### Bits and Pieces of Jersey

by bgharison

**Summary**

Please see series notes for complete warnings.

Danny's former rookie has found a place in Five-O, and in Steve's life. A collection of case fics, adventures and misadventures, and ohana moments. Continued from A Little Piece of Jersey.
Wake Up Call 1

It wasn't unusual for either or both of them to wake up a bit disoriented. Too many missions, too many close calls... too many concussions, for that matter. Now, though, they didn't wake up alone, and it was usually easy to tell what kind of night it had been, even without specific memory.

If the night had been one of peaceful sleep, Steve usually had to wriggle his left arm a little, to get the circulation going, because Jax's head was nestled on his shoulder, his arm around her, holding her gently. On those mornings, it was usually Steve's alarm that woke them, and sometimes Jax would join him for part of his morning swim, and then be waiting for him with coffee when he was finished. Or the idea of a swim would be abandoned altogether, and the rest of the team would smirk knowingly at them as they arrived a few minutes late. It wouldn't be so damn obvious if Kono would quit fist-bumping Steve. Sometimes Chin really wondered if Kono should have spent more time with their female cousins growing up.

If Jax's sleep had been plagued with nightmares, she usually woke up curled tightly on her side, with Steve wrapped around her; his long, muscled limbs curved around her, making her feel safe. His face would still be tucked into her hair, from where he had drifted off while whispering soft phrases of comfort and assurance. He could imagine the horror of 9/11 in vivid, brutal detail, as her tortured mumblings about falling bodies and burning buildings were seared into his mind. Sometimes he could remind her that Danny was still alive and okay, and that she'd see him in a few hours, and she'd settle back into sleep. When she called for Billy or Jake, he could only hold her tight and whisper the words that he hadn't yet brought himself to say out loud in waking hours. But when he caught an elbow to the ribs, or a knee to the groin, he did his best to dodge the punches and wake her as quickly as possible, before her harsh cries turned to whimpered pleas, of no and stop and God, not again... because those broke his heart into a thousand pieces.

If Steve had been reliving any number of classified missions in his sleep, he would often wake up with a jolt, well before his alarm. Jax's hands would tighten around him, even in her sleep; one hand over his heart, the other usually tucked under his head, fingers tangled in his sleep-mussed hair. Her lips would brush against the back of his neck as she murmured to him; her voice and touch calming his racing heart and mind. She knew more about Afghanistan than she ever wanted to know; could imagine the sand, the heat. When he called out for his father, for Freddie, she wept for people she'd never met, and whispered promises she could never keep; promises to always be okay, to never leave him, to never be taken away. She knew there were people walking the earth that she would gladly kill with her bare hands if given the opportunity; although she would deny any knowledge of their very classified existence.

So when Steve woke up with a jolt, in the pitch dark, and there was no gentle pressure around his chest, no soothing fingers stroking absently through his hair, he automatically reached behind him. Nothing. No quiet, sleep-graveled voice mumbling in his ear, no soft brushes of air across the back of his neck. The next thing he missed was the familiar and comforting scent of honeysuckle and gunpowder which inevitably transferred from her pillow to his. Come to think of it, there was no pillow. His head was resting on the floor. He pulled his arm back in front of him to feel... not his floor. Cold, unyielding... smelling of antiseptic... and blood.

"Jax," he rasped, trying to use his other arm to push himself up and collapsing again, biting back a groan of pain.

There was a sharp sound, and dim light filled the room. Back-up generator, he registered somewhere in the back of his mind. And then... Danny.
Danny. The smell of blood was coming from Danny. *Exsanguination*, his brain helpfully supplied. Damn the word-a-day calendar, Danny.

A burst of adrenaline allowed Steve to completely ignore the shooting pain in his arm, and he launched himself toward Danny. His best friend and partner was bleeding profusely from a deep gash in his side, and another over his eye, slumped against the wall of a . . . cell. He noted the solid door. No sliding bars. A protective custody cell, then, designed to keep someone in and keep others out, at the same time.

Halawa Correctional Facility. Partial memories came flooding back to Steve in flashes. They'd come to transfer a high-priority prisoner; a federal prisoner in protective custody, maximum security. The entire team had been tasked by the governor to move Declan Novak from Halawa to Hickam Air Force Base for a secure flight back to the mainland, where he would testify - in exchange for a reduced sentence, naturally - against one of the most lucrative arms trafficking rings in Eastern Europe.

Steve had been chasing Novak when he'd been pulled off the case and sent to track down an even bigger player, Anton Hesse. The other team assigned to Novak had lost him somewhere in Uzbekistan, and it had been a complete fluke that he'd been nabbed by a customs agent in Honolulu, when an ivory-handled knife caught their attention.

As Steve desperately wrenched a pillowcase from the pillow on the cot next to Danny, and pressed it against the wound, he started to seriously doubt that Novak's detention by customs was a fluke. It was starting to feel like a set-up. He remembered arriving at the facility, checking in with the guards, and gearing up with the team. He remembered Novak's smug smile . . . and then nothing.

"Danny, Danny," Steve said, patting Danny's cheek. "Come on, buddy, you with me?"

Danny groaned and swatted at Steve's hand. Steve continued to put pressure on Danny's wound with one hand, while the other slid behind his head and cushioned it from the unforgiving cinderblock wall.

"Steve," Danny grunted. "Stop smacking me around, you Neanderthal."

Steve grinned in relief. "Danny, hold still, you're leaking pretty fast, here."

"Why do you say that? You and Grover both. That some sort of Army lingo?" Danny grumbled.

"Navy," Steve corrected automatically. "And I don't know, maybe it sounds less terrifying than you're bleeding way too much, Danny. Hold. Still." Steve wrenched away a second pillowcase, and then efficiently tore a sheet into strips. "Hang on," he warned, as he folded the second pillowcase, pressed it on top of the first, and then wrapped Danny's ribs as tightly as he dared.

Danny hissed in pain. "Shit, Steve."

"Sorry, Danny, I've got to get this bleeding stopped until we can get you fixed up," Steve apologized. "Danny, what happened?"

"You don't remember?" Danny asked, but he was nodding his head as if it made sense. "Just as we turned the corner to Novak's cell, all hell broke loose. Electricity went out, cell doors flew open, and you started yelling at Chin and Grover to get the girls the hell out. One guard clocked you over the head and you went down hard."

"On my shoulder," Steve guessed, based on the constant ache radiating from his shoulder.
"Yeah, you hit shoulder first and then your head made contact. Thunk, like the giant melon that it is," Danny said.

"Who got you?" Steve asked.

"Random prisoner, I have no idea," Danny said, wincing. "Wasn't a knife, I know that. It was a shiv. Then there was a flashlight slammed into my face and then . . . here we are."

Steve nodded and tore another strip of sheet to press against Danny's eye.

"Do you think the girls got out?" Danny asked quietly. "They'd kick my ass for calling them girls, I know. And they'll both be furious with you for trying to shove them back, trying to get Chin and Grover to get them out. But do you think it worked?"

They could hear muffled sounds of shouting and chaos. Steve carefully tested the door. Locked - no surprise. He quickly scanned the room for any possible exit, knowing it was fruitless. Maximum security. Protective custody.

"Damn it," he muttered.

"Steve . . ." Danny said again.

"I don't know, Danny," Steve said harshly. "I don't know if they got out." He stopped, leaned his aching head against the door. "Sorry, Danny. I hope they got out. But I just don't know."

"So, Novak?" Danny guessed.

"No doubt about it, Danny. The question is, did Novak set this up to get to me, or did someone else set this up to get to Novak?" Steve wondered aloud, rubbing the back of his head.

Danny looked up as they heard briskly approaching footsteps. They were about to find out.
Chin - Grover - get Kono and Jax the hell out of here. Understood? Get them out - that's an order.

Chin had anticipated Steve's order in the split second that they made eye contact. He'd been on the force longer than all of them; he knew Halawa well, from his days as a rookie cop, booking various perps into general security, to his days as a lieutenant, booking more serious offenders into the higher security. He'd grabbed Kono firmly by the elbow and bodily shoved her with the flow of inmates rushing toward the common areas, and ducking unnoticed into the laundry as they passed by.

"Chin -" Kono protested.

Chin grabbed her shoulders and turned her around. "I'm only going to say this once, and you're not going to argue. Steve gave a direct order. For a reason."

Kono had seen Steve under fire before, outnumbered and outgunned, but she'd never seen an expression of panic on his face until today, when he had realized what was about to happen.

"But Steve and Danny -" Kono protested again.

"Will be able to think more clearly if they have reason to hope that you and Jax are out," Chin said firmly.

"We're abandoning them . . . I can't believe we're doing this . . . " Kono choked out.

"No. We're getting you to HPD SWAT so that they can use you as a sniper, and I'm going to pull up everything there is to know about Declan Novak. There's someone or something that has been overlooked, and I'm going to find it, so we can get Steve and Danny out of there," Chin said.

"What about Grover and Jax?" Kono asked.

Chin hesitated for the first time. "I don't know, Kono . . . I hope they found a way out, or found cover. Now, move, before the backup systems kick in, and we're trapped inside."

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Steve swallowed back a rush of nausea as he checked his pockets to see what he had to work with.

"Damn it," he muttered. "How did they take us both out long enough to get everything - gun, vest, phone, radio . . . even my damn badge?"

"Hey, this was clearly well-planned, Steve. There were at least six swarming directly on us that I could count. It would have only taken a moment," Danny said through gritted teeth, pressing his hand against his side.

The footsteps were right outside the door.

"Hold on, partner," Steve muttered, and grabbed Danny under his arms. He propped Danny in the corner behind the door and flattened himself against the wall. It was a long shot, but if he could move fast enough . . . maybe . . .
The door swung open and Steve rushed it, throwing himself against it and hearing the satisfying sound of the door colliding with someone's face. Steve rounded the door and with a sharp jab, broke the nose of the beefy assailant in prison orange; dropping him to the ground clutching his face in agony. Another prisoner rushed forward, his effort rewarded with the heel of Steve's hand firmly contacting with his solar plexus, dropping him next to his friend.

The sound of several automatic weapons being racked gave Steve pause.

"Go ahead, Commander," Declan Novak said calmly. "We can see how many you can take out before you fall, and then we'll shoot your partner."

Steve stood his ground, his chest heaving, staring coldly at Declan. He was trying his hardest not to let on that the room was spinning around him.

"Not so tough, are you, without a SEAL team to back you up?" Declan tsked. "Seems to me you've traded down, Commander. What, you just didn't have the balls for it, after daddy died?"

Steve let out a growl and rushed Declan, hands going for his throat. The butt of a semi-automatic rifle connecting with his jaw brought him up short, and he took a staggering step backward.

"What the hell do you want, Declan?" Steve said, spitting a mouthful of blood out on Declan's shoes.

"I want you to regret the day that you decided I wasn't as much of a threat as Anton Hesse," was the calm, measured answer. "I want you to answer for the hypocrisy of your country, which rewards those who sell weapons to the 'right' criminals and hunts like dogs those who sell weapons to the 'wrong' criminals."

Steve looked at the man in disbelief.

"This is about . . . what, revenge?" Steve spat. "So let my partner go, then. I didn't even know him in Afghanistan."

Declan chuckled. "No, Commander, this is about justice. An eye for an eye, yes? I lost those dearest to me while we were playing cat and mouse through Afghanistan. I want you to know how that feels."

Declan gestured to two of his men holding the semi-automatic rifles. One of them was a guard that Steve recognized.

"What happened to you, hunh?" Steve demanded. "Did he buy you out? Threaten you? What?"

"You're asking the wrong questions, Commander McGarrett," Declan said calmly.

"Yeah? What's the right question?" Steve challenged, even as he was being pushed backwards into the cell, trying to stay between the door and Danny without being obvious.

"The right question, Commander, is this: Where is the rest of your team?"

The door slammed again, and Steve smacked it in frustration.

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Jax narrowed her eyes at Grover, and briefly considered biting his big hand as it was clamped over her mouth.
Grover was newer to the island, so it had taken him a bit longer than Chin to process Steve's panic-stricken order, and he didn't know the facility as well as Chin. He did know that if he had any hope of getting Jax out, he had a very small window to find cover and an exit.

He spotted an electrical room and shoved Jax inside, covering her mouth to silence her protest while he waited for the initial flood of inmates to rush by. No doubt they were rushing to overcome and disarm the guards, raid the infirmary . . . the less violent just searching for exits and hoping to slip out undetected somehow.

When the rush of chaos moved past them, Grover shot Jax a warning glare and slowly took his hand off her mouth.


"You're new so lemme explain," Grover whispered, "We're in Halawa Correctional Facility - Special Needs: that means maximum security, protective security, and criminally insane. All male."

"Yeah, but -"

"We'd already been cut off from Steve and Danny and he knew it. The one thing that will keep him from going absolutely out of his mind is to count on us getting you and Kono out of here, and that's what I intend to do," Grover said, squeezing Jax's shoulder sympathetically. "SWAT is going to need you as a medic on this one, okay?"

Jax looked at him dubiously.

"Come on, any minute now the backup will kick on and the locks are going to re-engage," Grover said. "We'll try the opposite direction from where the inmates were rushing, see if we can find a way clear - then I'm going back for Steve and Danny, don't worry."

Grover peeked out carefully into the hallway and gestured for Jax to follow him. They crept along the corridor which was eerily empty; although they could still hear the din and chaos from the far end of the hallway. As they passed under an open staircase, two guards rushed down.

"Captain Grover? Officer Nolan?" one of them asked urgently. "Commander McGarrett was hoping we would find you; what a relief."

"He wants us to get Officer Nolan to safety," the other said, "he and Detective Williams are searching for Novak."

Grover studied them a moment. "McGarrett looked to have gotten his bell rung pretty hard; are you sure?"

The officer laughed. "You should know it takes more than that to stop McGarrett," he said. "Though I imagine he could use some help. We can get Officer Nolan out safely, get her to HPD SWAT, let you meet up with McGarrett."

Grover grabbed his radio. "Okay, let me just confirm with McGarrett."

The officer shook his head. "Frequencies are jammed, radios are useless. Cell signals too. This was well-orchestrated. Look, I understand your concern," he added, pulling out his ID and motioning for the other guard to do the same. "You can't be too careful."

They held out their credentials for Grover to check. "I was the officer who was here when you booked Dillon Rivera," one officer prompted. Grover looked up at him, recognition lighting up his
"Yeah, yeah, man," he said. "Okay, you guys get Nolan here to safety, and don't let her give you the slip and go after McGarrett and Williams herself - don't put it past her."

"Yes, sir, from what I hear she could do just that," the first guard said, respect and possibly awe in his voice. "But we need to move quickly if we're going to get her out; the exterior doors will lock down as soon as the generator kicks in. Officer Nolan, if you'll come this way; and Captain Grover, they think that Novak is headed to the offices, away from the exits and the commons."

"Copy that," Grover said. He placed his big hands on Jax's shoulders. "You meet up with HPD, come in with the cavalry, got it?"

"We've gotta move, sir, I'm sorry," the guard said. "We'll get her out safely."

Grover chucked Jax gently under the chin. "Catch you later, Nolan. Go."

Steve slid down the wall until he was resting next to Danny.

"They break anything vital?" Danny said. His voice was weaker but the sarcastic tone was the same.

"My head seems to be taking the brunt of the damage," Steve said, closing his eyes. "How you holding up?"

"Sitting here holding my guts in while you get beat up on my behalf. Just peachy," Danny sniped.

Steve's eyes flew open and his hands immediately went to Danny's midsection. "Danny," he said, in a panic, his long fingers probing carefully at the bandage.

"Whoa, babe, it was hyperbole," Danny said, gently putting his hands on Steve's.

"Oh," Steve said, swallowing hard.

"I'm sorry," Danny said, putting a hand on Steve's jaw, wincing at the already purpling bruise. "I'm guessing there was a time . . . "

"Yeah," Steve said. "When it wasn't hyperbole. Sorry."

Danny shook his head, then thought better of it. "Don't," he said simply. "Okay, we gotta have a plan. What's our plan?"

"Danny."

"Yeah, babe?"

"What if that's not the right question?"
Duke Lukela rushed to Chin and Kono when he spotted them at the perimeter of the parking lot.

"How did you manage to get out?" he asked. "Are you injured, either of you?"

"We're okay," Chin said. "Steve realized immediately what was happening; ordered me and Grover to get Kono and Jax out. Have you seen Grover or Jax?"

"No, we've not seen them or heard from them," Duke said. "We'll have to assume they're still inside."

"Which is where we should be," Kono said in frustration.

"Our first objective is containment," Duke said. "We can't get access to any of the computers, and cell and radio signals are being actively scrambled. But from what we can tell, the power outage was deliberate, and controlled. The generators didn't kick on automatically - the main power was disabled, and then the emergency generators deliberately turned on."

"Definitely inside involvement, then," Chin said, shaking his head. "It was chaotic, but I was pretty sure I saw a guard pistol whip Steve."

"We have to assume prison personnel involvement, yes," Duke confirmed. "Which is going to make our job exponentially harder."

"I was going to suggest that Kono stay on site, hook up with HPD and SWAT. You know she's the best sniper on the island," Chin said, "while I go back to the palace and pull every scrap of information I can on Declan Novak. I'll run background and cross-match on all of the prison personnel as well."

"That's exactly the help we need," Duke said, waving over another officer. "Marshall, Officer Kalakaua is a crack shot - take her along with the unit regaining control over the west wall guard tower. We first need to regain control over the yard and the exits."

Kono squeezed Chin's hand quickly and took off at a quick jog with the other officer.

"We haven't yet figured a way into the building," Duke continued, "so any information that you can give us by the time that happens will be most welcome, Kelley. We're operating blind here as far as how many people are involved inside. Look, I know you want to be here, but right now we need your expertise on that super computer of yours more than anything."

"Something was nagging at Jax . . . something out of place, and she couldn't put her finger on it. So she studied the guards flanking her on either side, and leading her - she would swear, lousy sense of direction notwithstanding - away from the exits and toward the center of the facility."

It was the socks that tipped her off. White. NJPD, NYPD, HPD, SWAT - uniforms varied a bit but all of them required black socks to be worn with black boots or oxfords. She glanced at the other officer, the one that Grover had recognized. His name tag read "Officer Mahelona", but most importantly, his socks were black.

Whitesox - she dubbed him quickly, although she was sure his name tag read something else - also kept getting gouged under his ribs with his flashlight. Any law enforcement officer a week on the
job learned to tweak their utility belt so that their gear didn't bruise them.

Whoever Whitesox was - it was very unlikely he was a guard. She mentally flipped through scenarios in which the other guard was unaware of the impostor... but she came up with nothing. Both of them were with Declan Novak, she was sure of it - what she wasn't at all sure of, was where she was being led, and why. Adrenaline flooded her system as she weighed her options. They were too close to try to draw on them; she could get one shot off, sure, but no way could she turn fast enough for the second. Play along? Too risky. Any minute now they could simply execute her.

She almost jumped when Whitesox spoke. "Here, we're going to take this staircase down to a floor with an exit away from the grounds," he said, holding the door open for her.

Now or never, she thought, and decided to make a break up the staircase instead, hoping to get them both behind her so she could turn and fire. She drew her Sig as she hit the landing, turned, and fired at Whitesox, who in his surprise, hadn't even drawn his weapon.

As the twin barbs of a taser wedged high on her hip, just below the protection of her vest, she realized she should have fired at Mahelona first. It was her last conscious thought before the voltage of the taser seized her muscles and she pitched forward down the stairs.

Officer Mahelona stood over the downed prisoner dressed in the guard's uniform.

"I can handle her from here," he said coolly, as he fired a shot point blank into Whitesox's chest.

"The first thing we have to do is get out of this cell," Steve said. "If we can convince them to move us to the infirmary, I might have something to work with; find a way out, find a way to communicate. Find a weapon."

"Okay, good luck with that," Danny said.

Steve grinned at him - that cocky, self-assured grin that usually meant Danny was about to have bullets whizzing by his head.

"What," he demanded weakly. "What are you thinking? The rest of the team may have made it out, the place is going to be crawling with HPD, SWAT, and National Guard any minute now."

Steve shook his head. "Declan specifically said that I should be asking where the rest of my team is. That tells me he has reason to think they didn't get out. I'm not going to sit here, trapped and unarmed and wait for him to decide what to do."

"Okay," Danny sighed. "Tell me what you want me to do."

Steve looked fondly at his partner; he was so predictable. All bluster and argument but when it came down to it, all Steve had to do was say the word and Danny was up for whatever challenge they faced.

"I need you to be unconscious and on the verge of bleeding out altogether," Steve said.

"I can do that," Danny wheezed.

"I'm gonna need to take off the second bandage, though," Steve said apologetically. "I promise, I'll be able to get the bleeding stopped if it starts again, but we gotta make the guards scared shitless."
Danny nodded and started pulling at the bandage.

"Let me, Danno," Steve said, as he carefully started unrolling the strips of sheet holding the wadded sheeting in place. "I'm sorry, Danny, this is the best I can think of."

Danny patted Steve's bruised jaw gently. "I trust you, partner."

Steve stowed the second, less bloody bandage carefully under the mattress where it couldn't be seen, then went and pounded frantically on the door.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Come on, my partner's bleeding to death! You gotta get us to a medic, get some help in here!"

"No way," came a curt response from the other side of the door. It wasn't Declan's voice, but with Steve's ear pressed against the door, he could just make out what sounded like Declan, maybe further down the hall. Maybe trying to work out a deal of some sort.

"Come on, you know your boss is going to use us for leverage for something; that's the only reason we're not dead. Anything happens to my partner, and I won't be inclined to let you push me around. The only reason I care about my life is to protect my team. Ask your boss, he knows it's true," Steve shouted.

There was a long pause, then Declan himself responded.

"Commander McGarrett," he said, in a bored tone. "Why should I let you make any demands? You're in no position of authority here."

Steve read the situation and changed tactics slightly.

"Declan, my partner is in bad shape. He's lost consciousness. Now, I'm pretty sure you gave your people instructions were not to fatally wound anyone on my team, because if you have a prayer of getting out of here alive, you need all the leverage you can get. I'm sure Williams is worth much more to you alive than dead," Steve said. "Besides, you know I'm not lying. You've seen me take a lot of abuse for the sake of my team before. You know I won't try anything if it would put my team in further danger."

Danny studied Steve carefully. What did he mean, Declan had seen him take abuse for the sake of his team? Danny didn't bother to ask - it was probably classified.

"And if anything happens to anyone on my team, you know I won't hesitate to see how many of you I can take down, because at that point I will have nothing to lose," Steve continued in a flat, emotionless voice. "I'll start with you." He paused. "You've seen a little of what I'm capable of, Declan. You and I both know that my priority being placed on Detective Williams' safety is the only reason you're still standing right this minute. At least let me get him to the infirmary, see what I can do to patch him up."

There was a long pause, and Steve could hear low conversation.

"Okay," Declan said. "We'll move you to the infirmary. Stand clear of the door, hold your hands out in front of you. Twitch, and Detective Williams is dead."

"Agreed," Steve said. "Hurry, he's bleeding and unconscious and I can't get the bleeding to stop without some supplies." He nodded to Danny, who gingerly moved until he was flat on the floor, and closed his eyes.

"I've got you, Danny," Steve said quietly.
The door opened and Steve was immediately cuffed, two semi-automatic rifles aimed at him the whole time. Declan kept his weapon trained on Danny, and Steve had to quell a flash of absolute and utter panic. He was gambling with Danny's life.

Two prisoners drug Danny unceremoniously around the corner while the guard - Steve caught his nametag this time: Officer Hale - and Declan marched Steve along behind. It was a blessedly short distance to the infirmary, and Steve took careful note of how many gates were standing open - at some point, no doubt, those gates would slam close, for better or for worse. Steve hoped for any kind of signal from the guard that would indicate he was an unwilling participant, but his sneer didn't leave much room for that possibility. He briefly considered faking a stumble and taking out Declan and the guard; but it left Danny too vulnerable and he couldn't risk it.

Danny let out a low moan, which Steve was reasonably sure wasn't just good acting.

"Come on, watch it," Steve growled.

Danny was roughly dropped just inside the door to the infirmary, curling weakly onto his side, his arm pressed against his wound. His alarming pallor and the fresh blood now soaking his bandage meant that Steve didn't have to pretend to be frantic over his partner's condition.

"Uncuff me," he said, holding his hands out to Declan. "Please."

Declan seemed pleased with having put Steve at such a disadvantage, and smiled malevolently as he nodded for the guard to undo the cuffs while he held his gun pointed squarely at Steve's head. Just before the door slammed closed, Steve saw Declan's hand move smoothly over an iPad, and heard the locks engage on the door. Declan was obviously still in control of the building, then.

Steve couldn't worry about that at the moment, not with Danny bleeding.

"Danny, hey," Steve said, kneeling next to him. "Hang on, I've got you." Steve maneuvered him as carefully as possible onto the nearest gurney and began frantically searching for supplies.

The rush of prisoners had already picked the infirmary clean of drugs and anything that could be used as a weapon, but there were boxes of gauze, and a few rolls of surgical tape. That, along with the packets of QuickClot combat gauze that had thankfully been left in his pocket, would have to suffice.

Danny cracked an eye open. "Did it work?" he mumbled.

"Yeah, we're in the infirmary, Danny," Steve said quietly, pulling Danny's shirt back open and carefully removing the bloody bandages. Fresh blood was seeping rapidly from the jagged wound, and Steve pressed a handful of gauze against it.

"Can you hold pressure, Danny?" he asked, and Danny nodded, pressing his hand to replace Steve's. "Okay," Steve continued, ripping open three packets. "On the count of three, you're going to pull the gauze back and I'm going to press this gauze down first and then apply more pressure, okay?"

Danny nodded again, and Steve counted down.

"Sorry, buddy," Steve murmured as Danny grunted in pain at the pressure.

"You and Jax buy stock in that stuff?" Danny panted.

"We keep a box in the laundry room, when we get our cargo pants out of the dryer, we make sure
at least one pocket is full of it," Steve replied absently.

Danny opened both eyes and looked incredulously at Steve. "You're serious," he said. "Domestic bliss. Laundry night with Steve and Jax, filling pockets with military grade medical supplies."

Steve grinned down at Danny. "Come on, Danny, you know you love us. Besides, this stuff is arguably saving your life here, so I wouldn't complain."

"Not complaining," Danny agreed. "Is it working?"

"Yeah," Steve said, his shoulders sagging with relief. "I'm sorry, Danny, it was the best way I could think to get us out of that cell."

"Well, come on then, SuperSEAL, let's see what we can do from here," Danny said, starting to sit up.

Steve pushed him down firmly. "Are you out of your mind? Hold still, you're going to start bleeding again."

"What, just sit here and do nothing?" Danny huffed.

"Sit there and actively avoid bleeding," Steve retorted. "Better yet, sit there, avoid bleeding, and keep both eyes and ears on that door while I see if I can find a computer or any means of communication. Or something that will explode."

"What, no grenades in your pocket today?"

"I had a couple flash-bangs but they took them."

"Unbelievable."

Steve flashed Danny a grin as he started to quickly and quietly go through the drawers and cabinets. The prisoners had taken all of the obvious implements that could be used as weapons . . . but Steve was a SEAL. He didn't need the obvious.

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Chin stood in front of the plasma screen in the central room of Five-O headquarters.

"That's great news, Duke," Chin said, relieved to hear that for the most part, the prisoners had been subdued and brought back into order by HPD and the National Guard unit. "Has anyone managed to get access into the protective custody wing?"

"No, sorry, Chin, not yet, but they're working on it. They've got the K9 unit checking for explosives, to be sure it isn't rigged," Duke answered. "We have a handful of prisoners unaccounted for: they could have managed to slip off the grounds, or they could be with Declan. We've got roadblocks and K9 units already on the ground. We've got a half dozen or so prisoners on their way to Kings Hospital; your Officer Kalakaua is as good of a shot with non-lethal weapons as she is with her sniper rifle. Rubber bullets may not kill but there are a lot of cracked ribs to be patched up."

Chin smiled. He was glad that Kono had been able to contribute as he had promised, even though he knew she would be frantic to get to the rest of the team.

"Any word at all on Officer Nolan and Captain Grover?" Chin asked, although he knew that Duke would have let him know immediately.
"No, I'm sorry, Chin," came the reply. "We have to assume they are inside; however, that doesn't mean that Declan has them. They could have found cover."

"How many guards unaccounted for?" Chin asked. "Because I think I have ID'd the guard who I saw take Steve down. Has Officer Mahelona checked in?"

"No, in fact, he and Officer Hale are unaccounted for. We have put their pictures out for all personnel; we have to assume they are either injured, being held hostage, or collaborating with Declan Novak," Duke said.

"Okay, I'm going to keep digging on Declan Novak," Chin said. "There's not much to go on; he's only been at Halawa for three weeks. It's hard to believe he put together an operation like this in that time. Too hard to believe."

"You're saying his arrest was deliberate," Duke said.

"Exactly. This was painstakingly set up. And no demands have been made of local or even state law enforcement," Chin added.

Duke whistled. "How far up the chain do you think he's trying to go? FBI, CIA?"

"I have no idea, but far enough up that I feel a little over my head," Chin said. "I'll keep digging, see what I can find. There's one other alternative - one that I really don't want to think about," Chin added.

"That is?"

"That he's not making demands anywhere on the chain; because this isn't about leverage, it's about revenge. It's personal. We have to consider the possibility that Declan Novak isn't holding hostages, and isn't making demands, because he has no intention of leaving Halawa alive," Chin said grimly.

Grover was halfway to the office wing when he was intercepted by a harsh whisper.

"Grover," came the hissed call, from behind the library door. Grover whirled, his weapon in hand.

"Hey, man, don't shoot." The voice sounded familiar . . .

"Sang Min?" Grover hissed, pointing his gun around the edge of the door.

"Man, get that gun outta my face," Sang Min whined. "I've looking for you everywhere. Where's McGarrett's pretty little redhead? Why isn't she with you?"

"McGarrett wanted Nolan and Kalakaua out of the building; two officers escorted Nolan out, said Declan was headed for these offices," Grover said. "What the hell are you doing sneaking around here?" he demanded.

"Trying to find Five-O," Sang Min said, "before you all get lined up and shot. Novak is crazy, man; he's set this whole thing up to get revenge against McGarrett. Why did you let the little ginger out of your sight? McGarrett going to kill you himself, man."

Grover had a sick, sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He shoved his gun against Sang Min's chest.
"Tell me everything you know, right the hell now," he growled.

"I convinced Novak to cut me in on the deal, man. He thinks I'm gonna help round up the Five-O, hand them over. He wasn't expecting the team to split up like that, when the shit hit the fan. It's messed up his plans," Sang Min explained. "But I never planned to cooperate; I figured, hey, Novak put money in an account for me. I play Novak, help Five-O; maybe the feds let me keep the money, give it to my family. My wife and kid, man."

Grover shook his head. As implausible as it sounded, he knew that Sang Min had cooperated with Five-O more than once. And providing for his family . . . it was motive enough to try to double cross someone like Declan Novak.

"So Novak - what, isn't going to make a deal? Isn't making ransom demands?" Grover said.

"No, man. He wanted all the Five-O team in one place. Said he wanted to make Steve pay for something that happened in Afghanistan; no better way to do that than to hurt his team," Sang Min said.

"Officer Mahelona," Grover said. "Tell me."

"He's in on it, dude," Sang Min said. "Please tell me you did not . . . oh, shit, McGarrett is gonna kill you for sure."

"I'm not worried about myself at the moment," Grover snapped.

"Oh, Mahelona won't hurt the little SWAT hottie," Sang Min said. "Or the hot surfer cousin, either. Only Declan is supposed to hurt them. One of his guys got eager, shivved Williams. Declan was super mad, man. It's all gotta go according to his plan. But we gotta hurry. Your people have everything all zen out there in the yard, they're trying to get into the wing now. Declan plans to be done with McGarrett and go down in a blaze of glory when that happens."

"And the prisoners and guard working with Declan?" Grover demanded.

"We slip out. Declan provides a distraction. The guards, man, Mahelona and Hale, gonna round us up, escort us to HPD for questioning. Then they follow an escape route, we all disappear," Sang Min said.

"You are voluntarily giving up an escape plan to help Five-O?" Grover said, pressing his gun into Sang Min's chest again.

"Hey, hey, watch it, you crazy - yes, I decide, I'll take my chances with Five-O. McGarrett may be crazy but he's not suicidal. You put in a good word, see if my wife and kid get that money, yeah?" Sang Min insisted.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Grover said. "We've gotta stop Declan Novak. What about Chin and Kono?"

"I ain't seen them, man. They musta got out," Sang Min said. "Or maybe they took cover. Or maybe they've been caught by now. I don't know."

"Okay, Steve and Danny?" Grover asked.

"Declan had them locked up in a protective custody cell," Sang Min said. "Williams is hurt bad, though. McGarrett got them to put them in the infirmary."

"How are you so well-informed, if you're out roaming around?" Grover demanded.
"Radio, man," Sang Min said, shaking his head as if Grover were a bit daft. "Novak is blocking all the cell and radio signals, but we got our own." Grover made a grab for the radio, but Sang Min pulled it away.

"You crazy? He gotta believe I'm out here looking for Five-O and coming up empty," Sang Min said.

As if on cue, the radio crackled with a burst of static.

"You found them yet?"

"No, man," Sang Min said into the radio, holding up a hand to indicate silence from Grover. "No sign anywhere. They musta got out."

"Okay, return to the infirmary hallway."

"No way," Sang Min said, "I haven't checked the offices, the laundry . . . they could be hiding."

"Okay. Watch your back. Mahelona and Corey still aren't back with the girl; and Hale and Stamos haven't led Captain Grover back to us."

###

Declan Novak was an angry, angry man. This team he had so carefully assembled had turned out to be incompetent at every turn.

"What about Kelly? Kalakaua? Grover?" he hissed into his radio.

Officer Mahelona shrugged and nudged Jax with his foot. He had a cool million waiting in an account and a one way ticket to the Maldives. All he had to do was be in the driver's seat of the prisoner transport when the time came, and he was home free. He really, really didn't care what else happened.

"No sign of them," he said boredly. "Look, I got Nolan, which was my responsibility. Where do you want her?"

Declan growled in frustration. Nothing was going according to plan. He only had half of the team; the other half could have managed to get out of the building, or they could be closing in on him. Sang Min was wandering the halls uselessly - probably going to get himself shot, not that Declan really cared. Hale and Stamos were supposed to have led Grover right into a trap, and they had apparently not coordinated well enough with Mahelona and Corey. Speaking of . . .

"You and Corey bring her to me," Declan demanded.

"Yeah, about that," Mahelona said. "Corey didn't make it. She figured it out, somehow, bolted and got a couple shots off."


"Novak. I've got the girl under control, don't worry. Corey was an amateur, I told you," Mahelona said.

"She better be alive when you get her here," Declan warned.

Mahelona shrugged again, although there was no one to see him. He nudged Jax again, roughly,
with the toe of his boot, and was rewarded with a low groan. "More or less," he said. He shut off the radio and proceeded to carefully collect all of Jax's weapons. He pulled off her vest and tossed it on the bottom step, then casually slung her over his shoulder and headed off toward the infirmary.

"You catch all that?" Sang Min said to Grover, as he put the radio back in the waistband of his prison uniform.

"Yeah," Grover said. "So, we gotta avoid Hale and Stamos, and try to intercept Mahelona, who has Jax, who's apparently injured. As usual. Trouble magnet, I knew it when I hired her . . . I knew it when Steve partnered me with her. But did I use common sense? No . . . "

"Hey," Sang Min interrupted Grover's muttered rant. "You gonna give me my piece back, or what?"

Grover sighed. "I am. Lord help me, but I'm handing you a gun."

Sang Min smiled and smacked Grover on the arm. "Now we're a team, yeah?"

"Unbalanced. You people are all unbalanced."

Chin read the message in disbelief, and placed the call to Duke.

"I forget sometimes that Steve was in Naval Intelligence . . . he somehow managed to get to a computer, bypass all the signal scramblers, and get a message to me. He and Danny are locked into the infirmary. Declan Novak has control of the building, including locks that are supposed to be interior locks only - like the infirmary. Steve had to keep the message brief, but he says that Declan is seriously unstable, and that they have a history that goes back to Afghanistan," Chin explained.

"Then we've got to assume . . . "

"That this is strictly revenge, and strictly personal," Chin finished. "I'm coming that way."

Jax opened her eyes and regretted it. It seemed like the world was upside down. She swallowed hard, and opened just one eye, carefully.

The world was upside down.

She blinked slowly and tried to keep her breathing steady. Her entire body felt tingly and short-circuited. She continued to take inventory, trying to clear the fuzziness that seemed to have taken over her brain. A weird, flippy skippy sensation with her heart. She should know the word for that, right? Arrhythmia. Various aching body parts which she dismissed quickly, as nothing seemed especially broken, at least not in a compound fracture sort of way. A burning, searing sensation high on her hip, which was aggravated by every step. No, that couldn't be right, she wasn't walking. Someone else's steps, then, because she could see boots.

