up?”

“I think I found something,” Jerry told him.

“Buddy, it’s Sunday, everybody’s day off, remember?”

“I do,” Jerry told him, “but I was online last night with one of my, shall we say, associates, and I think I may have something that could finally get us somewhere with Aoki. We can even act on it today.”

Steve had a moment’s hesitation, thinking about what he and Danny could be doing instead of dealing with Aoki. But if Jerry was right, they could maybe put this Aoki business to bed, and then get right back into this bed, and have even more to celebrate.
“Let me shower and I’ll grab Danny. Call the others. We’ll meet you at HQ in an hour.”

“You got it, boss,” Jerry promised.

Steve tapped the phone against Danny’s chest. “We may have a break with Aoki.”

“Duty calls,” Danny mumbled in disgruntlement, scrubbing at his face then up into his hair. He looked ridiculously adorable, and for once, Steve could do something about it.

“I did say I’d grab you in the shower.” Steve waggled his eyebrows, which made Danny laugh.

“You are a ridiculous goof,” he accused, eyes crinkling in that way that made Steve melt a little inside to see Danny genuinely happy.

“Oh, I’m a goof?” Steve couldn’t stop the grin, which could only be described as goofy, from spreading across his face. “You know who uses words like goof? Goofs. Especially when their hair looks as goofy as yours.” Steve raised the phone and snapped a photo.

“I hope for your sake you just saw another Nene,” Danny threatened.

“Just adding to my collection of Danny Williams’ hair gone wild photos.” Steve tossed the phone aside. “Ends up there’s almost no difference between the windblown and totally fuckable looks.”

“Yeah, well you can totally fuck off,” Danny snapped.

“That’s the plan.” Steve ignored the bitching, simply crawled over to kiss Danny with a wicked smirk. “Ready to get grabbing?”

“Oh, babe, we’re going to do a hell of a lot more than just grab,” Danny promised, tugging him closer.

“I am one hundred percent in favor of that plan,” Steve settled on top of Danny and nipped at his throat.

Danny tilted his head back to give better access to Steve’s mouth. “There’s just one problem, it’s going to take more than three minutes in the shower.”

“In cases of grabbing,” Steve told him happily, “I’m willing to make an exception. Besides, there are two of us, so we automatically get six minutes.”

Ends up, it took a lot longer than that. Steve couldn’t seem to find a reason to complain.

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

“So… guys?” Steve asked from behind the wheel of the Camaro.

Eddie sat in the backseat, watching the city pass by out the window, and Danny secretly wished he could be as oblivious to this conversation as the dog.

Danny knew this would eventually come up. Not that he didn’t have questions of his own; because based on what Steve had shown him already, there was no way the man was a novice around another man’s dick. However, Danny had hoped to have this conversation curled up in the afterglow of some mind-blowing sex, not on the commute to work.

“Yes, guys. I have experience in that arena,” Danny admitted.

“Well, obviously,” Steve shot a leering grin at him.

The fact that Danny found it endearing instead of annoying said a lot about how fucking head over heels he really was about the doofus. Honestly, it was a huge relief to be able to finally admit that, even to himself. There were only so many times he could blame the fluttery feeling he got when Steve smiled at him on indigestion, especially when he’d never heard of a medical case of heartburn leading to hard-ons.
“And I look forward to gaining even more experience with you,” Danny promised, “because while I have some, it’s not what you might call extensive.”

“Then previously, it was a one off?”

Danny sighed. For a man who had closed over a hundred cases with Five-0, Steve sucked at his current line of inquiry. Danny supposed he should consider himself lucky Steve hadn’t handcuffed him to the chair over the drain and threatened to shoot him in the leg if he didn’t give names, dates, and addresses for every one of Danny’s prior sexual partners.

“More than one, but not what I would call frequent.” Danny shifted in his seat, deciding he might as well spill it all. “There was this girl in college I had a thing for, and she, in turn, had a thing for watching two guys…together. Ends up, once things got going, I wasn’t as opposed to the idea as I thought I might be.”

Steve’s eyes widened. “So threesomes?”

Danny bobbled his head. “Not exactly. She’d sit and watch and … manage her own affairs, while Mike and I fooled around. It didn’t work out with her, but Mike and I would run into each other at parties a couple times a semester and, you know, reconnect for the evening. Then I met Rachel and that was that.”

“And this Mike, he was the only one?”

“After Rachel and I split up, I had a couple months where I decided to give up on women in general, so I had a few one night stands. Nothing serious. No one like you.”

It was the honest to God truth that no one, ever, had made him feel like Steve. Even Rachel, as much as he’d loved her, loved her still as the mother of his children, had never made Danny feel as whole as Steve did even before the sex. Add what had happened that morning, that absolute exclamation of ‘finally!’ that sang through his entire body when he’d been allowed to touch and taste Steve, and Steve had done the same in return, it made Danny feel like he was able to breathe again, even though he hadn’t realized he’d been holding his breath for all these years.

Although Danny’s breath did catch to see the look of fucking adoration that was on Steve’s face. “Oh, what is that?” Christ, he was going to have to come up for a name for this one, too, if he kept it up.

“What?” Steve asked with a frown, and Danny wished he’d never said anything, wished the face was back.

“The face. The Love Struck Puppy face.” Danny sighed dramatically. “You can’t look at me like that in public. People will know what’s going on with us if you do.”

“And we don’t want people to know what’s going on between us?” Steve asked, maybe a little defensive.

“I don’t know. Do you want to go public so soon?”

“So soon? You think we should wait? See if this is going to work out? Do you think it might not work out?”

Yeah, Steve was more than a little defensive.

“Steve, Steve, wait, stop.” Danny squeezed Steve’s thigh and left his hand resting there, because he could, and he wanted to, and Jesus, the intersection of those two concepts had been a long time coming. “I was the one who had visions of us sitting on the beach together at ninety years old. My subconscious has us pegged as an old married couple already. I am one hundred percent all in. But you are also sort of a public figure. The task force makes the news all the time. And since you haven’t exactly been an out and proud Navy SEAL, I don’t know how much you want to publicize…you know…us.”

The way Steve sat silently wearing Complex Math Face, Danny realized this was the first time
he’d actually thought about this. Danny should have known Steve would leap into this without thinking of the ramifications; he literally did that off of buildings with a terrifyingly frequent regularity.

“You’re not the first guy I’ve been with either, Danny,” Steve said, as if that was explanation enough.

“The blow job you gave me in the shower kind of clued me into that, babe,” Danny told him with a grin. “Okay, tell me, are there any long, lost, secret loves that might be coming out of the wood work since the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell I should be worried about?”

Steve gave a small shrug. “I’ve always been attracted to both men and women, but I’ve always dated more women. I’m not sure if that was because I preferred women, or it was easier while I was on active duty. I mean, ANA, Annapolis, all my assignments in the Navy, it wasn’t exactly easy to have any sort of romantic relationship with anyone, but especially not with another guy. Sure, sex, you could always find a willing partner for that, but not more than that.”

Danny had no doubt Steve had more than his fair share of willing partners throughout his teens and twenties. He still practically dripped with sexual pheromones at forty-one, for Christ’s sake. Still, Danny couldn’t help but comment dryly. “I’m sure you were a magnet for willing partners from both sexes, Steven.”

“Yeah, but none of that meant anything. The only other person, man or woman, I’ve ever been close to being serious about, besides you, was Catherine, and you know how that turned out.”

Danny had actually always liked Catherine, even though he hated how she’d broken Steve’s heart by staying in Afghanistan. Then he kind of hated her for how she’d come back and did it all over again. Now he realized, maybe, there was more to his reaction than just looking out for his best friend’s feelings.

“Steve, I’m not going to pull some stunt like that on you,” Danny promised.

“I know, Danny, I do.” Steve gripped Danny’s arm. “And that’s why now that we finally got our heads out of our collective asses and did this, I don’t want to go back. I’m tired of waiting around for the right person when you’ve been here all along. We’ve been making plans all this time with the restaurant and our retirement. I mean, who makes long-term retirement plans with someone who is just a friend? We’ve been idiots, Danny, but no more. What I’ve wanted for a long time now is you, us, the long term us, the old men on the beach, and I sure the hell don’t want to hide that.”

“Then we won’t hide it,” Danny told him simply, feeling warmth spread from head to toe.

Steve gave Danny’s hand a squeeze then parked the Camaro in its typical parking spot at the Palace. When they had both climbed out of the car, and Steve had pulled back the seat to let Eddie out, Steve asked, “Hey, Danno, when you saw us as old men, how was my hair?”

Danny crinkled his nose. “I have to tell you, it looked a lot better than it does now, babe.”

Steve grinned across the top of the car. “Yeah, but you still love me.”

“God help me, but I do,” Danny admitted with a smile of his own that just wouldn’t leave his face the entire trek across the parking lot and through the lobby of the Palace.

The three of them were waiting for the elevator when Danny asked, “So what do we do now? Do we tell the team?”

Steve frowned at the questions. “What? Like make an official announcement?”