Boots. With black socks. Officer Mahelona. It came back to her so quickly that she had to carefully control her breathing. She'd made a break for it, turned, fired . . . there was no sign of the prisoner dressed as a guard, so she must have at least disabled him. Good. And this idiot, this
Mahelona . . . had simply slung her over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and now here she was, head bumping along, arms hanging . . . and there was her Taurus and her Sig, tucked carelessly into the waistband of his uniform.

No. Oh, hell no. She loved those guns, especially the Taurus. Steve had picked it out for her while waiting for her shoulder to heal. Low recoil. Perfect for this situation.

Without giving it much further thought . . . not that she seemed capable of especially high brain function, which she briefly considered as concerning, because she still wasn't sure why . . . Jax grabbed the Taurus, racked it - still loaded, thank goodness - and fired. She was pretty sure she hit a thigh, or maybe a calf, it was hard to tell from upside down, and then she was falling, and momentarily crushed under the weight of Mahelona as he writhed in agony.

"You bitch," he screamed, grabbing for his leg and his gun at the same time.

Jax clumsily tried to roll to the side, but her limbs and brain still weren't cooperating very well. She heard the safety of his gun click out of place, and thought that maybe her idea wasn't that good, after all.

#*#*#*#*

Declan Novak stood outside the door of the infirmary.

"I have a wonderful surprise for you, Commander McGarrett," he said, in a sing-song voice.


Steve held up his hand in warning for Danny to be quiet. "I don't especially like surprises, " Steve said. "Thanks anyway, but I'll pass."

"Oh, you wouldn't pass this up," Declan said. "You haven't been able to pass this up from the day it arrived on the island. You've kept this all to yourself."


"Well, let me guess," Steve said. "You've managed to catch Officer Nolan. How many of your men did she take out? Because I'm thinking it's taken you an awfully long time."

"Shut up," Declan snarled. "The important thing is, I have her."

"No," Steve said, his calm tone at complete odds with the panic Danny could see in his eyes. "The important thing is, you have three of the six of us. I know I put a decent hurt on two of your guys. I'm guessing from your reaction that Officer Nolan has done some damage. That leaves, what - two, three of your guys? I'm not loving your odds, Declan. Maybe you better rethink this. Make a couple calls, make a few demands for safe release."

Declan laughed. "Oh, Commander, you still don't get it, do you? I don't plan to be released. I told you. I'm here to make you suffer, to make you experience the loss that you caused me to suffer. And then, we'll all die. First your team, then you, then me. You'll hold out to the end, trying to save whoever you can. And when you realize you can't save them, you'll die trying to kill me. It's beautiful, really. Elegant."

"Declan," Steve roared, as he pounded on the door. "You better make that call, and hope that there is some agency that will offer you protection, because if you think I'm gonna stand by and let you hurt my team, you are sadly mistaken."
"Whatever you say, Commander," Declan said, laughing, as he walked away from the door. "I'll bring what's left of Officer Nolan to you when I'm done with her; let you say goodbye."

###

Duke led Chin to a door that, thanks to a bent locking mechanism, they'd managed to pry open.

"Chin, we haven't finished checking for explosives," Duke warned. The German shepherd in a K9 vest wagged his tail at Chin.

"He doesn't seem concerned about this particular door," Chin observed. "I'm going in."

"Not without me, you're not," said a familiar voice behind him.

"Kono," Chin said, "I really -"

Kono cut him off. "Don't even think it, cousin. I'm going. You wanna take point, or you want me to? That is your only choice right now."

"I'll take point, then," Chin grinned. "Let's go get our people."

They went soundlessly down the hallway, carefully clearing each door, corner, and staircase. It was tedious and slow progress, but haste would only get them shot in the back, which was no help to their team.

They'd passed in front of the library door when they heard the shots ring out, and quickened their pace a bit as they carefully and cautiously headed toward the sound.

###

"Captain?" Jax squinted up at him.

"Nolan, you scared the shit out of me," Grover grumbled. "Hold still, lemme see how bad you're hit."

"I'm hit?" Jax asked in surprise, as Grover wrapped his hand around her upper arm. "Oh, it's just a graze," she said.

Grover shook his head. "You are as bad as McGarrett. Just a graze, they say. A graze, and you're dripping, in a big puddle, all over the floor."

"That," Jax said, pointing at Mahelona, who was unmoving in a rapidly spreading pool of blood, "is not a graze."

"No, that is not," Grover said solemnly. "He was shooting at you, didn't leave me a choice."

Sang Min's radio crackled and Jax looked at him, then back to Grover.

"Long story," Grover said, "this is Sang Min, and he's helping us."

"Oh, Sang Min . . . yeah, Kono's mentioned -" Jax started.

"Ah, the spicy cop," Sang Min grinned, and Grover smacked him on the head.

"What the hell was that? I hear shooting, and Mahelona isn't answering his radio."

"It's Declan Novak on the radio," Sang Min said, looking at the radio with suspicion. "He's never
been on the radio before."

"Good," Grover said. "We've got him scared."

Sang Min started to press the button, but Grover and Jax both waved frantically at him to wait.

"Hold up," Grover said. "Mahelona and Corey are finished. You said Steve had put a hurt on two prisoners. Hale and Stamos are unknown . . . we're reasonably armed. I'm liking our odds. I say we make a move before Declan does."

Grover turned suddenly at a sound behind him, raising his weapon.

"You'll really like your odds now," Kono said, grinning at him. "Although I'm not liking Jax's odds of avoiding a trip to the ER. Girl, you look axed."

"I'm good," Jax said, waving her off.

"Okay, what's the plan?" Chin said.

"Tell me what's going on!" came Declan's frantic voice over the radio.

"Fast," said Sang Min, "he's going loco, man."

"Why am I not surprised you're in the middle of this," Chin said.

Sang Min leered at Kono, who smacked him soundly. "Stop it," she said sternly.

"Let Sang Min take me to Declan," Jax said.

"Are you out of your mind?" Grover said. "You're hit, you're all black and blue from - why are you black and blue?"

"Fell down the stairs after . . . shit, no wonder . . . that asshole tazed me. No wonder I keep . . . never mind. Let Sang Min take me to Declan. I can have my backup in my boot, he'll assume I'm completely unarmed. The three of you can flank him, take him down," Jax said. "It's the best plan."

Chin, Kono, and Grover exchanged glances.

"It's crazy," Grover said.

"Risky," Chin said dubiously.

"It sounds like something Steve would do," Kono said, grinning widely and fist bumping Jax.

Sang Min picked up his radio. "The little redhead got the drop on Mahelona," he said. "He's down but I got her under control, boss."

"Hale, Stamos, return to the infirmary wing. We have to assume the other cowards got out; if not, they'll go up in flames soon enough. Sang Min, bring Office Nolan to me immediately. And Sang Min, do not make the mistake of underestimating her."
Sang Min was a nervous wreck. What if Novak didn't buy their story? He might shoot him on sight. Also, McGarrett's little redhead didn't look so hot. Well, she looked hot, but also like she might pass out. Or hurl.

"Hey, you don't look so good," Sang Min said, as he grabbed Jax by the elbow to steady her. It was the second time she'd stumbled. "You should let me patch your arm, maybe."

Jax swatted his hand away and shook her head. "You wouldn't care. Besides, any misdirection we can throw at Novak is good. Let him think I'm more hurt than I really am. I'm fine."

"That's true," Sang Min leered, "you are definitely very fine." He couldn't help himself. Jax smacked him soundly with her good hand, then let out a quiet gasp as she went down to a knee.

"What?! What's going on?" Sang Min said, in panic. "Look, I don't deliver you to Declan alive, he'll shoot me."

"Well thank you so very much for your concern," Jax panted. "Glad to know you care. I'm fine, just . . . shit. Okay," she said, allowing Sang Min to help her up. "My heart keeps skipping beats."

"Oh, yeah," Sang Min nodded sagely. "That happened to me once when I got tazed. You let me know if you need mouth to mouth resuscitation, yeah?"

"I swear, if you don't shut up and just get to Novak already, I'm going to strangle you with your stupid hair."

#*#*#*#*

Chin, Kono, and Grover ducked under the same open staircase where he'd been convinced to separate from Jax.

"What is it?" Chin asked, as he noticed Grover shaking his head in dismay.

"I made a rookie mistake," Grover said. "I can't believe I fell for that. I handed her right over to them."

"Brah, you can't beat yourself up over that," Kono said kindly. "We knew him, for God's sake. He's booked how many of our arrests?"

"From here, Kono and I will go up a level, come back down. With luck, we'll end up flanking Declan and his men. Without radios, it's going to be really hard to coordinate, so trust your instincts, and don't take chances. We still don't know exactly how many prisoners and guards are still in this wing, working with Declan," Chin said, checking the safety on his weapon.

"With McGarrett in the infirmary, I put good money on him having some sort of distraction or having armed himself with something crazy," Grover said. "We just have to keep from catching Steve, Danny, and Jax in the crossfire."

"And Sang Min," Kono added. Chin raised an eyebrow at her. "Look, he's sleazy, but you gotta admit, he's come through for us in a big way," she pointed out.

"Yeah, and I have a feeling this is a favor we'll have hanging over our heads for a long time. I don't look forward to explaining this to the governor," Chin sighed. "Okay, watch your back,
Grover. Get as close as you can to the infirmary without giving away your position."
"Copy that. Then what?" Grover said, checking the safety on his weapon.
"Well, then we hope that we all know when to shoot," Chin said. "It's the best we can do."

#*#*#*#*#
Sang Min half drug, half shoved Jax past Hale and Stamos as they stood at the end of the infirmary hallway. Declan stopped mid-syllable in his ranting at them and lit up at the sight of Jax.

"Well, look who we have here," he crooned. "Sang Min, I must say; you have exceeded my expectations and succeeded where others have failed."

Declan grabbed Jax roughly by the arm, and Steve and Danny heard the resulting sharp cry of pain, even through the heavy door of the infirmary. Jax gritted her teeth and stared at Declan defiantly.

"Yes, I can see the attraction," Declan mused. "A bit on the scrawny side, perhaps, but feisty. Figures McGarrett would want someone with a little fight in them."

Jax could hear Steve pounding on the door. "Come on, Declan, quit jerking around and let's settle this between the two of us," he yelled. "Or are you too chicken-shit?"

Declan snarled and wrapped his arm around Jax's neck, dragging her to the door of the infirmary. "But this isn't about the two of us, Commander," Declan said. "This is about you losing your people, the way I lost mine. Because I sold weapons to people your government decided were the enemy; and we both know that next year, or the year after that, your government will decide they are friends."

Jax's vision was greying out around the edges as she desperately tried to suck in air, her heart skipping and stuttering even more with the lack of oxygen. She fought off panic as Declan squeezed even tighter.

"Now, this is more like it," Declan said, satisfaction oozing from him. "I was supposed to be the one inflicting pain, and I missed the opportunity with Williams. It's all the more gratifying now, I must say." He released his choke hold just enough for Jax to suck in a desperate breath, and then out of nowhere, there was the glint of a blade before it sank into her thigh. She was caught off guard and couldn't stop the hoarse scream that ripped from her throat.

"I'm gonna make you regret that, you bastard," Danny yelled, holding his side and struggling to sit up. Steve was busy yanking a cannister of ethylene oxide off the back of a piece of sterilizing equipment and shoving it into one of his many pockets. Danny recognized the look of fierce determination on his face: it usually meant something was about to explode.

"Ah, Detective Williams, back among the land of the living, I hear," Declan said.

"Yeah, come in here and find out for yourself, you coward," Danny spat. He pressed his arm against his injured side, bracing it, and eased himself off the gurney. The hell if he was going to sit on his ass while that maniac had Jax.

"How does it feel, Commander? Separated from your team, knowing they're injured, hurting. How many of them can you help? Which of them do you sacrifice to save the other?" Declan taunted. He dug his fingers cruelly into the graze on Jax's arm, but she stubbornly refused to make a sound. "Oh, this one would take a lot to break, yes?" He twisted the blade in her leg a bit, and achieved the desired result as another cry ripped past her clenched jaw. She refused to flinch as he
pressed his gun to her temple, and nodded at Hale to release the lock on the infirmary door.

Steve heard the lock disengage and was fully prepared to launch himself through the door at Declan, consequences be damned, but as the door swung open, he caught sight of Sang Min over Declan's shoulder. Sang Min shook his head imperceptibly as he made eye contact with Steve, but it was enough. Declan shoved Jax violently toward Steve, and Hale slammed the door closed. Steve heard the lock seal back into place as he frantically checked Jax for injuries.

"There, Commander, now you have two of your team members, safe and . . . okay, well not safe or sound, I'm afraid," Declan taunted from the other side of the door. "Now, I'm sure you could figure out a way to escape. I'm sure that was your plan all along, moving to the infirmary, right? But can you get them out with you? Both of them? Or will you sacrifice one of them? I'm guessing you won't leave either of them behind, and that, Commander, is why you will all die."

Steve half ignored Declan . . . the rantings were becoming more and more deranged and nonsensical as the day progressed. No, Steve had much more pressing things to deal with, like the knife still sticking out of Jax's thigh. He picked her up as carefully as possible, and placed her gently on the gurney.

"Oh, shit," Danny breathed, and paled even further.

"Sit down, Danny, or get me some gauze," Steve ordered. "Do not pass out. Do you hear me? You do not get to pass out."

"I'm not gonna pass out, you numbskull," Danny sniped, but he limped over to the cabinet and pulled out another box of gauze and brought it back to Steve. "You have some more of that combat gauze, though, right, to stop the bleeding?" he asked worriedly.

Steve looked at the knife, shaking his head. "I don't know that it would be enough, Danny. Here, put pressure on her arm. Damn it. I wanted her on Five-O because I thought I could keep her safer . . ."

"Better not be the reason, McGarrett," Jax mumbled, "it better . . . shit . . ." she gasped in pain as Steve tore her pants away from the knife, " . . . better be because I am one hell of an officer. Left boot," she said, looking at Danny who was on her left side.

Danny carefully checked her boot. "Oh, babe, you are a goddess. Really. There will be songs written about you," he said, producing the Taurus. "How on earth . . . ?"

"Sang Min," Steve guessed. "He's helping us?"

"Yeah," Jax said, biting back a whimper as Danny tried to stop the bleeding on her arm. "Chin, Kono, and Grover are moving into position. They're going to flank Novak, take him out. You gotta get this knife out, Steve."

"No, no, it's safer to leave it, let a surgeon take it out," Steve argued.

"No, we might need to make a run for it," Jax protested. "Sang Min says Declan plans to blow the place. We need to get out. And create some sort of signal so the others know when to close in, take out Novak and his guys."

"Jax, I don't have much combat gauze left," Steve said. "And there's no morphine, nothing left in the infirmary. It got hit early, got cleaned out."

"Well, sailor, I keep my stash in the same pocket you do," Jax said. "Damn it, this is going to be weeks of not swimming. I can not catch a break."
Steve carefully checked her pocket for more QuickClot, and was relieved to find that, along with one of the trusty Israeli pressure bandages she always carried on her person. "Okay," he said, "we have combat gauze and an Israeli, but someone got your morphine. You didn't mention you were unconscious," he added, his jaw tightening.

"Oh, yeah, I got tazed," she said absently. "And my heart's still skippy so morphine probably isn't such a hot idea anyway. Stop procrastinating, Steve, you know what you need to do. Just do it already so we can be ready for the others to make their move. Sang Min is going to flip out and blow his cover if we don't hurry."

Steve looked down at her, completely stricken.

"Oh, babe," she said, reaching up to cup his face in her hand. "Come on, it's okay. You want me to do it? It didn't hit anything vital." She tried to sit up, reaching for the handle of the knife.

"No, no, I've got it, Jax," he muttered. He gingerly slid the compression bandage under her leg and tore open four packets of gauze, placing them within easy reach. "Danny, on the count of three, I need you to pull the knife straight out - don't let it twist or angle, right? - straight." Jax scrunched her eyes closed, and Steve held up two fingers to Danny. It would hurt less if she didn't tense in anticipation, and Danny read his signal.

"Okay, ku'uiipo, hold on. One, two . . ."

Jax made a strangled sound as Danny pulled the knife, and then a low moan escaped her as Steve pressed down on the gauze to try to stop the bleeding. Danny heard Steve growl low in his throat as Declan laughed maniacally on the other side of the door. Thankfully, Jax was right, and it hadn't hit anything major, but still, the blood quickly saturated the gauze pads. Danny looked at Steve in alarm.

"Get me two more packets out of her pocket, Danny," Steve said quietly. Danny fished in the pocket and ripped open the last two packets. Steve added the gauze and pressed down with the heel of his hand. Jax's eyes widened in pain, and she clenched her jaw so hard Danny was afraid she would chip a tooth, but she didn't make a sound.

"It's okay, babe," Danny whispered, taking her hand in his.

"Not giving that asshole the satisfaction," Jax gritted out.

"Hold on," Steve murmured again. "I've got to put a pressure bandage on, Jax, I'm so sorry, but it's the only way to stop the bleeding and keep the wound from tearing."

Jax nodded, and Danny found his hand in a bruising grip, as Steve tightened the bandage, and her back arched up off the gurney.

"Shit shit shit shit," she whispered, closing her eyes as a wave of pain and nausea washed over her.

"You are fucking amazing," Danny whispered to her, brushing a tear away from the corner of her eye. She noticed the way he kept his arm tight against his side, saw the bloody bandages. "Danny," she demanded. "How bad?" Danny just waved her off.

"How bad is Danny?" she asked, turning her head to Steve.

"It's not great, but it's holding," Steve answered honestly.
"Okay, what do we do to signal to the others to move in? Before that maniac comes in here and drags one of us back out," Danny said.

"Will they be ready?" Steve asked Jax, who nodded. "Then I have just the thing," Steve said, grinning at them both. "You, ah, might want to cover your ears." He pulled out the cannister of ethylene oxide and put it in the deep stainless steel sink. Danny shoved a limping and protesting Jax into the corner, standing in front of her, and nodded to Steve.

Steve wrenched the thin mattress from the gurney and stood behind it, only peeking out to aim and fire at the cannister, and then ducking back quickly to avoid the shower of glass and debris from the bank of cabinets at the far end of the room. Within seconds, they heard the shouts of Chin, Kono, and Grover.

"Clear!"

"Clear!"

"Clear. What the hell?"

"Stand back," came Chin's voice. "I'm going to have to shoot out the lock."

Steve grinned in relief at the unmistakable sound of Chin's shotgun racking, and in seconds, there was a huge hole in the door and it swung open to reveal the three team members.

"You guys okay?" Kono asked, rushing into the room.

"We're okay," Danny replied, "What happened? Where's Novak? The other guys? Sang Min?"

Chin shook his head. "We heard the explosion, counted on that being a signal to move in. When we did, the hallway was completely empty. Everyone's disappeared."

"Guys, we might have a problem," Grover said, pointing to an iPad on the floor. It showed a diagram of the special population wing, with red flashing lights at every exit . . . and a timer which was rapidly counting backward from four minutes.

"He didn't plan to go down with the ship," Steve said incredulously. "He knew I wouldn't leave an injured team member behind . . . He can't have gone far." Steve grabbed his gun and flipped off the safety.

"Steve," Danny said, putting his hand on Steve's arm. "No."

"But Danny," Steve protested.

"Not today," Danny said. "Today you get out with your team, together. Alive."

Steve stared down the empty hallway for a brief second, and slammed his hand against the wall. "Okay," he said, shaking his head, and looking intently at the iPad. "Looks like he has some sort of explosive wired at all of the exits."

Chin and Kono grinned. "All but one, boss," Kono said.

"Chin, take point, lead the way out," Steve said, scooping Jax into his arms. He kissed her temple, then handed her over to Grover, who hefted her easily and fell in behind Chin. "Danny, with me, you're about to keel over. Kono, cover our six. Let's move out, people, we need to beat that timer. Go."
The team made their way swiftly down the corridor, to the door where Kono and Chin had entered. There was controlled chaos all over the facility, but Duke spotted them immediately and came running over, flagging down an EMT to follow him.

"Get clear of this wing," Grover shouted. "It may be set to blow."

Duke signaled and there was a rush as HPD and other personnel moved away from the building. Just when they thought that perhaps the timer and explosives weren't going to be an issue after all, an explosion rocked the building and shook the earth beneath their feet. The building shuddered and shifted, as walls caved in and the sound of shattering glass filled the air. An eerie quiet followed, and everyone immediately looked at the yard, horrified at the possibility that the explosion would trigger yet another mass chaos, but the guards, HPD, and the national guardsmen maintained control of the situation.

Grover had put his giant hand over Jax's ear at the first sound of explosion, and pressed her head gently into his shoulder until it was over. "It's over, Nolan, and none of our people were inside, okay?" Grover said, so softly that only Danny, who was standing right next to him, could hear. Danny nodded in appreciation. Grover hadn't been at Ground Zero, like Jax had, but he'd worked with officers who'd transferred from NYPD to Chicago since, and he never failed to remember what emotions and memories those sounds could trigger.

Danny swayed dangerously on his feet, and Steve wrapped an arm around his shoulders, bracing him against himself. "Can we get a bus over here, Duke?" Steve asked, and Duke nodded as he waved over a medic crew.

"Hey, your buddies from SWAT are gonna give you a ride, get you fixed up, okay, Nolan?" Grover said. "Jax," he hesitated, placing her on the gurney, "I'm sorry, I recognized Mahelona . . . "

"Don't," Jax said, grabbing Grover's hand. "Don't second guess. It worked out, yeah? Plus, you saved me dragging my ass out of there on one leg. We're good, Captain." She smiled tiredly at him as she was loaded into the back of the ambulance.

Steve was helping another medic situate Danny onto a second gurney. "We brought the big rig over, figured these two would want to ride together," the medic said, as he expertly wheeled the gurney into place next to Jax. Steve looked in the back of the truck, and then back at the scene before him.

"Commander," Duke said, "The Correctional Emergency Reponse team at Halawa is one of the best; and they have the full support of HPD and the national guard unit. I don't know if any of the blood you're wearing is yours, or if it's all your teams - regardless, you need to be with your people. If we need anything from Five-O, I'll put people in touch with Kelley, Kalakaua, or Grover. Otherwise, I'll see you in your office tomorrow morning. I have a feeling we are going to need Five-O's help with a manhunt by the time we get a head count. But for now, go - take care of your team."

They could hear Chin on the phone with Malia. "Yes, we're all out safely, sweetheart. EMS is bringing in Danny and Jax. Yes, six weeks since you've had Five-O in your ER, that has been a pretty decent record. See you soon."

"We'll meet you at the hospital, boss," Kono said. "I'll grab your bag . . . Malia will read you the riot act if you walk around looking like that." Steve glanced down . . . he was, indeed, generously spattered with both Danny and Jax's blood.

"Room for a passenger?" Steve asked the medic.
"If the passenger is a Navy SEAL who knows how to clamp an artery and start an IV, sure," the medic replied, grinning.

Steve climbed in and made his way toward the jump seat between Jax and Danny, staying out of the way of the work the medic was doing. He quickly and efficiently had both of his patients supplied with oxygen, and pulse ox monitors on their fingers, before the second medic had even closed the doors.

"Detective Williams," his medic said, "between the blood loss and your pain, you're a little shocky, and we have a good fifteen minutes out to the hospital. Since we've started an IV, I'm going to administer some Fentanyl for the pain. Are you allergic to any drugs? No? Okay, good. This will take the edge off; we want to keep you stable and out of shock." Danny nodded groggily. The medic looked at Steve. "Let me guess - those are QuickClot gauze pads?"

Steve nodded. "I figured," the medic said, "they're not protocol, but Jax always had a wad of them stuffed in her gear. We're working on making them standard issue for HPD SWAT. Okay, these don't get touched until the ER, then. I don't want to aggravate the bleeding."

Jax's medic had set her up on a heart monitor, and he was frowning at the readout. He double checked all of the leads, then turning her wrist over gently, he pressed his fingers into her pulse.

"She was tazed in there," Steve said quietly. "Mentioned to me that she shouldn't have morphine, because her heart was skipping beats. Still a problem, I take it?"

The medic nodded. "She was right; definitely no morphine, unfortunately. Jax," he said, patting her cheek. "Stay with me, okay? I know this hurts like a bitch but you're flipping between tachy and brady. We need to get your electrolytes stable and that probably won't happen until the hospital."

"S'okay," Jax mumbled.

The medic continued to carefully check Jax's injuries. "The pressure bandage is holding; I'm sure it's safe to assume that's combat gauze under there, between the two of you. This arm is a mess."

"Hey," Danny protested weakly. "I did the best I could with what I had to work with. Just because I'm not some SuperSEAL or jacked-up SWAT medic like these two yahoos . . . "

Jax managed a chuckle, but it turned into a low moan.

"Okay, no more wisecracks from the peanut gallery," her medic said mildly, but he motioned for Danny's medic to double check Jax's pulse.

Steve automatically reached out to touch Jax, concerned at the medic's interest in her pulse, but pulled his hand back. He knew how important it was not to get in their way. "No, it's okay, you can touch her," one of the medics said kindly.

Steve leaned forward and brushed Jax's hair away from her face, kissing her forehead. "Hang on, ku'uipo," he whispered.

The medic quietly flipped the switch to charge the cardiac paddles, and Steve looked at him in alarm. "Her pulse is extremely erratic, and we just want to be prepared. I'll go ahead and tell you; if her heart should stop, and we don't necessarily think that it will, we'll be trying compressions first. We only want to add more electrical current to the mix if it's absolutely necessary."

Steve kept his eyes glued on the heart monitor. The fact that they'd explained it so carefully didn't
make it any easier when the erratic line of her heartbeat stuttered and stopped.
Jax's medic remained calm, despite the urgent beep of the cardiac monitor, and the completely unsettling flat line that it displayed.

"Okay, she's lost a pulse . . . we've got pulseless VT," he said, double checking her jugular. Steve appreciated the fact that he didn't assume that the machine was always right. The medic swiftly and decisively balled his hand into a fist and struck Jax soundly mid-sternum.

There was a pause, and then blessedly, a beep. And another.

Steve remembered to breathe.

"Sorry, that was probably a little strange looking," the medic started.

"Precordial thump," Steve said. The medic raised his eyebrows in surprise. "We don't have a lot of defibrillators in the field," Steve explained. "Good call."

"Wha' hap'ned?" Jax mumbled.

"Hey, Jax, you stopped pumping there for a minute, but I kickstarted you," the medic said.

"Thump?" Jax asked, wincing.

"Yeah, you'll have a bruise, sorry, Jax," the medic said. Jax liked Officer Gibson. They'd ridden together several times after her first partner took a civilian job. Generally, Gibson was by-the-book and extremely conservative, in contrast to Jax's more creative approach.

Jax raised her eyebrows and smirked. "Yeah? Careful, word might get out that I was a bad influence."

Malía met them at the ambulance bay; an entire team of doctors and nurses with her. In the flurry of activity, she put her hand gently on Steve's arm.

"Steven," she said gently, "I need you to go get checked out - don't argue, Steve, it's obvious you've taken at least one good hit today." She cupped her hand around his jaw. "By the time they check you, I'm sure the rest of your team will be here, and as usual, you can use the locker room to get cleaned up. You all can wait in the Family Waiting Room near Trauma 2 and 3; that's where we'll put Danny and Jax. I'll come get you the minute we have a handle on things. And since you're medical proxy for Danny, there's no doubt going to be paperwork for you to sign."

"Her heart stopped, Malía," Steve said, still not quite recovered from the scare. "And Danny . . . he's lost so much blood, and that wound has been open too long."

"I know, Steve, but as usual, you did everything you could in the field, and they're in good hands, okay?" Malía turned to a nurse who was waiting patiently. "Julia, please take Commander McGarrett to triage and do a vitals and concussion check. Steve, is any of this blood yours?"

"No, ma'am," he said politely. "It's all . . ." he swallowed hard. "It's all Danny's and Jax's."
By the time Steve was declared mildly concussed and dehydrated, with a severely bruised shoulder and strained collarbone, but otherwise sound, the rest of the team had arrived, and they quietly cleaned up and regrouped in the locker room. Grover hesitated outside the door of the family waiting room, and announced that he was going to go in search of coffee.

"He's anxious about how things played out today," Chin observed. "He did hand Jax over to someone who turned out to be with Declan. But any of us would have trusted Mahelona; I wouldn't have seen that one coming."

Steve nodded. "Under normal circumstances Grover would never leave a partner; none of us would. Nothing about today was normal. I over-emphasized getting Jax and Kono out of the building. It's on me."

"Everyone did their best," Chin said. "By the way, how hard was it to hand Jax over to Grover when we were getting out of the wing? I was a little surprised you did that; but I think it was a good move."

"It was one of the hardest things I've ever done," Steve admitted. "But I knew Danny was more seriously injured than he was letting on and wasn't sure he'd ask for help for himself. And as a team leader, I knew what Grover was feeling . . . "

"You wanted to demonstrate immediately that you trusted him," Chin finished. He nodded in satisfaction. "Your dad would be proud, Steve."

Kono came into the room, still rubbing her hair with a towel. "Anything?" she asked anxiously.

"Not yet," Steve said.

The smell of coffee wafted through the door, as Grover reappeared, setting down the tray of steaming cups. "Steve," he started, "They showed me credentials. I recognized Mahelona from the Rivera booking just six weeks ago. I don't know what to say -"

"Say that you brought creamer for Kono," Steve said, gripping Grover on the arm. "That's the only possible problem we have right now, Grover. Everything else is good."

"When we know Jax and Danny are okay, everything will be good," Grover said. "And yes, I have cream for Kono."

They each grabbed a coffee and settled as much as possible into the slightly uncomfortable chairs. Steve lasted three minutes before he began pacing the floor, but thankfully, Malia interrupted his travels before the rest of his team got dizzy.

"Okay, guys, I have an update for you," she said, entering the room and closing the door quietly behind her. "Jax has so far not had a recurrence of the arrhythmia; which is excellent news. We have to be very conservative with pain medication until we're sure her heart rate is stable, and her electrolytes are back in balance, so she's incredibly uncomfortable, but of course mostly she's worried about Danny."

"I thought Danny just needed stitches," Kono said, frowning.

"He's going to have plenty of those - in fact, I've called plastics in for both of them, and Danny's injury is going to be repaired in a surgical suite, just to take every precaution," Malia added. "The laceration is very, very deep; in fact, if it were lower on his ribcage it would have been even more serious. We're debriding carefully but there is a risk of infection." Malia caught the look of guilt that flashed across Steve's face. "From the original laceration, Steve. Danny described the blade as a very rudely fashioned shiv. Those types of weapons are a breeding ground for germs and
contaminants. We'll be keeping Danny at least overnight and starting him on IV antibiotics if necessary."

"What about Jax?" Steve asked.

Malia studied him for a moment. "She should stay, but we know she's going to argue. Maybe if we suggest that Danny needs her here . . . "

"That should work," Steve said, grinning and nodding in agreement. "Are you manipulating my team, Dr. Waincroft?"

"Every chance I get," she replied without apology. "It's usually the only way to get you to stay put and heal."

#*#*#*#*#

Trauma 2 and Trauma 3 were separated by a curtain, and Jax was ignoring the intern trying to clean her arm, and instead, she was actively trying to figure out whether or not her IV pole was long enough to reach and pull it back. Or pull the damn thing down altogether. At the bottom of the curtain, she could see entirely too many sets of feet clustered around Danny's bed. There were hushed voices and murmured consultations, but she couldn't hear Danny's voice and that terrified her. She made out the words infection and surgery and her heart monitor started beeping.

"Officer Nolan," the intern said, in mild desperation, "you really have to be still. I'm still trying to clean up your arm, and all of your wiggling around is messing up your cardiac monitoring."

Jax grabbed the saline syringe out of the intern's hand, and expertly shot a focused, narrow stream of the liquid into the graze on her arm, letting gravity do the rest. She plucked a sterile gauze pad off the tray and slapped it over the now freshly bleeding wound.

"There," she said, nodding in satisfaction. "Clean. Please, tell me what's going on with Danny."

The intern shook his head and threw up his hands in exasperation. "I'll go get a report."

Jax frowned as the intern's feet left the room altogether. That wasn't helpful at all. She shifted uncomfortably on the narrow gurney as her leg throbbed in time with her still steady heartbeat. Alone, safe and sound, with nothing to distract her, the pain from the knife wound and bullet graze was impossible to ignore. The chorus of concerned voices still surrounded Danny, and yet there was no sound of his blustering and ranting. It was wrong; it was all terribly wrong.

A familiar pair of desert brown combat boots appeared underneath the curtain, just before Malia pulled it back.

"What's happening with Danny?" Jax demanded, panic lacing her voice. The cardiac monitor flashed a warning as her heart rate increased, and Steve propped a hip on the edge of her bed, combing his fingers through her tangled mass of red curls.

"Jax," Malia said, "calm down, you're tachy again. Danny is going to be okay. He was sedated to make him comfortable while the laceration was debrided. Because of the risk of infection, his stitches are going to be placed in the surgical suite."

"Oh," Jax said, sagging into the thin pillows in relief. "He's going to be okay?"

"We will have to keep him overnight and watch carefully, but yes, he should be absolutely fine," Malia said. She picked up Jax's chart and started glancing through it. "You haven't yet been given any pain relief, Jax; how are you holding up?"
Jax shrugged. "I'm okay, just, no one would tell me about Danny, and he's so quiet. It freaked me out."

"I can imagine," Steve murmured, smiling down at her.

Malia stepped on the other side of the curtain, and they could hear her quiet voice in conversation with the other doctors and nurses. In a moment, the curtain was pulled back, and an orderly pushed Danny's gurney closer to Jax.

Danny was pale, and still, and quiet. It was absolutely terrifying.

"Danny," Malia said, squeezing his shoulder gently. He frowned and struggled to open his eyes, with Steve and Jax looking on anxiously.

"Wha'is it?" he mumbled.

"We're going to take you and get you stitched up now," Malia said. "Is that okay? Steve can sign the consent form."


"Okay," Malia laughed and handed Steve a clipboard, and he signed the designated line with his usual crisp, efficient script. "You feel better about things now, Jax?" Malia asked.

Jax nodded. "Thank you, Malia," she said. "I might owe your intern an apology."

"Oh, that wasn't my intern" Malia explained. "That was an intern from plastics, who's going to help stitch you up. And I would definitely apologize, since he's going to be the one wielding the lidocaine in a few minutes."

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It was several hours before Danny and Jax were finally settled in a regular room. Malia had once again bent hospital policy, explaining to those who questioned that everyone on the floor would ultimately be happier if the team members could be contained to a small area, as opposed to having one large former Navy SEAL and one small, limping but determined former SWAT officer roaming the halls trying to keep up with each other.

"You sure you don't want to go home, get some rest? We can trade off shifts overnight," Chin offered. It was an unspoken rule of Five-O, that despite the excellent care Malia could ensure, no team member stayed alone overnight at the hospital.

Steve rubbed the back of his neck and grinned sheepishly at Chin. "Well, Jax really needs to be on a cardiac monitor, so she needs to stay, and I don't want . . . I don't think I'll get much sleep at home. Without her."

"Oh, so it's like that," Chin said, his eyes crinkling fondly at Steve. "Okay then. Well, try to get some rest. We'll say our good byes and check in with you in the morning."

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Jax shifted for the millionth time, trying to get comfortable, and managed to jostle both her arm and leg at the same time.

"Shit," she choked out.
Steve's years in the Navy had enabled him to sleep in almost any circumstances, and he had drifted off in the recliner between Danny and Jax's bed. His eyes popped open at Jax's muttered curse. "You okay, ku'uipo?" he asked, unfolding his tall frame and carefully resting his hip on the side of her bed. He gently brushed her riot of red curls out of her face.

"I'm okay; the local has worn off," she sighed. "How's Danny doing?"

"He's resting comfortably," Steve assured her. "They have him doped to the gills."

"Good," Jax nodded. "The less he tosses and turns and the more soundly he can sleep, the better. He won't pull his stitches."

"And yet you're tossing and turning," Steve pointed out. "What can I do?"

"Tell me about Novak. The case," Jax said.

"Jax, this can wait . . . "

"Please. It will distract me," she pleaded.

He told her what he could of Novak's history and the cat and mouse game that they'd played, until he'd been pulled off to go after the Hesse brothers. It did the trick; as they retraced Novak's criminal history and the obviously well-orchestrated events of the day, almost an hour slipped by.

A quiet knock on the door announced the arrival of a nurse to check Jax and Danny's vitals, and she had a welcome order of meds for Jax.

"Your heart rate has remained stable for long enough that we can safely administer some narcotics. This is the pain relief protocol that's in your chart, Officer Nolan," she said, "we're just giving it to you in your IV instead of tablet form, so it will work even faster. And I'm going to unhook you from all of the cardiac equipment." The nurse quietly and efficiently administered Jax's medication, unhooked and stored the equipment, and checked and recorded Danny's information as well.

Steve raised his eyebrows at her after the nurse left. "No arguing? No insisting you're fine?" he teased.