“You’re the one who said you didn’t want to hide it,” Danny pointed out, stepping into the elevator when the doors slid open. “I’m just asking about the logistics.”

The doors closed with just them in the elevator car. Steve stood with crossed arms as he glanced across Eddie at Danny. “Logistics? We’re dating; not preparing for a major deployment.”
Danny rolled his eyes. “Logistics, Steve. To plan, to organize. I just want to know how you plan to do this when we get inside.”

Steve considered for the rest of the short ride. “We tell them,” he said decisively as he stepped into the hallway.

“By we, do you mean you?” Danny clarified.

“By we, Danny, I mean we, you and me, we tell them together.”

“So what? We count to three and say, ‘Good morning, everyone. Since we last saw you, we have gotten to ‘know’ each other in the Biblical sense’?”

“I don’t remember a lot of guy on guy action in the Bible, Danny,” Steve pointed out.

“Then what do we say?” Danny demanded, because this was not as easy as Steve seemed to think it would be.

Apparently, Steve came to that conclusion, as well, because he paused with his hand on the handle to the glass doors that led into HQ. Inside, Danny could see the rest of their team gathered around the tech table. Eddie, in the meantime, looked anxiously at Steve, waiting for him to open the door.

“Oh, so maybe we should wait, figure out exactly how we want to do this,” Steve relented.

“That sounds like a good idea.” Danny nodded in agreement.

Eddie looked at Danny, as if maybe he’d be the one to open the door.

“At least until after today,” Steve continued.

Seeing that Steve was still working through this, Danny put his hands in his pockets and swayed. “One day’s deferment. That’s seems a reasonable time to wait.”

Eddie gave up on Danny and turned his attention back to Steve.

Steve still stood with hand on the door handle. “If we’re going on a raid, we don’t need everyone being distracted by this sort of news.”

“Makes sense.” Danny granted patiently. Sometimes it was just best to let Steve have the time to work through these situations.

Steve still didn’t open the door. Eddie gave a small whimper of protest. Danny could see Tani and Junior craning their necks to try to see what he and Steve were doing standing in the hall for so long.

“So that’s the plan?” Danny confirmed, hopefully to get things moving. “We wait and don’t say anything today?”

Steve gave one decisive nod of his head. “That’s the plan.”

“And we’re in full agreement on this?” Danny reiterated. “You’re not going to go in there and blurt something out about me being the best lay of your life or anything like that?”

Steve’s lips quirked. “I’ll do my best to restrain myself.”

Danny couldn’t help the humor that spread across his own face. “I know it’ll be hard, but I have faith in your resilience. Alright, let’s do this.”

“We’re doing this,” Steve agreed, as he opened the door, and they both strode in like they had a million times before. Eddie bounded ahead to happily greet everyone else.

“Well, it looks like the gangs all here,” Danny noted cheerfully, taking in Jerry, Tani, Junior, Lou, and even Adam.
Steve slapped a hand on Jerry’s shoulder. “Jerry, my man, what do you have for us?”

“Somebody got up on the happy side of the bed,” Lou noted, taking a sip of coffee.

“Two somebodies,” Tani added with a suspicious narrowing of her eyes.

“What?” Steve laughed nervously. “What’s wrong with being happy?”

Danny did his best not to pinch the bridge of his nose at how fucking guilty Steve sounded. Five years of Naval Intelligence, his ass.

Danny stepped in to save him. “Look, I know it’s our day off, and I’m sure we all have things we’d rather be doing.” He absolutely did not look at Steve when he said it, since the man was the one thing Danny would rather be doing at the moment. “But if Jerry found something we can use to put Aoki away and this case to rest, then I, for one, am happy to be here.”

Steve squeezed Danny’s shoulder. “Thank you, buddy, I couldn’t have said it better myself. Jerry, do you want to bring us up to speed?”

Jerry glanced at Steve’s hand still resting on Danny’s shoulder. “Uh, yeah, sure boss.”

Shrugging out of the touch, Danny took a step away to lean against the table.

Jerry pulled up several pages of analytical data on the big screen. “So I sent the lab results from the refrigeration truck explosion to one of my contacts on the dark web. The guy is an expert when it comes to explosives and bomb making.”

“Let me get this straight,” Danny interrupted as the alarm bells started sounding in his head. “You have a friend on the dark web who builds bombs?”

“I wouldn’t necessarily call him a friend,” Jerry clarified. “But the guy knows his stuff. Personally, I think he’s a professor at one the east coast Ivy Leagues, but yeah, we should all consider ourselves lucky he uses his powers for good.”

“As far as you know,” Danny added, because there was no guarantee this character wasn’t mailing letter bombs to his neighbor over how mowed his lawn.

“What did he find?” Adam asked to keep Jerry on track.

Jerry zoomed in on one line of the test results. “This puppy here. It’s a polymer. I always thought maybe it was from something in the truck body, but my guy says it’s a lot less common than that. He thinks it’s possible that whoever was making the acetone peroxide was trying to develop some sort of stabilized compound.”

“That’s the problem with the explosive,” Steve noted. “It’s cheap and relatively easy to make, hard to detect, but it tends to blow up the people making it before it can be deployed.”

“Exactly,” Jerry agreed before he continued. “But what if you could lower the shock sensitivity and make it a whole lot safer to transport, maybe then you just need to store it at cooler temperatures for heat sensitivity?”

“Like a refrigerated truck,” Junior chimed in.

“If the stabilizer isn’t that common, how much is used on the island?” Steve asked.

“There are twenty-four companies I found that have placed orders for it over the last year.”

“Two dozen companies.” Danny shook his head. “That’s a lot of searches to execute.”

“I, personally, was hoping to take my wife out to dinner tonight. Any way to narrow it down?” Lou asked.

“Way ahead of you,” Jerry promised as he brought up a home page for a local business. “This is
Hawai’i Hearts, they make herbal supplements and essential oils. They’ve been in business for about nine months.”

“And I take it they’ve been ordering the polymer?” Tani asked.

“Received their first order about three months ago,” Jerry confirmed.

Adam studied the business records on the table more closely. “What does a natural supplement company want with a polymer?”

“Good question,” Jerry agreed. “Give you one guess as to the name of the company they hired to transport it from the cargo docks, though.”

“Lawe’ana Trucking,” Danny answered, “although that’s not exactly an iron clad connection to Aoki. For all we know, the essential oils are just essential oils.”

“True,” Jerry admitted, “except for the commercial lab and production facility that Hawai’i Heart leases is owned by Warren Reality.” The lease agreement appeared on the screen. “And the leasing agent was none other than Joseph Warren.”

“That could have been how Warren got involved with the traffickers in the first place,” Lou noted.

Danny couldn’t help but smile at Jerry. “You found the door to get our foot in.”

“Is it enough to get a warrant?” Adam asked.

“Depending on the lease, we may not need a warrant,” Danny explained, excitement building that they may finally have Aoki, after all. “Jerry, give me some good news.”

Jerry pulled up the rental agreement. “Per the lease, the use of the property and the business conducted thereon must comply with all laws and regulations applicable to the property. Furthermore, the landlord, or the landlord’s designated agents, have the right to enter the premises to conduct reasonable investigations to ensure that no violations are occurring.”

“Wait a minute,” Steve said in dawning understanding. “So if the Warren’s own the property, they can give us permission to search it?”

“If they designate us as their agents.” With a flick of his wrist, Jerry brought up the fully executed document on the screen, complete with the Warren’s signatures. “Which they have.”

“It’s the right form number and everything.” Danny beamed to see the completely legal and police-manual-compliant form. “I think this might be the happiest day of my life.” He jabbed a finger at Steve. “You, pay attention, this is how true police work is done.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but there, goddamn it, there it was again—Love Struck Puppy face. Danny glared, Steve blinked once in confusion then his expression became serious.

Maybe no one noticed. Maybe they were all too busy thinking about raiding the Hawai’i Hearts facilities to see Steve’s stupid heart laid out in all its stupid, wonderful glory.

“Good work, Jerry,” Steve said in his best Lieutenant Commander voice. “Alright, let’s gear up —”

“Oh my God!” Tani exclaimed, “You two did it! That’s why you’re both so damn happy today!”

“Did what?” Steve tried, and failed miserably, to play dumb. Which was quite an accomplishment considering it was his dumb face that gave it all away.

“I’m sorry, boss, but don’t even try to deny it.” Tani crossed her arms with a shake of her head. “I just can’t figure out if it was only a heavy-petting, make-out session, or a full on O-face event.”

“Oh, Lord,” Lou mumbled.

“Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa!” Danny waved his arms. “Tani, let’s watch the language. Not in front
Steve, for his part, was pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes.

Junior, possibly because of Danny’s SEAL comment, but probably because he had more than a bit of hero worship for Steve, said, “Commander, I just want you to know, even before the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, I would have supported you and Detective Williams completely.”

Taking a deep breath, Steve dropped his hands to rest on his hips and nodded. “Thanks, Junior. Not that we needed your approval, but I appreciate the open-mindedness.”

“Absolutely, sir.”

Lou had pulled his phone and used it to gesture toward Adam. “I’m texting your wife.”

“What? Now?” Danny demanded. “This can’t wait until after we take down the bad guys?”

“She owes me fifty bucks,” Lou told him.

“Only if this is the first time,” Adam stressed. “Is this the first time, or did you, maybe, have sex about two years ago?”

“Two years...?” Steve looked to Danny in shock, before turning back to Adam with a shake of his head. “No, we didn’t sleep together two years ago!”

Lou had a huge grin on his face and his hand out. “Haha! Pay up.”

“Actually,” Jerry added, “I think we need to call Max. He had sometime between Hanukkah and Lunar New Year in the pool.”

Danny threw up his hands. “So much for not telling them until later.”

Leaning over the tech table, Steve hung his head in disbelief. “No more plans,” he told Danny. “None of them seems to work anyway.” Trying to get things back under control, Steve raised his voice. “Okay, okay, let’s get it together and go do what we’re paid to do.”

“You have a hot date or something to get to?” Lou teased.

“As a matter of fact, I do,” Steve said, snatching the front of Danny’s shirt and pulling him into an unexpected kiss.

Danny was definitely caught off guard, but when he heard the whoops and whistles from the peanut gallery, he cupped the back of Steve’s head and kissed him back enthusiastically, if all too quickly. Even Eddie joined in with a bark at the uproar.

Steve’s smile was dazzling when he pulled away. Danny didn’t know if it was from the kiss, or the fact that everyone now knew. Probably a little of both, Danny decided.

Danny raised his eyebrows at Tani, who was shaking her head in disbelief, even as she clapped. “You jealous? Wanting a little action yourself? Because I’d be careful, Steve’s a possessive guy.”

Steve, meanwhile, was taunting the rest of team. “Okay, we good? Everybody enjoy the show? You like that? Good. Then gear up. Lou, call SWAT, I want them standing by in case we run into any resistance. Jerry, you’ve got coms. Adam, you’re with us. After we clear the buildings, I want you seeing what you can find to connect Aoki and the company. Let’s go, people, let’s move.”

The Hawai’i Hearts company resided in a small complex of three buildings on the windward side of the island. Records showed they only employed about twenty-five people, most working in the production factory that was in one building along with a small laboratory. There was also a warehouse with a cargo dock, and a third small administrative building that, according to the blueprints, had a reception area, eight offices, and a conference room.

They established incident command a few blocks away, out of view of the facility, which was set
back from the main road about a hundred yards. Junior had reconed ahead, reporting that they looked closed for business, as expected on a Sunday, but there were two gunmen patrolling with assault rifles outside the warehouse.

“That seems a little overkill for your typical weekend guard patrol,” Tani observed.

Adam raised an eyebrow at the news. “Must be some valuable oils in there.”

Lou walked up, shotgun draped across his arms, and reported, “Bomb squad just arrived.”

“Adam, you stay here. Wait for the all clear,” Steve ordered, then turned to Lou. “We’ll take a team of SWAT in with us, leave the rest as backup.”

Danny had brought Steve one of his endless supply of black t-shirts to change into, and wondered for the millionth time when he had become the man’s valet. Not that he ever complained about the view when Steve stripped out of his button down.

Leaning in close when he handed over the shirt, Danny murmured, “You, me, and those tats have an appointment later, so try not to get any internal organs obliterated today.”

Steve patted at Danny’s vest, game face firmly in place. “Same goes for you.”

Steve gave a quick once over of Tani and Junior, kind of like Danny always did with Grace and Charlie before they went into the ocean to make sure all the proper safety precautions had been taken. “Okay, everybody know the plan? We secure the warehouse then Lou, Tani, and Junior take the production facility, Danny, Eddie and I will take the admin building. Two SWAT with each Five-0 team. Got it?”

Getting a nod of confirmation from each person, Steve ordered, “Okay, move out.”

Danny felt the rush of adrenaline as he followed close on Steve’s heels, gripping his MK-18. One of the gunmen took a stand, but he went down with a single shot from Steve’s own assault rifle. They cleared the warehouse quickly after that, Eddie performing a final sweep, and found nothing more than boxes of tiny bottles of oil.

“There was another guard,” Danny reminded.

“Yeah, I know,” Steve assured, not looking very happy that the guard had disappeared.

Danny hoped he’d just run, decided the pay wasn’t worth dying over. More than likely, he was calling in backup.

Tani opened yet another box and held up a bottle of lavender oil. “Why did they need a guard on this?”

“We’ll have the lab process it once we’re done,” Steve told her. “Maybe it’s not just lavender oil in here.”

Tani carefully replaced the bottle at the implications that it could be a much more dangerous liquid.

They split up after that. Normally, an administrative building would be the least of their concerns, but that’s where they would have the best chance of finding any ties to Aoki, and they couldn’t risk the destruction of any records.

Danny and Steve, along with the two Swat members, jogged across the empty parking lot, with Eddie trotting close to Steve’s side. They paused behind a large generator bank to check for any other guards who might be patrolling the building, but saw none. Steve sent SWAT to check the perimeter and enter through the back, while Steve and Danny entered the building through the front doors. As expected, they found the reception area empty, and the building dark. Steve sent Eddie ahead, and they moved systematically through the six offices, finding no one. Something, though, wasn’t sitting right with Danny.
Eddie, in the meantime, was clawing at a spot on the floor in the waiting area. Looking closer, they could see the seam of what appeared to be a trap door; the lines of the planking in the wood flooring easily concealed it.

“There has to be a release somewhere,” Steve said, already looking around the room.

“Check behind the desk,” Danny told him, as he searched the wall for any sort of switch.

Steve was behind the reception desk, and must have found it, because there was a distinct snick and a whoosh, like they had just broken the seal on whatever was below the hatch. Steve ordered Eddie back as one end of the hatch started to rise, lifting a four-foot by eight-foot piece of flooring into a forty-five degree angle to reveal an empty space below. Steve and Danny trained their weapons into the opening. It was dark, but Steve shone his flashlight in what appeared to be a space about the size of a walk-in cooler. In fact, by the cool air coming up, that might be exactly what it was. All Danny could see in the narrow beam of light were walls lined with shelves that held small boxes, although these were different from the ones in the warehouse.

“I don’t know about you,” Danny said, “but I don’t remember seeing that on the blueprints.”

“Me either,” Steve agreed, and started to head down the small wooden stairway of six steps that led into the space.

Before Danny could protest that the last refrigerated unit they’d come across had exploded, Lou’s voice came across the radio. “Steve, we found the other guard.”

“He alive?” Steve asked.

“For now,” Lou told him. “He’s going to need a hospital soon, though. So if you want to talk to him first, you better get over here.”

“Copy that.” Steve looked torn between staying and checking the space they’d just found, and questioning the guard.

“Go,” Danny told him. “I’ll handle this until you get back. Send the bomb squad, there’s a good chance there are explosives down there.”

“You sure?” Steve asked, seeming relieved Danny had recognized the danger the room presented.

“I’ve got Eddie and two members of SWAT,” Danny dismissed. “And nobody is going down there except the bomb techs. I think we can handle it.”

“Okay, I’ll be back in a few.” When Eddie started to follow, Steve ordered, “Eddie, stay. Keep Danno out of trouble.”

Danny rolled his eyes at the command and the accompanying grin then Steve was gone.

Danny took a few steps back from the edge of the stairs and peered into the dark space. Then he tried to figure out what was still bugging him about this building. “Jerry, how many offices are there supposed to be in here?”

“Eight and a conference room,” Jerry reported back.

“There were only six,” Danny informed him, “and no conference room.”

“Hold on,” Jerry said, “Let me check the drawings again.” A few seconds later, Jerry reported, “There are two offices and a conference room running along the whole right side of the building when you walk into the reception area.”

“There’s nothing but a wall with display cases full of herbs and flowers and nature crap.” Danny waved his hands to encompass all the aforementioned crap.

“Don’t know what to tell you, boss man, that’s what the drawings show.”

Well, if there was a button for a secret vault in the floor, maybe there was a button for a secret
vault hidden by the display cases. Behind the reception desk, Danny found the button Steve had pushed for the floor, then adjacent to it, another one. He pushed it, and a section of the display cases moved forward then started sliding slowly sideways.

“Hey, guys, I found something,” Danny called through his radio, walking around the desk and peering into the opening. “It looks like it’s another lab.”

Steve said something, but Danny raised his gun when a young man in a lab coat walked by the newly revealed door. “Five-0! Show me your hands!” Beside him, Eddie’s hackles rose, and the dog growled menacingly.

The man looked stunned to see Danny standing there, dropped the tray of…shit, were those diamonds?...he was carrying, and raised his hands. Then he glanced to his right.

Danny had just enough time to think, ‘Fuck!’ before another man, this one with an automatic weapon of his own, appeared and started firing. Danny dove behind the raised hatch in the floor for cover the same time the lab technician bolted for the front door. Eddie ran off in pursuit. The guy with the big gun, however, stayed right where he was.