Jax groaned. "No. Not this time. Okay, back to today - we got out of the building before it blew. Do you think Novak did, too?"

"It's certainly possible," Steve agreed. "The Halawa Correctional Response Team and HPD forensics will be working around the clock until we have an accurate head count."

"If they don't find Novak's body, who will be on the case?" Jax asked, starting to blink slowly as the pain killers made their way through her system.

"That's a good question," Steve said. "It depends on which aspect of this situation takes priority."

"But you think Five-O will be involved, don't you," Jax guessed.

"If he's on the island, my guess is that Five-O will coordinate, yeah," Steve said. "Let's talk about that tomorrow, though, Jax. You need to rest."

Jax yawned and closed her eyes. "Okay," she said agreeably. "I'm really tired. Today sucked."

She was quiet for a moment, and then her eyes popped wide open.
"Steve," she said urgently. "That asshole Mahelona took my SIG. I think Grover got it back, though. Will you ask him?"

"Yep," Steve said, perching back on the edge of her bed again. He knew from experience that the good painkillers prompted random and often amusing ramblings from Jax, and he really wanted her to stop fighting it and rest. He ran his fingers through her hair, rubbing the back of her neck in an effort to get her to relax. "I'll ask him tomorrow. It's the middle of the night. Danny's sleeping; you should sleep."

"Okay," she whispered. "I don't want to wake Danny up."

Steve chuckled and settled back into the recliner. There were several minutes of quiet, and he thought she'd drifted off, until he heard a quiet whimper.

"Ku'uipo, what is it?" he whispered.

"I'm cold, and I can't get comfortable, and you're all the way over there," she said, in the tone that he recognized, with amusement, as highly medicated and completely unfiltered.

"I can fix that," he said, as he picked her up carefully out of the bed. He moved her IV pole next to the recliner as he sat back down, cradling her against him. "Better?" he murmured into her hair.

She nestled her head into the crook of his neck, inhaling the familiar smell of salt water that seemed to always linger on his skin. "Much better," she mumbled. She sighed contentedly and finally drifted off to sleep.

#*#*#*#*#

"It's like deja vu all over again. I remember this scene from that undercover op Jax did the first week she was on the island."

Steve looked over at Danny, who was awake and studying them fondly.

"Danno," Steve said, grinning at Danny over the unruly mass of Jax's curls tucked under his chin. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I've been carved up with a shiv," Danny said honestly. "How's Jax?"

"Her heart rate stayed stable, so they were able to finally give her something for the pain," Steve said. "You both had another dose about an hour ago."

"Danno?" Jax mumbled, opening her eyes slightly and peering at Danny. "Hey," she said brightly. "Wow, you look like shit."

"Hey, rookie," Danny said, grinning at Steve. He recognized that medicated, unfiltered quality to her voice as well. "You don't look so great yourself. You okay?"

"'M'fine, Danny," Jax said, absentely waving her hand in dismissal. "I don't have a concussion or anything. My heart is normal again. I just have some stitches; no biggie." She pondered for a moment. "You're not going to make any rules, are you? You know, like before. You made a rule - no . . . you know . . . - until I didn't have stitches."

Danny rolled his eyes. "No, babe, no rules."

"Good," Jax nodded emphatically. "Because at this point, it's un . . . unnecessary. One or the other of us has stitches or something half the time. We've learned to navigate around it. Creative. Steve
Jax was cut off by Steve placing his hand over her mouth.

"Okay, honey, I think Danny gets the picture," Steve whispered, as Danny groaned. "Stop it," Steve ordered firmly, as Jax nibbled delicately on his hand, "I'm putting you back in your bed now, okay?"

Jax sighed. "I miss our bed."

Danny groaned again. "Call the nurse. I want to demand a private room."

What have we got, Chin?" Steve asked, striding into the main room of Five-O headquarters. The rest of his team was huddled around the computer console, and files were up on the plasmas.

"We've got a manhunt," Kono said. Chin frowned at her. She was entirely too excited about the situation.

"But before we explain - how are Jax and Danny?" Chin asked.

"Both due to be released this evening, if all goes well," Steve said. "Danny is still on IV antibiotics because of the risk of infection. Jax is doing great - her heart rate stayed steady and they were able to start giving her IV pain relief. She's not fighting for discharge, thankfully, because she can stay and entertain Danny. For once, she'll get the rest she needs."

"Whatever we can do to help, Steve, you count on us," Grover offered. "Renee, too. She said we'd be happy to have Danny at our house while he recuperates; or Jax, for that matter."

"Thanks, guys, I'll keep it in mind. Now, who are we hunting?" Steve asked, nodding at the plasma screens.

"We have four bodies unaccounted for," Chin said. "Two prisoners, and Declan Novak."

"That's three; who's the fourth?" Steve asked.

"Remember Officer Mahelona?" Grover said, his voice uncharacteristically angry.

"Yeah, of course," Steve said. "He tazed Jax and you both shot him."

"Indeed we did." Grover said. "Jax caught him just below the knee as he carried her upside down; and I caught him center mass. Somehow, he not only survived the two gunshots, but apparently escaped."

"We have four very dangerous criminals loose on the island," Kono said, and although her eyes were sparkling with adrenaline, she was obviously well aware of the seriousness of the situation. "An international arms dealer, a prison guard, and two maximum security prisoners."

"What agency are we working with?" Steve asked. "Homeland? FBI? Naval Intelligence?"

"U.S. Marshals Service," Chin said. "They're sending an agent in this afternoon to join us."
That evening, the team gathered at Steve's so that Danny and Jax could be caught up on the situation. Danny had commandeered the recliner, while Jax stubbornly insisted on staying mobile, with a crutch tucked under her good arm.

"So, U.S. Marshals?" Danny pondered, shifting a bit to try to get comfortable.

"They are the agency responsible for escaped prisoners," Chin explained. "Wasn't who we were expecting, but they claimed jurisdiction and I'm not sure that anyone really wanted to fight them for it. They will have an entire team here in a few days."

"Who's taking point?" Jax asked.

"Joint cooperation; however, Five-O needs to be free to address other urgent cases as the need arises," explained Steve. He was reluctant to share jurisdiction - but he had to admit, it made sense.

"Here are the files that Marshal Alesha Shelton brought in," Grover said, pulling out two manila folders and handing one to Danny. He held on to the other one and raised an eyebrow at Jax. "I will hand you your file, when you sit down and stop pacing around."

Jax mumbled something about 'once a captain always a captain', but sat down in the corner of the sofa near Danny. She and Danny glanced through the paperwork.

"Okay," Danny narrated, "We have Sang Min unaccounted for - no surprise there. I've never met someone more opportunistic. Declan Novak, who obviously orchestrated this whole thing; although I thought he was out for revenge, not escape - either way, he's clearly nuts. Kevin Mahelona, our prison guard turned criminal."

"This fourth guy," Jax said, holding up a paper. "Was he part of yesterday's fiasco? Martin Lassiter, who was being held in maximum security, for eleven counts of kidnapping and murder. Doesn't sound familiar."

"As far as we know, he had nothing to do with Novak, although of course we can't rule it out," Steve said. "We think he just saw the opportunity to escape and took it."

"Keep reading his file; it gets weirder," Kono said grimly.

Jax and Danny read silently while the others watched them expectantly.

"Holy shit," Danny exclaimed in disgust.

"What . . . oh . . . oh that's just wrong," Jax said shaking her head as she caught up to Danny. "Dismemberment? Killing fields?"

"It's believed he kidnapped and murdered his victims on several of the islands, then cut up their bodies and dumped them on Kahoolawe," Steve said.

"Kahoolawe?" Jax asked.

"The smallest island, uninhabited," Chin explained. "Only forty five square miles."

"And still scattered with live explosives. The military used the island for training," Kono added.
"So, we have an international arms dealer, a rogue prison guard who has no issue turning against law enforcement, and a serial killer presumably roaming on Oahu? Armed and dangerous?" Jax asked, incredulous.

"And Sang Min," Danny sighed. "Don't forget Sang Min."

"Yeah," Steve said, running his hand through his hair. "Try to get some rest tonight, guys; I have a feeling the next few weeks are going to be really interesting."

#*#*#*#*#

After the rest of the team left, Steve helped Danny settled in the guest room.

"You're sure you don't want us to sleep down here, Danny?" Jax asked for the tenth time. "We don't mind, really. What if you need pain meds? What if you pop a stitch?"

"I can get my own medication," Danny said. "And if I pop a stitch I will send you a text message."

"Okay, if you're sure," Steve said dubiously, lingering outside the guest room door as Jax made her way down the hall toward the stairs, thumping along gamely with her crutch.

"Positive," Danny said, nodding emphatically. "I still need brain bleach for the image of you being 'creative', Stephen, I don't need the audio clip to go with it."

Steve grinned. "Ok, Danny, but you shoot me a text if you need anything at all, got it?" He turned and caught up to Jax at the foot of the stairs.

"What is Danny rambling about?" she asked, poking at the bottom stair with her crutch and looking up the staircase as if it were a puzzle to solve.

"You don't remember explaining to Danny that we, um, get creative . . . you know, working around injuries and stitches?" Steve teased, wrapping one of Jax's wayward curls around his finger.

"Working around - oh. OH. Oh dear Lord," Jax laughed. "When I was doped up? No, I don't remember. Poor Danny."

"Yeah, poor - wait, stop, what are you trying to do?" He easily wrestled the crutch out of her hand and set it aside.

"I was thinking of going upstairs," she replied, arching an eyebrow at him.

"Oh, I think that's a great idea," he said, tracing the backs of his fingers over a bruise on her jaw. "Did Mahelona hit you?"

"Nah, that has to be from falling down the stairs," she said. "Speaking of stairs . . . " she tried reaching for her crutch.

"Crutches and stairs don't mix," Steve said, as he bent and gently tucked an arm under her knees, and one under her shoulders, lifting her, carefully avoiding her fresh stitches.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, wincing as the stitches on her arm pulled. A quiet grunt of pain escaped Steve; he'd been so distracted with Danny and Jax, and then the briefing with the US Marshal, that he'd all but forgotten his badly bruised shoulder.
"Am I that heavy?" Jax teased. "I'll lay off the loco moco."

"Hardly," Steve said, nudging the bedroom door open with his foot. He placed Jax carefully on her feet, making sure she had her balance before letting go of her. She caught him wincing again before he could school his features.

"Okay, sailor, off," she said, tugging on the hem of his shirt. He was clearly hiding an injury and she was having none of it.

Steve smirked. "Aye, aye, ma'am."

"Oh for crying out loud," she said, rolling her eyes. "You're obviously hurt, I want to see."

"Hmm, how many times did you use that line on your patients?" he teased, reaching a hand back and grabbing the neck of his tshirt and pulling it forward over his head in one smooth motion. It didn't matter how many times Jax saw that particular move . . . it always made her knees a tiny bit wobbly. The shirt went sailing in the general direction of the hamper. Even in the low light of the bedroom lamp, Jax could see the dark purple bruise on the top of Steve's shoulder, extending down toward the intricate tattoo on his bicep. Her fingers probed gently, prompting a hiss of pain.

"Sorry," she murmured. "When did this happen? Did you get this checked out? And your collarbone is swollen, it's at least strained," she added, her fingers delicately tracing over his shoulder, across his collarbone, and then trailing up his neck to cup his jaw.

Steve's eyes darkened in response to her gentle touch, and his hand slid into her hair, tangling in her curls and turning her face up to his. Bending, he kissed her, carefully at first, and then when he was sure that he wasn't hurting her, much, much less carefully.

"You didn't answer my question," she observed, several minutes later, when she reluctantly pulled away for much-needed oxygen. Damn Steve and his Navy SEAL lung capacity.

"What was the question?" Steve murmured, as he kissed the bruise on her jaw, and then the one on her cheek. There was a particularly nasty bruise forming under an angry looking scrape on her wrist, and he turned her hand over gently to brush his lips across it.

Jax shivered. "What question?" she asked, losing her train of thought completely. Since her clothes, as usual, had been completely thrashed, she'd worn scrubs home from the hospital, and the v-neckline revealed the perfectly fist-shaped bruise high on her sternum.

Steve touched the darkening bruise reverently. "Your heart stopped," he whispered. "It just . . . stopped. You flat-lined. Danny and I were watching, and it just stopped."

"I know," she said. "But Gibson started it again."

"Scared the shit out of me, and I knew what he was doing," Steve said. "Does it hurt?" he asked, bending and pressing a kiss to the bruise.

"Not as . . . oh . . . not as much as compressions would have," she answered breathlessly.

Her scrubs and Steve's cargo pants joined the pile of clothes reasonably close to the hamper. He found several more bruises to kiss better as he helped her gingerly ease her aching body onto the mattress. . . she'd fallen unhindered down a flight of stairs, and while her vest had provided protection for her ribs, the other points of impact were colorful. His hand ghosted over the bandage on her thigh, and he caught a glimpse of a strange expression on her face.

"What is it?" he asked, brushing her hair away from her eyes.
She shrugged. "I won't be able to swim until the stitches come out," she hedged.

His hazel eyes stared straight into her. "You want to try that again?" he asked, not buying her answer.

"Do you think my board shorts will cover the scar?" she asked, looking down. "Never mind, that's stupid."

He tucked his fingers under her chin and tilted her head up to look in her eyes. "It's not stupid, ku'uipo. Malia called plastics in for both you and Danny, remember, so I'm sure the scar will be faint. And I do think board shorts will cover it, which will be good while it's healing completely, so it won't get sunburned. But Jax," he said earnestly, "trust me when I tell you that when you're on the beach, no one is looking at your scars."

She blushed and smiled, as he traced over the scars on her sides and then finally the one on her hip. "I happen to love this particular scar the most," he continued, "because you let me take care of this the first week you came to the island. I couldn't believe that you trusted me enough, after all you'd been through."

He pulled away reluctantly and she made a sound of protest.

"Danny didn't make any stupid rules," she pointed out. "Where are you going?"

"Danny's stupid rules aside," he said, "you're bruised all over and stitched up in two places."

"So? Be creative." She grinned at him wickedly.

*Creative? Oh hell yes,* his brain chimed in, and for once, Steve didn't feel the need to ignore or contradict his subconscious.

When he woke up the next morning, Steve smiled, realizing that Jax had slept soundly through the night, her head cradled on his uninjured shoulder. Granted, she'd taken her prescribed sleep and pain medication, but when she did have a night of uninterrupted, pleasant sleep, he always liked to think that he had at least a little something to do with it. He checked his phone and sighed. It was a good thing they'd had a decent night's sleep - the governor had already emailed to ask about the search for the four men missing from the Halawa fiasco, and Steve had absolutely no idea what to tell her. It was going to be a long day.
Memorial Day

Chapter Summary

Freddie's parents want to spend Memorial Day with Steve

Chapter Notes

I couldn't find any canon backstory for Freddie's parents, so I took a great deal of liberty in creating one.

There was nothing for it - four missing prisoners, all assumed armed and dangerous, and a team of federal marshals coming to participate in a joint operation to hunt them down - Steve was going to miss Memorial Day with Freddie's parents. They'd kindly invited him months ago, and he'd almost forgotten until his phone rang and 'Mom Hart' popped up on the caller ID.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm so sorry. I was looking forward to it as well. Thank you for understanding," Steve said, slumped in his desk chair. Jax was on his sofa, pecking away at a laptop, her injured leg propped on a low footstool. She normally shared an office with Grover, but there were two marshals sharing what was intended to be her desk, and it was plenty crowded.

"Actually, that would . . . are you sure? I think that would be very nice, if you don't mind that I'm likely to be tied up and the office and chasing down leads. But I, um, need to ask my . . . well, you see, someone is living with me now. Yes, ma'am," Steve said, and Jax looked up, intrigued. She could swear he was blushing. "Just a moment, please." Steve pushed the mute button on the phone.

"Hey, Jax," Steve said, "I was supposed to spend some time with Freddie's parents this weekend, but obviously, with the case . . . they've offered to come to our place instead, spend Sunday night, maybe at least catch a little time together in the evening. And then they could enjoy the beach. Maybe you could listen to Malia for once, and take it easy for a bit, keep them company?"

"Is this a conspiracy to keep me out of the field?" Jax said suspiciously.

"No . . . although you're definitely not cleared for field duty . . . these are Freddie's parents. They're . . . they're his parents," Steve said simply. It was enough.

"Of course, Steve," Jax said. "I'd be honored to meet them. I'll cook for them, if you think they'd like that. But anything good comes in, you have to promise, you're not going to cut me out of the loop."

"I won't, ku'uipo, but you'll work tech and logistics from the home office," Steve said. "Malia would frown on you even being here today." He returned to the phone call. "Mrs. Hart? We'd be delighted to have you. No it's absolutely no problem whatsoever, my . . . well, Jax, who you'll meet, is injured and on severely restricted duty. It actually works out very well. Yes, ma'am, we'll see you Sunday evening, then."
The rest of Saturday passed in painstaking, agonizingly boring comparison of notes, and Sunday started off the same. The US Marshals were thorough and followed their own protocol, and while it wasn't Steve's style to put so much energy into creating files, he respected their approach.

So far, the prisoners had vanished without a trace, although it was highly unlikely that they'd made it off the island - at least, not through any conventional means. With no active leads to follow, Steve asked to speak with US Marshal Brian Caviness in his office.

"What can I do for you, Commander?" the marshal asked, curious as to why he was being invited for a private conversation. "Is there a problem?" He was well aware that he, and his team, were likely stepping on toes, even though they were just trying to do their jobs.

"No, Caviness, no problem at all," Steve assured him, gesturing for him to sit. "Do we have any active leads whatsoever?"

"Not yet. I can see where our data-based approach is probably frustrating to you, Commander. You're welcome to add to the cases as you see fit. We are, after all, in your offices," Caviness said.

"Your attitude is refreshing, Marshal," Steve said. "And if my team seems . . . skeptical; well, please bear with us. We just had a very negative experience with an agent from Homeland Security."

Caviness nodded. "Yes, Captain Grover filled me in after your Officer Kalakaua gave me the stink-eye." He laughed and waved off Steve's look of concern. "Commander, I assure you, my team is tight-knit; we would have had a similar dynamic. But, I don't think that's why you asked to speak with me?"

"No, actually, I wanted to let you know that I'm leaving for a few hours, provided there isn't anything pressing you need from me," Steve said. "As Danny will attest - loudly - I often stay in the office 24/7 while there's an open case, but I need to go home for a bit. I lost a team-mate in an op a couple years back . . . his parents are coming in for the Memorial Day holiday."

"And I assume you'll be taking Officer Nolan with you?" Caviness asked mildly.

Steve crossed his arms and stared at Caviness. "Is that a problem?"

"Not at all. She's not cleared for field duty; I assumed she was here because she would be considered an active target for at least two of the escaped prisoners. Her official file lists the same residence as yours; obviously, it's not a secret that she lives with you. My interest in Officer Nolan's whereabouts and schedule is purely to coordinate her safety. We assume every member of your team is a target; especially Nolan and Williams. We're suggesting that the usual precautions be put in place," Caviness said. "I also asked if you were taking her with you, because she's bleeding through her bandages."

Steve followed Caviness's gaze out to the main computer, where Jax had a hip propped against the computer, her crutch long abandoned in some forgotten corner of the office. She and Kono had their heads bent over the console, and as Jax stretched to reach and click on a file, Steve could see the faint trace of blood seeping through the bandage on her arm.

He sighed. "If her arm's bleeding, she's likely pulled stitches on her leg, too. Yeah, I'll get her out of here. I'm reachable by cell, and I have a home office."

Marshal Caviness smiled and nodded. "Commander McGarrett, your team has been through an
incredible ordeal. We're here to help and support - please allow us to share some of the workload. All of you need to take some down time this weekend. We know how to reach you." Caviness stood and extended a hand to Steve. His handshake was firm, but not aggressive.

"Marshal Caviness, I appreciate it," Steve said. "I look forward to working with you."

"Jax, you're dripping on Chin's computer," Steve said, leaning in the doorway of his office and looking at her with fond exasperation.

"Sistah, you've pushed it too far again," Kono chided. "Sorry, boss. I didn't notice or I would have tried to bench her."

"Come on, we're going to head home, be there when Freddie's parents arrive," Steve said.

"Okay," Jax sighed. "Kono, let me know if that stake-out for Sang Min becomes a possibility." Jax started to limp toward the elevator.

"Crutch?" Steve said, quirking an eyebrow at her.

"In here," Danny called from his office. "Where it's been for the last hour, while she neglected to use it." He came out of the office, holding the crutch out toward Jax, who took it reluctantly.

"It makes my good arm hurt," she protested.

"You know, a good solution for that would be to, oh, I don't know, stay off your feet altogether," Danny said. He looked exhausted; still pale from blood loss, and lines of fatigue and pain etched his face.

"Danno, call it a day," Steve said. "That's an order. Go home. Rest on the sofa; let Gracie play nurse. Marshal Caviness is going to keep us posted if any leads come in. Kono, you and Chin and Grover wrap it up when you are ready, okay?"

Marshal Caviness nodded in approval, smiling as Steve's hand settled on the small of Jax's back as they headed toward the elevator.

###

"Do we need to go see Malia?" Steve asked, as he boosted Jax up into the Silverado.

"Nah," she said, leaning her head back against the seat. "Will you change the bandages for me?"

"Of course," Steve said, looking at her with concern. She usually was stubborn enough to insist on trying to do that herself. Her skin was pale beneath the smattering of freckles across her nose; her eyes closed, lashes dark against her cheeks. "I could call the Harts . . . " he started.

Her eyes flew open and her head snapped up. "Don't you dare," she said. "I'm fine, really and truly. I'd never forgive myself if you missed seeing Freddie's parents because of me."

"Okay, but no cooking tonight," he said. "We'll get the good barbeque from Chan's; Mr. Hart especially will love it."

Jax nodded in agreement and fell silent for most of the rest of the drive home.

"What is it, Jax?" Steve asked gently, putting his hand, warm and strong, on her knee. "You're awfully quiet." She was biting her lip uncertainly, and he resisted the urge to just pull over and kiss her until she stopped.
"I think I should sleep in Mary's room," she mumbled quietly, looking down at her hands. "I mean, I don't know his parents, and what if they're old fashioned, and how are we going to explain . . . I mean, I haven't even known you that long, and . . ."

"Jax," Steve said, stopping her rambling. "Seeing as how their granddaughter was conceived before Freddie and Kelly got married, I don't think they're going to be shocked at the idea of us sleeping together. But if you're more comfortable sleeping in Mary's room, then of course, that's absolutely fine."

"I know how important the Harts are to you," Jax said, "and I just don't want to disappoint you."

Steve shook his head. "Jax, they are going to adore you. And you could never, never disappoint me. Now, come on, let's go get your bandages looked at, and get a couple of beds made up." He winked at her as he easily lifted her from the truck, and carried her, protesting, into the house.

###

A little of Jax's nervousness slipped away the moment Fred and Maureen Hart entered the house. She'd stood back, hesitant, balancing on her crutch, as Steve opened the door wide and welcomed them inside.

Fred shook his hand and clapped him on the back.

"Good to see you, son," he said.

"Steve," Maureen said, as she cupped his face in her hands and kissed his cheek. Steve wrapped her in a hug, and from the way he rested his forehead on her shoulder, Jax knew he was struggling to control his emotions. "I know, honey, it's okay," Maureen murmured. Freddie had always easily expressed his emotions, but Steve . . . well, Maureen suspected it had been frowned upon, and she thought that was a shame.

"Steve, there is a beautiful young woman in your house," Fred said. "Hello, darlin', I'm Fred."

Jax awkwardly reached her hand out to him, still precariously balancing on her crutch.

"Jax," she said, "it's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Hart."

Maureen turned Steve loose with a pat. "Jax, please, we're Maureen and Fred. It's so lovely to meet you. Shouldn't you be off your feet, though, sweetie? Please, don't stand on our account."

"Let's sit on the lanai," Steve suggested. "Jax is supposed to stay off that leg; you all get settled, I'll bring out some drinks."

Jax shot Steve a look a sheer panic, but he just winked at her and headed to the kitchen. Something about her reaction seemed odd to him. She hadn't been nearly this worked up over meeting any of Danny's friends when she arrived on the island.

He pulled out his phone and shot Danny a text.

*You feeling okay Danno? Looked tired today. Take it easy.*

*I'm good, Steve. Gracie and I are settled in for an evening of movies.*

*Bring her over if she gets bored. The Harts would enjoy her. Hey, Jax is totally freaked about meeting them. ? Why ?*
Steven. You numbskull.

What?!

You realize: this is the equivalent of meeting your parents.

It is?

Yes, you neanderthal. Your parents are gone. You speak of Freddie like a brother. Ergo, his parents are in loco parentis.

Crazy what? You're not making sense.

Not loco, you idiot. In loco parentis. Substitute parents.

Well, yeah, we're close.

Steven. You've invited her to "meet the parents". I'm sure you've not yet had any sort of conversation with her about your relationship, mind you, you schmuck, but yet she's meeting the parents.

Oh shit.

Yeah.

How would you feel if her parents walked in the door?

Oh shit.

Yeah.

Okay, thanks Danno. Gotta go.

Steve leaned against the refrigerator. Why hadn't he thought of this - of course Jax was nervous about meeting Freddie's parents. Now he was a little nervous, too. This was ridiculous. He sighed and grabbed a tray, loading it with bottles of water, and a beer for Fred.

When he stepped onto the lanai, he had to smile. As he had predicted, the Harts were clearly smitten with Jax. Fred had launched into an animated retelling of one of his and Freddie's misadventures, and while Jax laughed in delight, Maureen was discreetly investigating the bandage on her arm.

"I promise I cleaned and dressed it properly," Steve said, smiling down at Maureen.

"I'm sure you did, Steven," she said, patting Jax's arm gently. "This remarkable young woman hasn't mentioned yet how she got injured."

"Maureen, she might not be able to say," Fred reminded Maureen gently.

"It's actually related to one of the missions Freddie and I were on, before . . . " Steve said. "Someone we were chasing held a grudge. Wanted to hurt me, so . . . ":

"So he went after someone close to you," Fred said, nodding. "I'm sorry, son. And I'm sorry you got hurt, Jax."

Jax hesitated. Her injuries seemed so insignificant, compared to the Harts' loss.
"Oh, no, you can't do that," Maureen said, reading Jax's hesitation accurately. "You can't be sad to be alive, just because Freddie isn't. Right, Steve?" she said, fixing an intense gaze on Steve. "We had to have this conversation quite a few times," she added to Jax.

"From the way Steve looks at you, I think he'd be quite devastated if anything happened to you, darlin'," Fred said. "So none of this nonsense of feeling guilty for being alive. From either of you. Is that beer for me? Good man, Steve. You aren't having one?"

"No, sir, we are on standby and I could have to drive at any point," Steve said.

The evening passed pleasantly, with the Harts hearing the story of how Jax came to the island. They told more joyous stories in memories of Freddie. Sometimes Maureen laughed through tears, and Jax saw Steve struggling to control his emotions more than once; but on the whole, the memories brought them joy. Fred and Maureen smiled at each other when they noticed Steve's arm around Jax, his thumb tracing idle circles at the edge of the bandage on her arm. And they didn't miss the way Jax's hand slid into Steve's, holding it tightly when a memory of Freddie threatened to overwhelm him.

As the sun started to set, Steve turned to Maureen.

"Jax is an amazing cook, so you'll have to come again some time when she can be on her feet. But we got some really good barbeque from our favorite local place," he said. "Are you all ready for dinner?"

Maureen popped to her feet. "Let me come help," she said, holding out a hand to Jax, who had reached for her crutch. "Nonsense, Jax, stay and entertain Fred. I'm perfectly fine helping Steve."

As soon as they were in the kitchen, Maureen grabbed Steve in a fierce hug.

"She's just lovely, Steve, and we're so happy for you," she said. "But there's a sadness beyond her years. What happened?"

"She was at Ground Zero; really young, not even quite twenty, but New Jersey PD. She lost a brother, and her first love," Steve said quietly. "And she left out a lot of details about the case just before she arrived here," he added.

"You care very deeply for her," Maureen said.

"Yes, ma'am," Steve answered, nodding.

Maureen studied him for a long moment. "It's important to say the words, Steven," she reminded him gently. The Hart family told each other frequently, and specifically, how much they loved each other. It had seemed to Maureen that Steve's family had not set such an example.

"Well, then," Maureen said briskly. "Let's go get everyone fed, shall we?"

After a hearty dinner, the Harts took a short walk on the beach. Steve saw Jax looking wistfully at the Adirondack chairs closer to the water, and scooped her up and headed for them.

"Crutches are useless in the sand," he said, sitting down in a chair and nestling her comfortably in his lap.

"The Harts are good people," Jax said, snuggling her head against his shoulder.

"They feel the same about you," Steve assured her. "You sure about sleeping downstairs? I'm pretty sure we're not fooling them."
Jax laughed. "I know you think it's silly, but . . ."

"Not silly; whatever makes you comfortable is not silly," he said, kissing the top of her head.

Steve made sure everyone was comfortable for the night, including a brief argument with Jax over her pain medication.


Steve gave in, exasperated, and kissed her goodnight. "Sleep well, ku'uipo," he whispered.

Perhaps it was his own exhaustion, or perhaps the subconscious knowledge that the highly competent Maureen Hart was on hand, but for whatever reason, Steve didn't wake up immediately when Jax stumbled out of Mary's bedroom at 2 am, half asleep, and not at all aware of her surroundings.

Maureen did, though. She and Fred had thought it was quaint, and charming, that Jax had stayed on the first floor.

"Who exactly does that boy think he's fooling, Mo?" Fred had asked. "She didn't even know where the light switch was in that bedroom."

"Well, it's whatever they're comfortable with, Fred," Maureen said. "We're the closest thing Steve has to parents, remember? I think it's sweet. It's high time Steve shared his life with someone. Though between the two of them . . . " she sighed. "They've lost entirely too much."

So when Jax stood in the hallway, completely disoriented, Maureen didn't think twice. Her instincts kicked in, and her heart went out to the petite young woman.

"Billy?"

The cry of anguish broke Maureen's heart.

"Jax," she said softly. "What is it, sweetheart? Do you want me to go get Steve?"

"You need to get out," Jax said urgently. "The building is going to come down. I'm trying to find Billy."

Maureen hazarded a guess. "Your brother?" she asked gently.

"Yes, ma'am, and Danny. You need to get to safety, though ma'am." Maureen was touched; even in her confusion, Jax's instinct was to try to protect others.

"My dear, I think you are not fully awake. Can you tell me where you are?" Maureen asked. Her years in social work had given her a solid understanding of PTSD, and there was no doubt in her mind that was what she was dealing with here. "Do me a favor, look down at your feet, and tell me what you see."

Jax looked at her feet in confusion. Light wood, bleached and worn smooth with age. Definitely not concrete.
"I'm not in New York," she said. "And Billy and Jake are gone."

"That's true, sweetheart, and I'm so sorry," Maureen said.

Realization dawned on Jax. "Oh, I'm so sorry; I woke you up . . ."

"Nonsense," Maureen said, reaching out and tucking a wayward curl behind Jax's ear. "Darling, I understand. Sometimes, in those first moments between asleep and awake, I find myself wondering if I'll hear from Freddie, or trying to remember if I've marked the date of his next leave on the calendar."

Jax nodded in understanding, impatiently brushing a tear from the corner of her eye and squaring her shoulders. She mentally berated herself for creating a situation which clearly reminded Mrs. Hart of her loss.

"I'm so sorry," she said again, trying to make a retreat to her room. She turned and put too much weight on her leg, and gasped in pain, reaching out to the wall for support. Maureen took her gently by the elbow and pulled her into a hug.

"Oh, my dear, let's get you sorted," she sighed. She sized Jax up. "Let's see, NYPD, SWAT . . . how about a nice strong coffee?"

Jax smiled, and Maureen chuckled, fetching the crutch from where it leaned against the wall next to Mary's bedroom door.

"Steven," Maureen said calmly, as they made their way past the stairs and into the kitchen, "I see your feet on the stairs. We're having coffee; do you care to join us?"

Steve sheepishly shuffled down the stairs the rest of the way, wrapping his arms around Jax and snuggling her to his chest. "You okay, ku'uipo?" he murmured. She nodded against him, and he gently framed her face with his hands, tilting her head back to look in her eyes. Satisfied that she was okay, he kissed her gently, brushing her cheekbones with his thumbs.

"I gotta hit the head," she mumbled, thunking down the hall as quietly as possible.

Maureen had started the coffee pot and set out three mugs. Steve sighed as he came into the kitchen.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Hart; I couldn't convince her to take her pain medicine tonight," Steve said. "Did she hurt you?" he added, suddenly worried, and remembering the assorted bruises that he'd suffered from some of Jax's more violent nightmares.

Maureen pointed at a stool and Steve slid obediently onto it.

"No, she did not hurt me, Steven - I'm quite alarmed, though, that apparently that's a possibility," Maureen said, reaching out to hold Steve's hand across the counter. "Has she hurt you, honey?"

Steve scoffed. "Please, she packs a punch but I'm a Navy SEAL, remember?" He grinned.

Maureen fixed him with a no-nonsense glare.

"Her last case in New York . . . just before she came here," Steve said, "she was assaulted. If she has a nightmare, sometimes, she can get violent, and I have a hard time waking her up without hurting her. It's getting better."

"And what happens when you have nightmares, Steven? Have you ever hurt her?" Maureen
asked quietly.

"Never," Steve said.

Maureen gave him that look again.

"She’s learned how to avoid getting punched," Steve admitted.

"My darling boy, it's time to stop pretending you're okay. It might be time to get some help. The both of you. Promise you'll think about it," Maureen said.

"Yes, ma'am," Steve said, glancing down the hallway as Jax came out of the bathroom.

"Now," Maureen said, as she poured three cups of coffee. "What is this nonsense, with Jax sleeping downstairs in a clearly unfamiliar room, waking up from a nightmare without you to comfort her, Steven?" She smiled over the top of her coffee cup as Jax and Steve glanced at each other sheepishly.

"It was my idea, Mrs. Hart," Jax said. "I didn't want to make you uncomfortable; I wasn't sure if you'd be okay with . . . you know. It seemed disrespectful, somehow . . . "

"Ah. It seemed disrespectful for you and Steve to have a normal, healthy relationship . . . because Freddie isn't here with Kelly?" Maureen guessed.

"Yes, ma'am," Jax said, studying her coffee.

"I see. Steven, would Freddie have liked Jax, do you think?" Maureen asked.

Steve lit up. "Freddie would have adored Jax," he said. "Don't you think?"

"I do," Maureen agreed. "He would have liked her smile, and her pretty freckles, and he would have teased her about her hair. And you would have had to smack him around a little bit, because despite his faithfulness to his Kelly, Jax is absolutely fetching, and he would have made several inappropriate comments. Am I right?"

Steve laughed. "Yes, ma'am. I would have had to threaten to rat him out to you or Kelly."

"So, my darling children, what part of making yourselves miserable do you think honors Freddie's memory?" Maureen asked gently. "You honor his memory, and the memory of all of those that you've lost, by being as happy as they would want you to be. Yes?"

Steve's arm had wrapped around Jax again, his thumb brushing the edge of the bandage on her arm. She rested her head on his shoulder, and he dropped a kiss into her hair.

"Now, we have several hours before sunrise," Maureen said, gathering up their coffee cups, "and I had the foresight to make decaf. Off to bed, the both of you, and get some more sleep. Or, not," she added, winking at Jax, who blushed furiously.

A few minutes later, Jax was snuggled contentedly next to Steve.

"I told you they wouldn't mind," he whispered, teasing her gently.

"Yeah, yeah," she mumbled, her fingers delicately tracing over his intricate tattoos. "Be quiet; we're supposed to be sleeping."

"Or not," Steve whispered. "That was an option, too . . . "
Chapter Notes

The backstory of Freddie's parents is entirely a figment of my imagination, created for the Jersey universe.

Jax had stirred when Steve tried to slip quietly from bed. Under normal circumstances, both of them were incredibly light sleepers - too many years of being on high alert would do that to a person - but he had hoped not to wake her. The scant hours sleep she'd managed after waking with a nightmare had been fitful at best, even with Steve wrapped around her. Steve hadn't succeeded much better; each time he drifted off to sleep, he was rewarded with images of Danny, motionless and bleeding . . . or of Jax, flatlined in the back of the ambulance.

"Ku'uipo, it's early still," he whispered. "Try to get some more sleep. I want you and Danny to stand down today; rest if you can. I promise I'll keep you in the loop and call if anything of interest comes in." He rested his hand on her hip, his thumb brushing over the scar there. Shaking his head, he marveled at how tiny she always looked in their bed; tangled in the sheets and now cuddling his pillow. It was such a contrast to how she looked in her tac gear, always projecting a strength and confidence that belied her petite frame.

"Promise?" she mumbled sleepily. "Because if you don't, Grover and Kono will, they promised, too."