“Danny!” Steve was yelling in his ear.

“I could use a little help here,” Danny yelled back, leaning to return fire around the hatch. “Eddie went after a runner, but I’m kind of pinned down here.”

“Hold on, we’re on our way!” Steve promised. Danny could hear him breathing hard as he ran.

One of the SWAT team burst through the front door and began firing at the shooter who was still standing in the door to the lab. Danny could hear glass shattering from where he huddled on the first step behind the hatch, and thought that probably wasn’t good, considering these people were supposedly making explosives.

The shooter in the lab finally went down from SWAT, but Danny felt two sharp wasp stings to his back that knocked the air from his lungs. Thanks to his vest, the bullets didn’t enter his lungs, but the force of the impact sent him tumbling down the stairs and into the opening in the floor. Cold air and darkness enveloped him, and stars exploded behind his eyes when he landed and slammed the back of his head on a concrete floor.

“Da…ny…what….. ned… ”

Either the radio on his vest had been hit by the gunshots he’d just taken, and thank God for body armor, or the reception was being blocked by the room he was in, because Steve was breaking up badly.

“Vest….” Danny managed to groan, trying to reassure Steve. “Okay…,” although the room tilted sickeningly when he tried to push up. Yeah, he’d really whacked his head but good.

Steve was still calling him, and Danny could hear his voice growing frantic, even though he couldn’t pick out clear words through the static.

“Steve?” His head was throbbing, and if possible, the room grew darker for a second. “D’you hear me?”

A silhouette filled the opening of the hatch above him, split into two, merged back to one when Danny blinked. Danny went silent, patting unsuccessfully for his rifle he’d dropped in the fall. He knew how dark the space was, knew whoever stood at the top of the stairs couldn’t see him without a flashlight. Danny didn’t know who it was, but given the shape of the gun he held as he took a step down, Danny knew he wasn’t part of his team or SWAT. Pulling his sidearm from his holster, Danny fired off three quick rounds, aiming for what he thought was center mass in hopes of hitting the blurry shape. The shape tumbled forward the same time a blinding light and massive wave of pressure and sound consumed his world. His final thought before everything was swallowed in a smothering, black weight was, ‘This sure the hell isn’t going to help with Steve’s
Steve had started running as soon as he heard the first gunshots sounding in stereo through his radio, as well as on the other side of the complex. The rest of his team was hot on his heels, but he really didn’t care, his one and only thought was to get to Danny. The grunts of pain he heard from Danny had him calling again, threatening to kick his ass if he didn’t answer him, but the only answer he received was static. Out of the corner of his eye, Steve saw Eddie leap onto a man in a white lab coat at the far edge of the parking lot, and Steve just pushed himself to run faster. He vaulted over a parking bumper at the edge of the lot, called to Danny again with nothing but more static for a response. He heard three sharp reports from a gun being fired inside the building, told himself that Danny absolutely did not just get shot again. His lips were forming Danny’s name yet again, when he was thrown backwards by the blast that took out the administrative building in a massive ball of flame.

Steve landed hard on his back on the pavement, shook off the disorientation, rolled so he could push up, only to see nothing but total destruction where the admin building had been. The building where he’d left Danny.

“NO!” he screamed, eyes wide in shock and terror and how, how, how the fuck did that happen when Danny was still inside?

“DANNY!” Steve was fighting to gain his feet, felt something, someone holding him down. He swung his elbow back and connected with flesh. Heard a grunt of pain and a curse, but Steve was staggering to his feet, and that was all that mattered.

“DANNY!” he yelled again, getting his feet under him at last, praying, pleading, that some miracle would happen, and Danny would answer him through his radio.

Behind him, he heard Lou yelling, “Junior, stop him!”

A solid weight tackled him, took him down hard onto the pavement with a heavy thud. “No!” he screamed again, swung a fist once more, connected, but this time the restraining hold didn’t loosen. The Navy had trained Junior to stop a target at all costs, regardless of any personal harm he might suffer. Steve knew the younger man wasn’t going to let go.

Even that fact didn’t stop Steve from fighting with everything he had, never taking his eyes from the burning building.

“Let go! Danny!”

“Sir, you can’t go in there.” Junior was trying to reason with him.

But Danny was in that fucking inferno.

“Danny! No!”

Another set of hands were on him, smaller, feminine, but still holding him firmly in place. “Boss, you need to stop.”

“Danny!”

Danny was in that Hell come to Earth.

Large arms circled around Steve, hugging him tight. “Steve, brother, we’ve got you.”

Somewhere in the distance, Steve could hear Eddie barking and barking in his own desperation.

“And Danny,” Steve choked out, felt the name lost in sobs, lost in the flames that filled his vision, lost in the fire that consumed his mind, lost, lost, lost…

And Steve was lost, too, in his own personal Hell.
In BUD/S, he’d spent days in the cold Pacific surf until his legs went numb, buried himself in the sand until his skin was raw, held a log over his head until he couldn’t feel his arms, then he did it all over again. He never got used to the pain and discomfort, but he learned to just deal with it. That’s really all he could do, just deal. He was doing his damnedest to deal right now.

He’d gone numb about the time the fire trucks rolled into the parking lot, let himself be led to one of the waiting ambulances. He sat obediently while the medics checked him over, bandaged a few scrapes, checked for a busted knee when he flinched when they hit a tender spot. Lou hovered, Tani paced a short distance away, and Junior had a hold on Eddie, who whimpered and jittered at the edge of the perimeter HFD had established, as if he was just waiting for permission to get back in the building to Danny.

At one point, Steve looked around from where he sat in the ambulance and asked, “Where’s the Camaro?”

Lou and Tani exchanged a glance, before Tani volunteered, “I’ll bring it around.”

It was a stupid thing, to want a car at a time like this, but it was Danny’s car, and Steve had always loved it because it reminded him of Danny…compact, fast, powerful, loud, and fucking obnoxious as hell when Steve got it going.

When Tani parked it and offered him the keys, Steve ignored them, climbed into the passenger seat instead. He slumped down, closed his eyes, and pretended it was the warmth of Danny against his back instead of sun-heated leather.

“What could be a while,” Lou told him calmly.

Not anymore, Steve added silently, then turned slightly in the seat to look toward the driver’s side instead.

The only easy day was yesterday. He’d learned that in BUD/S, too. Only, this morning had been so damn easy and right and perfect. The best goddamn day of his life turned to the worst in a matter of… what, hours?

Steve didn’t even know what time it was, but when he noticed the familiar photo clipped to the visor above the steering wheel, he had a moment of panic. “Rachel and the kids. Fuck, I need to be there, I need to tell her, and then I need to be there when she tells Grace and Charlie.” He sat up abruptly looking at his watch. It shocked him to see it had only been about half an hour since the explosion; it felt like it had been an eternity.

Danny had been there for moral support when Rachel told the kids about her and Stan’s divorce. Danny said telling Grace about his and Rachel’s own divorce had been the hardest thing he’d ever done. Steve envied him that conversation compared to the one he was going to have to have. Steve had been about Grace’s age when he’d been told his mom had died. If anyone knew the nausea inducing gut punch of news like that, it was Steve. He’d be there for them, Grace and Charlie, through this horrible fuckfest. He’d do it for the kids he loved, for Danny, for as long as they needed him, as long as…

“Oh, God, Lou,” Steve choked out, feeling the fear and pain and all out panic eating through the cocoon of numbness he’d been using as a retreat from the total fucking void that was now his life, “what if Rachel takes them back to New Jersey? Gracie and Charlie. What if I never get to see them again?”

Lou knelt down beside Steve, bracing himself on the open car door, Lou’s own face streaked with
tears. “Steve, listen to me. I know this is hard on you, man. It’s hard on me, too. But we are going to get you through this. Me and Renee, Adam and Kono, Chin, Tani, Junior, Jerry, Kamekona, all your friends. We love you. We are going to be with you every step of the way. I’m not going to lie to you and say it’s going to be easy, because it’s not. But we’ll be there, and you’ll take it one day at a time, brother. One day at a time. Right now, you need to take one hour at a time, one minute. Just take a minute for you. We’ll take care of Grace and Charlie, I promise you; we’ll take care of Danny’s babies. You and me, we’ll go there together, but not right now. Right now, I need you to take a minute for you. Alright?”

Steve nodded briskly, felt the sting of tears, leaned his head back against the seat, and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes as if that could stop them from flowing again.

Jesus, he was tired of losing people he loved. Steve had spent a big chunk of his life thinking his mom was dead, and then he’d lost Freddy and his dad within days of each other. Even Aunt Deb, who had been the closest thing he’d had to a mom since he was a teenager, was gone. Now, he’d lost Danny. Danny, who had been so goddamn easy to love that Steve hadn’t realized he was in love with him until it was too late.