"I promise," Steve chuckled. Kono and Jax kept him - all the guys, really - on their toes. Reminding them, when necessary, that they were fine officers, highly trained. Lethal, when they needed to be. Not simpering damsels in distress who needed protection; quite the opposite, in fact. Steve still had a little groveling to do, to make up for trying to get Chin and Grover to get Kono and Jax out of Halawa when all hell broke loose. He knew, though, that he'd make the same call again, in the same circumstances - if he even had to. More than likely, Chin, Danny and Grover would take the same action without even being told.

"Promise," he whispered. "Get the Harts to drop you off at HQ when they're ready to leave." He kissed her cheek, turned reluctantly from the bed, then turned back, lingering in the doorway. "Oh, and Jax," he added, "make sure you keep the alarm set." He paused. "And keep both your SIG and your Taurus on you."

Both of her eyes popped wide open at that, fixing Steve with a steady gaze.

"Understood," she said, nodding. So he did think the team was possibly a target for the escaped prisoners, then. No surprise there.

Fred Hart, Sr. kept a routine that most men half his age would have envied. He was coming in from an early morning run when Steve came through the kitchen to get a thermos of coffee.

"Good morning, son," he said quietly. "Did you get a lead?"

"No, sir," Steve answered. "I was happy to take some time off yesterday afternoon, so I thought
I'd go in early this morning. Look over everything while it's still quiet. The Marshal heading up the investigation . . . seems to be doing an awful lot of research. Thought I'd look over it, get up to speed, so that our teams work well together."

"Research . . . not so much your style, is it?" Fred smiled.

"No, sir, but he seems to be a good man. The Marshal service and WITSEC . . . have their own way of doing things. Danny should feel more at home," he added, laughing. "Would you and Maureen be willing to drop Jax off at HQ when you're ready to head home? No rush at all, I just . . . well, Jax is probably under the impression that she's been tasked with making sure you're secured. I didn't tell her about your background."

"I'll be honored to serve as back-up, if needed," Fred said, smiling in understanding. "Though you're more than welcome to tell Jax, Steve. I'm retired, you know. You expecting trouble to come calling? Think your team will be targeted by these escaped prisoners?"

"The whole situation was created by a personal vendetta against me," Steve said. "The man we were tracking before they sent Freddie and me after the Hesse brothers set up the whole thing to get revenge."

"I would have thought he would have been happy to get off so easy," Fred said.

"He's clearly unbalanced," Steve explained. "He stood on the other side of a door from me, put a knife in Jax . . . taunted me. It was personal; very, very personal. I don't know what intel he has, but until we find his body, I'm operating on the assumption that once he realizes we survived . . . he'll be looking for another opportunity to take us down. My team first, then me."

"Well, then," Fred said. "If I see him, I'll be sure to give him your highest regards." He nodded at Steve, a look of grim determination and understanding passing between them.

"The security code to the gun safe is Freddie's DOB," Steve added quietly. Another nod, another exchange which required no words, and Steve was on his way.

The quiet, empty offices of the Five-O headquarters sometimes reminded Steve of the deck of a carrier, between shifts, in the dark hours of early morning. Or the pre-dawn patrol of a remote Afghan village. When he was in the SEALs, he'd thrived on the steady rush of adrenaline of training and missions; but in Naval Intelligence, he'd some to appreciate the peace and quiet of dark, early hours to sift through clues and data, hoping that some nuance of information would be the break he needed.

Being barely 6 am, no one else was in the office, but he could see a stack of files neatly left on the desk that Marshal Caviness had been using, and decided to start briefing himself on the information gathered by the team of marshals. He'd barely spoken to Marshals Ed Polinski and Alesha Shelton, but they seemed quiet and dedicated, much like their team leader.

Steve frowned at the stack of files . . . there were the four he expected, one for each of the men they were searching for . . . but there were six more. One for each of the members of Five-O. Holding the stack of files, Steve angrily strode into his office and sat down at his desk. He turned on the desk lamp, leaving the rest of the floor in relative darkness, and picked up the file marked with his own name.

"What the hell . . . " he muttered, as he started glancing through the information. Succinct and to-the-point, details of his history were laid out in black and white. High school, Annapolis, the
SEALs, intelligence . . . right up to the last item in the file, a picture. Steve examined the photo - obviously taken just as the team was gathering at his house, right after Jax and Danny were sent home from the hospital. He remembered pulling up in front of the house, lifting Jax carefully out of the Silverado, and reaching back in for her crutch . . . then the uneasy feeling of being watched. In the photo, he's looking almost directly at the camera, instinctively putting Jax between himself and the truck.

"I thought for sure you'd made me," Marshal Caviness said quietly, nodding at the picture in Steve's hand. "You looked straight at me."

Steve had registered the quiet sound of someone else entering the office, but had been so intrigued with looking through the file that he hadn't looked up to see who else was there; generally speaking, he'd have assumed it was Chin.

"Caviness," Steve said slowly, "we've gotten off to a good start . . . I hope you have a damn good explanation for why you have me and my team under surveillance."

"I do," Caviness said, nodding, crossing his arms across his chest. "My team is not here just to help take the four missing men into custody, Commander. We're also here to evaluate which, if any, of your team or their families needs to be put into the WITSEC program."

"Shit," Steve said, sinking back into his desk chair. "Novak?" he asked, pulling out the file marked accordingly.

"For starters," Caviness said. "I read the reports; he obviously tried to take out your people, and it seems that Detective Williams and Officer Nolan were his first targets. It's also obvious that you're aware of this." Caviness pulled out the files marked with Danny and Jax's names.

Steve nodded. "I assume my entire team is being targeted by Novak."

"Novak may be the least of your worries, but it's clear that you've taken measures to protect your team. Starting with Officer Nolan . . . you have retired Delta force operator Fred Hart, Sr. at your house," Caviness said.

"The Harts are friends; we were supposed to spend Memorial Day together," Steve said.

"And you didn't argue when they suggested coming to your place instead," Caviness guessed. "My guess is that's the only reason you're here and Officer Nolan is there."

Steve rubbed his hand over his face. "When they leave, they'll be dropping her off here."

Caviness nodded. "Excellent." He flipped open Danny's file. "And I see you convinced Detective Williams to accept the offer from Captain Grover to stay at their house."

"Well, normally Danny would have stayed at my house . . . no Five-O member stays alone when they're injured," Steve said mildly.

"Ummhmm," Caviness said, pulling out a photo from the back of Danny's file. "And the fact that Commander Wade Gutches took a few days of leave time . . . and just happens to be in several of our surveillance photos of the Grover family?"

Steve was silent.

"It must be a coincidence," Caviness said, smiling. "Just as the presence of Commander Joe White in the house next door to Detective Williams' ex-wife; and the shockingly ubiquitous presence of one Kamekona and several of his relatives in close proximity to Lieutenant Kelly, Dr. Malia
"Waincroft, and Officer Kalakaua - also coincidence?"

"I may have called in some favors," Steve said.

"Is your team aware, Commander, that you've put protective surveillance in place?" Caviness asked.

"Grover, Chin, and Danny were told that I had asked some friends to keep an extra set of eyes and ears on their families," Steve said. "You could have asked, you know. Instead of sneaking around taking surveillance photos."

Caviness nodded. "We could have. But we prefer to observe the situation as it is, rather than planting suggestions."

"And your observation tells you . . . what, Marshal?" Steve said. His hackles were up a bit. Was Caviness suggesting that he was careless with the safety of his team?

"Easy, Commander. Our observation is that your team is remarkably well-protected; especially given that you don't fully understand all of the threats. Yet," Caviness said.

"You said that Novak may be the least of our worries," Steve said.

"Martin Lassiter," Caviness said, pulling his file out of the stack. "Your Lieutenant Kelly did a fantastic job of research, and you know most of the case."

"But not all of it," Steve said. "I'm guessing there's a WITSEC connection here."

"That is correct. Obviously, extreme measures are taken to protect the identity of those in the program; including no mention of their names or involvement in all official case files, including those shared with law enforcement. The information is shared only on a need-to-know basis."

"And we need to know," Steve said.

"You at least need to know that eight individuals, two of whom are minors, went into WITSEC in order to put Lassiter behind bars. Every moment that he walks free, their security is diminished. We have a rapidly closing window before protocol demands that we uproot them yet again and create new identities for them." Caviness hesitated. "The two minors involved are in high school and middle school; doing well, settled in, with good friends, good teachers . . ."

Steve sighed. He knew all too well what it was like, having your life uprooted at such a crucial time. "And you want to be sure Five-O doesn't focus on Novak to the exclusion of Lassiter," he said.

"Commander McGarrett, you've been asked to participate in the hunt for all four criminals unaccounted for, and I have no doubt you will do just that. However, there's no denying that Novak is a particular threat to your team, while Lassiter is a particular threat to our witnesses. We can accomplish more in cooperation, especially if, God forbid, these two maniacs are cooperating and joining forces. We're happy to share every piece of information we have on Lassiter - both what's on and off the record - and assume you'll do the same regarding Novak."

"You assume there's off-the-record information on Novak," Steve said, raising an eyebrow.

"He was willing to put himself behind bars in order to have the opportunity to personally attack your team. That's pretty much a red-flag for there being more to this than meets the eye," Caviness said. "If nothing else, it's an indication that the man is simply nuts."
"So where do we start?" Steve asked.

"I trust my team implicitly, as you do yours," Caviness said. "We start by reading each other in, and then read our teams in. Full disclosure, full cooperation."
Assuming that the rest of the team would arrive at their usual time - holiday notwithstanding, they had four prisoners on the loose - Steve sent a quick text to Grover to reluctantly ask that he bring Danny in, and then to Fred Hart to ask him to bring Jax.

_Sorry to cut your time short, but we have information on the case. Is Jax up?_

_She made us breakfast and is now lacing her boots and looking at her watch. I'll be happy to give her a ride._

_Thank you, sir._

_No problem, son. She's a keeper. I wish Freddie could have met her._

_Yes, sir. Me too._

Chin and Kono arrived next. Steve smiled at the sight of Kono's hair, still damp from an early morning surf - that boded well for her mood for the rest of the day. Marshals Polinski and Shelton came off the elevator soon after, and within a few minutes they were standing with Chin and Kono at the computer console, uploading and sharing files.

The welcome smell of coffee and pastries wafted off the elevator along with Danny and Grover.

"Danno," Steve said, relieving him of a tray of coffees. "Good to see you looking better. Renee must have cooked for you."

"She did, Steven, and her cooking is much, much better than yours, so my days of recuperating at Casa de McGarrett may be numbered," Danny quipped.

"Well, Danny, you know, now that you mention it, it does sort of cramp my style when you're at the house," Steve retorted. It was just too easy; Danny was walking right into this one, and Steve rarely could resist the opportunity. "I mean, Jax and I have to try to be quiet so as not to offend your delicate sensibilities . . . make it all the way upstairs . . . it's kind of a drag."

"You enjoy doing this to me, don't you?"

"Yes, Danny, I do," Steve said, nodding and smiling as he grabbed a coffee.

"Where is our favorite medic, by the way? I'm surprised you let her out of your sight," Danny said.

The elevator dinged, and Steve looked up, a soft smile appearing on his face.

"Ah," Danny said, not even bothering to turn around. "Smitten face . . . Jax must be here."

"I do not have a face," Steve said absently, even as he felt the lines of tension around his eyes relax. He shoved his hands in his pockets, as a reminder that they were at work, so tangling his fingers in Jax's hair and kissing her senseless would have to wait until later.

Danny caught the gesture and rolled his eyes. "Incorrigible, is what you are," he muttered.

"Is that today's word from the calendar?" Steve asked smugly.
"That's every day's word for you, Steve, along with many, many others," Danny sighed. "Okay, let's get this show on the road. While I appreciate the gesture, I'll be glad when Commander Joe White is no longer skulking about my baby girl. It makes me edgy. Let's put these assholes back behind bars where they belong."

After outlining the BOLOs and alerts that were issued to all local law enforcement, transportation options, and hospitals, the teams started with the file on Sang Min.

"Well, that's . . . wow. He's unique," Marshal Shelton said, incredulously, after Kono briefed the marshals on Five-O's history with Sang Min. "He actually helped your team during the prison riot? Unbelievable."

"As far as threats go, Sang Min is arguably the least likely to threaten the lives and safety of our teams, and the general population," Steve said. "However, he's also the most likely to be able to offer some sort of information on the whereabouts of the other three. So, while his threat risk is relatively low, I'd place tracking him relatively high. He is an opportunist, and will look for any way possible off this island, but his options will be limited. He's recognizable."

"That hair . . ." Jax muttered.

The file for Officer Mahelona was up next. Chin flicked some photos onto the plasma.

"We've worked with Officer Mahelona for years," Chin said. "That's how he was able to convince Captain Grover to entrust him to follow Steve's orders to get Jax out of the building, if possible. In fact, Mahelona was the guard responsible for booking and processing Dillon Rivera in a recent gang-related arrest."

"We read the case file," Caviness said, as his fellow marshals nodded. "Excellent work; despite the unfortunate misconduct of the homeland security agent involved."

"I've pulled every shred of background on Mahelona that I could get my hands on," Chin continued, "and turned up a few interesting pieces of information." He flicked another file onto the screen. Several screen shots of financial statements appeared. "Mahelona has a serious gambling problem; he owes thousands to loan sharks who are affiliated with MS-13."

"Not the Yakuza?" Steve asked in surprise.

Grover shook his head in dismay. "MS-13 is moving in, slowly but surely. Buying up debts is one of their signature moves."

"So he was motivated by money, then," Danny suggested. "Not personal revenge, like Novak."

Chin hesitated. "I hope it's that simple, but . . . Now, this is a stretch, and it even seems a little narcissistic to mention it, but . . . I did cross-reference Mahelona with everyone on the team, and I came up with this." He flicked another file onto the screen. "I didn't remember Mahelona from the academy, but apparently, our paths crossed. We were both in the selection pool for officer training school; I was selected, but he was cut."

"Ouch," Danny said.

"It gets worse, and I don't think this is a stretch," Chin said grimly, pulling another file onto the plasma. Several clippings from the Honolulu Star-Bulletin appeared. "Mahelona has written at least half a dozen letters to the editor over the last five years, vehemently protesting the selection and promotion of female officers in HPD."
"Oh, geez," Kono said, rolling her eyes.

"Check the dates," Chin said, and the team squinted at the files on the screen.

"That one was published the same month I joined Five-O," Kono said quietly.

"And that one," Grover said, pointing at another file, "was published the week that I hired Nolan for SWAT."

"Shit," Jax swore quietly. "No wonder he tazed me."

Danny looked at Chin. "Please tell me Mahelona never applied for SWAT," he said quietly.

Chin shook his head. "Wish I could say that, Danny, but he did, about five years ago. He was turned down. Shortly after that, he quit HPD and went to work as a guard at Halawa."

Caviness picked up on the subtle shift of the Five-O team; the way Steve's hand quietly rested on Jax's waist; the way Danny almost imperceptibly stood closer to her, angling his body between her and the marshals; the tightening of Chin's jaw; the graceful caress of Kono's hand over her Smith & Wesson; and the downturned expression of profound sadness that flickered across Grover's features.

"I'm going to follow up on this later, Commander McGarrett," Caviness said quietly. "If that's okay with you?"

"That's fine, Marshal Caviness," Steve said, clearing his throat quietly against the sudden tightening.

"So we're going to assume that this Officer Mahelona may have tried to take his money and run, or he may yet have a personal axe to grind with Lieutenant Kelly and Officers Kalakaua and Nolan," Marshal Polinski suggested. "Would you all agree?"

A round of nodding and quiet assent indicated that everyone was in agreement with Polinski's solemn assessment.

"He's injured, thanks to Jax and Grover, but we've hit a dead end at all the local hospitals and clinics. If he's getting medical help, it's not going to be on record," Chin continued. "Kamekona and the cousins are keeping eyes and ears open for anything that might be a lead on Sang Min and Mahelona."

"We will, of course, defer to your suggestions and follow your lead on tracking these two," Marshal Caviness said. "But whatever we can do to be of assistance, you'll have our full cooperation. Commander McGarrett, go ahead and catch us up on Declan Novak, if you would."

Steve nodded and flicked a new set of files onto the plasma screen.

"Declan Novak was a primary target when I was working Naval Intelligence. He sold arms to the highest bidder, and didn't care who got caught in the crossfire," Steve began. "He also didn't care about the quality of his goods." He flicked a picture onto the screen, a grainy photo which showed a truck, and several misshapen clumps which only Jax and Caviness recognized immediately as the broken and mutilated bodies of an indeterminate number of soldiers.

It took a moment for the rest of the team to realize what they were looking at.

"Holy shit," Danny murmured, glancing down at Jax when he realized that she'd instantly
recognized the image for what it was.

"This was from an RPG that never made it out of the truck; it backfired through the heat shield and breech. There were an estimated four dozen RPGs in that particular shipment; we know there were many injuries and fatalities, but of course there's no way to collect exact data. Novak didn't keep invoices," Steve continued. "It's a wonder he wasn't taken out of commission by some of his customers; but then again, when you can't obtain equipment through legitimate channels, you get what you pay for."

"In addition to his lousy business practices and poor quality merchandise, Novak had a tendency to sell especially to anyone whose interests contradicted those of the United States and its allies," Steve explained. "He seemed to go out of his way to put our soldiers and sailors at a disadvantage, and for a brief time, that's why he was near the top of the list of arms dealers we were trying to take down."

"Until someone even higher up the food chain came on the scene," Kono guessed.

"My team was pulled off to track the Hesse brothers," Steve nodded. "And I think you all know how that ended?" He looked at Caviness, who nodded.

"We've read the case file, Commander, yes," Caviness confirmed. "And we're terribly sorry for your loss associated with that mission."

"Thank you," Steve said, looking down at the table for a moment. "Another team was sent after Novak, and they were good. Using our intel, they closed in and raided his camp. Somehow Novak managed to slip out and evaded Naval Intel. Until he showed up on the island, nabbed by customs, it was assumed he was still at large in Europe or Asia; perhaps operating under a new identity."

"And you don't believe that he was 'nabbed' by customs, is that correct?" Caviness asked.

"Based on the elaborate care with which he set up the Halawa situation? No way. Months of planning went into that; including doing the background work necessary to know which guards to recruit," Chin answered. "He was several steps ahead of us."

"Everything seems to indicate a pre-meditated and well-orchestrated plan," Steve agreed, "except possibly for the fact that he intended my team to go up in the explosion of the prison wing."

"Possibly?" Grover asked, incredulous. "We barely made it out of there."

"Yeah, but if you remember, Novak also claimed that he was going to go up with the building," Steve said. "I don't put it past him to have on some level hoped for more of a cat and mouse game. Everything he said and did in that prison was personal - his goal was to exact revenge on me by hurting my team."

"How pre-meditated, and how personal?" Caviness asked, standing across the table and leveling an open gaze at Steve. There was nothing threatening about his posture or tone, but it was obvious that he was expecting full disclosure.

"He obviously tracked the same information that Chin did, if he knew to recruit Mahelona, which indicates a tremendous investment in planning time," Steve said. "And very, very personal. He made it clear that he wanted to hurt my people himself, starting with Jax. He'd been gathering intel for quite some time. We threw his plan off kilter by getting some of our people out, and he definitely underestimated my team."

"But we'd be foolish to underestimate him," offered Marshal Shelton.
"Yes, absolutely," Steve nodded.

"So, we need to assume that Declan Novak is targeting your team, especially those close to you?" Marshal Polinski offered again. It was obvious that his role in the team of marshals was to objectively assess risk, and he was good at it. "And that would be . . ."

"The entire team," Steve said firmly. "Okay, obviously Jax . . . he knew we had a private relationship . . . but if he knew that, then I think it's safe to assume he knows that Chin was close to my father, that I hand selected Danny as my partner while he was investigating my father's murder, that Kono is Chin's cousin and my first rookie recruit, and that Grover was hand-picked from HPD. We spend time together outside of work, at my home . . . if Novak wants to hurt me by going after my team, he will go after any and all of them." Steve hesitated. "And their families. Which is why I called in some favors for extra eyes and ears. But you should know that part of the reason we're cooperating with the US Marshals on this . . . they're here to evaluate whether or not a recommendation will be made for any members of Five O, or their families, to participate in some level of Witness Protection."

The room fell silent as the rest of the Five O team absorbed that information.

Kono was the first to speak, looking calmly at Marshal Caviness. "And what is your recommendation so far, Marshal?"

"At this point, I'm cautiously optimistic that we won't need to recommend it," he said, meeting her gaze openly. "The sooner we apprehend these people, the better."

"I'm guessing there's another WITSEC connection in all of this," Danny said.

"Yes, you're correct," Caviness answered. He paused and flicked a mugshot onto the screen. "You've read the file on Martin Lassiter. Eleven counts of kidnapping and murder; victims taken from various parts of the islands, their bodies . . . or parts of them, anyway . . . eventually recovered on Kahoolawe." He paused, taking off his jacket and tossing it over a nearby chair.

Without the jacket, and with the emphasis of the shoulder holster, Kono noticed for the first time that Caviness was . . . very nicely put together. She realized she had tuned out when she saw the twinkle in Danny's eye under his slightly raised eyebrows. Willing herself not to blush, she tuned back in to what Caviness was saying.

". . . injuries due to the unexploded ordnance on Kahoolawe, it's possible there could be evidence that was not, despite our best efforts, even recovered. What is not included in any official file is the fact that Lassiter was not successful in all of his kidnapping and murder attempts. There were survivors who testified against him; they and their families are part of WITSEC. Obviously, with Lassiter free, we consider them at incredibly high risk."

"May I ask . . . why isn't the FBI working the Lassiter case?" Danny inquired. "Not that we're complaining."

"The FBI apprehended Lassiter the first time," Marshal Shelton explained, "but at the present, he is an escaped prisoner and a threat to WITSEC participants, and as such, he falls under the jurisdiction of the US Marshal service. If there is reason to believe he has murdered again . . ."

"The FBI steps in," Steve finished. He sighed and scrubbed his hand over his face. "There are eight of us; two still recovering from injuries. We do have the cooperation of HPD, of course, but . . . it could be considered hubris not to ask for the FBI's help."

Caviness nodded, studying Steve. "Or," he said slowly, "it could be considered the better part of
prudence to keep our operation small and local. Five-O, is, after all, an elite task force, with immunity and means."

A subtle smile spread across Steve's face, and was quickly mirrored on the faces of the rest of the team. "That's true... that's true," he said, now grinning broadly at Caviness. "The FBI doesn't have immunity and means."

Caviness started to send some files up to the screen, and then hesitated. "If anyone wanted to break for lunch before we talk more about Lassiter... you may not feel like eating afterward."

"No, go ahead," Steve said, as the rest of the team nodded.

"Some of the crime photos you've seen," Caviness continued, as several pictures appeared on the screen. "But some details that would have been known only to the WITSEC participants were withheld from all official files. Lassiter tracked at least some of his victims by cyberstalking; we assume he can, and will, hack into any of our files, given the opportunity. These files are on removable drives only; never uploaded into any data base or transmitted via the internet. Lassiter's victims all had one thing in common - they were native Hawaiians."

Caviness paused as the team stared, horrified, at the plasma screens. Lassiter had obviously tortured his victims while he held them captive, if the pictures were any indication.

"These are evidence photos... of the survivors?" Jax asked quietly.

Caviness nodded. "Yes. Even in these photos, their identities are protected."

"What provoked Lassiter?" Chin asked. "What triggered him? The file we read didn't give a definitive answer."

"Because there isn't one, really," Marshal Shelton offered. "The FBI profilers came up with some theories, but even after extensive interviews with survivors, there was no specific identifiable trigger. Which makes predicting his victim selection and tracking his movements almost impossible."

"The file said he was captured when he slipped up... these survivors managed to escape," Danny said.

"Lassiter made an error of arrogance and over-confidence. He forgot that the cyber tracking he was using could be used against him. An analyst found a lead, followed it back. Lassiter had kept photos, documents..." Caviness said.


"Like most serial killers, Lassiter had a compulsion to keep souvenirs. He kept his digitally, and that's how the FBI took him down," Polinski said.

"So, is there a connection between Novak and Lassiter?" Grover asked.

"Not that I found on my end," Chin said, looking to Marshals Polinski and Shelton.

"We haven't yet found a connection," Polinski said. "According to the data available, they never crossed paths, even at Halawa."

"But, that's only according to the information we have on record," Shelton added. "If the two of them are working together..."
"Well, let's not borrow that particular trainload of trouble until we have a reason to do so," Grover suggested.

"Okay, so even with HPD backup, we are going to be spread thin chasing after four suspects," Steve said. "Caviness, obviously you and your team need to focus on Lassiter. Chin, Kono - I want you to work with the marshals. No one knows the tech we have available to us, or the island, better than the two of you. Grover, you and Jax focus on Officer Mahelona; get Duke and whoever else you need from HPD, especially anyone who knew him when he was on the force. Jax, you are restricted from active duty, so you're surveillance and tech only, got it? Danny, you and I are going to focus on Novak, and I'm going to get some help from Naval Intel."

"What about Sang Min?" Kono asked.

"We're going to see if Kamekona and his cousins can get us a lead on Sang Min," Steve said.

"Kamekona is going to ask you to deputize him before this is all over," Chin warned.

Steve grinned. "Well, stranger things have happened. Remember, we don't know if, or to what extent, any of these guys may be working together. Leads may cross paths; keep an open mind. And no one - no one - goes after anyone without backup."

"Really," Danny said sarcastically. "Really, no one? Not even you, Super SEAL?"

"Not - what, Danny?" Steve asked indignantly. "When I need to, I call for backup, yes. What?!" he repeated, as he followed Danny into his office.

Caviness raised his eyebrows at Chin, who just shook his head.

"Okay, people, you heard the man," Grover said. "Let's get to work. Jax, fire up that computer," he added, smirking down at Jax.

"I hate desk duty," she grumbled darkly. "And you're my partner now, not my boss," she reminded him.

"Yeah, but I still outrank you and outweigh you by, oh, about a hundred pounds," Grover said, his tone clearly affectionate as he handed her crutch to her and gently rubbed her injured shoulder.

"Come on, I have an idea; remember Carlos?" she asked, as she made her way gingerly to her desk.

"We can take over the main console here," Chin said, gesturing to the large computer table in the center of the room. "Make yourselves comfortable . . . "

###

Steve slid behind his desk with a sigh and propped his head in his hand, rubbing his eyes. Danny eased himself slowly into a chair across from him.

"You, my emotionally constipated friend, have found yourself in a pickle, haven't you?" Danny asked. He looked at Steve sternly, but his voice was compassionate.

Steve looked up at him, surprised.

"Steven. You're going to have to pull every available resource for this . . . including Catherine. And you," he said, pointing a finger at Steve, "have neglected to have two crucial conversations, haven't you?"
"I just . . . the thing between Catherine and I, it was never serious, Danny. I assume that Jax was involved with other people before she met me; and I'm sure she assumes the same . . . it's just never come up. We talked about Jake, a little, but she's never asked . . ." Steve said, rubbing the back his neck.

"I know, Steve," Danny said kindly. "And I know you have to pull Catherine in on this. It's too important not to. Jax will understand, too, and I don't think she's the jealous type, anyway . . ." Danny hesitated.

"What?" Steve asked. "What's that tone?"

"I do not have a tone," Danny said automatically. "It's just - she's not jealous, Steve, but she tends to be a little . . . maybe a little insecure. You've said it; Jax has no idea how special she is, how pretty . . . and Catherine, she's . . . well, Catherine."

Steve frowned. "You're not making sense, Danny. I don't get it."

"I know you don't, my friend, and I love you for it," Danny said. "Now, I am going to go call Rachel and ask her to invite the nice man who's probably sitting in a tree outside the mansion inside for some lemonade, and ask him to drive Gracie to and from school until this situation is resolved."

"I thought you didn't like Joe 'skulking around your baby girl', Danny," Steve said.

"Oh, I don't. I don't like it one bit. But you didn't send a rent-a-cop to watch after my family, Steve, you sent the badass, hardass, asshole who made you the man you are today. And if you and I can't be there to protect Gracie ourselves, then I trust the man you trust," Danny said. "Now, let's get our uncomfortable conversations over with so we can catch these bastards."

Steve sighed again and trailed out of his office after Danny, walking to the office that Grover and Jax were sharing.

"Grover," Steve said, knocking on the door. "Um, Danny's calling Rachel to make sure security and Joe White are in place . . . do you need to make any calls, set anything up with Renee? Is there anything we can do for them? Name it, man, and we'll make it happen."

Grover unfolded his huge frame from behind his desk. "Renee is quite accustomed to the life of a cop, Steve, and you've been kind enough to ask your friend Commander Gutches to keep an eye out . . . but, maybe it would be a good idea for Renee to talk to the kids' school; let them work from home for a couple days."

Steve nodded. "I uh, need to speak with Jax for a moment while you take care of that."

Jax looked at Steve quizzically, but grabbed her crutch and followed Steve back to his office. He held the door open for her, and then closed it.

"Steve, you're making me nervous," she said quietly, leaning against his desk.

He stood just in front of her, tracing a finger over the bruise on her jaw. "You sure you're up to this?" he asked.

"You did not make me limp across the room to ask me that," she said exasperated. "Spill, McGarrett."

_Yep, still hot_, his brain offered.
"Okay. I mentioned calling in Naval Intelligence," he said.

"Yeah, that's fantastic, that you still have access through contacts there," Jax said. "I hope it gives us a lead or a break we can use."

"I do too, and I think it will, or I wouldn't try it. I just . . . I should have talked to you about this a while ago, the middle of a case is a lousy . . . " he took a deep breath. "My contact in Navy Intel is Lieutenant Catherine Rollins. We used to . . . we were . . . I mean, things were never serious but we did . . . you know. We saw each other."

Jax arched an eyebrow at him. "You saw each other."

"Yeah, we . . . dated. Or whatever." Steve said, shifting his feet awkwardly.

"Okay," Jax said. "You think she'll still be willing to help?"

"Do I - yes, I think she'll still be willing to help," Steve said. "So you're not . . . you don't think it will make you uncomfortable?"

"Should it?" Jax said, biting her lip uncertainly.

Steve cupped his hand around Jax's chin, tugging on her lip gently with the pad of his thumb, until she quit chewing on it. His hazel eyes locked with her dark green ones, and he smiled at her - the slow, soft smile that she was pretty sure was just for her.

"Nope," he said. The answer was short and to the point, but the kiss that followed it spoke volumes. "Not Catherine . . . not anyone."

"Well, okay then," Jax said. She tried to keep her voice carelessly confident, but damn it if it didn't come out all breathless and smitten. Steve smirked.

"Shut up," she said, smacking him on the arm. She'd forgotten that she was balanced on a crutch, and stumbled backwards just as Danny returned to the office.

"Whoa, whoa," he said, grabbing her by the waist and steadying her. "We good here?" he asked cautiously.

"Fine, Danny," Steve said.

"All set," Jax said. "Now get to work, boys, get us a lead."

"Steve is going to follow that lead," Danny said, grabbing Jax by the elbow. "You and I have a follow-up appointment with Malia."

"Danny," Jax said, exasperated. "We are in the middle of a huge case."

"Yes, yes we are. Which will be severely compromised if one or both of us succumb to an infection at a crucial point."


"Yes, Steven, that is what happens with infection. It sneaks up on you, overtakes you quietly, and BAM!" Danny yelled so loudly that Kono, already on edge looking at photos of body parts, jerked her head toward Steve's office.

"What the fuck, brah?" she asked. Caviness glanced at her, his expression a mix of astonishment
"What the fuck, brah?" she asked. Caviness glanced at her, his expression a mix of astonishment and amusement. "You'll get used to it," Chin mumbled absently, as Danny prodded Jax toward the elevator. "What's going on?" Kono demanded.

"Steve's calling Lieutenant Rollins," Jax tossed back over her shoulder. "The boys are losing their shit over it."

Agents Shelton and Polinski looked mildly horrified, and Chin was pretty sure he heard the word "unprofessional" slip quietly between them. Kono shrugged and grinned at Caviness. "Welcome to Five-O," she offered.

"Hello, sailor," the familiar, warm voice came over the line, and suddenly, Steve felt like a jackass. He should have called her. Really.

"Catherine," he said, his voice already hesitant. "It's been a while . . ."

"It has," she replied, "and I've missed hearing from you. Word from Pearl is that you have a real situation on your hands there - Declan Novak is at large again? I'm assuming you need help."

"I do, Catherine," he said earnestly. "We've got three criminals and Sang Min on the loose, and zero leads. We've spent hours looking at traffic cams, security footage, airport and harbor footage . . . nothing. It's like they're ghosts, all of them; they've just vanished. We're working with the US Marshal service, hoping to avoid calling in the FBI."

Catherine hummed sympathetically. No one liked calling in the FBI.

"Well, the full resources of Naval Intelligence will be at your disposal, Commander," she said. "Novak is on our wanted list, too."

"Thank you, Catherine," Steve said. "There's, um, there's something else . . . now is a really bad time, but I really should mention . . ." He paused. Of the many ways to go about this, he was reasonably certain he was choosing the wrong way.

Catherine couldn't take it; she knew Steve had a good heart, and she knew he was already overwhelmed with the stress of the case. Any other time she might have enjoyed tormenting him a bit, but today wasn't the day for that.

"Steve," she said gently, "I know about Jax."

Steve didn't realize he was sitting there with his mouth literally hanging open in astonishment until Chin raised his eyebrows at him pointedly. Steve closed his mouth. He was a professional, after all.

"Where'd you get your intel?"

Catherine snorted indelicately. "Oh, Steve. Danny called me a while back."

"Danny?!"

"Now, hold on, Steve," Catherine placated. "I get this call from Danny, wanting to know if you had led me to believe that our relationship was exclusive, or serious, or heading that way. Because
you seemed to be falling for his former rookie; and if you were leading either of us on, he was going to, and I quote, 'kick your ass to Hoboken and back'."

"Oh. And what did you tell Danny?" Steve was thinking that since Danny hadn't, in fact, kicked his ass, that maybe Catherine had told him what he needed to hear. But talking about relationships was not his strong point - okay, it wasn't his any point - and he had a momentary pang of genuine anxiety, that he had inadvertently mislled Catherine.

"Oh, Steve, honey," Catherine said. "You're worried, aren't you? You're such a good guy. Danny is right, you're also emotionally constipated, but a good, good guy. Damn it, all the good ones really are taken."

"Catherine," Steve said, his voice a little strangled.

"I told Danny that neither of us had made the other any promises, Steve," Catherine said, "and that I never thought our relationship would be permanent, and it lasted longer than I thought; but you desperately needed someone in your life from whom you're willing to accept comfort and affection, and I was happy to be that person until someone came along and stole your heart completely."

"So, what, you dated me out of pity?"

"God, no, Steve, you're fantastic in bed."

Steve hoped the flush that he felt creeping over his face wasn't visible all the way out to . . . no, Kono was smirking again. Damn.

"Look, Steve," Catherine was saying. "I've been on a lot of missions, even been in combat zones. But I've never experienced . . . when I leave the Navy, I'm going to be able to leave it behind me, move on into civilian life. We both know that's never going to happen for you, and you need to be with someone who really understands that. From what Danny says, Jax gets it, gets you, in a way that very few other people ever can or will."

Steve cleared his throat. "Yeah."

"At some point, Steve," Catherine said gently, "you're going to need to do better than 'yeah'. I know you're better at demonstrating your feelings than sharing them, and Danny says she's the same. So . . . just make sure you use your words, okay?"


"Yes, well. Then you should listen to the people who love you, Steve," Catherine said. "Now, send me everything you have on Declan Novak, and I'll get a team together and we will turn over every rock on Oahu until we find him."

"Okay, Catherine," Steve said. "Thank you. And . . . thank you."

"You got it, sailor."

"Any luck, guys?" Steve asked, coming out of his office to stand next to Chin.

"Only the bad kind," Chin said grimly. "We have a new missing persons report just filed this morning. The description of the missing person matches the general demographic of Lassiter's victims."
"Native, between the ages of 25 and 45, successful," Steve said. "Of course, that describes many of the people on the island."

"It does, and we'll hope it's a coincidence," Caviness said. "But until we prove otherwise, we're concerned. In the absence of other leads, though, we will follow through on this."

Kono put a file up on the screen. "Valerie Keon; age 33. She owns a small but very profitable bed and breakfast on the North Shore. Her guests went to sleep last night; woke up this morning and they were the only ones in the house. No sign of a struggle, no sign of Valerie. We're going to interview the family, and cross reference every shred of data that we discover."

Steve nodded at Caviness. It wasn't much, but it was more of a lead than they'd had so far. He continued across the room and poked his head into Grover and Jax's office.

"Hey, big guy," he said. "I expect Jax and Danny back soon. Did you get Renee and the kids all set?"

"Yeah, thanks Steve," Grover said. "We're all set. Hey, Jax had an idea that I've been following up on - remember Carlos, from the Rivera case?"

"Yeah, the punk that was working his way up the MS-13 food chain? I remember him," Steve said, his eyes darkening dangerously.

"Well, he didn't get much of a deal with the DA," Grover said, raising his eyebrows at Steve.