Steve took several breaths to calm himself, and he felt the cold, deadened sensation ease back into his mind. He wanted to close his eyes and sleep for an eternity, but he doubted he’d ever sleep again without Danny in his bed. He wanted to scream and fight and run until his lungs burned as hot as the fire that taken everything from him, but that hadn’t done him one damn bit of good trying to get to Danny. He wanted to hurt the people responsible, make them hurt as bad as he did, make them wish for death, make them dead.

That he could do.

He opened the glove compartment, saw the Sig Sauer he usually kept in there was gone. Realized his own sidearm was missing from the holster, and wondered if it was Lou who had told Tani to take them, or if she’d come up with that on her own.

The thing was, they didn’t need to worry about Steve hurting himself, at least not until he killed Aoki and any other motherfucker he could tie to what happened here today. Steve felt all sorts of helpless right now, but taking out Aoki was something he could do. He was good at a lot of things, but killing he fucking excelled at. The United States government had made damn sure of that.

The fire in the building was out now, and Steve could see the full extent of the damage. The entire right side of the building was gone; what hadn’t been blown away by the initial explosion had burned down to the mangled, metal-reinforced structure that had formed the skeleton of the lab Danny had found. That frame, combined with the sprinkler system, had spared much of the left side from burning to the ground, but every window and big chunks of the walls had blown out in the explosion.

Steve swallowed down threatening bile at the thought of Danny still being alive when the intense, chemically-driven fire broke out. What a hell of a choice to hope he’d died in the blast or from a gunshot instead. He’d have to wait for the report from Neolani, who stood soberly awaiting the all clear to enter to crime scene, to know for sure.

Eric arrived while the hazmat team was still checking the lab area for any remaining chemical hazards. Steve heard him going, what Danny called, ‘full E-Train, angel wings on his ass, Jersey Shore’ on Duke, who was maintaining a working perimeter for the HFD. Eric was demanding they let him in to start his investigation, threatening to call one of his uncles, who he claimed had lots of unsavory connections back in Jersey, if they didn’t let him, even as his voice cracked with emotion. Steve hoped they’d let Eric in since Duke had already told them Five-0 was officially banned from the building until the Fire Marshall concluded his inspections. But Eric was Danny’s family, and since Steve couldn’t go in, Eric was the next best thing. Danny deserved to have someone who loved him be there when they…

Christ, he just couldn’t think about it, or he was going to fucking lose it again.

Another familiar voice had Steve opening his eyes. “Boss?” Jerry asked.
“Jerry?” Steve took in the big guy in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

Jerry shrugged uncomfortably. “I gave Eric a ride. Didn’t think he should be driving after I told him what happened. Besides, it just seemed like I should be here, you know, with the rest of the team. That okay?”

“Yeah, of course,” Steve told him, understanding completely. “No, man, I’m glad you came.”

A wet nose rubbed against Steve’s wrist, and he looked down to see Eddie pushing under his hand. Steve obliged, giving Eddie a rough pet and scratch behind his ears. “Hey, boy. You miss him, too, don’t you?”

Junior walked up, hitching a thumb over his shoulder. “Looks like they’re going to let Dr. Cunha go in soon. Eric, too.”

Steve could see the unasked question on Junior’s face, which he just noticed was sporting an impressive bruise thanks to Steve’s first. Rubbing Eddie’s head again, Steve told the younger man, “Take Eddie in. He might be able to help Neolani with the recovery.”

Junior sounded relieved when he answered, “Yes, Sir.” Taking Eddie by his lead, Junior jogged toward the now charred building. Steve knew the feeling that drove both Eddie and Junior, the need to just do fucking something.

Danny wasn’t the only one missing. A SWAT member was unaccounted for, there were possibly more people in the lab, and then there was the shooter Danny had engaged. Steve remembered, belatedly, that Eddie had taken down one of the lab workers. He had no clue what HPD had even done with the guy. In fact, Steve had forgotten about the case entirely other than the desire to kill Aoki. He’d be dead before nightfall if Steve had anything to say about it.

Steve was torn between wanting the recovery team to find Danny and dreading when they did. When they called for a body bag, his heart started racing, and he, honest to God, thought he might throw up. He swung his legs out of the car, braced his forearms on his knees, hung his head, and concentrated on inhaling through his nose, exhaling through his mouth.

“Looks like they found Dodson from SWAT.” When Steve nodded in understanding, Lou’s large hand landed firmly on the back of his neck. “One minute at a time, Steve. We’re going to do this.”

Steve had seen victims of bombings before, what was still there sometimes less than what was missing. He’d seen the charred remains of friends and enemies alike. And now Danny was going to fall into one of those categories.

_Breathe, just fucking breathe_, Steve told himself.

Across the distance, Steve could hear Eddie barking, Junior calling for help moving some debris, someone else calling for a prybar, and then Junior, again, asking for light.

Then Eric was exclaiming, “Holy fuck, Uncle D!”

Steve buried his face in his hands… _They found him, they found him, just breathe…_ waiting for the call for another body bag.

“Sir, are you okay?” Junior asked in surprise, before yelling louder, “Commander!”

Tani’s, “Oh my God, Danny!” had Steve raising his head. “Steve! Holy shit, Steve! Get over here! Steve!”

Looking toward the building, he saw Tani running into the ruins, saw Junior crawling out of the hole then reaching a hand down as several others crowded around and helped lift someone out, saw a flash of blond hair.

“Sweet Mother Mary,” Lou exhaled softly beside Steve.
“Lou?” Steve asked warily, afraid to trust what he was seeing, afraid he’d lost it completely and was hallucinating, then more anxiously. “Lou?”

“It’s him,” Lou confirmed in awe. “By God, it’s Danny.”

Steve stood, steadied himself on the car door while he watched Eric release the person he was embracing then step back to reveal Danny, all of him, standing, motioning toward the hole they’d just pulled him from as he said something to Junior. Tani nearly knocked Danny over when she rushed in and wrapped her arms around him.

Danny hugged back, although he seemed more confused by the act than anything. Dazedly, he let Eric and Junior lead him out of the building as he looked around, and asked, “Where’s Steve?”

Steve’s brain went straight into SEAL mode at that point, he had eyes on a high-value asset and he was going to secure the target at all cost. He was already walking briskly across the parking lot, his injured knee causing him to limp, but he quickly assessed the situation.

“Junior, check him, he’s bleeding,” Steve ordered, because Danny’s shirt sleeves were stained red, and fuck his knee, Steve needed to move faster. He broke into a jog.

Junior was easing off Danny’s vest, even as Danny protested, “It’s not my blood. The guy I shot bled out on me. He’s like the size of Kamekona…well, three quarters of a Kamekona…I’ve been trapped under him forever.”

After what seemed an eternity, Steve reached him. “You shot a guy?” Finally put his hand out and touched Danny, and he was real, fucking real, and alive, and talking, and fuck, fuck, fuck, he thought he might cry in relief, thought he might already be crying.

“Well to be fair, he shot me first,” Danny countered, looking at Steve with a worried expression. “You okay?”

Steve ignored the later, concentrated on the former. “He shot you? Where were you hit?”

“It hit my vest.”

“Where, Danny?” Steve demanded, already patting over Danny’s chest.

“My back,” Danny told him. “He shot me, I fell in the hole we found in the floor…”

Steve had already spun Danny around, lifted his shirt, and was checking his back. There were two purple bruises, but nothing more than that.

Danny, for his part, never stopped his summary of events. “…I shot him, he fell on me, evidently the building blew up, and I’ve been stuck down there since then.”

Steve was running his hands over Danny’s skin, checking for any more damage. “You’re cold. Why are you cold?”

“Because I’ve been stuck in a floor refrigerator all this time. It’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever seen. Who puts a refrigerator in the floor?”

“I don’t know, Danny,” Steve admitted, laughing to hear Danny bitching, because that meant he was alive. Goddamn, he was alive.

“Babe?” Danny reached up and thumbed a tear from Steve’s face.

Steve couldn’t help himself anymore; he pulled Danny in, and held him close against his chest. “Danny, Jesus, Danny,” he exhaled in a rush at Danny’s ear. Danny wrapped his arms around Steve in return, and Steve cupped the back of Danny’s head. He thought he was going to black out from happiness.

When Danny winced, Steve pulled back, but he’d already felt the goose egg on Danny’s head. “How’d you hit your head?”
“I fell down a flight of stairs, how do you think?”

“Did you lose consciousness?” Steve was checking Danny’s pupils.

“I think so,” Danny offered unsurely, “I must have. No clue how long.”

“Is that a diamond?” Tani asked, picking something off of Danny’s shoulder.

“The shelves in the room where full of them, they scattered everywhere.”

Danny tried to turn when he spoke to Tani, but Steve cupped his jaws and held him firmly in place to finish checking him over. His pupils were oversized, but at least even and reacting.

Eric took the small stone from Tani and held it up. “It’s a weird looking diamond. Cheap knock off at best.”

Steve ignored the conversation about diamonds, instead brushed his thumbs along the stubble on Danny’s jaw, watched the way Danny’s eyes softened in response and his eyelids fluttered when Steve leaned in…


Steve made room, but he took hold of Danny’s arm and wasn’t about to let go. Didn’t think he could even with a gun to his head. He slid his hand down to hold Danny’s hand tightly and bent in the middle because he actually felt a little light headed when Danny gripped back in return. Danny was honest to God alive!