"Imagine that," Steve said. And Grover could imagine that; he could imagine a phone call from Steve explaining to the DA exactly why Carlos shouldn't get any breaks.

"Mahelona owes MS-13 big bucks. So, who wants to find Mahelona as badly as we do?" Grover asked.

Steve pointed at him. "MS-13. So how do we play that angle?"

"We give Carlos an incentive to give us the name of the MS-13 member or members most likely to go after Mahelona to try to get their money. We tail them, they lead us to Mahelona," Grover explained. "At least, that's how we'd do it in Chicago or New York. Don't see why it wouldn't work here."

"MS-13 is a transplant gang . . . they'll operate here much like they operate in Chicago or New York, at least for the first generation," Steve said. "It's a solid plan, Grover, good work."

"Hey, it was your girl's idea, man," Grover said. "I'm just setting up the interview at Halawa. Speak of the devil, here comes my pocket partner now."

Steve chuckled at Grover's apt description.

"Don't you tell her I said that, McGarrett," Grover warned quietly. "She may be little but I'm not messin' with that Jersey temper of hers."

Danny and Jax came off the elevator and toward Grover's office, arguing all the way.

"I'm telling you, Danny, it's not a big deal," Jax protested, as she limped beside him.

"What's not a big deal, and where's the crutch?" Steve asked, as Jax and Danny entered the office. Jax sat on the edge of her desk, feet dangling well above the ground. Steve couldn't help it - professionalism be damned - he slid a hand into her hair, fingers tangling in the curls, and pressed
a gentle kiss to her forehead.

**Excellent restraint,** his brain complimented him.

"I have been promoted from the crutch," Jax said proudly. "And also, cleared to drive."

"Oh dear Lord," Grover sighed. "I guess you're gonna insist on driving to Halawa then. I set up the interview with Carlos."

Danny looked at them in confusion. "Carlos?"

"We're hoping Carlos can tell us a specific MS-13 member that will go after Mahelona for the money he owes the gang," Jax explained.

"Ah, and he leads us to Mahelona," Danny said.

"When do we go?" Jax said, checking her pockets. ID, extra clip for the SIG, notebook, pen. All set.

"Soon; we have to allow extra time to get through the construction at Halawa," Grover said, looking at his watch. "We should leave in about ten minutes."

"Got it; let me hit the locker room and I'll be ready," Jax said, sliding off the desk.

Once she was out of earshot, Steve turned to Danny. "She deflects my question, Danny. What were you all arguing about on the way in?"

Danny sighed. "Okay, so I'm her medical proxy, right? I'm probably violating some sort of hippo law telling you this."

"HIPPA," Grover suggested.

"Yeah, that. So, Malia tells me that Jax has lost more weight. She's a little concerned," Danny said. He looked at Steve sternly.

"She says the pain meds always throw off her appetite," Steve said. "What, Danny, you think I hadn't noticed?"

Grover sensed an argument, fueled by concern and hurt feelings, brewing between the partners. "Whoa, guys," he said, holding a hand up to each of them. "So, we make sure she's eating, right? I'll stop on the way to Halawa, how's that?"

Danny and Steve nodded but then fell silent as Jax turned the corner. She came into the office, impatiently calling for Grover.

"Come on, let's go," she said. "I'll drive . . . I need to learn my way around, remember?" She anticipated his objection and countered with a comment he'd made earlier. Perfect.

"Alright, that works for me," Grover agreed quickly.

*Too quickly,* her brain chimed in. *Too quickly and Danny is too quiet.*

She narrowed her eyes at them suspiciously; she wasn't Danny Williams' rookie for nothing. Retrieving the keys from Grover's desk, she ignored both Danny and Steve and headed straight for the elevator. "Come on, time's wasting," she called back, not bothering to look over her shoulder.
Grover sighed and followed her, muttering something about 'sassy little red-headed partners'.

Steve looked at Danny, once, a glance loaded with something that looked an awful lot like reproach, and then spoke as he started walking toward the stairs. "Danny, we're going to head to Pearl; I'm going to look at some surveillance footage in their system, see if we find something the other footage didn't have." His steps were clipped, and Danny could almost see the weight of the chip on his shoulder.

Danny sighed, pinched the bridge of his nose, and followed. Kono, who was just too uncannily observant for her own damn good, followed their movements silently. Danny nodded at her as he passed, and she offered him a tentative smile.

When they reached the parking lot, Danny tossed Steve the keys. It may have been a peace offering, or it may have been a comment on Steve's control freak personality. Steve couldn't tell, and Danny hadn't decided yet.

"Steve, I -"

"Danny, I -"

They spoke over each other. Danny pinched the bridge of his nose again and Steve rubbed his eyes. They each took a deep breath.

"Look -"

"Listen -"

Steve chuffed impatiently. "Go ahead, Danny, you're going to have your say anyway."

"I'm gonna - okay never mind. What's with the face?"

"What face? I do not have a face," Steve said, his knuckles tightening on the steering wheel.

"You have a very distinct face, pal, you have Betrayed Trust face."

"Betray - Danny, that's bullshit."

"Nope. Betrayed Trust face. I make a simple statement, and you pull Betrayed Trust face."

"Okay, because that was not a simple statement, Danny, you had a tone," Steve argued.

"A tone? I do not have a tone," Danny said, hands gesturing wildly. "And eyes on the road, Steve, please, for the love of God."

"You do have a tone . . . it's . . . Disappointed Tone," Steve said.

"Whoa ho, partner, you are reading way too much into my 'tone'," Danny protested.

"Well, you are reading way too much into my 'face'," Steve countered.

Danny was quiet for a minute. Steve stubbornly tried to wait him out, but honestly, a quiet Danny was freaking him out. It was unnatural.

"What?" Steve demanded, when he couldn't take it any more.

"Okay, so what if we're not reading too much into each other's . . . whatever. Face or tone," Danny said.
"What do you mean, Danny? Stop talking in metaphors," Steve said.

"That's not a metaphor," Danny started, but put his hands up in surrender at Steve's murderous glare. "Alright, maybe there was a trace of disappointment in my tone. I mean, I love you, man, and I've already told you, if anyone is worthy of Jax, you come reasonably close. But, well, the rest of us, we usually only see her in her ubiquitous cargo pants and boots and . . . okay, well, if any of us were to notice that she was losing weight, it should be you. And I was, maybe, a little bit concerned and maybe there was measure of disappointment to think that you hadn't."

"A measure," Steve said suspiciously.

"Just a little skooch," Danny said. "And obviously, I then stood corrected. Mea culpa."

Steve was quiet again.

"Your turn," Danny said.

"My turn?"

"Your turn to explain why maybe there was Betrayed Trust face," Danny said, smiling benevolently at Steve.

"Betrayed Trust face," Steve said, deliberately schooling his features into the blankest expression he could summon.

"Don't," Danny said, shaking his head. "Interrogation SEAL face is worse."

"Interr - Danny, you are so full of shit," Steve said.

"Now you're deflecting, which means I am absolutely, positively, one hundred percent on target with Betrayed Trust face," Danny said smugly.

"Fine, Danny, yes, I may have felt a bit betrayed by your disappointment in me. That you have that little confidence in me," Steve said. He paused.

Danny nodded at him encouragingly. "Go ahead, it sounds like you're about to have an emotion."

"That when it comes right down to it, you don't believe that I'm capable of . . . that you don't believe that I'm worth . . ." Steve sighed. "You know what, just forget it, Danny."

You're not capable of love, Steve's brain whispered.

"Babe," Danny said, shifting slightly in his seat so that he was really looking at Steve. "You know the best bullshit meter out there?"

"A New Jersey detective with impeccable intuition?" Steve said. Goodness knows he'd heard that phrase enough times in the last couple years.

"No," Danny said, shaking his head. "A smart ten year old girl, raised by an even smarter British mother and a New Jersey detective with impeccable intuition. And do you know what my smart ten year old girl thinks of you?"

Steve got the same goofy, soft smile on his face that he always did when he thought of Gracie.

"What, Danno?"
"Gracie thinks you are a good man, Steven. She trusts you implicitly. She believes, with all her great big heart, that you would die to protect her . . . that you would do anything in your power to make sure I come home to her every night."

Steve swallowed around a sudden lump in his throat. "You know I would, Danny."

"Yes, I do know that you would," Danny said, nodding. "Just as I know you would do the same, a hundred times over, for Jax. Just as I know that no one, not even me, cares more about Jax than you."

"It's true, Danny," Steve said.

Danny nodded. "It's also true that not everyone that tried to be part of Jax's life over the last ten years has been as worthy as you. So, when she lost her brother, I went from Danny Williams, training officer, to Danny Williams, overprotective asshole. Today, I was Danny Williams, overprotective asshole."

"Yes, you were," Steve said, nodding solemnly; but his eyes were twinkling.

"And we're not even going to pretend that I won't be again," Danny said.

"This is probably true," Steve said, still nodding. "So are you gonna tell me?"

"Tell you what, babe?" Danny asked, confused.

"How bad is it?" Steve demanded, exasperated. "In case you've forgotten, the reason we've even had this stupid argument is because Jax is losing weight. More weight. Again. Which I knew, but . . . " he sighed.

Danny waited him out again.

"I don't always know how much to push, Danny. I did notice, you know. About five pounds, I'm guessing, which wouldn't be much for you or me, but for Jax or Kono . . . " Steve shook his head. "I asked her about it, and she blew me off with the thing about the pain meds messing with her appetite."

"Why do you say she was blowing you off? Sometimes they give me stuff that makes me queasy as hell," Danny observed.

"Because I noticed it before Halawa," Steve said quietly. "More, after, but I noticed it before."

"Seven," Danny said, out of the blue.

"What?"

"Seven pounds. Malia said that five or less she wouldn't have said anything. She said it could be training hard to try to overcome all her injuries; maybe having trouble adjusting to this godforsaken heat and humidity; maybe the switch from New York pizza to Kamekona's shrimp, it's less calories in exchange . . . could be any number of things. Hopefully not anything to worry about, yeah?" Danny tried to keep his tone lighthearted.

They pulled up to the gate of the Pearl Harbor Naval Base, and Steve flashed his credentials at the guard, who waved them through.

"Hopefully not anything to worry about?" Steve pressed Danny.
"Well," Danny hesitated. "Malia mentioned that sometimes, consciously or subconsciously, people who feel like they have had control taken away from them assert control in other aspects of their life. Like obsessively cleaning their guns, for example."

"It's not obsessive, Danny, it's proper firearm maintenance."

"Right. Or exercising excessively . . . or . . . controlling their food intake," Danny finished, looking at Steve.

"Shit, Danny," Steve said, throwing the car into park and rubbing his face. "Like the PTSD isn't enough for her to deal with."

"Steve," Danny said carefully, "did you not hear a word I was saying? It's possible that you and Jax both are seeking out ways to deal with the sense of the loss of control. You swim five miles every freakin' morning, Steve, that's not normal."

"It is for a SEAL," Steve insisted.

"Okay, big guy," Danny said, deciding that he'd pushed hard enough for one day. "Well, it might very well be stress, plain and simple, so let's go find a lead and bury this Declan Novak character; give us all one less thing to worry about, yeah?"

#*#*#*#*#

"We'll need to split up," Caviness said. "Officer Kelly, would you take Marshals Shelton and Polinski to interview the family? I'm guessing that the parents of Ms. Keon would appreciate a local conducting the interview; and you're more likely to pick up on anything unusual."

Chin nodded in agreement.

"Officer Kalakaua, could you take me to the crime scene?" Caviness asked.

"Sure," Kono agreed. "Do you want a CSI team? I can call HPD."

"That might happen later. I'd like to take a look first, get a feel for it," Caviness said.

The teams split up, gathering their credentials and sidearms, and headed for the parking lot.

"Cute car," Caviness said, as Kono indicated her red Cruz to him. He slid easily into the passenger seat.

"It carries my boards and it's easy to park at the beach," Kono said.

"Ah, yes, you were a professional," Caviness commented. "Do you miss it?"

Kono thought about that for a moment. "Not enough that I would choose that, instead of Five-O, if I had to make the choice now. And I still surf, but now it's for fun, not competition. I'm teaching Danny and his little girl Gracie, and Jax, too. I enjoy that."

"I can not imagine Detective Williams on a surfboard," Caviness chuckled.

"How about you? Do you surf? You've been assigned to the Honolulu office for six whole months," Kono teased.

"You did your homework," Caviness said.

"Well, I don't have a file with surveillance photos, but yeah," Kono said.
"Sorry about that," Caviness said. "I hope you all understand . . ."

"You were just doing your job," Kono nodded.

"You're exposed, you know. When you surf just before dark," Caviness explained. "Not a lot of cover, and when you're on the water, you're a pretty easy target. You keep your sidearm locked in your glovebox."

"I can't very well tuck it into my bikini," Kono pointed out, then blushed when Caviness looked at her appraisingly.

"No, that wouldn't work," he said, smiling at her. "Maybe no evening surfing, until we get these assholes rounded up?"

Kono looked at him dubiously. She loved evening surfing.

"Or . . . " he hesitated. "I could come with you, watch your six."

Kono looked at him even more dubiously. "No one felt the need to watch my six when Victor Hesse was at large on the island." She turned into the lush, palm lined drive to the bed and breakfast.

"Maybe someone should have," Caviness said, as he checked the clip on his Glock. He climbed out of the car, leaving Kono to look at his retreating back with a mixture of irritation and . . . well, she wasn't sure what the other thing was, but it wasn't irritation.

Caviness held the tape up for Kono to duck under, and they made their way to the quiet house.

"Everything looks perfectly in place," Kono said. "None of the shrubs are disturbed . . . it doesn't look like he came in through a window."

"Original CSI crew didn't find any unusual prints on windows or doors," Caviness said. "Of course, gloves could explain that quite easily."

They spent close to two hours going over the property carefully, methodically. Caviness was quiet, and steady. Kono might have thought it was like working with Chin, except. Well. Caviness was definitely not her cousin.

"Look over here," Caviness said, as he bent and peered over the back of the sofa.

*Okay, yes, absolutely, I will look right over there. Yes indeed.* Kono's brain was wholeheartedly willing to go along with the suggestion.

"Kono?" Caviness prompted, looking back over his shoulder at her.

She shook her head minutely and kneeled next to him on the sofa, peering over the back.

"What on earth . . . " she mumbled, pulling out her penlight and shining it behind the sofa. Wedged between the foot of the sofa and the wall, was a shoe.

A prison issue slip-on with what looked like blood on the sole.

"Looks like one of our escapees was here," Caviness said soberly, "and all the evidence points to it being Martin Lassiter."

"If Martin Lassiter was here," Kono said, her eyes wide, "where is Valerie Keon?"
"Well, lookee who it is," Carlos sneered. He slumped in his chair across the interview table from Grover and Jax. Grover was making a mental note of the idiot who'd reversed his instructions to make sure that he and Jax were seated first, before bringing Carlos in. Instead, they'd been ushered into the room, Jax not bothering to minimize her limp, and Carlos was already sitting there between two guards.

"Looks like the jailhouse story is right; you got your wings clipped there, chica," Carlos continued. "Nice knife in that tender flesh of yours, eh?"

"And here we were, driving all this way out here to see if you wanted to improve your situation, Carlos," Jax said, standing at the table across from Carlos. She didn't sit when Grover did, opting to stand instead. It gave her just the slightest height advantage over Carlos.

"What do you mean?" Carlos asked cautiously.

"Well, usually when a criminal is booked on charges associated with gang activity, they're usually offered . . . an incentive," Grover said.

"Incentive," Carlos repeated.

"Yeah, a condition, an improvement, a lesser charge . . . in exchange for, say, the name of the next higher asshole on the ladder," Grover said. "And thus far, you have not been offered any incentives."

"Because, Carlos, you didn't have anything much to offer," Jax continued. "We already had Dillon Rivera."

"But now, you might have something we want," Grover said, "and we might be able to give you something you want."

"I'm listening . . ."

Steve stared at the screen in front of him in disbelief. Pearl Harbor Naval Base had the best satellite footage modern technology had to offer, and the picture didn't lie. The evidence was irrefutable.

"I don't believe it," he said.

"Babe, I know I tease you about aneurysm face, but seriously, I'm afraid you're going to stroke out on me here," Danny said, looking at Steve worriedly.

"He slipped through my fingers. Again," Steve said. "Damn it to hell, Danny, Declan Novak is in the wind."
"I don't understand why we can't just go check it out now," Jax argued.

"Because, we are not going after a known Yakuza enforcer without backup," Grover explained. "We wouldn't look at all conspicuous in Chinatown; a gimpy redhead and a giant black guy. No, that wouldn't attract any attention in mid-afternoon. What could possibly go wrong? We are going back to the palace; where a reasonable plan will be agreed upon to tail this guy, and take down Mahelona. But you and I are not going right this minute, no way."

"But, just surveillance. I'm totally cleared for surveillance. And I'm cleared to drive; so why are you making grabby hands for the keys?" Jax said indignantly, holding the keys tightly.

"I'm hungry, I thought I'd pull through that drive-through soft serve place," Grover said.

Jax put her hands on her hips and raised her eyebrows. "Danny threw me under the bus, didn't he? I am going to kick his ass to Hoboken and back."

"Now, hold on," Grover said, "I'm a big guy. It takes a lot of calories to fuel this machine. -" He stopped short at the look of disbelief Jax had leveled on him. "Okay," he admitted. "Danny may have mentioned that you'd lost some weight. More weight."

Jax threw up her hands in exasperation and slid into the driver's seat, slamming the door behind her. "We are in the middle of the biggest case we've had since you and I transferred to Five-O. So I've lost a couple pounds; who wouldn't, with all the running and the crazy hours. It's absolutely no big deal."

"Good," Grover said, "then it's no big deal to stop at the soft serve place; my treat. Order me a double chocolate. No, honey, you have to turn left here."

Jax rolled her eyes but dutifully corrected her direction, and in a short time, milkshakes in hand, they were headed back to the palace.

"I'm gonna let Steve know we're headed back," Grover said.

* Moco loco and a milkshake. Tag, McGarrett, you're it for the evening shift.

Thanks, man.

#*#*#*#*#

Kono drove much faster than was strictly necessary back to the palace, and Caviness found himself grabbing for the oh-shit handle on a particularly sharp curve.

"Wow, you, um, know these roads well," he said.

"I do," Kono nodded happily. "The sooner we get this shoe back to the lab, the sooner they can get started on it. I'll introduce you to Charlie; he's an amazing lab tech. We actually grew up together, surfing and hanging out on the beach . . . gosh, all the way through high school." Kono dimpled prettily as she recalled happy times with Charlie and their friends.

Caviness wasn't sure he was going to like this Charlie person at all.

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"Steve, babe, it's gonna be okay. At least we know that Declan Novak is not gonna come murder us in our sleep, which I gotta say, is a bit of a relief. I mean, I wanted to catch him, sure, but I'll sleep better tonight knowing that he's not physically on this island looking to hurt Gracie - or Jax, or Kono, or Chin . . . right? Look at the bright side," Danny said hopefully.

Steve glared at him. "He got away from me. Again. Again, Danny . . . he's not even nearly the smartest criminal I've ever tracked. How the hell did he just board a freighter, practically in broad daylight? We had every camera, every eye, every harbor employee . . . "

"Had to be an inside job, Steve, and we'll find the people who helped him," Danny said. "And I don't think two am is really broad daylight, babe." Steve started to open his mouth, and Danny interrupted him. "I know, I know - it is to a SEAL. Fine. But he got past mere mortals."

"He's in international waters," Steve sighed.

"I know, babe, and I'm sorry that the law prohibits you from swimming out to drag him off the ship," Danny said. "Actually, no, strike that - I'm glad the law prohibits you from doing that, or you'd probably be in the Pacific right now."

"It's too simple, Danny," Steve said. "Too easy. Just like him walking away from Halawa and us managing to get out of the building was too simple. I don't like it."

"Are you saying you don't think he's actually on the ship?" Danny said, his forehead crinkling in concern. He shifted in his seat, trying to ease the ache in his side.

Steve shook his head. "I don't know what I'm saying, Danny. Something definitely doesn't feel right." He paused, looking sharply at his partner moving uncomfortably in the passenger seat. "Hey, Danno, you okay?"

"I'm fine," Danny sighed. "Don't bounce back the way I used to. I'll grab a cold pack when we get back to the office."

"Don't push too hard, Danny," Steve said. "Remember, you mustn't succumb to an infection," he added, his eyes twinkling.

"That's exactly right," Danny said, laughing. "Ow, damn it, don't make me laugh."

Chin and Marshals Shelton and Polinski were already back at the palace when Steve and Danny arrived.

"Anything of interest, Chin?" Steve asked, as he and Danny exited the elevator.

"The family has absolutely no reason to believe that anyone would want to harm Valerie. She has no enemies, no debts, no estranged boyfriends or jealous women in her life. No reports of strange phone calls, nothing," Chin answered.

"In the absence of any other known suspect, we'll continue to assume there's a possibility that Lassiter could be involved," Marshal Shelton added.

Steve nodded as he grabbed his phone, which had started buzzing.

"That possibility just got significantly higher," he said. "Kono and Caviness have something - they're bringing in evidence from Valerie Keon's bed and breakfast to the lab. They think it may link to Lassiter. Danny," he added, turning to his partner, "go grab that cold pack you were talking
Danny started to protest, until Chin put a hand on his shoulder. "You are looking a little the worse for wear, brah. Besides, it will be easier for Steve to convince Jax to take a little breather if you're taking one."

"Okay," Danny said, "but for the love of God, don't let on that's what we're doing. I'm already in trouble with her today." Danny walked into his office; his steps slow and his shoulder hunched a bit over his injured side. Steve quickly caught up to him.

"Sit down, Danny," he said gently, giving Danny a nudge toward the comfortable sofa angled in the corner of his office. "Be right back." He went into his office and grabbed out three instant cold packs, a bottle of Motrin, and two water bottles. Returning to Danny's office, he activated the cold pack and tossed it to Danny.

"Oh, yeah," Danny sighed in relief as he placed the cold pack against his side, the coolness relieving some of the pain and fatigue. Steve grinned and handed him an open water bottle and tilted two tablets into his hand. "Hey, partner," Danny said, "when Jax gets back, you gotta get her to take a break. She's got to be feeling it, even if she does have youth on her side, and you know how she is. She won't admit it."

"Way ahead of you, Danny," Steve said, putting the extra cold packs and water bottle on the sofa next to Danny. "Hang tight, buddy," Steve said, as he went back to join the others at the main console.

The elevator opened, and Grover, Jax, Kono, and Caviness all stepped off together.

"Please tell me you all found better leads than we did," Steve said, leaning against the console. "Declan Novak, as far as we can tell, is on a freighter in international waters."

"Commander, I'm sorry," Caviness said. "I know you were counting on being able to take him down."

Steve sighed. "Obviously, I can't count on anything when it comes to Novak. What did you and Kono drop off at the lab?"

"A prison issue shoe," Kono said. "We found it wedged behind the sofa at Valerie Keon's bed and breakfast. There were traces of blood, and who knows what else. Charlie is working on it."

"So, everything really does point to Lassiter," Chin said. "I don't know whether to be relieved that we have a lead. Not considering what Lassiter is capable of."

"Lassiter liked to play with his victims," Caviness said soberly. "We still have about twenty-four hours to find her, if he has her."

"Valerie Keon is our number one priority," Steve said. "But what about Carlos? Did he have anything useful to give us, in tracking Mahelona?"

"He insists that there are just two MS-13 members on the island who go after debts; if Mahelona is still alive, they're looking for him," Grover said. "They work out of Chinatown."

"Okay, we need to put a team on them immediately," Steve said, "but it's going to have to be an HPD undercover unit. The only people here that wouldn't be immediately made as cops are Chin and Kono, and we need them on the Keon and Lassiter case. Grover, could you set that up?"

"You got it," Grover said, and started heading toward his office. Jax started to head after him, but
Steve stopped her with a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Jax, would you go check on Danny? He's in his office," he said quietly.

"Shit, is he okay?" Jax asked in alarm.

"Yeah, he was hurting earlier," Steve said. "Go on, I'll go down to the lab with Caviness and Kono; catch up with you in a bit. Grover can handle setting up surveillance. Take a few minutes, ku'uipo. You and Danny shouldn't even be on duty, but it's all hands on deck. At least take a breather."

"Lest I succumb to infection," Jax added, her eyes twinkling up at Steve.

"Yeah, we wouldn't want that to happen," Steve said, tucking one of her random red curls back into place.

"Oh, and Steven McGarrett," she said, sweetly and quietly, but shit, she was using his full name again . . . "you, and Danny, and Grover are not fooling me with your completely transparent attempts to mother-hen and manage me. We'll discuss it later."

Kono, who routinely and shamelessly eavesdropped on her friends' conversations, sauntered a few steps closer, and stood shoulder to shoulder with Jax in a show of feminine solidarity. "Oh, boss, I think you're in trouble," she said cheekily - but quietly; she loved teasing Steve but he knew she would keep this little moment between them.

He rolled his eyes; he wouldn't admit it, but their antics amused him.

Kono lowered her voice even further and continued, "Jax, darling, if you think Steve needs to be punished, you can always borrow the special handcuffs, you know."

Okay, not amusing, his brain protested. Other things, many other things, amusing is not one of them.

Kono and Jax chuckled at the sight of their six foot plus, tough as nails, Navy SEAL boss frozen in his boots by Kono's well-placed suggestion.

"Thank you, Kono, love, I think this is enough punishment for now," Jax said. She gave Steve a sympathetic pat on the shoulder as she walked by him, and into Danny's office.

"Kono," Chin called from across the room. "Kamekona has something on Sang Min; he . . . well, take the call in your office, let him explain."

Kono looked at Steve and shrugged. "This should be good. I was going to check in with Charlie . . ."

"Go, take the call," Steve said. "I'll go with Caviness to the lab."

Jax, babe, I hope you feel a little better than you look," Danny said, smiling up at Jax as she limped into his office.

"I'm fine, Danny," she said, but she sank gratefully into the couch when he patted the cushion next to him.

He awkwardly activated the cold packs, while holding his against his side, and unceremoniously
plopped one on Jax's leg.

"Ow," she said. Then, "Ohhhh," as the cold started to relieve a throbbing that she wouldn't have admitted to anyone.

"Ummhmm," Danny agreed. He handed her the other pack and she pressed it against her upper arm. Sighing in relief, she closed her eyes and leaned her head back against the sofa.

"Nope," Danny said, "here; first." He tilted two tablets into her palm, and handed her an opened water bottle. She tossed the pills back with a swallow of water.

Danny put his arm on the back of the sofa, behind Jax's head. "Okay, now," he said, and nudged her head against his shoulder, wrapping his arm carefully around her and gently rubbing her shoulder.

She closed her eyes again and snuggled next to Danny; too tired to really protest.

"I'm supposed to be checking on you," she mumbled, "not letting you take care of me."

"I'm fine," Danny mumbled back. "Catch me up."

"I've never heard you use so many one syllable words," Jax observed. "You must be exhausted. So, Kono and her marshal found a shoe that light belong to Lassiter; Carlos gave us a lead on Mahelona, but HPD has to follow up, because apparently Grover and I would be wicked conspicuous in Chinatown. Declan Novak really slipped through? Got off the island? That sucks, man."

"Yeah, Steve had aneurysm face all the way back from Pearl," Danny said. "Wait. Kono and 'her marshal'? Whataya mean?"

"Oh, Danny, catch up," Jax mumbled. "I thought you were a good detective. By the way, I hate you. So much."


"Ratted me out," she answered. "Grover stopped for moco loco. And a milkshake. I'm not gonna be able to button my cargoes."

Danny pulled her closer to him, kissing the top of her head. "Malia's worried enough to say something to me, babe, then I'm gonna be worried."

"Don't worry, Danno," Jax muttered, then yawned. She decided to keep her eyes closed for just another minute as well.

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Steve pressed the elevator button to take them to the lab.

"Interesting team dynamic," Caviness observed, smiling. "In my short time on the island, I've heard a lot about Five-O. It's starting to make sense now."

Steve groaned and rubbed the back of his neck. "Yeah, it's really not what you think -"

Caviness held up a hand to stop him. "I think that you have an incredibly successful team dynamic. It explains your high success rate, and also why don't don't completely lose your minds, dealing with the highest risk and most stressful situations that come your way. No judgment,
Commander, trust me. Although I'm reasonably sure I don't want to know what Officers Kalakaua and Nolan were saying that made you look like you'd just been poleaxed."

"Those two are going to be the death of me," Steve said. He looked sideways at Caviness, who was studiously nonchalant. "I hope working with Officer Kalakaua has been helpful," he said.

"Very," Caviness agreed. "She's a fine officer. Hard to believe she's only been out of the academy a couple years."

"Not even quite that," Steve said. "Chin suggested her for an undercover up before she even graduated. She faced off against Sang Min in nothing but her underwear. Fearless. It's been nice for her, I think, adding Jax to the team. Even if they are joining forces to slowly drive me out of my mind. The paperwork alone, all of the sexual harassment complaints filed against them."

Caviness swallowed hard. He could have perhaps done without the mental image of Kono in her skivvies. "You mean, complaints filed on their behalf? I imagine they get more than their fair share of unwanted advances."

"That too," Steve sighed, "but no, complaints filed from jerks who can't handle being taken down by women half their size filing complaints just to make trouble for them. Idiots. Although, I gotta admit, Kono or Jax undercover . . . it really is almost unfair to the criminal element. Here we are," Steve said, clapping Caviness on the back as they got off the elevator. "Let's go find Charlie. Have you met Charlie?"

"Yes," came the clipped reply.

Steve smiled.

"Good afternoon . . . wow, almost evening," Charlie said, as they entered the lab. "The blood is definitely a match for Valerie Keon, I'm afraid. We are trying to find a DNA sample to run against the database for a match with Martin Lassiter, but the shoe size is the same. There was also a decent sample of pebbles, sand, and crushed shell imbedded in the sole of the shoe. That's our best shot for trying to narrow down a location."

"Each beach on the island has a specific sand and shell type," Steve explained to Caviness. "It's not foolproof, because of course there's transfer, but it's a start. Keep us posted, Charlie. And I'll approve overtime for anyone that needs it; we go around the clock until this case is closed."

"Got it," Charlie said, turning back to his equipment. "Thanks, Commander; I'll keep you posted."

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Back on the main floor, Steve looked fondly into Danny's office. Jax had pulled her legs up onto the sofa and was curled contentedly into Danny's side; her head tucked into the crook of his neck, and his arm around her protectively. Someone, probably Kono, had snuck in and tucked a light blanket around the both of them.

"They've both been out for about ten minutes," Chin said, soundlessly coming to stand next to Steve. Danny consistently threatened to put bells on the both of them. "I think Marshals Shelton and Polinski are longing for the normalcy of their own office by now," Chin added, chuckling. "I could have sworn I heard them arguing over which of you Jax was dating."

"More scuttlebut," Steve commented. "Do you think I was crazy, asking Jax and Grover to join Five-O?"

"No way, brah," Chin said. "Five-O is about ohana. And it doesn't get more ohana than those..."
two. Right down to the sibling rivalry."

Kono hung up her phone and came out of her office shaking her head.

"Unbelievable," she said, then glancing behind Steve at the sight of Danny and Jax resting, she lowered her voice.

"Lead on Sang Min?" Steve asked. "Is it legit?"

"Unfortunately, I think so," Kono said. "He contacted Kamekona; said that both the Yakuza and MS-13 are gunning for him. Apparently word got out that he helped us inside Halawa, and now he's convinced that he's safer in custody than on the street. He wants to turn himself in."

"I'm not surprised," Steve said. "I expected as much."

Caviness and Grover joined them at the center console as Kono continued. "Well, then you probably aren't surprised that he's insisting that Jax and I come to bring him in. Such a pervy little jerk."

"Well, no way is that going to happen," Steve said firmly, crossing his arms.

"And exactly why not," Kono said just as firmly, also crossing her arms. She added a subtle shift of her hip to one side, and Caviness noticed that he suddenly needed a drink of water.

"On the off chance that it could be a set-up," Steve said, while Chin nodded in agreement. "When and where is he suggesting he turn himself in?" Steve asked.

"Kualoa Plantation Sugar Mill," Kono said. "He claims he's injured from the explosion; doesn't have transportation; doesn't want to risk coming into a populated area. Says he's holed up in the ruins until we can give him medical treatment and safe transport to HPD. He's insisting that we do this his way, or he'll take his chances and reach out for protection from The Company. He says he wants just me and Jax . . . something about brutality and an ashtray?"

Chin and Steve shrugged sheepishly.

"Okay, it's probably just Sang Min being his usual opportunistic self, but no way are we sending you and Jax alone. Let's come up with a plan," Steve said, motioning for the others to join him at the console.

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Steve crouched in front of the sofa. Danny's eyes popped open immediately.

"Hey, partner," Steve whispered. "How long have you been awake?"

"A few minutes," Danny replied. "I wanted to let Jax rest as long as possible. What have I missed?"

"Blood on the shoe matches the blood type for Valerie Keon; Charlie's testing the sand in the sole. And Sang Min called; wants Kono and Jax to come pick him up," Steve murmured quietly. Jax stirred, and he ran his fingers through her tousled curls.

"I'm driving," she mumbled. "Where are we going to pick up Sang Min?"

"You sure you're up to this?" Steve asked, tracing the outline of her bandage beneath her cargo pants.
Her emerald eyes popped open, and he recognized the same gleam of intensity and confidence that he'd seen her first week on the island, when she threw herself into the ring as bait in an undercover operation.

"Hell yes," she said. "What's the plan?"

"We've been partners for almost two years, and you've never once let me drive your truck," Danny observed, as Steve, Caviness, Jax, and Kono put on their tac vests and comms.

"Well, I let Jax do a lot of things I don't let you do, Danny," Steve said, smiling at Danny. "Like shift my gears."

"And wax his surfboard," Kono added solemnly.

"Brain bleach," Danny proclaimed, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "I need brain bleach. You people are incorrigible."

Caviness looked on in amusement.

"I'm sorry," Kono said. "We get this way when we get tired, and punchy. It's like we all lose our filters."

"I find it . . . endearing," Caviness said. "Hold up, turn around." He readjusted an errant velcro on her tac vest, patting it into place. "There you go."

"Thanks," she said. "Do you need gear? We have plenty."

"No, thanks, I'll grab mine out of the back of my Jeep," Caviness said. He strode over to his Jeep and opened the back, rummaging around.

"Okay, so you and Jax will be in the cab; Caviness and I will be in the back out of sight. Everyone else will follow and stop on the main highway. They'll be about five minutes out from the ruins," Steve said, checking the clip on his automatic rifle and patting down multiple pockets.

"Grenades? Please tell me - you know what, no, don't tell me," Danny said.

Caviness reappeared as he slammed the back of his Jeep closed.

Holy shit, yes please, purred Kono's brain. His button-up shirt had been discarded, and his US Marshal tac vest fit snugly over his plain white t-shirt. Apparently, like Steve, Caviness preferred thigh holsters for field work.

"Kono," Jax laughed quietly. "Ixnay on the actual, literal drooling."

Despite the circumstances, the drive to the abandoned sugar mill was pleasant.

"Commander," Caviness started, but Steve paused him with an upheld hand.

"We're in the back of my pickup. Please, I think this case has taken us well past titles."

Caviness chuckled. "Agreed. We have a bit of a drive, and there was something I wanted to ask you, McGarrett."
"Go right ahead," Steve nodded. "I'll answer if I can."

"I said I would come back to this later . . . when we were going over the files, it came up that Mahelona had a grudge against women in law enforcement and had been passed over for SWAT. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember," Steve said.

"The body language of your entire team shifted in that moment," Caviness continued. "Your hand went to Officer Nolan's waist; Williams physically placed himself between her and my team - the strangers, the newcomers; Captain Grover and Lieutenant Chin both slipped a little in their usual impassive demeanor. And Kono's hand actually went to her weapon."

"Impressive," Steve said. "Let me guess; psychology major before joining the US Marshals?"

"Master's, University of Arizona," Caviness said. "You're not obligated to answer the question, McGarrett, so you don't need to subtly deflect. I know your degree from Annapolis was in Operations Research, so the deflection skills must have been picked up in Naval Intelligence."

"And your willingness to give me an easy out to continue deflecting?" Steve asked, smiling.

"Years of working with witnesses who don't trust me," Caviness said. "We should play poker some time. Look, it's no big deal. Officer Nolan's jacket from NYPD was sealed pretty tight. I study people intensely; it's how I try to keep them alive. Your team's reaction made an impression. No disrespect intended."

"None taken. What did the NYPD jacket say?"

"Officer Nolan was injured and came to Hawaii during her medical leave, and decided to transfer to HPD," Caviness answered.

"NYPD is either saving face or protecting her privacy," Steve said. "She was roughed up by three NYPD officers who took exception to her being awarded the SWAT position for which they'd all applied. There was a hearing, and Danny flew back with her. One of the assholes took Danny hostage. It ended with Jax taking a head shot."

"Shit," Caviness swore quietly. He could read between the lines of what Steve carefully wasn't saying. "Okay, I really didn't mean to pry."

"What you picked up on, the team's body language," Steve said. "Liability? Are we giving too much away? That never would have happened in the SEALs."

"No way, McGarrett. Look, I've only been assigned to Honolulu for a few months, but Five-O is making a name for itself. The close personal relationship of your team is common knowledge; you're not going to change that. What I saw in that room would have made me think long and hard about whether or not I wanted to make a personal attack on any of your team members," Caviness said. "Stop worrying about relationships being a vulnerability. The way I see it, it's your team's strength."

"Thanks, man," Steve said, as they felt the truck turn off the main road. "So, it probably hasn't escaped your attention that Chin is way overprotective of his baby cousin, right?"

"I haven't worked with the two of them together, much, why?"

"Kono is the only one of my team you've called by their first name," Steve said, grinning. "I should warn you, Chin has a shotgun. And yeah, advanced communication and interrogation
techniques, courtesy of Naval Intelligence. We really should play poker sometime."

"Comm check," Steve whispered into his headset.

"Check" came back from Kono and Jax, and Caviness nodded.

"Okay, watch your backs," Steve said quietly, as Jax and Kono climbed out of the cab of the truck. Sunset was approaching, and they'd left the headlights on, shining toward the crumbling smokestack of the abandoned sugar mill.

"Come on, boss, that's why we brought you guys," Kono said.

Steve grinned as he picked up his radio. "Danny, Chin, you guys copy?"

"Check," Danny said. He and Marshal Polinski were in the Camaro, parked behind Grover, Chin, and Shelton in Grover's huge SUV. "We estimate we're only about five minutes out if you need us. Watch the girls, Steve, I don't like this."

"Copy that," Steve said quietly, frowning.

"What is it?" Caviness asked.

"Not sure," Steve said, tightening his grip on his rifle.

"Okay, we're here," Kono called out. "Come on out, Sang Min, it's just us."

"I'm hurt, you need to come fix me up and help me," came Sang Min's voice.

"Sang Min, what's going on?" Kono demanded, her voice firm.

"Where I got burned, it's embarrassing," Sang Min whined. "I didn't want the guys to see."

"Oh dear Lord," Jax mumbled.

"Hey, you're the hotshot medic," Kono said, "and I'm the better shot. You're dealing with his . . . oh God, whatever it is . . . and I'm covering you."

"Fine, fine," Jax grumbled. "Steve, copy?" she added, speaking quietly into her headset.

"Copy," Steve replied. "Be careful."

"Okay, we're coming in, Sang Min, but so help me if you try to cop a feel again, I will shoot you myself," Kono said. "I will make you beg Steve and Chin to come save you, I swear it."

Steve and Caviness watched as Kono and Jax approached the doorway of the smokestack cautiously and then disappeared inside.

"Shit," Jax's voice came over the headset. "Okay, hold on, I've got you." She nodded at Kono as she holstered her weapon and put her backpack down on the ground, opening it and crouching next to Sang Min. Kono stood over them, eyes scanning in the dimming light.

"Sang Min, these are taser burns . . . " Jax said, in confusion. She had just enough time to register the blur of Kono's body falling next to her, before she felt the cold metal pressed to the back of her neck, and the unmistakable sound of a gun cocking.
"Take out your headset and throw it on the ground next to you. Make one wrong move and she's
dead," came a cold, vaguely familiar voice. Jax heard the sound of a slide of a second gun, as a
pair of heavy boots came into her line of vision, standing right at Kono's head. A hand reached
down and pulled Kono's headset away, and Jax reluctantly tossed hers next to it, where both were
promptly crushed by a third set of boots.

*Shit,* Jax's brain helpfully supplied.

"Taser burns? Jax, what's going on?" Steve demanded; and then he and Caviness both winced as
a sharp, crackling sound of static filled their earpieces. They grabbed them out and tossed them
down.

"Damn it, something's not right," Steve said, grabbing the radio. "Danny, Grover, move in,
something isn't right."

"No kidding," Grover's voice came back urgently; Steve could hear the sound of the engine racing
in the background as they drove toward the Silverado. "The HPD undercovers are tailing the MS-
13 members in this direction, Steve. We've got MS-13 heading out here."

Steve's mind raced to pull together details . . . taser burns . . . MS-13 . . . Mahelona.

Mahelona.

"Shit," he swore loudly. "Mahelona used Sang Min to ambush us."

"Not us," Caviness said, chambering a round and taking the safety off his gun. "Kono and Jax."

They jumped out of the back of the truck and moved forward, staying out of the beam of the
headlights. Danny's voice came over the radio. "Steve, we've called in for backup."

"No time," Steve said tersely, and Caviness nodded in agreement.

"Okay, at least wait for the five of us," Danny said, "we're gonna be there in a couple minutes.
Wait, Steve."

Steve growled in frustration.

Danny's voice came back; the voice that Steve recognized as the one he used to give Gracie a firm
instruction, in order to keep her safe. Like that time he'd cut his hand on a jar as it had shattered,
and Gracie had instinctively started to run toward him in her bare feet.

"Stop," Danny said, just like he'd said to Grace, before she'd stepped on the broken glass, and
Steve actually stopped. "You go in there unprepared, no recon, no backup, you're as likely to get
them killed as you are to save them, Steven. We're on our way. See if you can find out what's
going on."

Caviness had stopped short in the instant that Steve had, following his lead. He continued to do so
as Steve now crept silently toward the smokestack.

Steve found a crack in the crumbling wall, and desperately pressed his face to it, the light from the
headlights dimly illuminating the dank interior. He peered inside, waiting for his eyes to adjust to
the changing light, until he could make out the figures.

He whispered to Caviness, who was crouched next to him, facing away from the smokestack,
"Sang Min is down, looks like he's handcuffed. Jax is working on him but I can't make out what's going on. Three guys standing, holding guns on Jax, Kono, and Sang Min. Kono's down, she doesn't look to be moving."

"Is she hurt?" Caviness whispered.

"I can't tell," Steve said. "She could be waiting for an opening."

Steve fell silent at the sound of voices.

"I'm sorry," Sang Min was saying. "They said they would go after my wife and kid."

"Shut up, Sang Min," Jax said, but her tone was kind. "Just don't say anything right now, okay?"

She started to look up at the man standing over her with a rifle, and he viciously butted it against the side of her head.

"Hey," she protested. "Trying to work, here. You need to let me check her out."

"She's fine," came the gruff response.

"You need to let me check you out," Jax continued, glancing subtly toward the crack in the wall. She'd noticed the disturbance in the light coming in from outside.

Steve breathed a silent sigh of relief. Jax knew they were there; she was feeding them intel.

"So, what, you had on a vest?" she asked. "That blocked the worst of Grover's shots, I guess. The blood must have come from my bullet, and I'm guessing a ricochet. Probably a minor head wound; those things bleed like crazy."

"Shut up," and this time, the instruction was accompanied by a blow to her arm, where blood was already seeping through the layers of bandages and her tshirt. It had to be Mahelona standing over her; it was the only thing that made sense from what she was saying.

"Hey, that's a dick move," Jax said, gritting her teeth against the pain. "Look, you need to let me check her out. If you wanted her dead, you'd have shot her, so I'm assuming you need her alive for whatever you have planned, right?"

The man standing over Kono kicked her solidly in the back with his boot, and there was no response. Steve could see blood trickling freely down the side of her head, under her chin, dripping onto the floor.

"Stop; let me check her out," Jax was pleading now, barely keeping the panic out of her voice.

"Fine," Mahelona said, and kicked Jax toward Kono's unmoving body. Steve winced as he watched the heavy boot make contact with Jax's ribs, but she shook her head minutely. He could almost hear Danny's voice in his ear again. *Wait. We're coming.*

As Jax frantically checked Kono's pulse, the man standing over them spoke. "She's right, you know; you wanted to have your fun with this one, then use her to get her son of a bitch cousin out here. Won't work very well if she's dead, and you better made good use of the medic here before the boys come to take her back to the boss."

"Shut up!" Mahelona yelled. "How can you be so stupid?"
"Who are they gonna tell?" the man argued. "They're both gonna be dead."

Steve saw Jax close her fist around her bandage scissors, and she looked directly toward the crack and nodded once. He stood, Caviness right behind him, and stepped into the doorway of the smokestack. He could hear Danny and Grover pulling up, saw the lights from their cars turning toward them.

"The hell they are," Steve roared, as he breached the doorway.

Jax struck swiftly, fueled by rage and adrenaline, sinking the sharp scissors into the leg of the man standing over Kono. He screamed in pain and fury, striking out blindly, and a wild shot rang out as a bullet ricocheted off the crumbling brick and stone wall of the smoke stack. Jax ducked, throwing herself protectively over Kono's prone body, as a shower of dirt and debris fell around them.

The distraction was sufficient for Steve and Caviness to get shots off, as Mahelona turned on them in surprise, and they quickly dropped him and the injured gunman. The third gunman, however, had much faster reflexes, and a much stronger sense of self-preservation. Knowing that he would never survive a stand-off with a clearly enraged Navy SEAL and US Marshal, he'd grabbed Jax and his handgun in one move.

Hauling Jax easily by the straps of her tac vest, he yanked her off of Kono and held her, struggling and cursing, his gun pressed under her chin, forcing her head back. He lifted her up, her toes barely brushing the ground. The light filtering in from the headlights cast the whole scene in a wavy, surreal dimness.

"Ah, ah, gentlemen," he said, as Steve and Caviness face off against him. "Drop your weapons," he said.

Steve instinctively tightened his grip on his rifle, and the gunman shoved his weapon more forcefully into Jax, wedging the barrel of his gun against her windpipe. Her head was forced back even further with a pained wheeze, and Steve finally complied.

"Okay, okay," he said, holding out his empty hand, and slowly bending to place his rifle on the ground in front of him. Caviness followed his lead, doing the same.

"Steve!" Danny yelled from outside.

"Oh, they stay back," the gunman ordered, pulling Jax closer to himself, using her as a shield. "Tell them," he demanded.

"Stay back, Danny," Steve called.

Caviness addressed the gunman. "Look, as far as we can tell, you haven't hurt anyone here yet today. There are six people behind us, and more on the way. You know you're not walking away from this if you hurt that officer. So, this is your one chance. We're standing, unarmed, between you and four of her very pissed off team members. Put the gun down, let us take you into custody."

"No way, man," the gunman said, his voice tinged with panic. "She's my only ticket out of here."

"There's someone you're more afraid of than us," Steve said, trying to bargain with him. "I get it. We can help you with that, too. Who was Mahelona going to give her to, hunh? What was the deal? Tell us, let us try to help you."

"Mahelona owes the boss big money; he was going to give him the redhead instead. Said she'd
made MS-13 look bad too many times. Boss said if Mahelona could deliver the girl, he'd cancel his debt,” he said, his eyes wild and frantic. Jax had wrapped her hands around his meaty forearm, and Steve noticed with alarm that her grip was getting weaker and weaker. "If I cooperate with you, I'm a dead man, in or out of the joint."

"Okay, we get that," Steve said, trying to keep his voice calm. "But if you strangle her to death, the boss isn't going to be happy with you, either. Loosen up just a little bit, buddy, okay?"

The gunman looked down, and the person they'd all forgotten, Sang Min, made his move. From his awkward position on the ground, he kicked his legs out, catching the gunman behind the knees. The split-second distraction was all Steve needed, and his SIG Sauer had materialized in his hand, seemingly out of thin air.

Jax felt a buzz and a sting, and then the impact of the dead weight of a body falling forward on her. She kicked and struggled until finally the weight was lifted, as Caviness unceremoniously flipped the dead man off her, and having retrieved his weapon, stood covering them as Steve frantically checked her over for injuries.

"Clear," Caviness yelled to the rest of the team, who had held back in confusion at Steve's instruction. "Cover us in here, guys, we've got injuries in here and company coming. Not sure how many." He moved to Kono's side as the remaining team members took cover behind their cars, placing themselves between the doorway to the smokestack and the unknown number of gang members heading their way.

"Jax, are you hit?" Steve asked, searching for the source of the sticky blood he could feel, almost everywhere he touched her.

"I think it's his," she said, pushing his hands away. "Kono . . . let go, let me get to Kono."

Steve hauled her easily to her feet and as she stumbled toward Kono, he glanced back at Sang Min. "You okay, Sang Min?"

"I'm okay," he said, "you owe me, McGarrett."

"Yeah," Steve said. "Stay down, we'll sort you out."

Jax had grabbed her bag and tossed a flashlight at Caviness, and they were both bending over Kono. Steve stood over them, facing the doorway, his rifle back in his hands. "I've got you, how's Kono?" It was unsettling; he'd never seen Kono out of commission before.

"Steady pulse, but she's unresponsive," Jax said, her small, strong hands moving deftly over her friend as Caviness kept the light steady for her. "Come on, Kono," she said quietly, flashing a penlight as she opened each of Kono's eyes in turn. "Pupils are unequal," she added, "definite concussion. I've got weak breath sounds and distension in the veins of the neck."

"Jax," Steve said. He knew what these symptoms were likely describing; he'd seen it too often in combat. He kept his eyes on the door, though, as he heard the sounds of multiple vehicles approaching.

"I know, I'm on it," Jax said. "That asshole probably broke a rib and punctured a lung when he kicked her." She looked at Caviness. "Help me or switch with Steve and cover us if you can't handle it."

"I can handle it, tell me what to do," he said instantly.

"Help me get her vest off; try not to shift her too much," Jax said. They worked together, ripping
the velcro straps of the vest open and easing it over Kono's head.

Kono moaned quietly in pain as her arm was moved.

"Hey, Kono," Jax said softly, "hold on, babe, we've got you." Kono's eyes opened, and a look of confusion and panic crossed her face as she struggled to take a breath.

"Kono," Jax said firmly. "I know, you can't breathe. I'm on it, okay? I've got you."

She tossed a small bottle of alcohol at Caviness, and held out her hands in front of her. "Pour that over my hands, quickly," she instructed, rubbing her hands together as he streamed the liquid over them. Shaking her hands off, she grabbed a pair of medical shears and cut Kono's shirt open from the sleeve to the neckline. She swabbed the space under her collarbone with an iodine wipe, and grabbed a needle and catheter kit out of the bag.

"Steve, what's going on out there?" she asked, as she heard a couple of rounds of gunfire.

"Don't worry about it; it's not coming in here," Steve said firmly. "Take care of Kono."

Kono's eyes widened at the sight of the large needle and catheter as Jax pulled it from the sterile wrapping. She struggled to take in a breath, a wheezing, strangled sound escaping her.

Caviness grabbed her hand and turned her face toward his. "Kono, look at me. You've got a hotshot medic taking care of you, remember? Come on, I've read the files. She got Chin through nicking his femoral artery; she's got you. Just hold on."

Jax nodded in approval as Kono stopped struggling and focused on Caviness. Her hands were steady as she inserted the needle just above her third rib, listening intently, trying to ignore the commotion outside until . . . there: the distinctive hiss that told her she'd placed the needle correctly.

Kono relaxed visibly as she was able to take a deeper breath, biting back a cry of pain as the breath shifted her broken rib. Jax threaded the catheter in and carefully withdrew the needle, tossing it across the room out of the way.

"Okay, hold on, Kono, I've got to secure this little catheter in place, okay? You had a collapsed lung, but this is going to hold you over until you get to the hospital, and you should be able to breathe fine," she said, as she gently taped the catheter in place with medical tape. "Or, as fine as you can with a broken rib."

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Kono mumbled.

"I know, that's the concussion," Jax said. She was fighting wave after wave of nausea herself; had been, since Mahelona had cracked her on the side of the head. "But babe, throwing up with a broken rib and a chest tube is a colossally bad idea. Try not to, okay?"

Kono nodded miserably. They could see her swallowing convulsively.

"Okay, we're going to sit you up, Kono, just in case. If you do get sick, I don't want to risk you aspirating," Jax addressed Caviness. "Get behind her shoulders; I'm going to pull and you're going to push, as gently as possible. She's got at least one rib broken, right side, mid way. Give that as much support as you can, okay?"

Caviness nodded in agreement as he set the flashlight up on its end, casting a strange dim light inside the small space, and they worked together until Kono was partially upright. She panted against the pain and settled against Caviness, who was holding her gently.
"You're doing great, Kono, hold on," he encouraged. "Hell of a first date."

Jax grinned as she continued to check over Kono's injuries, turning her attention to the gash just behind her ear, which was continuing to bleed.

"First date?" Kono gritted out. "Ow, Jax."

"Sorry, babe," Jax said. "This is nasty; no wonder you have a concussion. Hold on," she said, pressing a dressing against the wound to try to stop the bleeding.

"Yeah, first date," Caviness said. "I'm an old fashioned kinda guy. Ten dates, at least, before I ask a woman to stay over. I figured, maybe we could start counting now."

"Hell no," Kono said firmly. "Crime scene counts as the first date, in that case."

Jax chuckled, then stopped abruptly as Kono's nose began to bleed, and her eyes slipped closed.

"Caviness, hold pressure on that head wound," she ordered. "Kono," she said, patting her face gently. "Kono, come on, open your eyes."

"Steve, whatever is going on out there, tell Danny to get it under control right the hell now," Jax yelled, the urgency in her voice unmistakable.

"Danny," Steve yelled. "Are you clear?" The sounds of gunfire had stopped.

"Clear, Steve," came the reply. Grover's voice called out as well. "We're clear; HPD says we've got no one else coming this way. They've set up at the main highway just in case."

"I've got a bus on the way," Chin said, rushing into the smokestack and kneeling next to Kono. "It should be less than five minutes out now."

"You're a good man, Chin Ho Kelly," Jax said.

"Well, any time you and Steve are involved, it's a safe bet to go ahead and call for an ambulance," Chin said. "Kono, honey, open your eyes." Chin was also patting Kono's cheek gently, casting worried glances at Jax, who was wiping the blood away as it trickled from Kono's nose.

"This isn't a good sign, is it," Chin murmured.

"Not great, no," Jax said. "But it's possible she got a nosebleed from falling forward. Could just be residual, and the change of position, it's draining out."

Kono's eyes fluttered open. "Chin?" she asked groggily. There were a few of him, and she tried to figure out which one to talk to.

"Yeah, honey, I'm here," Chin said, brushing her hair away from her face.

"Be nice," Kono said. Chin looked at Jax in confusion, and then narrowed his eyes at Caviness, who was absently stroking Kono's arm as her head rested against his shoulder.

Nice, strong, comfy shoulder, Kono's brain hummed quietly, under the thrum of pain and nausea.

Steve returned from outside, where he'd helped Danny, Grover, and the Marshals cuff the now subdued MS-13 members who'd come to collect their prize, and been woefully disappointed. Grover and the marshals were on their way back to HPD with the prisoners, including Sang Min.
Steve had grabbed a massive flashlight from his truck, and as he turned the wide, strong beam on the little group huddled on the floor, he let out a gasp of dismay.

"Jax," he said, shaking his head and crossing over two her in two long strides.

"What is it?" Danny demanded, right behind Steve. "Holy shit, Jacqueline," he said, as he caught sight of Jax.

"What?" Jax said irritably. They were being loud, and her head was really starting to pound. Her arm was throbbing where Mahelona had kicked her, and she was pretty sure she'd torn at least a few stitches.

"Ku'uipo," Steve said, as he crouched carefully next to her. She looked much as she had when he'd found her in the waiting room after the altercation with Danny and O'Neil in New York: pale, covered in blood, obviously in shock, and starting to shake. He put his hands gently on her shoulders.

"What?" she demanded. "I need to check Kono's pupils again."

The wail of the siren and the flashing lights announced the arrival of the ambulance. Chin and Grover had called for the SWAT medic team; they were taking no chances.

"Jax, babe," Danny said. "Your old partners are here, we're going to let them take care of Kono now, okay?"

"I need to give them a report," Jax said, confused. Danny wasn't EMS, but he'd been around enough to know how this was supposed to work. Three medics came rushing in, and Jax turned her attention to them, gently shaking Steve's hands off. She caught Danny holding up his hand and shaking his head at Steve, and wondered why they were acting so strangely.

"Just let her go ahead," Danny said quietly. "Don't waste time arguing."

"Officer Kalakaua," Jax said, addressing the two medics bent over Kono. "Closed pneumothorax, catheter insertion allowed the lung to reinflate; breath sounds seem improved. Definite concussion, she'll need a head CT and close follow up. Nasebleed; undetermined if it's from a forward fall or from the original blunt force trauma to the back of the head, just below the ear. Some LOC. Oh, and nausea," she added, as they loaded Kono onto a gurney. "For God's sake, don't let her aspirate," she called out to them, as they hustled Kono to the ambulance. Chin disappeared into the back of the ambulance with Kono, as Caviness stood watching closely.

A third medic addressed Jax. "Hey, Nolan," he said mildly, looking at Steve and then back to Jax. "Nice work with the needle decompression there."

"Hey, Gibson," Jax said, grinning. "So, how much trouble did you get into for not following protocol and thumping my heart back into rhythm?"

"Good results usually keep us out of trouble," Gibson said. "You, ah, want to catch a ride back with us?"

"Nah, I'm good," Jax said. She really just wanted a few minutes to close her eyes and rest. Just a few. Maybe get Steve to check her stitches, change the bandages. And get a shower, wash all the stickiness away. She decided to try to mention that. "Chin needs to be with Kono, let him ride. I want to get back to HQ, get cleaned up."

"Okay, yeah," Gibson said agreeably. "Cause you are bleeding pretty good there, kid."
"This isn't mine," Jax said. "Go on, hurry up, get Kono to Queens for a head CT. Stop dicking around," she added irritably. She was tired; really, really tired, and suddenly very agitated.

"Jax, babe," Danny tried. "I think some of the blood is yours. Can you let Officer Gibson check?"

"Officer Gibson needs to get Kono to Malia, STAT," Jax said, her voice now low and dangerous. "And I just need a shower, and a Motrin." She looked down in confusion at her hands. Why were they shaking?

Steve nodded to Gibson. "Go, get Kalakaua to Queens. Danny and I can handle this."

"Okay," Gibson nodded. "Get her to an ER, Commander McGarrett."

"Copy that," Steve said. Gibson backed out of the smokestack and ran to the ambulance, jumping in the driver's seat and taking off.

"He's a great medic," Jax said, her voice sounding strange in her ears, "but geez, he doesn't know when to stand down."

"You know, that's the thing about SWAT medics," Danny said calmly.

"Guys," Caviness said, his voice full of concern. In the bright LED light of Steve's military grade flashlight, he could now see the blood steadily dripping from multiple lacerations. A good chunk of Jax's hair was completely saturated with blood, flowing in a steady trickle down the back of her tac vest.

"Yep," Steve said. "You wanna grab Jax's bag for her, Caviness? Hey, Jax, ku'uipo, do you remember when Chin got shot, and you were so busy taking care of him, that you didn't notice you had that awesome piece of shrapnel in your side until they took him down to surgery?"

"Yeah," Jax said, wondering what the point was. She absently put her hand on her side, where she'd caught the shrapnel that day on the dock. It was fine, still covered by her vest.

"Okay, so, I think when there was that wild shot, it ricocheted, and you caught some sharp edges of this brick and stone," Steve said.

"Oh. I don't remember . . . I just remember trying to cover Kono," she said, confused, starting to pat around, checking for injuries. Since literally every part of her ached, she wasn't sure where to begin.

"And you did," Caviness said. "I don't think Kono has a cut on her. But you need to get yourself sorted."

Jax winced as her hand landed on her head, and came away blood soaked. "Oh, geez," she said. "It's just a superficial head wound, guys, you know these bleed like crazy."

Steve grabbed her hand as she started to pat down her shoulders and arms. "Hey, let's just head to the hospital to check on Kono, and you can get cleaned up in the locker room, okay?"

"Now that's the first sensible thing you've said, McGarrett," she nodded. "Let's roll." She glanced down at her blood soaked clothing. "I guess I should ride in your truck, not Danny's precious Camaro," she added. "You've got a tarp in the back, right?"

She headed toward the door, willing her suddenly shaking legs to hold her up. She just needed to sit down, for just a minute.
"Steven, she has pieces of brick stuck in her," Danny said incredulously. "Did you see the piece . . ."

"Just above her collarbone, yes," Steve said, grimacing. "Danny, if we pull them out here, it's just going to bleed faster. She's right; it's mostly superficial. She's in shock from the injuries but pumped full of adrenaline from taking care of Kono."

"Steve, you might be used to seeing teammates pumped full of shrapnel, but I am not, God help me," Danny said. His hands were shaking, too.

"I'll drive the Camaro," Caviness offered, "if you want to ride with Steve and make sure Jax is okay."

"That's actually a good idea," Steve said. "Just in case she passes out. Thanks, Caviness."

Danny nodded and tossed Caviness the keys and jogged to keep up with Steve's long strides carrying him toward the Silverado. Jax was leaning tiredly against it.

"I couldn't reach the tarp," she said, her voice shaky with exhaustion.

"It's okay, ku'uipo," Steve said, grabbing a waterproof camping blanket out of his gear box and tossing it on the front seat. "Danny," he said, turning to his partner, "help me with her vest." He and Danny gently unstrapped the velcro completely and lifted the vest straight over her head, moving her arms as little as possible. "Here you go, up and in," he said, gently helping her into the cab of the truck, with Danny climbing in next to her.

"Danny, I'm starting to think you really don't like to drive," Jax teased. She sighed in relief as she sank into the familiar comfort of the bench seat of the Silverado. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back.

"I just want to be sure Steve doesn't get into any new trouble on the way to the hospital," Danny said.

Caviness had already taken off in the Camaro, thankful for Danny's built in GPS. It hadn't been hard to find directions to Queens: among the handful of favorites programmed into the GPS were a pizza place, a Chinese restaurant, and all of the hospitals on the island.

"Hmm," Jax mumbled, settling her head on Danny's shoulder.

"You okay, babe?" Danny asked.

There was no answer, and Steve pressed harder on the gas pedal, and flipped on the lights. They sped through the night to Queens.

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Officer Gibson made record time to the ER.

Malia was waiting for Chin and Kono at the double doors, a full team behind her.

"Chin," she said, rushing to the gurney as it was gently placed from the back of the ambulance and pushed through the doors. "How is she?" she asked the medics. "I have the preliminary notes."

"Additional loss of consciousness en route," one of the medics said. "Officer Nolan was on scene at the time of injury; she was very concerned about closed head trauma. Needle decompression of
a tension pneumothorax is holding steady, respiration is good. We administered an anti-emetic; Nolan was concerned about the risk of aspiration if she vomited."

Malia looked over Kono expertly, flashing a penlight in her eyes. Kono whimpered and tried to turn her head away.

"Hey, Kono," Malia soothed, "we're going to get you all sorted out, okay? I'm going to let Dr. Alora take a look at you, and probably take you down for a CT scan." Malia stepped out of the way and let the neurosurgeon step up to Kono's side. He thoughtfully probed her skull and repeated the examination of her pupils.

"I agree with the medic, that in order to rule out a slow bleed or skull fracture, we need to do a CT," he said. Chin paled at the mention of a bleed.

"It's more of a precaution than anything," the surgeon continued, "but we need to get a clear image."

"While we're in radiology," Malia continued, "we'll x-ray her ribs. She's in good hands, Chin," she assured him. "Go ahead and call your uncle. He'll need to find someone to sit with your auntie so he can come over. Where on earth is the rest of the team? What happened?"

"Steve and Danny will be bringing Jax in; she seemed to be injured, but I'm not sure how or how badly. Grover and the marshals we're working with were taking one of the men we've been tracking into custody, along with a few gang members. It was a mess; we'll be sorting it out," Chin sighed.

The radiology team came to take Kono for her tests. Chin kissed her gently on the cheek and stood looking after her as they wheeled her down the hall and to the elevator. Malia wrapped her arms around him. "She'll be okay, Chin," she assured him. "Go, make your calls; I'll watch for Steve and Danny."


"Well, then I will keep an eye out for this Marshal Caviness as well," she said.

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Caviness pulled into the parking lot of Queens emergency department, and strode through the swish of the pneumatic double doors. He flashed his credentials at the information desk.

"I'm here with Five-O," he said. "I'd appreciate an update on Officer Kalakaua, if possible, and could you help me find Lieutenant Kelly? Also, I think there was a mention of a doctor . . . Malia? Commander McGarrett and Detective Williams will be bringing in another officer with injuries, an Officer Nolan."

The nurse was completely unfazed by his rapid fire requests. She typed rapidly into her computer.

"Officer Kalakaua is currently in radiology," she said. "I'll send a text page to Dr. Waincroft and she'll be right out for you."

The nurse turned and thumbed through a shelf of files kept at arms' reach, nodding in satisfaction as she selected Jax's file.

"You keep Five-O's files . . . right there?" Caviness said, raising his eyebrows at the nurse.
"It doesn't make sense to put them back in the drawers," Malia said, as she joined him at the information desk. "Especially Steve and Jax," she added, shaking her head.

"They're behind me," Caviness said, extending his hand. "Marshal Caviness," he introduced himself.

"Malia Waincroft," Malia said, shaking his hand firmly and giving him an appraising look. "Don't let Chin scare you," she said. "He's all bark."

"McGarrett said he had a shotgun," Caviness said, his eyes twinkling at Malia.

They both looked up at the sound of the swishing doors, and Malia gasped at the sight of Steve carrying a bloody Jax in his arms, Danny walking briskly alongside them, holding a wadded towel pressed against her neck.

"Trauma 1," Malia called out to Steve, and Caviness noted that he knew exactly where that was. He strode into the room and deposited Jax with exquisite care onto the bed.

"Steven, what happened," Malia said, grabbing medical shears and pulling a well-stocked tray next to the bed. The nurse had followed, quietly and efficiently handing her gloves and other items.

"There was a wild shot, and Jax threw herself over Kono," he said. "She caught the brunt of the shrapnel. How's Kono?" he asked anxiously. "She looked bad, Malia."

Malia was busy cutting away Jax's bloody t-shirt, but answered Steve as she worked. "Kono is in radiology. The neurosurgeon agreed with Jax; we want to rule out a small bleed in her skull, as well as any skull fractures. They'll x-ray her ribs while she's down there. We'll repair the laceration and treat her broken ribs next, while we wait for the CT report." She paused and looked up at Steve. "We really think she'll be fine, Steve, we're just being careful. Chin is calling her father, just to keep him informed."

Caviness let out a breath that he didn't realize he was holding, and Danny patted him sympathetically on the back as they stepped to the other side of the curtain. They sank into the chairs just outside Trauma 1, close enough to hear most of the activity surrounding Jax.

"Help me get her cleaned up," Malia said to the nurse. "There's so much blood . . . I don't know where it's all coming from."

"'S'not all mine," Jax mumbled. "Malia, did the needle decompression hold?"

"Yes, Jax, you did a fantastic job," Malia said. "Hold still, honey, let me take care of you, okay? How did these stitches get torn?" she tskeed, examining Jax's arm.

"One of the men we were tracking used her as a soccer ball," Steve said tersely. "There was a lot of that going around tonight. That's how Kono's ribs were broken."

Malia continued her examination of Jax as she and the nurse cleaned away the blood so that they could evaluate the damage.

"It looks to be all superficial," Malia said, and Steve sagged with relief into a chair next to the head of Jax's bed. "This one laceration right above her collarbone will need closing," Malia continued, "and of course we'll need to repair the stitches in her arm. Everything is going to have to be cleaned, but most of the cuts will just need bandages, not stitches."
"This head wound . . . " Malia continued, "strange; it almost looks like a bullet graze."

Steve leaned forward anxiously as Malia parted Jax's bloody hair and indicated a deep gash just above her ear. "Oh, shit," he said succinctly.

"Steven McGarrett," Jax mumbled, "what the hell, you shot me?"

"Nah," he said, "I shot the guy holding you. You just didn't move your head fast enough."

"Steve, you shot my rookie?!" Danny exclaimed from the other side of the curtain.

"Kick his ass, Danno," Jax said, smirking up at Steve. She paled suddenly, and swallowed convulsively, as a wave of nausea passed over her.

"Whoa, steady there," Steve said, laying his hand gently on the top of her head. It always seemed to help him, when he had a concussion.

Malia frowned and checked her pupils, and gently probed the bruising on the side of her face. "This is pretty nasty," she said, her cool fingers settling over the bruise on Jax's temple. "I'd say mild concussion."

"I've had much worse," Jax confirmed. Her voice was raspy, and Malia traced her fingers over the rapidly darkening bruising around her windpipe.

"I've had much worse there, too," Jax rasped, waving Malia's hand away. "Seriously, I'm fine. Just clean me up and patch me up."

Malia looked at her sternly. "Okay, do you feel like you can shower without passing out?"

"Yes," Jax said emphatically. "A shower is like, ninety percent curative at this point, I swear."

"Okay," Malia laughed. "Steve, clear out of here and give my patient her privacy. Does Jax have a go-bag in your truck? If so, go fetch it."

"Yes, ma'am," Steve said obediently.

"Get everyone's," Malia said. "You know the drill, you all can clean up in the locker room so you don't frighten my patients."

Jax tugged on Malia's sleeve to get her attention.

"Check Danny's stitches, please," she said. "He was shooting at people tonight and who knows what else."

"Daniel," Malia called, as Steve bent to kiss Jax on the forehead.

Grumbling, Danny let Malia check his stitches.

"All set," Malia said. "Danny takes much better care of his stitches than you do," she scolded.

"Ha," Danny said.

"Bite me," Jax threw back.

"Okay, enough," Malia said, throwing her hands up in exasperation. "Jax, I'm putting you in a patient room, and Julia will help you get showered and sorted. Danny, show Marshal Caviness to the locker room. He's welcome to scrubs if he doesn't have a change of clothes with him."
Showered and changed, Danny, Caviness, Steve, and Chin were now pacing outside Jax’s room, anxiously waiting for an update on both Jax and Kono.

Malia poked her head outside of Jax’s room. "Danny, we need to debride these cuts, and Jax is refusing pain medication. You’re her medical proxy; want to try to talk to her?"

Danny sighed and Steve patted him sympathetically.

They could hear a brief murmured conversation, and Danny returned quickly, throwing his hands up in frustration. "I tried," he said. "God help me, that girl is stubborn."

"Nothing stronger than Motrin?" Steve guessed.

Danny nodded. "Why does she do that, Steven?"

"It’s about control, Danny," Steve sighed. "Most narcotics just trap her in nightmares; the good protocol takes her out of commission, makes her feel like she’s not in control."

Danny chuckled. "But that’s so amusing," he said, thinking of the things that Jax had said under the influence of medication.

Malia stepped out of the room. "Does she want me to come in?" Steve asked.

"She says, and I quote, 'no one had better come the hell into this room without a report on Kono’" Malia said, shaking her head. "Honestly, she's being a bit difficult tonight. She's incredibly stressed over Kono. I'm going to track down the radiology report." Malia started to walk away, and then hesitated and turned back. "You may want to step into the family waiting room down the hall."

They looked at each other, confused, until they heard the muffled sounds of pain from the other side of the door. Chin and Caviness quickly excused themselves and found the waiting room as suggested.

Steve stubbornly crossed his arms and settled more firmly into his chair. Danny sighed and sat down next to him.

"I'm not sure which of you is the biggest masochist," Danny muttered.

"That's not really our thing," Steve said, managing a tired smile at Danny. "Although, her scars are really sexy . . . "

"Stop, I beg you," Danny said.

Malia reappeared with a smile on her face and Chin and Caviness in tow. "Radiology report is done. Kono's CT is clear. She has a severe concussion, and two completely broken ribs, along with three additional fractured ribs. I hope the person who did this to her is safely in custody, before Chin gets to him."

"The person who did this is on the way to Max's table," Steve said darkly, nodding in satisfaction at Caviness.

Chin looked appraisingly at Caviness. "Your shot?"

"Officer Nolan's scissors, then my shot," he nodded.
Chin nodded at him, a grudging approval evident in his eyes.

Julia and another nurse exited Jax's room, both of them looking pale and worn. "Dr. Waincroft," Julia said, pulling off her bloody gloves and dropping them in the hazard bin, "the lacerations are debrided and ready for you to close. IV fluids and antibiotic started."

Malia shook her head. "Thank you, Julia. I'll take it from here." She knocked quietly on Jax's door before going in.

Jax was sitting anxiously on the edge of the bed. "What did Kono's CT say?" she asked. She was going for strong and assertive, but her voice cracked and a tear escaped the corner of her eye.

Steve was at her bed in two steps; he grabbed her shoulders and gently eased her back against the pillows.

"CT is clear," Malia said, and Jax closed her eyes in relief. "Broken and cracked ribs," Malia continued, "and a severe concussion. Lung is holding steady. She'll be admitted for a couple of days and she'll need several weeks to recover. And if you don't cooperate, Officer Nolan, you'll find yourself in the same situation."

Jax was so relieved at the good report on Kono that she didn't argue. Malia pulled up a rolling stool and the suture cart, and nodded at the empty chair for Steve.