Junior’s feet and Eddie’s head came into Steve’s field of view, and Steve straightened, took a step forward to wrap his free arm around Junior’s shoulder and give him a one armed hug. The act had both his and Danny’s arms stretched to their limits, but neither let go of the other’s hand.

“Junior, thank you, man. Thank you.”

Junior looked like he might actually be blushing, but he shook his head. “No, sir, this was all Eddie. I just helped move some debris where he showed us.”

Eddie was bounding happily at the attention, and Steve rubbed along the dog’s side. “Oh, Eddie, you are such a good boy for finding Danno. You are getting a whole goddamn bag of Snauasages tonight as a treat.”

Lou had released Danny, and now Adam was smiling happily as he pushed a phone into Danny’s hand.

“Hello?” Danny asked into the phone in confusion, then in surprise, “Kono?”

Adam was standing behind Danny and squeezing his shoulders as Danny talked to Kono, and Adam laughed out loud when Danny protested it wasn’t his fault she had lost fifty bucks to Lou.

Steve still had a white-knuckle grip on Danny’s hand, but it didn’t stop Lou from draping an arm around Steve’s shoulder. “Looks like you’re stuck with your boy after all.”

“You won’t hear me complaining about that,” Steve said in all sincerity.

“I’ll remind you of that when you two start arguing on the drive home,” Lou warned with a grin.

“I can’t wait.” Steve had never looked forward to anything more in his life. Danny, alive, bitching and complaining and arguing, and Steve would never take general pissieness for granted again in his life.

“Thank you, Lou. Seriously, I--” Steve’s attempted gratitude was cut off by a desperate tug on his hand by his partner. Jerry was hugging Danny so hard, Danny was groaning. “Steve…little help?”
“Jerry, man, okay, okay, ease up.” Steve was working a hand between the two men to pry them apart. “Let’s let him get some air.”

Danny was a tactile person. He touched an arm to get someone’s attention, slapped a back, draped an arm around a shoulder, squeezed a bicep, and yeah, he hugged on occasion. But all the touches, especially in public, were light, there and gone before you knew it, so it was no surprise when Danny exhaled in relief to be released.

Steve, however, immediately stepped in and reclaimed Danny in his arms. He had no intention of relinquishing his rightful claim anytime soon.

Danny patted Steve’s back. “Alright, here you go. One last one.”

“Danny, I’ve spent half the morning thinking you were dead,” Steve told him hoarsely. “This isn’t even the last one before lunch.”

Danny exhaled, wrapped his arms securely around Steve, and murmured, “Yeah, okay, fair enough,” then finally, finally, relaxed into the embrace.

If possible, Steve held him even tighter.

~H50~H50~H50~H50~H50~

It wasn’t that Danny didn’t like the guys on the bomb squad, it was that he would have liked them much more if he didn’t have to see them so often in their official capacity.

“So, Bullock, do you like Indian food?” Danny inquired of the man dressed out in full protective gear.

“I’ve been known to eat tandori chicken from time to time,” the sergeant told him as he collected residue swipes from Danny’s hands. “Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know, it seems like we see you so often, we should get to know you better.” Danny closed his eyes when the head of the bomb squad ran the small paper across his forehead. “Maybe we should go have dinner sometime, see you when we aren’t on the verge of blowing up. We know a good Indian place near here.”

“Has great achaara.” Steve added from where he sat shoulder to shoulder with Danny on the ambulance gurney.

“Yeah, the achaara is good.” Danny agreed then added the caveat, “when they have it. Sometimes they run out. A lot of times. Always have the riata, though.”

“Awesome riata,” Steve provided, “and killer naan. Love the naan.”

“Can’t go wrong with naan,” Danny said, and yeah, it was a lousy distraction from the fact that he might once again be on the verge of an explosion, but it was a distraction nonetheless.

“No offense,” Bullock said, placing the last swipe from Danny into the small plastic bag and sealing it, “but you two tend to attract a large amount of explosives. I’d be worried about having to work on my day off.” He turned his attention to Steve. “Your turn, Commander.”

Ends up the diamonds that had rained down on Danny in the refrigerated storeroom in the floor weren’t diamonds at all, but a stabilized explosive compound that exploded when it dissolved.

That’s what had caused the explosion in the first place, probably a result of all the shooting breaking containers of solvents in the lab, and the spilled liquid mixing with the stones the lab technician had dropped when he made a break for it. The fire investigators had figured that out about the time the ambulance Danny and Steve were riding in arrived at the emergency entrance to the hospital.

Tani and Junior met the ambulance…Danny didn’t even want to think about how fast Tani had been driving the Camaro to reach the hospital before they did… and told them Danny was now under quarantine until they could determine if he still had explosives on him. They also needed to
determine exactly how to get them off of him, if he did. It wouldn’t do to have him detonate because of the cleaners used during the decontamination procedure.

The driver and paramedic had left the ambulance, Steve, of course, had not. Danny wasn’t even sure Steve would let him go to the bathroom by himself after the scare he’d had, much less leave Danny to potentially blow up while he watched for the second time that day. Danny had tried to talk sense into Steve, but that was nearly impossible on a normal day, and today was anything but normal.

In fact, Steve had a minor freak out when their teammates told him Danny might be a walking bomb.

“Two of those things fell out of your hair at the site, Danny,” Steve reminded, as he climbed behind his partner on the gurney and started running his fingers through said hair from back to front. “You had tiny bombs in your goddamn hair.”

Danny had tried to protest, but he knew it was a lost cause. Steve was on edge like Danny had rarely seen him, and once he realized that everyone thought he’d been dead for over an hour, he understood why. Still, it didn’t make sitting still while Steve groomed him like a chimpanzee any easier.

“So you’re not even hiding your Neanderthal tendencies anymore, huh?” Danny complained as his hair was pushed forward into his eyes. “Going full on ape man now.”

“Bombs in your hair, Danny,” Steve reiterated.

“I swear to God, Steven, if you take another picture of me with my hair messed up—” Because the windblown look couldn’t hold a candle to the blown up look, Danny was sure.

“Bombs, Danny. In your hair.”

Danny may not have been able to see the Aneurysm Face, but he knew Aneurysm Voice when he heard it.

So yeah, best just to let Steve work out his anxieties, and hope he didn’t break out a pair of clippers and buzz Danny’s head down to a good approximation of a Brillo pad the same way he had his own. Fortunately, Bullock and the bomb squad showed up before he could.

Steve raised his feet so Bullock could start his swipes, adjusting the blanket around his shoulders when it slid down. “I thought acetone peroxide was undetectable.”

They had the air conditioning cranked to the max to keep the ambulance as cold as possible. The generator-powered cooler used for storage in the administrative building was the reason Danny was still alive. Not only had it protected Danny from the blast when the hatch was blown shut, but it had provided a source of fresh air and cooling against the fire, which had in turn, kept the explosives stored there from detonating. Since Danny might be covered in potentially heat-sensitive, explosive residue, he had foregone the blanket, opting to freeze his ass off as opposed to, you know, exploding.

“Using typical nitrogen detecting tests, it is,” Bullock agreed. “But since we know what we’re looking for, we can streamline the test for those compounds.” The sergeant finished up his swipes, then handed over a larger bag. “We’ll need your clothes”

“I’ll make sure you get them.” Steve told him, taking charge of the bag, because…Steve. “You need to get those tests run so we know what we’re up against.”

Bullock nodded as he headed out the back of the ambulance. “Alright. My guys should have finished up with the swipes on the rest of your team, so we can run them all together. Just open the door when you have the clothes bagged up, and we’ll come take them. Do a controlled blast.”

Bullock shut the door, and Danny sighed. “I really liked these shoes.”

“I’ll buy you new shoes,” Steve told him, even as he started unbuttoning Danny’s shirt with a
determination he typically reserved for weaponry. “New shirt, new pants, all of it.” He grimaced at the bloodstains on the sleeve. “Neolani is running the son of a bitch’s blood for any pathogens. If we need to, we can get you started on the right—“

Danny was a natural worrier. He worried about his kids, he worried about his family back in Jersey, and over the years, he’d worried about Steve, a lot. Steve, however, was just the opposite, had absolute faith that everything would work out absolutely. Typically, Danny lamented their imminent demise, and Steve told him to hold his shit together, they weren’t dead yet, and rescue was just around the corner. While Danny would never admit it out loud, and never ever to Steve, he kind of depended on Steve to be the optimistic force that let Danny cope with the shit they did every day. It was definitely throwing Danny for a loop that Steve was the one who needed the reassurances today. If nothing else, Danny could remember what Steve always did, and fake it for the time being.

“Hey, hey, Steve.” Danny decided to take a cue out of Steve’s own playbook. He stilled the hand working the buttons of his shirt by pressing Steve’s hand flat against his bare chest, right over his heart. “I love you.”

Steve had used that ridiculously simple statement, in the most earnest tone imaginable, to put an end to arguments with Danny on more than one occasion. Every damn time he said it, even when Danny knew he was being manipulated, it stopped Danny in his fucking tracks.

Steve, however, wasn’t being swayed from his task at hand. “I know, Danny, and I love you, too.”

Danny held tight to the hand under his when Steve started to pull away. “No, not like that. I mean, yes, like that, but not only like that.” He cupped Steve’s jaw to look him in the eyes. “I love you. I know I almost died today. What’s worse, you thought I died today, and I get it. Believe me, I get it because I’ve been where you are right now. After you were shot, and I landed the plane, all I wanted to do was hurt someone. Hurt the someone who hurt you.” Danny remembered the gun in his hand, the shooter on the ground, the temptation to squeeze the trigger, to put that motherfucker down... He shook his head to clear it of the memory. “I was a mess. I mean, maybe I was lucky I went into surgery because they sedated me, and I didn’t have to keep thinking about it, thinking how I might never get to see you again. So I just want you to know, to have no doubt in your mind. I love you.”

A small shudder passed through Steve, and it was almost like the night before when he’d finally seen Danny during his dream and the anxiety melted away. It was his Melting Butter on Toast face. Danny decided he really liked that one a hell of a lot, especially when Steve closed the small space between them to kiss him warmly.

Jesus, Danny had it bad for the goof, because it felt like it had been days since he’d last kissed Steve, when it had only been a few hours since they’d rolled out of bed that morning.

Steve pulled back just enough to murmur, “I know, Danno. I love you the same way. Think I have for a while now.” before returning his lips to Danny’s and running his hands along the exposed skin of Danny’s chest and abs as he continued to unfasten buttons.

“I guess that means we’re in love.” Danny ran his nose along Steve’s cheekbone. “We are in love, we have been in love.” He kissed Steve beside his left eye. “And you are loved, Steven, a ridiculous amount.”

“We will stay in love,” Steve reiterated as he nuzzled Danny’s jaw.

Danny found it amazing that he got to conjugate that particular verb with this particular man, especially in the future tense. “For life, babe.”

And who knew being the backup was simply code for being in love?

Steve gave him that smile that turned Danny’s heart to a melted chocolate bar, and his brain into a short circuit, and his dick into a steel rod. For a second, Danny could do nothing but stare at that stupid smile on that beautiful face in all its glory. Jesus, he was fucked. Finally, steel rod dick
won out, got his short circuited brain and melting heart to get with the program already, and Danny kissed Steve hard, right on his stupid, beautiful, glorious smile.

Steve apparently thought that was a great idea, given the small moan he made against Danny’s mouth as he kissed back. Danny obligingly shrugged out of the shirt when Steve pushed it off his shoulders, only breaking the kiss momentarily when Danny eagerly tugged at Steve’s t-shirt to pull it over his head. Then they were chest to chest, Danny deepening the kiss when Steve ran his hand down Danny’s bare back, skimming lightly over where he knew the bruises to be, and past the waistband of Danny’s boxers.

Danny nipped at Steve’s lower lip. “What about your rule about no sex after a near death experience?”

“Doesn’t apply,” Steve informed him as he squeezed an ass cheek. “We were in bed, planned to go back to bed. This was like a…rain delay.” Steve smirked wickedly at his analogy.

“Rain delay?” Danny grinned as Steve kissed down his neck. “Maybe if the Mets did this during their rain delays they’d have a better season this year.”

Steve meandered his way back to Danny’s lips as Danny’s hands were working at Steve’s belt buckle, then button and zipper of his pants. Steve groaned against Danny’s mouth when Danny cupped him through his cargos then slid his hand…

“Whoa! Hello!” Bullock said when he opened the back of the ambulance.

Steve jumped back in alarm, like he’d suddenly realized the adorable kitten he’d been petting was a plague-infested rat. He hit his head on the cabinet behind him, cursing as he knocked a piece of monitoring equipment on the floor. Finally, Steve turned his back as best he could, and seemed to be trying to zip his pants again.

Danny, even though he was only shirtless, felt the need to cover himself. He settled for crossing his arms across his chest. “We…uhm…we’re dating now,” Danny told the sergeant rather lamely.

“Really? Who would have ever guessed?” Bullock’s sardonic tone turned questioning. “Wait, what do you mean now? Like five minutes ago now?”

“No,” Steve snorted, as if that was the most ridiculous thing he’d ever heard. “It’s been since…this…you know…this morning.”

“This morning?” Bullock scoffed. “Are you shitting me? I thought you two had been together for five, maybe six years. At least back to that time with the terrorist with the proximity bomb.”

Steve threw his arms up in frustration, and then demanded of Danny, “Why do people keep thinking that we’ve been together for years?”

Danny could only shake his head with a shrug, because they really had been fucking clueless all this time.

“I’ll tell you why,” Bullock volunteered. “This is the second time you’ve refused to leave him during a bomb scare, and I would lay money that if you could have left him when you were trapped in quarantine you wouldn’t have. Most people who are ‘just friends’ don’t stand around waiting to die if they don’t have to. Speaking of which, I would not be working up any friction if I were the two of you. You both hit positive for residue. Everyone else came back clean. Speaking of which, I would not be working up any friction if I were the two of you. You both hit positive for residue. Everyone else came back clean.” He pointed at Steve. “Your levels were fairly low, McGarrett. Obviously cross contamination.” The sergeant waved a hand between the two of them. “No surprise how that happened. I’m also sure those levels have now increased since I took the samples.”

Steve was rubbing at his forehead, turning redder by the second. Still, he managed to keep his voice level when he asked, “So do they know how to safely decontaminate us yet?”

“Lab says it’s not water soluble. We’re setting up the kiddie pools and portable decon units now.” Bullock gave them a bright smile. “It’s Silkwood time, gentlemen.” He started to leave then
turned back. “Oh, and I still need those clothes. Can I trust you remove your own pants and not create any unnecessary heat while I’m gone? I mean, you’ll have your cold showers soon enough.”

“Yes,” Danny promised, “we’ll control ourselves.”

Bullock fixed them with a dubious look but shut the door, it didn’t stop Danny from hearing him calling across the parking lot, “Hey, Kalani, you’re not going to believe this. McGarrett and Williams claim they just hooked up for the first time today. I know! That’s what I said.”

“Guess we don’t have to worry about how we’re going to tell everyone else,” Danny mumbled as he bent to take off his shoes.

Steve dropped beside him, and scrubbed his hand over his too short hair. “Jesus, I want this day to be over with. I just want you, alive, no explosive residue, no tiny fucking bombs, with me, in bed.”

“And you’ll get that,” Danny promised.

Steve reached out and pressed his hand into Danny’s chest. “I don’t even care if we have sex—“

“Well, let’s not go too overboard with the crazy talk,” Danny told him, because his dick definitely did not approve of that suggestion.

Steve just ignored the comment. “I just want you and bed and a do-over for this day.”

“I don’t.” When Steve stared at him in shock, Danny continued. “Okay, I admit I could have done without the past few hours, and I’m not exactly looking forward to the freezing fire hose wash down we’re about to get. But, babe, the rest of it? The you and me parts? I wouldn’t want to do that over ever. It was fucking perfect the first time.”

Steve shot him a smile, the shy one that made Danny’s heart want to crawl of his body and beg Steve to take it in and give it a forever home like the stray that it was, or at the very least crawl out and hump Steve’s leg for a while.

Okay, Danny was concussed; he had a right to have weird analogies like that.

Fortunately, Steve couldn’t read Danny’s thoughts, but he could understand what today, the good parts of today, had meant to Danny. “It was fucking perfect, wasn’t it?”

“That it was.” Danny gave Steve a warm but chaste kiss, careful not to let things get too heated, literally or figuratively. “Not to mention we got one step closer to putting Aoki away for a ridiculously long time. I mean, can you imagine how an explosive like this could be used. Drop a few pellets in a glass of solvent, walk away, and boom! He could even hide it in a piece of jewelry. We can probably nail him on terrorism charges.”

“One way or another, he’s going down,” Steve told him in stone cold certainty. “I guarantee you that.”

Danny knew that look on Steve’s face. He didn’t want to give it a name. Danny had worn a similar one when he killed Reyes after his men showed them the drum with Mattie’s body. Danny knew at the time he pulled the trigger he was going to break something deep inside him, deep in his soul. The problem was, he already felt so fucking broken at that moment he just didn’t care. Danny didn’t want Steve to do the same, especially because of him.

“We’ll get him,” Danny promised. “Jerry and Adam will have access to everything from Hawai’i Hearts, they’ll find the link. With all of us working it, we’ll have him in no time. But for now, take off your pants before Bullock comes back and yells at us for having too many clothes on this time.”
Steve looked up from removing his own boots. “I can’t believe he wouldn’t go to dinner with us.”

“I know, right?” Danny raised from his seat just enough to ease his pants over his hips. “Who wouldn’t want to have dinner with us?”