"Okay, let's get you fixed up," Malia said, adjusting her glasses and settling in to close the deeper lacerations. "The shards of brick were so sharp that the edges of the wounds are clean. We can use surgical glue for the ones that need it."

"Nice," Jax said, nodding in satisfaction.

Steve took her hand in his and brushed her hair out of her face. "Ku'uipo, why didn't you let them give you something while they cleaned the cuts? I know that hurt like hell."

"Yeah, but now it doesn't, and my head isn't all fuzzy," she said, shrugging.

"What am I gonna do with you?" Steve said.

"Well, you could stop shooting me," Jax observed.

###

Kono was trying to figure out which way to kick, which way to turn to the surface of the water. She wasn't alarmed, she could hold her breath for a long, long time. Not as long as Steve, but long enough to sort this out. She floated in the dark water, turning gracefully and looking for an indication of light.

"Kono."

It was Chin's voice. They must have been surfing together. In the absence of light, it would be safe to follow Chin's voice, so that's what she did.

"Come on, Kono, there you go," Chin said. She must be getting close to the surface. It was getting lighter.

She opened her eyes, rubbing at them to brush away the salt water, and looking at her hands in surprise when she realized they were dry.
"What happened?" she asked. "Which beach was I surfing?"

Chin chuckled. "You didn't bite it on a wave this time, cuz."

Kono struggled to focus her eyes, and she could see familiar faces behind Chin.

"Hey guys," she said groggily as Danny and Steve smiled at her. "Jax," she said, frowning, "you're all beat up again."

"It's okay, Kono," Jax said.

"Kono, do you remember what happened?" Malia asked cautiously, checking Kono's pupils. Kono turned to face Malia, and her eyes fell on Caviness, standing a bit apart from the others, somewhat awkwardly leaning up against the wall.

"We went to get Sang Min," Kono said, "and we got ambushed." She frowned in confusion and looked at Caviness again. She brightened. "Can this count as our third date?"

Chin looked skeptically at Caviness, while Jax laughed out loud. "She's oriented, Malia. Trust me."

Steve looked down at his phone, which had started buzzing madly in his pocket.

"I hate to break up our get-well party," he said apologetically, "but the lab has something for us. The grit on Lassiter's shoe? Very, very specific. We have a location."

"Go, go," Kono said, making shooing motions.

Chin kissed her on the cheek, and Danny and Steve each took a hand and squeezed it gently. "I hate taking down assholes without you," Steve said, chucking her tenderly under the chin.

Jax touched the bandage behind Kono's ear tentatively, and Kono reached up and grabbed her hand. "I'm okay, Jax," she said quietly. "Go. Go get Lassiter. Then come back here and chill out in bed with me, and we'll read trashy magazines and nap. 'Cause you look like shit, girl."

Caviness, under Chin's watchful eye, bent and kissed Kono on the forehead. "I want our fourth date to be something that doesn't involve a crime scene or flying bullets," she said, smiling up at him.
They left Kono in Malia's competent care, and raced back to the palace. Finally, a lead on Lassiter, but with a rapidly closing window of opportunity to act quickly enough to have any hope of finding Valerie Keon alive.

Jax was quickly restocking her medic bag and pockets of her clean pants. Steve had installed a cabinet just outside the armory, and persuaded the governor to allot a generous budget for supplies - many of which were ordered through military supply, not civilian emergency services. There was a running joke among the team regarding Jax's absolute delight with the arrangement, and even now, she was humming quietly as she selected fresh packets of gauze and hefted a new pair of bandage shears in her hand.

"When you order those, do you think about how well they work as a weapon?" Steve asked, stepping up soundlessly behind her. She jumped slightly, and put the shears carefully in the bag.

"Don't sneak up on a girl with razor sharp medical equipment in her hand, McGarrett," she said. Her attempt at a lighthearted tone fell short of disguising the sudden tension in her body language.

"Sorry," Steve murmured, wrapping his hands easily around her slight shoulders. "I don't mean to startle you."

Jax sighed. "Not your fault. And yes; everything in my bag is a potential weapon as well as a potential life-saving device. You'd be surprised at how many times it's a TAC medic who gets sent in, undercover as a civilian EMS, to a hostage situation. These are really nice. I hope my other pair gets recovered from the scene."

"I think Max might be able to recover them for you," Steve said. "That was quick thinking tonight. Gutsy move."

"Did what needed to be done," Jax said, shrugging.

Steve gently stroked the side of her head where a graze had parted through her hair, leaving a nasty wound behind. She flinched just slightly, but smiled up at him.

"Yeah, I hope you liked the haircut I had when I first got to the island," she said.

"I love your hair, no matter what you do to it," Steve said. "Well, not so much the black, though that had its own appeal . . . but I'm just . . . God, Jax, I can't believe my shot grazed you." He tilted her head to the side, seemingly fascinated with the injury.

"Look at me," Jax demanded, and he reluctantly met her determined gaze. She could see concern and guilt flooding his expression. "First of all, we don't know that it was your shot. It could have been a ricochet; or it could have been Caviness. Don't know, don't care. It was dark and all hell was breaking loose."

Steve was silent, his hands still moving gently through her hair.

"Have you ever been involved in a friendly fire incident, Steve?" she asked seriously. "Is that what this is about?"
"I have, but no," Steve said. "The situations were completely different."

"Then let me make something clear," she said, her eyes flashing, "if you need to shoot me - flat out, full on, take the clean shot shoot me - in order to save my life, or someone else's, you do it, yeah? And this?" she added, gesturing to her head, "this is nothing, babe. It's a scratch."

His hand continued to move gently over her, taking inventory of her injuries.

"They're all just scratches," she said, cupping his face tenderly in her hands. "I'm fine." But she flinched as his hand grazed over the bruising on her windpipe, and over the swollen and rapidly purpling bruise on her cheekbone and temple.

"I can't keep you safe," he murmured. "I thought maybe . . . maybe if you were with Five-O, I could protect you."

"People flew airplanes into buildings, right above my head," she said, her eyes haunted. "Glass and concrete and rebar fell out of the sky like rain." Steve's hand automatically went to the scar on her side; a constant, sometimes aching reminder of that day. "I dodged falling bodies."

"Ku'uipo," Steve whispered, pulling her closer to him. She'd rarely spoken so bluntly about her experience.

"I don't expect you to keep me safe, or protect me," she whispered. "That's asking the impossible. You can't make any promises in a world where people fly airplanes into buildings."

"Then what do I do, Jax?" Steve asked desperately. "Do I watch everyone I care about get hurt, over and over and over again?"

"Yeah," she said, "That's what happens, when we have this . . . this gift, or this curse, that makes us run in when everyone else is running out."

He bent and kissed her, his lips ghosting over the cuts and bruises scattered on her cheeks, her neck, her collarbone. He finally caught her lips in gentle desperation, and kissed her like he was drowning and she was oxygen.

"If I can't promise to keep you safe, Jax, what do I do?" he asked again, frantically searching her eyes for an answer.

"Promise to do your best to stay alive. Promise to try your hardest not to leave me," she said. She reached up and kissed him back with equal fervor, her fingers pressing into the solid muscle of his biceps and pressing him back against the cabinet with a strength that belied her tiny frame.

Steve nodded, not breaking their kiss, and slid slightly down the cabinet to minimize the difference in their height. Jax hummed in approval as she no longer had to stretch up to kiss him, which she did with renewed intensity until his hand brushed too closely over one of the recent cuts, and she bit back a sharp sound of pain.

He trailed the backs of his fingers softly over the injury. "I'm so sorry ku'uipo," he whispered. His fingers once again traced over the bruises on her face, and his thumb smoothed over the familiar scar on her hip. The exact location was memorized and he could find it, unerringly, regardless of layers of gear. "God, you are so beautiful," he murmured.

Jax rolled her eyes. "In the middle of the armory, black and blue, held together with stitches and surgical glue," she commented skeptically. "In the middle of a serial killer case," she added.

"In the middle of anything and everything," Steve said honestly. "Always. You're always
beautiful to me." His voice lowered another register. "In the middle of everything, always, I always want you."

"Yeah?" she said, her voice another dimension of raspy that had nothing to do with the bruising.

"Yeah," he said, nodding.

*Use your words. Say the words,* his brain demanded.

"I told you they'd be down here," came Danny's voice from around the corner. "Good Lord in heaven, Steven, you'd better be fully clothed and decent or so help me . . . I know guns and military grade medical supplies do it for both of you, but we've got a serial killer to catch. Chop chop."

Steve groaned and kissed Jax on the top of the head as Danny appeared.

"Oh, don't bother, your shirts are untucked, Jax's color is better than I've seen since Halawa - actually, it is nice to see some color in your cheeks, babe, even if Steve did put it there - and Jax's hair . . ." Danny muttered, grabbing some extra clips.

"What's wrong with my hair?" Jax demanded.

"Honey, your hair is an event under normal circumstances," Grover said, as he grabbed a case of shotgun shells, "but there is a very distinctive style called "McGarrett's had his hands all up in it" which you sport on a regular basis. Such as now."

Jax scowled and grabbed an old HPD SWAT ball cap from her cabinet and shoved it on her head, muttering darkly. "Fine. I have to get a haircut now anyway."

"Oh, that asymmetrical cut you had when you first got here would work," Danny commented, tightening the straps on the third vest he'd pulled off the shelf this week. "Especially now, with the highlights you've picked up from surfing."

Steve, Chin, and Grover stopped dead in their tracks and stared at him.

"What?" Danny said. "I have sisters and a pre-teen daughter. I know these things. Hey, is that why you had that cut to begin with? One of your fellow officers shot you in the head?"

Steve glared at Danny. "We don't know that it was my shot, Danny," he said.

Chin decided the better part of valor would be to derail their bickering before it escalated. "Okay, how about we go catch Lassiter and then all go home for a much-deserved rest?"

#*#*#*#*

Charlie and his team of lab technicians had worked around the clock to determine the source of the grit embedded in the sole of the prison issue slip on. They'd narrowed it down to the distinct pebbles found on Ma'ili, and the team was now rushing toward the leeward coast as the sun appeared over the horizon.

Any idea of stealth or additional surveillance was abandoned; it was a simple race against the clock, and they were desperately hoping to find Valerie Keon alive. This was their only lead, and their plan was simple: find Valerie, stop Lassiter.

"How many open cases are linked to Lassiter?" Steve had asked Caviness, as they'd briefly looked over the most likely places where he would be holding Valerie.
"You're asking if I need him alive, in order to help identify other victims," Caviness had replied. "Yeah, probably. The FBI would probably appreciate that."

"The FBI isn't here," Steve had said, and it hadn't escaped Caviness' attention that when giving instructions to their teams, neither of them had made any mention of taking Lassiter into custody.

Marshals Polinski and Shelton, for all their quiet demeanor, had impressed the team during the stand-off at the abandoned sugar mill. Danny had worked with officers like this his entire career; quiet, unassuming, but completely and totally unflappable and dependable under pressure.

"This is not the time for us to learn our way around the island," Polinski said. "We transferred as a unit with Caviness; we're still a bit unfamiliar with some of the outlying areas."

Chin looked up at the comment. "You followed him to Hawaii? From where?"

"New Mexico," Shelton answered. "We had the option to continue working with Caviness or move to a new team." The two marshals slipped into the back of Grover's SUV, as Jax carefully and gingerly eased her aching body into the passenger seat. For once, she wasn't going to argue with Grover for the keys.

Chin glanced toward Caviness, who was quietly gearing up at the back of his Jeep. Caviness looked up and caught his glance.

"My partner is in the hospital," Chin said. "Care to ride shotgun?"

The slightly stricken look on Caviness' face amused Chin. Perhaps 'shotgun' had been a poor choice of words. Nonetheless, Caviness was headed his way, his long stride easily eating up the space between their vehicles.

"Thanks," he said, putting a rifle case in the back of Chin's SUV.

"So," Chin said, once they were speeding down the highway, "Kono said something about a fourth date . . . "

Caviness briefly calculated the risk of taking a rolling dive out of the car.

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"I'm surprised you didn't make Jax stand down on this one," Danny said, as they sped away from the city.

"Calculated risk," Steve said, his hands gripping the wheel tightly. "We've got one suspect, three marshals, five of us. Jax is a medic on this one."

"You could have called a SWAT medic," Danny observed. "Jax would have threatened to neuter you, but still."

"HPD SWAT doesn't currently have a female medic," Steve said quietly. "Based on Lassiter's file . . . I'm not sure what we're going to find."

"Wow, you thought all of that through during your little make-out session in the armory?" Danny quipped, his eyes twinkling.

"I can multi-task," Steve said smugly.

#*#*#*#*#
Caviness had pinpointed an abandoned farm, adjacent to the coastline, as Lassiter's most likely choice of location. The area was deserted, well away from the quiet beaches that the locals enjoyed, and carefully marked against trespassing. Law abiding citizens would have no reason to stumble upon his activities.

The three vehicles pulled up, lights flashing, and parked just outside the makeshift fenceline. They were more exposed than either Steve or Caviness would have liked, but if they had any chance of recovering Valerie Keon alive, moving in quickly and with a show of force was their best option.

Caviness scanned the area quickly as the rest of the team readied their weapons. He pointed to a small barn, leaning dangerously on its foundation, and they moved toward it, with Steve and Caviness taking point.

Everyone froze at the sound of a faint whimper coming from the barn.

"Your team covers us," Steve said quietly to Caviness, who nodded agreement.

The three marshals faced outward from the barn as the Five-O members crept quietly toward it. Reaching the door, Steve gave a quick series of hand signals to the rest of the team, and they fell into flawless formation. Within seconds, they were in the barn.

"Clear," they each said in turn, as they cleared their designated corners, letting their eyes adjust to the dimmer light.

The sound of another agonized whimper caught Jax's attention, and she holstered her weapon and pulled her backpack off her shoulders, wincing as it caught her stitches and the new injuries.

"Cover me," she said quietly. It was always a risk, holstering your weapon, but in this moment she was a medic first, and she trusted the guys to have her back. She moved quietly toward the far corner of the barn, Grover just a step behind her.

Grover gasped as they came upon a filthy mattress shoved in the corner, a woman chained to the wall behind it.

"Valerie," Jax said softly.

"Y-yes," came the hoarse reply. "Run . . . go get help . . . h-he's coming back."

"We've got her," Grover called back quietly to the others.

"Valerie, that is so brave of you," Jax said, kneeling next to her, "but help is already here. You're safe now, okay? My team will keep you safe, you don't have to worry. How many people were holding you here?" Jax tenderly pulled Valerie's tattered robe more snugly around her body.

"J-just the one man," Valerie said. "I tried to get away, I t-ried, but . . ."

"Shhh," Jax soothed. She pulled at the chain secured to the wall, knowing that checking for injuries and bleeding really should be the first priority, but unable to overcome the overwhelming urge to free Valerie from her constraints.

Valerie seemed to agree, and yanked weakly against the cuffs on her wrists.

Steve recognized the urgency and near-panic in both of their movements. He'd seen it before and understood the compulsion. Pulling a slim kit from one of his many pockets, he knelt next to Jax and selected a slim metal pick, and within seconds the heavy cuffs were off Valerie's wrists.
Jax threw them aside with a vehemence that raised an alarm in Steve's mind, and he briefly looked to Danny, whose eyes reflected his own concern. But Jax moved on quickly, focusing her attention completely on Valerie.

"There, that's better, yeah?" Jax murmured. "Okay, Valerie, can we tell these guys where they might find the man who's been holding you here? And then they're going to go take care of him, while I take care of you. Is that okay?" She pulled a water bottle out of her bag, and gave Valerie a careful sip. She swallowed with difficulty, her throat and neck swollen and bruised.

"I don't know where he goes," Valerie whispered. "He goes away, and then he comes back . . . he always comes back." Her voice broke.

"Well, he's not coming back anymore," Jax said firmly. She glanced around the littered scene, her eyes falling on a simple pair of cotton panties that had been flung to the side, off the mattress. She tilted her head at them, and then closed in on Valerie's field of vision as Grover discreetly collected them and put them in an evidence bag. Her jaw tightened and Steve put a hesitant hand on her shoulder.

"You okay?" he whispered.

"I've got it," she whispered back, nodding.

He squeezed her shoulder gently. 'Got it' was definitely not the same as 'okay' but it would get them through the day.

"Danny," he said quietly, "stay and cover Jax and our survivor. We're going after Lassiter."

Steve handed Danny an extra rifle and clip. With one loaded glance, Danny understood his instructions perfectly, and he nodded at Steve.

Steve, Chin, and Grover stepped carefully outside and joined the marshals.

"Steve," Grover said, "Jax is . . . this is . . ."

"I know," Steve said. "Danny's watching her. He's got it covered."

"If Lassiter shows his face in there," Caviness started.

"Yep, Danny's on it. He'll shoot first and ask questions later," Steve finished.

"Did I miss a discussion?" Caviness wondered.

"With Steve and Danny . . . " Chin shrugged. "If you blink, you've missed it. I'm thinking we start here, move in a grid pattern toward the shoreline."

Steve nodded, and they started searching for any evidence of Lassiter.

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Danny stood a few feet away from the corner; angled to cover both the door and a small opening in another corner of the deteriorating barn. His back was turned to Jax and Valerie, but he could hear the slow, quiet murmur of Jax's voice as she painstakingly cleaned and bandaged the lacerations and burns that covered Valerie's body. One cut in particular was deep, and vicious, and Jax sprayed it with a topical anesthetic before she cleaned it gently and wrapped it in clean gauze.

"Do I need to call a bus?" Danny asked quietly.
"Yes, but have them on standby," Jax said. "The scene technically isn't secure until we have him in custody."

"Do you know who did this?" Valerie asked. "You're searching for him now?"

Jax nodded. "Yes. Let us worry about it, okay? Danny and I are going to stay right here with you. As soon as it's safe, there will be an ambulance here to take you to the hospital, and we'll call your family to meet us there."

Tears streamed down Valerie's cheeks at the mention of her family.

"I know, it's overwhelming," Jax said, gently wiping the tears away with a soft gauze pad. "You're going to be okay, Valerie. Someone will be with you every step of the way, and then your parents will be there, and you can call any of your friends to come be with you."

Danny's heart sank. Jax hadn't had any of those things when she'd been attacked in New York. Her parents had fled the scene years before, and he was in Hawaii at the time, completely oblivious to what had happened. Jax had never mentioned any other friends in New York, and when he'd packed up her apartment, he hadn't found any evidence that anyone, even her roommate, had been close to her. No wonder she had jumped on the first available flight to Hawaii.

"They're going to need to do a kit, aren't they?" Valerie whispered. "I know they need to... collect evidence."

Jax stopped what she was doing and held Valerie's hand. "There are two options," she explained gently. "You can just be evaluated and treated for your injuries. Or, evidence can be collected along with that process, so that charges can be filed. You don't have to decide that right now; and whatever you decide, someone will stay with you the whole time."

"Will you stay with me?" Valerie asked.

Jax didn't answer directly. "I promise, you won't be alone, Valerie."

"Please," Valerie pleaded, her voice breaking. "Please, will you stay with me?"

"Okay," Jax soothed. "I will. I'll stay with you."

Danny's hand tightened on his rifle as gunshots broke the silence of the early morning, and Valerie cringed in fear.

"Valerie, look at me," Jax said quietly. "What you hear is the sound of us getting one step closer to getting you out of here."

#*#*#*#*#

Martin Lassiter had gone to the shoreline to fuel up and stock the boat that would have carried Valerie's body to Kahoolawe. On his way back to carry out his horrific plans, he'd caught a glimpse of the six armed officers steadily bearing down in his direction, and ducked behind a rocky outcropping.

At this point, even with the odds of six to one, Lassiter had an advantage: a veritable arsenal stashed in the cave-like structure afforded by the rocks. He had cover, and he wasn't likely to run out of ammunition any time soon.

The first volley of gunfire caught the marshals and Five-O team off-guard, and they dove for...
"What the hell?!" Grover exclaimed.

"That's automatic rifle fire," Steve said, looking at Caviness. "There was no mention of him using automatic weapons in the file."

"We've never found evidence of automatic weapons," Caviness said.

A whistling sound, followed by an explosion of sand and dirt just behind him, had them all flat on their faces covering their heads.

"What was that?" Chin asked, shaking his head to clear the ringing in his ears.

"That was a grenade," Steve said incredulously. "Oh, hell no, two can play that game." He reached into one of his pockets and retrieved a grenade. Nodding to Chin to cover him, he stood up from behind the small tractor where he'd taken cover, and expertly lobbed the grenade toward the rocks.

Steve's satisfaction at the small explosion and shower of rocks was cut short by an even louder whistling sound, followed by the tractor in front of him exploding into a cloud of shrapnel. Only his combat experience and reflexes had him turned and curled in on himself in enough time to let his vest take the brunt of the damage. He stayed flat on the ground, the wind knocked completely out of him, until Chin and Caviness grabbed him by his vest and dragged him behind more cover. Both teams had hunkered down behind a feed bin, but it wouldn't provide protection for long.

"Okay, now we have a problem," Steve panted, pulling a sharp piece of metal out of the back of his shoulder. Thankfully, it had deflected off his vest, but it stung, and he was royally pissed off. "That was an RPG, and it's conceivable that an RPG could reach the barn."

"We can't let that happen," Chin said.

"No we can not. Caviness, you and I are going to flank him while everyone else keeps him busy," Steve said. Caviness bumped his fist solidly and moved two clips to the front of his vest for easy access. As the rest of the teams moved around, popping off random cover fire from as many different angles as possible, Steve and Caviness crept in opposite directions, moving behind and beside their target.

"Danny," Jax pleaded. She wasn't entirely sure what she was begging Danny to do - go find Steve, let her go find Steve, or just make everything stop and be okay.

"Babe, I know this is one of the hardest things you've ever been asked to do, but we hold here, okay? Have faith, kid."

"Danny, that's automatic weapon fire and explosions," Jax said quietly. She had given Valerie pain medication and a mild sedative, in preparation for moving her to the ambulance and transporting her to the hospital.

"I know," Danny said. "Look, I'm worried too. We've called for backup. Until we hear from Steve otherwise, we stay put. C'mere." Danny held out his arms and Jax leaned against him as he hugged her gently, mindful of her injuries. He felt her take a shuddering breath, and he kissed the top of her head, stroking her hair. In the next instant, he felt as though she was physically rearranging her molecular structure, and she squared her shoulders and pulled away from him.
"I need to check Valerie's IV," she said, her voice flat and emotionless, as she turned away from him.

"Jax, babe, don't do that," Danny pleaded. "I know this case . . . this is the first case like this you've handled since New York. It's natural for it to be hell for you. Don't try to shut off your feelings."

"I have a critical patient and it sounds like a stand-off out there, Danny," Jax said. "My feelings have no place here."

"Jax," Danny started, but she turned and looked at him. Just a glance, before she looked away, but the flash of raw anguish was enough to shock him into silence.

"Just don't, Danny, please," she whispered, her hands clenched so tightly that Danny was afraid she would split the skin over her knuckles.

"Okay, Jax, okay," Danny sighed, and he resumed looking anxiously through the doorway for any indication of what hell was breaking loose outside.

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Steve and Caviness were in position. There was no way to know if Lassiter was unaware of their positions slightly behind and to his sides, or if he was just busy returning fire and hadn't acknowledged them yet.

"US Marshals," Caviness shouted. "Martin Lassiter, give it up. We're taking you into custody."

Lassiter turned toward Caviness, raising his weapon to fire at him. Steve fired off three quick rounds, and Lassiter fell forward, his automatic rifle spraying off several more wild rounds, obscuring Caviness in a cloud of sand and rock.

Steve yelled for the others to cover Caviness, as he rushed forward to ensure that Lassiter was subdued. As Steve knelt to put his knee in Lassiter's back, the man suddenly wrenched himself sideways, his leg striking out and catching Steve with a punishing impact to his ribcage. Still slightly winded from the explosion, Steve once again found himself gasping for air and slightly stunned. It was enough of an opening for Lassiter to grab a handgun and point it at Steve.

Chin watched in horror as, for one terrifying moment, it looked like Lassiter had Steve at gunpoint. But then Chin noticed Steve's SIG firmly gripped in his hand, pointing at Lassiter as well.

"Go ahead, Lassiter, take the shot," Steve said calmly.

There was a deafening sound of two guns firing at close range, as Chin and Grover stood, their own weapons trained on Lassiter. They could hear Polinski and Shelton behind them, trying to determine how badly Caviness was injured.

Time seemed to stand still for a split second, and then Lassiter's body was falling back, and Steve was standing over him.

"Clear," Steve said quietly, stepping over the body. "Caviness?" he asked.

"Rock fragment caught his shoulder just at the edge of the vest; looks like he may have fractured his wrist breaking his fall," Polinski said. "We'll get him back to your medic. Looks like you could do with a once-over yourself."
Steve looked down, not sure what Polinski was talking about. Rivulets of blood were running down his muscled forearms and dripping steadily onto the pebbles below. Chin came up behind him and gave a low whistle.

Steve craned his neck around to see what the problem was.

"Ow," he said, as the twisting motion made sharp pains shoot through his shoulders and arms, where the vest had not blocked the bits of tractor.

"Yeah, ow," Grover agreed. "I would, ah, try to hold still there, McGarrett, until Jax can get you fixed up."

Steve grinned at Grover. As far as Steve was concerned, there was never a bad reason to have Jax's small, capable hands on his body.

"You people are unbalanced," Grover muttered, shaking his head as they all trudged back toward the barn.

Steve paused at the small arsenal tucked into the rock formation at the edge of the shoreline. His eyes landed on the crate which had contained the RPG.

"Son of a bitch," he swore quietly, and Chin appeared at his side.

"What is it, Steve?" Chin asked.

Steve pointed at a small emblem embossed on the crate. He would recognize it anywhere; he'd chased it for months all over Afghanistan.

"The Novak family crest," he said in disbelief.

"Here they come," Danny said.

"All of them?" Jax asked, her heart in her throat.

"All of them," Danny confirmed. "Looks like Caviness got hit, but he's on his feet. Super SEAL, as usual, is covered in blood and dirt." Jax grabbed two rustic stools and shoved them from the corner of the barn to just outside the door.

"Whatever Danny," Steve said, as he and Caviness gratefully sank onto the stools where Jax pointed, her eyebrows arched at them, daring them to argue with her.

Steve liked this arrangement, it put him right at eye level with Jax's beautiful emerald eyes. Which were currently filled with a swirl of emotion that he couldn't quite pin down: fear, uncertainty . . . pain.

Not good . . . she's not okay, his brain flashed out in warning.

"You okay?" he asked quietly, pausing her efficient movements with a gentle hand on her hip, his thumb brushing over the scar beneath her cargo pants.

"I'm better now," she answered honestly, but she avoided his gaze. She plopped her medic bag unceremoniously on Steve's lap, trusting him to hold it steady for her while she helped Polinski and Shelton carefully remove Caviness' tac vest and shirt.

She wrapped soft gauze around Caviness' shoulder. "This fragment should be removed at the
She wrapped soft gauze around Caviness' shoulder. "This fragment should be removed at the hospital; I don't think it hit anything vital. Looks like you might have to wait on asking Kono for surfing lessons for a while, though, because this wrist is going to need at least a hard splint," she said, sympathetically. "What the hell went on out there; it sounded like Armageddon."

"Lassiter was well-armed," Caviness said, with a lopsided shrug.

"By Novak," Steve added grimly, shaking his head. "I can't even sort this out right now; my ears are still ringing. We'll have the tech team bag and tag every single piece of evidence on this beach."

Jax was using a pair of forceps to carefully remove the shards of metal from Steve's shoulders and arms.

"All of these cuts will have to be cleaned, and maybe one or two could use surgical glue," Jax said, collecting her bag from Steve, still avoiding looking him in the eyes. "I need to get back to Valerie; make sure she's ready for transport."

He stood to follow her, and then stopped short and stood next to Danny.

"How bad, Danny?" he asked quietly, so that only Danny could hear.

"Valerie Keon or Jax?" Danny murmured, then shrugged. Didn't matter, the answer was the same. "Bad. She made Jax promise to stay with her. You know, through the whole thing. At the hospital."

"Shit," Steve said, patting Danny on the shoulder, and then following Jax into the barn.

"Send the medics in here when the bus gets here, please," Jax said. Her voice was level and efficient, but with a tonelessness that sent a tendril of cold dread curling up Steve's spine. "I want to give them the report in here, not out there in front of the teams. Preserve what I can of Valerie's dignity."

"Jax," Steve said helplessly.

"He's not in custody, is he? Lassiter," Jax said.

"No."

"There's no ambulance coming for him?" She kept her back turned to him as she asked; her shoulders a stiff, straight line.

"Coroner."

Jax nodded in satisfaction as Valerie stirred and whimpered.

"Valerie, it's okay. You're safe," Jax said, tucking a blanket around her. "The ambulance is almost here, and we're going to ride to the hospital."

"You're going with me?" Valerie asked anxiously.

"Yes, I'm going with you," Jax assured her.

"Did they find him? Did they find the man?" Valerie whispered. "Is he coming back?"

"He is never coming back," Jax said, with a quiet intensity that made her voice almost unrecognizable to Steve. "He is never going to hurt you or anyone else, ever again."
"Jax?" Steve tried again.

"Steve, I think I hear the ambulance; could you check?" There was no hint of anger or impatience in her voice; but Steve thought he would have preferred that to the toneless resignation.

He quietly slipped back outside and stood next to Danny in the mid-morning sun, and waited for the ambulance.

#*#*#*#*#

Malia ran an efficient emergency department, and there were three teams and three rooms ready and waiting for them as they arrived, in turn, at Queens. Normally, Steve would have had nothing but appreciation for the almost military precision, but today, he was frustrated. Valerie Keon, along with Jax, had been swept quickly and quietly into a treatment room at the end of the hall, before Steve could even catch a glimpse of her.

"She's gonna be okay, Steve," Danny said sympathetically, as Steve fidgeted on a narrow treatment bed. Given his frequent injuries and high pain threshold, it wasn't unusual for Malia to turn him over to interns who needed to sign off on skills, and today was no exception. "Would you sit still?"

"Yes, please, Commander McGarrett," the fresh-faced intern asked.

Steve turned to glare at her, and she put her hands on her hips and glared right back. Well, damn, Malia knew how to pick them.

"Sorry," Steve muttered, turning back around and sitting quietly. Danny could feel the tension radiating from him, but at least he wasn't tormenting the poor intern, and she quickly finished, patting a final bandage into place over one of the larger lacerations.

"I'll go get a report on Marshal Caviness for you," she suggested, beating a hasty retreat from the room.

"I didn't even - Danny, she wouldn't even look at me. What the hell happened in there?" Steve demanded, snagging the shirt that Danny tossed at him and yanking it over his head. "Ow."

"Steve . . ." Danny sighed. "You're gonna have to be patient. You can't shoot this; you can't shove this at me and tell me to book it."

"Danny," Steve said quietly. "I'm going in blind, here. She visibly reacted to the cuffs and restraints. There wasn't anything in the NYPD report about restraints, was there?"

"No. There wasn't. Who the hell knows what was left out of the report."

"What else, Danny?"

"She kept assuring Valerie that she wouldn't be alone. Over and over; kept telling her that her family would be with her, that someone would be with her every minute - from leaving that godforsaken barn, to the hospital, to going home. With her parents. Her family. Jax seemed to know that was the one thing that could somehow make this bearable for Valerie."

"Shit."

"Yeah. The one thing Jax didn't have in New York. Days, Steve. Days, before she snuck out of the hospital and hopped a plane to come find me. Not one record of a visitor; aside from IA coming to serve charges against her."
"Shit."

"You've said that already."

A knock on the door interrupted their despondent conversation, and Malia poked her head in.

"Ms. Keon is going to be taken to a regular room soon. May I suggest you go get some food, and good coffee, and bring some back for Jax?" she said. "Marshal Caviness is all set; I believe he's going up to check on Kono," she added, smiling delightedly.

###

Brian Caviness wasn't sure how fracturing his wrist and having a fragment of rock dangerously close to his rotator cuff could feel lucky, but as he shoved his prescription bag into his backpack and stepped off the elevator on Kono's floor, it somehow did.

Confirming her room number at the nurse's station, he found it and softly knocked on the door.

A slight, gentle looking man opened the door, holding his finger to his lips. Kono was sleeping soundly, an oxygen mask over her face.

"Hello," Caviness said awkwardly. "I'm Marshal Caviness; I've been working with Kono's team these last few days. I just wanted to check . . . but I see she's sleeping. I'll go."

"No, no, it is okay. I need to get back to her mother, but we learned from Kono's knee injury that she very much dislikes waking up alone in the hospital. I was expecting Chin Ho, but I understand you all had a very busy morning."

"Yes, sir . . . Mr. Kalakaua? Yes, it was a busy morning. There is a scene to secure. I got sent home early," he said, indicating his splint and sling. "I would be honored to sit with Kono. With your permission, of course."

Mr. Kalakaua studied Caviness for a moment, and nodded in approval. "She does not like to wake up alone," he repeated.

"I will see to it that she doesn't, sir," Caviness said. He settled into the recliner to wait.

###

Steve had settled on coffee as the best strategy available to him. Jax loved coffee; as evidenced by that adorable little sigh of happiness and contentment when she was handed a cup. It wasn't his favorite little sigh of hers, but it was close. Coffee, guns, and hard-core medical supplies . . . this situation definitely called for coffee.

They stepped back onto the ER wing, and Malia's favorite nurse, Julia, motioned for them.

"Jax is in Suture Suite 3," she said. "Dr. Waincroft said to bring you back."

"Suture?" Danny asked, worried.

"She pulled just a couple of stitches jumping out of the back of the ambulance today," Julia said. "That's going to be easily fixed . . ." her voice trailed off hesitantly. "She's . . . well, she's had a hard day, obviously. She was an amazing help to Ms. Keon."

Julia knocked softly on the door, and tilted her head inside. "Commander McGarrett and Detective Williams are here," she said. "With coffee," she added.
Steve stepped into the room; the lights were dimmed, except for the strong light which Malia had focused on Jax's leg, which was sticking out from under a cocoon of blankets. Her cheeks were pale beneath the smattering of freckles across her nose, and the recent bruising stood out in sharp relief. It brought him back to her first night on the island; she'd appeared in his kitchen, holding out gauze pads and a tube of antibiotic cream, covered in bruises, and triggering every protective strand of his DNA.

That was then, and this was now. And now, they were sharing a career, a life, a bed. From the minute he'd met her, Steve had thought Jax was really something. Now . . . now he realized that she was everything. It scared the living shit out of him. He'd never known how much he stood to lose.

"Hey," she said. "Coffee?" She dropped her eyes quickly, twisting her fingers in the blanket, but not before Steve had caught the flash of the one thing he most desperately needed to see in that moment: trust. And he knew, whatever had been dredged up in the barn that day, they'd deal with it, somehow.

"Yeah," he said, smiling. He handed her the cup carefully, his long fingers brushing against her strong, compact hands. His hand slid to the back of her head, and he kissed her auburn curls gently.

"You're okay? How's Caviness?" she asked. One hand clutched her coffee, the other twisted in the blanket, and she kept her eyes fixed on Malia's painstaking repair of the torn stitches. But her voice, while shaky, was no longer frighteningly toneless, and Steve let out a silent exhale of relief.

"I'm fine, ku'uipo," he answered softly. "The intern that fixed me up said that Caviness had his shoulder stitched up, and his wrist splinted. It was fractured, not broken."

"There you go, Jax," Malia said. "Honey, please try not to tear these out. I think we've still minimized the scarring but let's not push it, okay?" She smoothed a clean bandage over the stitches.

"Okay, Malia," Jax said. "Thank you. I can go home now?" she added, hopefully.

"Yes. We'll clear out and let you get sorted, and then you can go home," Malia said. She gestured for Steve and Danny to clear the room, and closed the door quietly behind them. Steve and Danny both looked at Malia anxiously.

"Jax is a remarkably strong young woman," Malia said. "Her day with Ms. Keon was undeniably traumatic, but you wouldn't have known it to watch her in action. However, even Jax has her limits, and once Ms. Keon was settled in her private room, Jax experienced a drop in blood pressure and some other symptoms of traumatic shock. While I'm sorry that she tore some stitches, the damage was minimal, and it gave her a graceful way to accept some simple comfort measures: warm blankets, a quiet room."

"Coffee," Steve added.

"Yes," Malia smiled, "coffee seems to always be welcome. Look, guys, Jax didn't offer any clues as to what, specifically, was most unsettling to her. I've read the very vague, superficial report from her own assault back in New York. No details - and this isn't unusual. She might have refused to give up any details, in an effort to maintain some sort of control of the situation. She might have been so severely concussed that she didn't remember many details. In either case, today may have forced her to confront some painful memories; possibly for the first time."
"So, what can we do to help?" Danny asked. No way was he letting his two best friends struggle through this alone. It just wasn't how he worked. Besides, those two needed someone who knew how to use their words. Loaded glances would only get them so far.