“Tell you what, forget Bullock.” Steve shimmied out of his own pants. “We’ll have the team over to my place, grill some steaks, maybe a couple pieces of fish, drink a few beers. It’ll be great.”

Danny made a noncommittal noise. “Or, here’s an idea, we tell everyone we’ll see them on Tuesday, go home, get in bed, and do good and somewhat filthy things to each other for the next day and a half.”

“That’s a great idea,” Steve agreed with a grin. “I like that plan.”

Danny nodded and removed his socks. “Then it’s set, we have a plan.”

“We have a plan,” Steve agreed.

Within an hour of them completing decon and finally checked out of the emergency room, all of Five-0 was at Steve’s on the lanai drinking beer.

They really did need to stop making plans.

Komekona and Flippa showed up with shrimp plates…twenty percent discounts for everyone except Danny. As Komekona said, “If the little Jersey haolie keeps insisting on nearly dying, I need to make a profit off of him as often as I can.”

Steve paid him. Apparently, he hadn’t had his wallet in his cargo pants when the bomb squad blew them up. No surprise there.

It was also no surprise when within a few weeks, Jerry and Adam had followed the paper trail of subsidiaries and shell companies that finally tracked back to Aoki. Adam was convinced Aoki still wasn’t the top dog they had been looking for, but he was big enough and dangerous enough he was worth removing from play. He could have been the lowest dog in the yard. Danny knew, as far as Steve was concerned, Aoki was going down.

Which went a long way in explaining why four months after arresting him, Steve and Danny were at the courthouse on the day of Aoki’s arraignment. Court was in recess for lunch, and Aoki and his lawyer were headed to the restrooms. Ellie Clayton, the prosecutor on the case, stopped Aoki’s lawyer in the hallway, telling him she had a plea bargain she was authorized to discuss. The lawyer told Aoki to go on, and he’d catch up momentarily.

Now that Ellie had done her part, Steve announced, “I think I need to take a piss.”

Danny knew what Steve had in mind. He knew that’s why Steve wanted to come to the courthouse today in the first place. Danny also knew he had a role to play, as well, just not necessarily one Steve was expecting. There was a lot more to this backup thing than protecting Steve from the unknown attackers, sometimes it meant protecting Steve partner from Steve.

Grabbing his partner’s arm, Danny stopped him before he reached the bathroom door. “Listen, I just want to make sure you can control yourself in there.”

“I’m not going to touch him,” Steve promised.

“Because you did such a good job of not touching him in interrogation when we brought him in,” Danny reminded.

Lou and Tani eventually had to take over that interview. Danny all but tackled Steve and dragged him from the room after Steve lunged at Aoki with the Face That Shall Not Be Named. Danny had no doubt Aoki would be dead, and Steve the one being arraigned today instead, if he hadn’t intervened.
“I didn’t touch him,” Steve stressed, hands on his hips.

“I know, I know.” Danny patted at Steve’s chest. “And I know you need to do this, but I need you to come home tonight. Okay? I need you with me, not locked up in County. We have the kids this weekend, alright?”

Steve’s face softened into that goofy smile he got whenever Danny including him as part of the parental unit responsible for the wellbeing of Grace and Charlie.

“Oh, will you…” Danny shook his head. “It’s been four months, Steven, four, and you still look like I told you we’re getting a new puppy whenever I use the words ‘we’ and ‘kids’ in the same sentence.”

Steve just shrugged. “I can’t help it if it makes me happy, Danno.”

“It makes me happy, too, babe,” Danny told him honestly. “And it will make me even happier if we can all of us spend the weekend together, and not visiting you through glass.”

“Danny, I swear, I won’t touch him.”

Danny studied Steve closely, satisfied that the reminder of Grace and Charlie had had the desired effect, before he pushed the bathroom door open.

Aoki, standing at one of the sinks, glanced up when the door opened. He hesitated for a second when he saw who it was, before turning his attention back to washing his hands. He was about Danny’s height, trim, graying at the temples, but that was the only sign he was in his early sixties. He wore a well-cut, and no doubt expensive, business suit, but nothing flashy. Elegant was the word that came to Danny’s mind. Even his mustache and dark-rimmed glasses looked dignified.

Danny checked the stalls in the bathroom, saw no one else was there, and nodded to Steve, who locked the entry door. Danny crossed his arms as he leaned back against the far wall.

Aoki didn’t look at Steve, only pulled paper towels to dry his hands. “Commander, I feel I should point out that my lawyer will be here shortly. The locked door will seem highly irregular.”

Steve sat against one of the sinks. “Oh, he’s busy right now. The DA’s office is making a plea offer, a really good one. One you sure don’t deserve.”

Aoki tossed the towels and turned his attention to his reflection in the mirror. “And I suppose you are here to convince me to take the offer.”

“Just sharing some well-known prison statistics,” Steve said with a shrug. “I suppose the other option is that you could run, leave the country, take the large sums of cash I’m sure you have socked away in some Caribbean bank account, and disappear.”

“Seven times, at least,” Danny said. “In two month. He’s had a lot of accidents. Funny how that happens to guys who hurt kids.”

“And you,” Steve continued to Aoki, “have been running the trafficking ring specializing in children. Children you also planned to use as mules for your little explosives once they got the stability issues resolved.” Steve pursed his lips with a shake of his head. “I think you might have a few more accidents than Joseph, and probably much more serious.”

“Is that a threat, Commander McGarrett?” Aoki was straightening his tie, still not looking at Steve.

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“I hear Amsterdam is nice this time of year,” Danny volunteered. “Or Canada.”


“Excuse me,” Danny interrupted with feigned politeness. “Isn’t that information classified?”

“Actually, you are correct, Detective Williams,” Steve acknowledged in his own mock civility, “it is classified. And the rules say you don’t talk about classified things.”

“They treat it like Fight Club,” Danny told Aoki.

“But I can tell you the numbers are crazy high. When SEALs have a mission, we execute it, and if part of that mission is that no one knows we were there, then no one knows. The targets never know what hit them, the bodies are never found. And if the target runs, goes to ground, we find them anyway and complete the mission.”

Aoki did a damn good job of maintaining his cool, Danny would give him that. Danny, however, hadn’t missed the slight shake in Aoki’s hands as he rebuttoned his suit jacket.

“Thank you for your input, Commander, but this conversation is over.”

Aoki headed for the door, and Steve stood to loom in front of him. Danny straightened, as well, prepared to step in and stop Steve from beating the living shit out of a man in the middle of goddamn courthouse.

Steve crossed him arms, Danny thought maybe to keep from using them to choke Aoki to death, then leaned down into Aoki’s personal space. “You are nothing more than a piece of shit criminal with a nice suit, good lawyer, and a ton of money, but at your heart you’re the same as the two-bit punks who sell guns and drugs and girls on the street corner in Wahiawa. For that, you deserve to rot in a prison cell. But you are also the one who nearly took everything from me.” Steve’s eyes flicked toward Danny as he leaned in closer, spoke directly at Aoki’s ear. “And for that, I hope you run.”

Straightening, Steve headed for the door, and Danny followed. As he passed Aoki, who still stood ramrod straight, Danny said, “Me, personally, I hope you rot in prison. But if you do run, please, consider Amsterdam.”

Danny caught up with Steve in the hallway. “Feel better?”

“I’ll feel better when he’s out of the picture, one way or another,” Steve said, before exhaling and admitting, “But yeah, some.”

Danny rubbed lightly at the small of Steve’s back. “Good. Nothing but happy thoughts this weekend with the kids.” Danny rolled his eyes again. “Seriously, with the smile again. Four months, Steven. Four months.”

“I can’t help it,” Steve repeated with absolutely no shame at his reaction. “You might as well get used to it, because I’ll probably still be doing it in four years, forty even.” Then it was Steve’s turn to taunt, “Now who has the happy, goofy smile?”

“Yeah, I know.” Danny couldn’t hide his expression anymore than Steve could. “It’s that damn future tense that gets me right here every single time.” Danny patted at his heart then tapped at Steve’s chest in return. “I flirted, you have seduced, we are in love, we will live happily ever after. It’s a great conjugational relationship we have going here.”

Steve’s smile turned a little more lascivious. “Speaking on conjugating, we have a few hours before Gracie gets out of school. What say you and me go back to your place and work on some present tense verbs for a while? We can grab some food for a late lunch on the way, pick up a DVD for tonight. Sound like a plan?”

Danny almost said, ‘fuck, yes, that sounds like an amazing plan,’ because ‘fuck’ was one of his favorite verbs to conjugate with Steve. He felt his neck flush at the memory of Steve declaring,
“We are fucking, on this couch, right now,” just last night.

But then he pictured Steve’s phone ringing as soon as he said the word ‘plan,’ and it being the governor calling about some chemical release that would have one or both of them in ICU, or quarantine, or a quarantined ICU, by nightfall.

Instead, he hooked Steve by the bicep to get him moving again, “You know what, how about we just play it by ear?”

The weekend went off without a hitch…

…and when all was said and done, so did the next forty years.

The  End

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