"There's no simple answer," Malia said. "For starters, your entire team needs to stand down for a minimum of forty-eight hours, Steven. Chin and Grover are the only team members uninjured at the moment. And as for Jax . . . " she sighed. "Follow your instincts. You've done well this far. She may not even know what she wants or needs - be patient. Unfortunately, in this sort of situation, setbacks like this are typical."

Jax came out of the treatment room; shoulders squared, head high. The only indication that all was not perfectly well with her was the blanket still wrapped firmly around her.

"I'm going up to check on Kono," she announced, as she walked past them to the elevator. "Be back in a few minutes."

Danny started to go after her, but Steve put a hand on his shoulder.

"Danny," he said quietly. "I'm pretty sure we weren't invited."

#*#*#*#*#

The nurse smiled at Jax as she came off the elevator.

"You're here to see Officer Kalakaua?" she guessed. "Come right this way. She may be sleeping but I know she would want you to stop in."

Jax tiptoed into Kono's room, smiling at the sight of Caviness, sound asleep in the recliner. Kono's eyes opened, and she grinned widely and gestured for Jax to come in the room.

"Hey, Kono, I didn't mean to wake you up," Jax whispered.

"I'm so tired of sleeping," Kono complained. "But the last time I woke up, there was a US Marshal in my room. So apparently nice things can happen while I'm asleep."

"I hope he's not here to protect you," Jax said, smirking. "Because he's doing a lousy job."

Kono laughed quietly. "I convinced him to take his own pain meds about thirty minutes ago. His wrist had to be killing him, and he was just exhausted. You're looking a little rough around the edges, there, girl." She hesitated. "Caviness said you treated Valerie Keon. Are you okay, Jax?"

Jax replied quickly. "Ms. Keon is settled with her family. Thanks to Steve and Caviness, there won't be a trial for her to deal with."

Kono shook her head. "Not what I asked. Jax - are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Jax waved her off, and then gestured toward the metal clipboard file at the end of the bed. "Hey, do you mind if I look at the notes on your chest tube? I want to see what they placed and how it's doing. And your CT; I know the first one came back clear, but they should be doing a repeat, just to be safe."

"Jax," Kono said again. She'd scooted over on the bed, and she patted the space beside her. "Put my chart down and come here."

Jax reluctantly replaced the chart and shuffled to Kono's bed, sitting down carefully. Kono tugged on her until she relaxed, resting her head next to Kono's on the pillow.
"Now, you wanna tell me again that you're fine?" Kono said quietly.

"I'm fine," Jax whispered. "Kono, please . . . really. I'm fine."

"You're a lying liar who lies," Kono whispered back.

Jax snorted out a half-laugh, half-sob. "You're a terrible friend."

Kono took her hand and held it tightly. "Please. I am a fantastic friend and you know it. You're not fine. But you will be. You have an ohana now, Jax."

Jax impatiently brushed away a tear that had escaped despite her best efforts, and nodded, not trusting her voice. It was nice, sitting here with Kono and Caviness. There was something nagging at the back of her mind about Caviness . . . oh yeah. Something Kono would like.


"Yeah," Kono whispered back. "What do you think?"

"I think," Jax said, yawning, "that I'm looking forward to hearing from you when you discover the ink."

"There's ink?" Kono said dreamily. "What? Where?"

"Sorry, patient confidentiality," Jax murmured sleepily. "You'll have to discover that on your own." 

"You're a terrible friend," Kono protested. "Jax?" Kono craned her head around, trying to see if Jax had really fallen asleep.

"I think she's asleep," Caviness whispered, looking fondly at Kono.

"Oh, hey," Kono said, dimpling at him. "How's the pain?"

Caviness blinked at her. He hadn't gotten past the dimples yet. Wait, she said something about pain.

"You're in pain? I'll get the nurse," he offered.

Kono shook her head and smiled, then looked up as Steve and Danny quietly opened the door and looked in. She gestured for them to come in the room.

"Hey, guys," she said quietly.

"Kono, babe," Danny said, crossing the room and kissing her on the cheek. "How are you feeling?"

"Not bad," Kono said, holding up her hand attached to the IV. "They're giving me the good stuff."

Caviness looked up at Steve standing quietly next to him. "I don't know how you manage, man," Caviness said, nodding toward the two beautiful women in front of them. "My ability to concentrate would be seriously, seriously compromised."

"I'm a SEAL," Steve said, shrugging. "I compartmentalize."

"Sure," Caviness said. "That's why the two of them were able to render you completely
speechless in the office the other day."

"Hey," Steve protested, "I'm still human. How's the arm?"

"Cracked, not broken," Caviness said. "Enough to warrant a couple of days off active duty."

"So you've assigned yourself protection detail?" Steve grinned. "You know we have all the guys in custody."

"Can't be too careful?" Caviness offered. "Wait, Chin's not allowed to bring that shotgun to the hospital, right?"

The sound of Steve's low laughter woke Jax, and her eyes flew open, startled and disoriented for just a moment. Kono squeezed her hand gently.

"Hoaloha, the boys are here to take you home," Kono said.

"Sorry," Steve said. "You didn't come back . . . "

"So Super SEAL decided to recon and retrieve," Danny supplied. "You ready to go?"

Jax nodded and stood, keeping the blanket wrapped around her. "See you tomorrow, Kono. Take it easy, Caviness," she added. "Don't forget to take all of the antibiotic. I don't even want to know what was growing on that rock."

The late afternoon sun had warmed the Camaro, and Jax slid wordlessly into the back seat. Steve didn't reach for the keys, for a change, so Danny had the rare privilege of driving his own car.

Jax snickered from the back seat as Danny adjusted the driver seat forward, and it was a welcome relief from some of the tension.

"Shut it, you," Danny groused, smiling at Jax in the rear view mirror. "Steve, did you want me to drop you off to get your truck?"

"It's out of the way," Steve said, leaning his head back against the seat. "I'll ask HPD to bring it to the house tomorrow. Let's just go home, yeah?"

#*#*#*#*#

By the time they arrived back at Steve's house, the sky had clouded and a gentle rain was falling. Jax simply pulled her blanket up over her head and wandered slowly up the front walk to the porch.

Danny got out of the Camaro and hesitated. "I guess I'll head on . . . " he said.

Steve and Jax both turned to him. "Stay, Danny," they said in unison. Danny grinned and grabbed his bag out of the trunk, then fell in next to Steve, and they followed Jax into the house.

"Dibs on the shower," she said, and trudged up the stairs, without looking back at them.

Steve sighed and headed toward the kitchen, Danny patting his shoulder sympathetically.

"I guess that's a clue that she wants a little space? Shit, Danny, I am out of my element here," Steve said. "What's . . . " he broke off, looking at the counter in confusion. A large collection of familiar Kamekona takeout containers were neatly stacked next to the sink, a delicious smell wafting from them.
Steve grabbed the note left on top of the containers. "I'm proud to have such a gifted officer and medic as my partner," Steve read. "Eat up, Nolan, I know it's been a rough couple days. Share some with Steve and Danny if you feel sorry for them. Grover."

"Aw, that's nice," Danny said. "I'm going to grab a quick shower before Jax uses all the hot water," he added, and headed off to the guest bathroom.

When he emerged, there was still no sign of Jax, and Steve was standing at the bottom of the stairs, looking up. Danny stood next to him, shoulder to shoulder, in companionable silence for a while.

"You look like you're contemplating breaching a fortress," Danny said, finally.

"I know how to do that," Steve said. "That would be easy."

They heard the shower turn off, and retreated hastily to the kitchen, aiming for nonchalance as they set the food and some Longboards out on the island. Jax padded into the kitchen, wearing sweats, her brother's old FDNY t-shirt, and wrapped in the same blanket that had apparently become her talisman against the evils of the world.

"Smells good," she said, sliding onto a stool. Steve handed her the note from Grover, and she read it, smiling. She took a long pull on her Longboard, swallowing past a sudden lump in her throat.

"Is there any hot water left?" Steve asked, smiling at her and tucking her damp curls behind her ear.

She nodded and ducked her head down, biting her lip. Steve risked tucking his fingers under her chin and tilting her head to look up at him. He rubbed his thumb gently over her lip until she smiled at him. "Maybe enough for one of your Navy showers," she said. "Sorry."

He shook his head. "I love having you here using up my hot water," he said. "I'll be right back. Go ahead, start eating. You know me, I'll catch up."

Danny pushed the carton of lemon pepper shrimp toward Jax. He knew it was her favorite.

"Thanks," she said, trying to ignore the funny feeling in her stomach that the smell of the food was prompting.

This is your favorite, she chided herself. Stop being such a baby and pull it together.

Pulling the blanket around her a little more snugly, she snagged a bite of rice. It was almost to her mouth when she realized that she was not going to win this fight. Dropping the chopsticks back into the takeout tray, she bolted from the kitchen, making a beeline for the bathroom.

Danny sighed and grabbed the blanket and followed her, wedging his foot in the door when she tried to slam it in his face.

"Danny," she protested weakly, turning and hovering over the toilet. "Just leave me alone."

"Not gonna happen, babe," he said evenly, standing over her and holding her hair back. There was little to nothing in her stomach, and she retched violently and dry heaved, until Danny winced in sympathy.

Finally, she stopped and leaned back against the cabinets, wrapping her arms around her legs and laying her head on her knees. Danny tucked the blanket around her and filled a small cup of water.
"Tiny sips," he instructed, handing it to her. She swished a mouthful around and spit it out, then took a few sips.

"Thanks," she muttered.

Danny slid down to the floor next to her, ignoring the twinge in his knee.

"I'm sure someone, at some point, warned you about this, prepared you for this, yeah?" Danny asked, rubbing the back of Jax's hand with a finger.

She nodded. "Not my first rodeo, Danny," she whispered. "I thought maybe this time would be easier, though."

"This time?" Danny questioned. He was pretty sure . . . but he had hoped maybe . . .

"Thought this time would be easier than, you know. After the first Rivera case."

Danny clenched his fists in anger. "That wasn't in the Rivera reports. No charges were filed against his men."

"Wasn't part of the case," Jax said wearily. "Jade was still a viable cover; and Jade would never have gone to the police or pressed charges. Jade wouldn't have even gone to the hospital."

Danny saw the faint shadow outside the bathroom door, knew that Steve was listening quietly.

"Jade didn't go to the hospital," Danny said softly. "She went over a bridge instead. And you wouldn't look at me, when I came to the hospital then. Just like you won't look at me and Steve today."

Jax shrugged and picked at a loose thread on the blanket. She was quiet for a long time, and Danny had almost decided to give up and suggest they get up off the floor. He saw Steve's shadow move just slightly, and then Jax spoke.

"Were there photos?"

"What, babe?" Danny said. He wasn't sure he'd heard her correctly.

"Were there photos? In my file. The report . . . after O'Neil," she repeated softly. Steve's shadow shifted more, and he opened the door carefully and slid down to the floor, joining Jax and Danny.

"There were," Steve answered, rubbing his finger over the back of her hand, much as Danny had done a few minutes earlier.

"When Valerie found out that Lassiter was dead, and that she didn't have to go through pressing charges, and a trial . . . we asked Marshal Shelton, and she said that Valerie didn't need to feel obligated to do photos. That it wasn't needed to help build a case against him. I couldn't remember . . . I didn't remember anyone asking me about photos," she said quietly.

"You had a severe concussion," Danny reminded her. "There's a lot you probably don't remember." He thought it was possible that photos had been taken without her permission, but he didn't trust himself to say that out loud.

"Oh, God," Jax groaned, covering her face with her hands. "Did the team see the photos?"

Steve pulled her hands away from her face gently. "No. No, ku'uipo." He held his breath, hoping that she wouldn't ask . . .
"You saw the photos," she said. "You and Danny."

"Some of them," Steve answered honestly. "Not nearly all. I closed the file. I could barely stand
the idea of the injuries I could see for myself, in real life . . . I couldn't bring myself to . . . and it
seemed like an invasion of your privacy."

Danny nodded in agreement. "Same here, babe."

"Jax," Steve continued, "NYPD sealed your file. Caviness pulled records on all of us, to see how
vulnerable we were to a threat. He barely had any information from NYPD at all. Just that you
were injured in the line of duty and decided to transfer to HPD."

Jax nodded. That seemed to make her feel better.

Steve was still idly tracing over her hand with his finger. As much as he longed to take her in his
arms and hold her, he knew, from experience with her nightmares, that it might be a while before
he could do that without spooking her. But this, she never seemed to mind. Maybe because it was
a reminder of her battered and bruised knuckles; evidence that she dealt out plenty of hurt of her
own to those who had dared attack her. His finger drifted down to her wrist and she inhaled
sharply.

"What is it, ku'upo?"

"There weren't any ligature marks," she said. Her voice was dispassionate, as if she were
reviewing evidence for a case.

"I don't follow," Danny said.

"I don't remember . . . but there weren't ligature marks. I wasn't restrained?" she asked in
confusion.

Steve looked at Danny carefully over the top of her head, which was bent down, studying her
wrists. This was unsettling. Danny shrugged, his eyes full of alarm and concern.

"I don't remember there being marks on your wrists, Jax, if that's what you're asking," Steve
answered slowly.

"That makes no sense," she said sharply. She stood easily, with a gracefulness that made Danny
feel keenly the ten or so years he had on her, and stalked, cat-like, toward the kitchen.

Steve looked at Danny. "Okay, I got nothing, buddy, how about you?"

"I'm not even going to touch that one," Danny said. "Look, partner, you're the expert on combat
PTSD, but I've had countless classes on post assault PTSD. Hate to say it, but this is pretty classic.
Honestly, she's too strong for her own good. If she would just let go of that damn control for five
minutes . . ."

"I know, Danno," Steve agreed. Danny looked at him side-eyed. Steve, Mr. Control Freak
himself, was one to talk.

"Okay, I'll let that slide. Help me up, my knee is killing me," Danny complained.

###

Jax stood at the window, frustrated with the rain. She was exhausted, but not sleepy. Vaguely
ache, but not in actual pain. Tired, but restless. A swim would have been nice, but stitches. Or a
run, but rain. And stitches.

_Stupid rain. Stupid stitches._

She let out a string of expletives that had even Danny raising his eyebrows.

"Sorry," she said.

Danny shrugged. "Hey, babe, you let it rip. No judgment. About anything."

"Can we go to the range tomorrow?" Jax wondered aloud. Her mood changes and subject changes would have been amusing, under other circumstances.

"Might be a good idea," Steve said. He could relate with the urge to shoot something.

"I think the last time I was here, I set the DVR . . ." Danny muttered, fumbling with the remote. "Aha! Hockey. Ranger vs Red Wings."

"Hell, yeah," Jax said, dragging her now ubiquitous blanket to the sofa. Steve shook his head. The blanket would have been amusing under any other circumstances, too, but now he was wondering if it would be hauled upstairs with her at the end of the night.

Danny hauled out two six packs and a bowl of pretzels from the kitchen and plopped them unceremoniously on the coffee table. Steve raised his eyebrows. They'd each already had a couple of beers with dinner.

"Look," Danny said, gesturing in his familiar fashion. "I'm usually the poster child for moderation, and dealing with problems appropriately, and all that. But enough. We all feel like shit. This was a horrible case, and it ended horribly, and it brought up all kinds of horrible stuff for Jax. And it's awkward and miserable and none of us know the hell what to do about it. So let's watch hockey, and drink maybe just a little too much, and trust that tomorrow will be better, okay? Tomorrow has to be better. And no one is driving. I'm not going home to my empty house, okay?"

"Okay, Danny," Jax said agreeably, patting the sofa cushion next to her. She tried to think of something helpful and normal to say. "Thanks for recording the hockey game," she said with a nod.

That was good, Danny thought. "You're welcome," he said, plopping down next to her. It was still awkward, as he tried to determine the appropriate amount of distance. That wasn't usually a problem. He grabbed a beer and a handful of pretzels.

Steve sat down on the other side of Jax, equally awkward. On the rare evenings that they vegged out in front of the TV, it usually started with snuggling and ended with a complex arrangement of tangled limbs and discarded clothing. Tonight, Jax was radiating a nervous energy and Steve didn't know what the hell he was supposed to do. It seemed inconsiderate to put his hands all over her, given what she'd been through today, what she'd had to relive . . . but his fingers itched to touch her, his arms felt useless and empty with not holding her.

He sat in awkward misery, pretending to watch the game while studying Jax's shallow breathing and the way she kept biting her lip and fidgeting with the blanket. The tension radiated off of them until Danny couldn't bear it, and he mumbled an excuse about going to call Gracie, and shoved off the sofa, walking quickly down the hallway.

"I'm sorry," Jax whispered. "I wish . . . I understand. It's too much to expect. I know you were standing outside the bathroom, I know you heard."
"Heard what, ku'uipo?" Steve asked, shifting on the sofa to try to look at her.

She shrugged, picking at the label on her Longboard. "The Rivera case. The first one."

"Jax, I'm so sorry," Steve said. "You'd never said, but you know, Danny and I . . . well, we wondered. You deliberately provoked them; made them turn on you so that young girl could get away . . . then there were things that Dillon Rivera said. I hate that you were made to believe that preserving your cover was that important, that it was worth . . . " he shook his head.

"I understand, Steve. Once is a fluke; twice is . . . " She shrugged again. "And the photos . . . God, I don't even . . . I understand."


"I understand why you don't want to touch me," she whispered. "It's okay."

"Wait, what?" Steve said, putting his beer down and turning sideways on the sofa, tucking one of his long legs up beneath him so that he could face her. "What? No, Jax." He ran a hand through his hair. This was not going well at all. "I'm so sorry . . . no, sweetheart, it's not that. God, it's not that. I want to hold you so bad, it's making me crazy."

"But you're not. You're very carefully not touching me, and I get it, I do. It's . . . horrible."

"No, Jax," he said firmly. "No, you being hurt, that's horrible. It's just . . . okay, when you have nightmares, I have to be really careful . . . you hit. Hard," he teased gently.

"Oh," she replied. "Oh! Because I don't know it's you. Sometimes I get . . . confused. You're not you, you're . . . someone else. For a few minutes." Steve didn't argue, he knew what it was like to have no sense of time. But he could think of several times when a 'few minutes' had been an agonizing hour.

"But you know it's me right now," he said, stroking her tousled curls, wincing at the sight of the graze above her ear, hidden by the tumble of hair until he moved it.

She nodded.

"And this is okay?" he asked, sliding his arm around her and pulling her gently into his side.

She nodded again and hesitantly rested her head on his shoulder. He waited patiently, brushing his fingers through her hair gently, until she pulled the blanket more firmly around her and relaxed.

"Hey," he said, kissing the top of her head. "Are you still cold?"

She nodded yet again, and shrugged. "Yeah," she said quietly.

He shifted a bit, so that she was snuggled against him, knee to shoulder, and wrapped his arm more closely around her. His fingers caressed the bandage on her arm. She marveled that the hands that could be so dangerous could also be so impossibly tender.

"I am so, so sorry that I misread the situation, Jax," he said quietly. "I told you, in the armory: there's never a time - never - that I don't want to touch you, and hold you. No matter what. Nothing changes that, Jax."

Her breathing hitched. "I thought that maybe . . . maybe it was just too much." She pressed the heels of her hands violently into her eyes.
This can not be happening, she thought. Pull it together.

Danny came back into the living room, and took in the scene in front of him. Progress had been made on some fronts, obviously, because his friends were snuggled together - not in their usual eye-roll inducing public display of affection, which usually involved someone's hand on someone's ass, true, but Jax looked distinctly more comfortable, and Steve no longer had aneurysm face. But clearly, Jax was working way too hard to maintain control, and failing, from the looks of it.

"Jax, babe, tell us what we can do," Danny said, sitting on the edge of the coffee table and stroking her knee gently.

Steve looked perplexed, and helpless.

"You were right, Danny," Jax started, and Danny put his hands out in an 'of-course' gesture which brought a smile to her face. "Today sucked. Can we just sit here together, and pretend to watch hockey, even if I'm being all weird and all over the place? Because I feel like I'm going to crawl out of my skin, here, guys, and I'm freaking out a little. So I want to drink, and curse, and can we pretend it's because we're watching hockey?"

Danny was reasonably sure that Malia would not approve, but she wasn't here, so he ignored that little voice of disapproval.

"You got it, babe," he said, and handed their beers back to them, and they proceeded to do just that. When Jax let out a string of curse words at random intervals during the game, Steve and Danny cursed right along with her. If the names O'Neil and Rivera got mixed in with phrases like 'bad call' and 'stupid ref', well, blame that on the Longboards. When Steve felt her shoulders shake quietly with tears that she didn't understand and couldn't begin to explain, he simply held her until it stopped and kissed her head. And Danny wordlessly handed her tissues out of one box, and held an empty box to her to collect them when she was done.

After the hockey game, Danny collected all the empties, waving off Steve's half-hearted offer to help, and queued up one of the Lethal Weapon installments. He and Steve argued over which of them was Riggs and which was Murtaugh, until Danny noticed that Jax was sound asleep.

"She's down for the count, partner," Danny murmured, smiling fondly at Jax. He let out a shaky exhale. "Shit, that was brutal. I know it's normal, after a day like today, but learning about it in a seminar and witnessing it are two different things. Want me to help you get her upstairs?"

"No," Steve said, stroking her hair thoughtfully. "Just toss me an extra pillow, would you? I don't want to risk waking her up."

Danny grabbed a pillow from Mary's room and gently lobbed it at Steve, who caught it mid-air with a flick of his wrist.

"Good night, partner," Danny said, as he shuffled to the guest room. "And good luck."

Chapter End Notes

Two more chapters -- including Jax and Catherine meeting -- and this particular storyline will be wrapped up. In progress is a Jax and Danny centric story, in which no one gets hurt except the bad guy.
Respite

Jax's slightly inebriated subconscious worked on the puzzle for hours before coming to a solution.

"Well, shit," she said aloud, rubbing her eyes.

"What?" Steve said, instantly wide awake, voice perfectly normal. It was infuriating, really, how he could do that.

"The restraints," she said. "I mean, there weren't restraints. Or ligature marks. But I keep dreaming . . . when I have a nightmare, it involves being restrained. My hands being restrained. It was bugging me today."

"Oh," Steve said. 'Bugging her' didn't seem to do justice to the mental and emotional events of the day, but they'd go with it for now.

He stroked her hair as she fidgeted with the blanket. "This okay?" he whispered.

"Ummhmm," she mumbled, staying snuggled close to him. In spite of everything, there was no part of her that didn't appreciate being enveloped by his strong arms, and she rested a hand splayed out against his solid abs, idly admiring the definition even through his t-shirt.

"My hands," she said slowly, still not fully awake - maybe not entirely, completely, utterly sober, she thought in passing, "were underneath me. Martinez . . ."

"The one whose knee you dislocated?" Steve prompted, trying to keep his tone level, despite the hot burn of rage that was building.

"Yeah . . . he wasn't holding down my hands, because they were underneath me. Behind my back. He was holding down my shoulders, though," she said, as if she was explaining a new martial arts move. Steve wished he wasn't entirely sober. No one should be sober discussing this.

"That's how your shoulder was dislocated and your collarbone fractured," he said, closing his eyes and willing the image out of his mind. "You fought so hard you dislocated your shoulder and cracked your collarbone," he marveled. "Jax," he said, a sudden thought coming to him. "That makes him directly complicit. You could still file charges." Or Danny and I could fly to New York and file our boots up his ass, he thought.

Jax yawned sleepily and snuggled closer to Steve; he held her as tightly as he dared, trying not to hurt any of the recent cuts and bruises, and buried his face in her hair, grounding himself in the familiar honeysuckle and gunpowder scent.

"I'm glad I figured that out. At least it makes sense now," she said, as she drifted back to sleep.

Sleep did not return to Steve, and Danny found him the next morning, staring out the window at the still-falling rain.

"Babe, you look like shit," Danny said. "I didn't think you drank that much."

"I didn't drink enough, Danny," Steve sighed. He pointed at Jax, still curled up on the sofa, her riot of dark red curls cascading over her pillow, one small foot stuck out from under the blanket. "She drank enough, though, to let go of some of that iron-willed control of hers, and tell me what she remembered."
"Oh, shit," Danny said, pouring some coffee, and wondering if it was way too early to add a splash of something stronger.

"You know yesterday, right before she flipped like a switch, she said something about restraints, and it didn't make sense?"

"Oh, shit," Danny said again. He knew he was being redundant, but he had a bad feeling about where this was going.

"Yeah, she remembered being restrained," Steve said, his voice dripping sarcasm and fury, "but no ligature marks. Because her hands were being restrained by her own body weight, trapped underneath her."

"Oh, shit," Danny breathed.

"While Martinez, despite his dislocated kneecap, held her shoulders down. He held her shoulders down, Danny, while . . . " Steve broke off, rubbing his eyes furiously. "She struggled hard enough to dislocate her own shoulder and crack her own collarbone. But with her hands trapped underneath her, and O'Neil . . . she couldn't get any leverage. If she'd gotten her hands free she likely would have killed them both."

"Oh, shit," Danny whispered once more, and then fell silent for a long, long moment. He needed to update his word-a-day calendar. "That was not in the report," he said finally.

"No, it wasn't. She didn't remember until yesterday. Taking the restraints off of Valerie Keon must have jarred it loose," Steve said. "I wonder how many more times this is going to happen," he added, leaning wearily on the counter.

"As many as it needs to, Steve, and all we can do is ride it out," Danny said. "Wait, this means Martinez . . . "

"Directly complicit," Steve finished. "She brushed off the idea of filing charges."

"It's her call," Danny reminded him.

"I know, Danno," Steve sighed. Jax stirred, stretched, and winced as she pulled on two sets of stitches.

"Ow," she said to the world at large. "Why did you let me drink so much?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," Steve said, smiling down at her. He sat a cup of coffee on the table next to her and helped her sit up, brushing her tousled hair out of her face. "Good morning."

"Gimme," she smiled, reaching for the coffee. She sighed in happy appreciation, and his heart did its usual stumble at the sound. "Did I say I wanted to go to the range today?"

"You mentioned it," Steve said.

"I've changed my mind," she announced. "Danny," she yelled, and then grimaced. Too loud. "Danny," she tried again, more quietly. "Isn't it your day to pick Gracie up from school?"

"It is, indeed," Danny said, coming in from the kitchen and handing her a pop tart from his stash of unhealthy food that he kept hidden right under Steve's nose. Steve started to protest, and then remembered the little problem that Jax was having keeping her weight healthy, and decided that some processed sugar was possibly not the worst idea.
"Can we take her to visit Kono?" Jax asked, nibbling on her pop tart.

Danny and Steve both grinned broadly.

"That sounds absolutely perfect, babe," Danny said.

"I should go into the office and start on the paperwork," Steve said, his fingers still tangled in Jax's hair. But his legs folded back onto the sofa instead, and Jax curled against him. Danny handed him a cup of coffee and settled into the recliner, grabbing the remote.

"Let's see . . . we have Rangers vs Blackhawks . . . and three of the Fast and Furious oeuvre - I can tell what Jax does on your reserve weekends, Steven . . . "

The day passed in companionable sloth. Jax showered before their lunch of leftovers, and again before it was time to go pick up Gracie. Steve and Danny cast worried glances at each other but didn't say anything; Steve just quietly did a load of towels in the laundry, and turned the thermostat up slightly on the water heater.

Gracie was ecstatic to see both Jax and Kono; she'd heard that they were injured - Danny had learned that telling her a simple version of the truth caused her much less anxiety than what her active imagination provided. She was easily reassured by their presence, and took far too much interest in Kono's chest tube and Jax's stitches for Danny's liking.

"If you want to be a surgeon, Gracie, honey, that's just fine," Danny said. "But if Aunt Jax starts saying words like 'medic' or 'tactical', it's time to go home. Got it?"

Gracie, of course, giggled and rolled her eyes. "Danno, I don't want to be a medic," she said.

"Well, good, that's very sensible," Danny said.

"What do you want to be, honey?" Kono asked.

"I want to be a cop, like you or Danno," Gracie said solemnly. "Or a Navy SEAL like Uncle Steve."

Kono offered Danny her oxygen.

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The rain stopped just as Danny dropped Steve and Jax off to retrieve his Silverado from the palace parking lot, and they rode home in the fading light of sunset.

"So, tomorrow, we start processing all of that arsenal?" Jax asked.

Steve sighed. He hadn't been able to resist a peek, and sure enough, many of the crates were marked with the arrogant and distinctive Novak family crest. For some reason, Declan Novak, international arms dealer, had set up Martin Lassiter, local serial killer, with enough firepower to take out his team.

"Yeah, we do," he said. "At least it will keep you and Danny in Malia's good graces; it's not active duty."

"Why would Novak . . . " Jax shook her head. "It's creepy."

"No kidding," Steve said, helping her out of the truck. "Sit by the water a while?"
"Absolutely," Jax said, smiling up at him.

Absolutely amazing, his brain confirmed. Also, that was alliteration, his brain added, helpfully but not remotely pertinent.

They settled into the chairs and enjoyed the sunset.

"I miss this," Jax said, "when we have a case. But I appreciate it more when I get back to it."

"Hmm, do you appreciate me more when I get back from reserve weekends?" Steve teased.

"I thought I made that obvious," Jax mumbled, grinning, as she closed her eyes and rested her head back against the seat. "Ow."

Steve leaned back in his chair as well. "Ow."

Jax snickered. "Do we have enough of that topical anesthetic left?"

"I bought a case," Steve grunted. "Technically, the governor bought a case. For Five-O. We should go in, it's going to take us an hour just to clean and change bandages."

"Five more minutes," Jax muttered.

Twenty minutes later, the sky was almost dark, and Steve was gently shaking her awake. He dodged a left uppercut.

"Nice one," he said, holding her shoulders carefully and cautiously at arm's length. "You with me now?"

"Yeah, sorry."

Steve was right; while Jax had efficiently and quickly cleaned and replaced the bandages on the half-dozen or so cuts scattered on his arms, he had taken much, much longer. Each and every cut was cleaned with infinite care, and gently covered with cream and bandages where necessary.

He pulled out a small tin and rubbed his fingers in it, and traced them gently over the two rows of stitches.

"What's that stuff?" Jax asked, more than a little breathless.

"Coconut oil," he murmured. "Kono swears by it." He rubbed more onto his fingers, and then onto the scars on her side and hip.

"I bet you a steak dinner that next time we see Caviness, he smells like coconut oil," Jax said.

Steve chuckled. "I'll take that action." He rubbed the last of the oil on his fingers onto a small abrasion on her jaw. His fingers took on a mind of their own and slid into her hair. He'd spent the better part of the last thirty minutes touching and gently kissing every part of her body that was cut or bruised . . . which was pretty much every square inch . . . and he was almost lightheaded with desire. He groaned as he tilted her head back and pressed his lips to hers, his tongue sweeping out to just graze -

She inhaled sharply with a cry, and he froze, pulling back.

"Oh, God, Jax," he said. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to rush . . . after all you've been through these last couple of days . . ."
She placed a finger over his mouth. "Steve," she whispered. "You shot me in the head, remember?" She grinned and pulled her hair back. He'd forgotten and run his fingers right over the wound, hidden by her thick curls. "Now, where were we?" she asked, her eyes dark, as she trailed her fingers down toward the waistband of his cargo shorts.

"I don't want to hurt you," he whispered, catching her hands and stopping their progress.

"Remember how I told Danny you could be creative?" she asked, her eyes sparkling with amusement. She kissed the little spot behind his ear that always made him go stupid. "Be creative," she whispered.

Steve had wondered if the image of the Novak family crest would fill his thoughts that night. As it turned out, he didn't think of it at all.
Jax and Catherine finally cross paths.

"Danny," Jax said, and it bordered on a whine, it really did. "Why are we being punished?"

"Not being punished, babe," Danny sighed. Although, mid-way through the day of processing the arsenal that Declan Novak had left for Martin Lassiter, it was starting to feel that way.

"I'm never even going to get to shoot any of these," Jax said morosely, as she painstakingly dusted yet another wooden case for fingerprints. So far, they'd found only Lassiter and Novak's prints; which meant Novak had personally ensured that Lassiter had enough weapons to take out the entire Five-O team.

"Aw, I'm sorry," Danny said. "Maybe Steve will let you keep one of the M8-4 stun grenades."

"You think?" Jax said, bouncing a little on the balls of her feet in excitement.

"Do I thi - no, I do not think," Danny said. "You people are crazy."

"Then we are being punished," Jax muttered.

"Geez, someone got up on the wrong side of the bed this morning," Danny said.

Jax shrugged, sighed, and rubbed at the side of her head irritably. Danny studied her for a moment, his trained eye taking in details at a glance: still pale, with dark circles still smudged beneath her eyes. He shook his head and pondered for a moment, then grinned as he pulled a small radio off the shelf. Wiping a fine layer of dust off the top, he plugged it in and fiddled with the controls.

"Aha," he said smugly, as music started to fill the evidence bay.

Jax turned back from the case of RPGs and looked at Danny. "Bon Jovi, seriously?" she asked, arching her eyebrows at him. But a grin was tugging at the corners of her mouth.

"Yes, my Jersey Girl, you know it," Danny said, grinning back. "Nothing better for getting you out of a funk."

Jax rolled her eyes and turned back to the case, smiling. Danny watched her and sure enough, there was a subtle lift to her shoulders, and by the second verse she was humming along.

"Are you still hopeless on the dance floor, Jax?" Danny asked.

"Shut up," she said fondly. "Just because some of us didn't hit the club scene during our misspent youth . . . I bet your moves are old, now, anyway."

"My moves are classic," Danny said, and proceeded to demonstrate. It had the desired effect, and Jax smiled and laughed as Danny broke out his best moves.
"Okay, you're actually really good, you know, for an old guy," Jax teased. She wasn't surprised; Danny had natural coordination and athleticism. Plus, there had been that one undercover case that had lasted for weeks. Jax had watched Danny and Grace tear up the dance floor for nights on end, and he had more than held his own.

The radio station switched to a slow ballad, and Danny smiled and held out his hand to Jax. "Come on," he said, "you're not terrible at slow dancing."

"Danny," Jax protested, "we're supposed to be working here." But she stepped into his open arms all the same, and rested her head on his shoulder.

"So," he said quietly, leading her gently around the corner of a box of grenades, "everything okay?"

"Ummhmm," she mumbled. She was tired, really, and this felt nice.

"Cause, you know, not to insult you or anything, but you look like shit," Danny said.

"Aw, Danno, you say the sweetest things," she said, stepping on his foot accidentally-on-purpose. He chuckled and deftly kept her from tripping. "You and Steve don't know when to say when . . . you know that you have nothing to prove, here, Jax. I know you. You were this way in the academy; always pushing to go harder, faster, further. Don't try to keep up with Rambo, okay? None of the rest of us mere mortals are trying. Remember to eat. Get some decent sleep."

"Okay, Danny," Jax agreed.

The music shifted again, this time to the latest club dance hit. Danny looked thoughtful for a moment, then shrugged.

"Okay, yeah, I got nothin' for this," he said. He kissed Jax on the forehead and went back to his clipboard. "One more crate. You wanna count or fingerprint?"

"Fingerprint," Jax said emphatically.

They carefully pried open the crate, after Danny had photographed and logged the Novak family crest which had been stamped onto the corner. He was muttering about the arrogance of the ubiquitous symbol as they set the lid aside.

"What's that?" Jax asked, pointing to a sheaf of papers that appeared to be shoved into the edge of the crate, nestled among the wood shavings. Danny snapped a photo of the papers before pulling them out, gently.

They looked at them in stunned disbelief.

"Well, shit," Jax said succinctly.

#*#*#*#*#

The team stood looking at the documents, now scanned and displayed on the plasma screens, while the originals were at the crime lab for fingerprinting.

"Okay, so there are a few surveillance photos of each of the team members; but look," Chin said, pointing at one picture, "in this shot of Jax, she's wearing the HPD SWAT uniform. And the only shot of Grover is one where he's in the frame with Jax, but it doesn't even look like he's intentionally included. These shots, at least, were taken before they transferred from HPD to Five-
"So it's highly improbable that Lassiter took them. Novak?" Danny asked.

"That would be my guess," Steve said. "Either himself or at his request."

"My guess is that Lassiter was never supposed to abduct Valerie Keon," Grover observed. "I think he was supposed to target the team, and Jax, after everyone escaped from Halawa. But he's a sociopath; couldn't contain himself, and went after Valerie, true to his usual habits."

Danny and Chin both nodded. "That's as sound a theory as any, until we have reason to suspect otherwise."

Steve was still studying the pictures. "No pictures of Gracie, or Rachel or Stan," he noted, "and none of Malia. There's no indication that anyone else was a target."

"No pictures of Mary," Chin added.

"Okay, let's see what the crime lab has to say; and get them to double check, see if there were any photos or documents retrieved from any of the cells from our guys," Steve said. He glanced at his watch. "Chin, I know you need to go pick Kono up from the hospital; why don't you take the rest of the day, so you and Malia can get her settled. She staying with you?"

"Yeah, Malia has already gone over and packed up a couple days worth of clothes. Malia says she's doing well, though, and I'm supposed to bring her in with me tomorrow," Chin said. "Kono being bored is more dangerous than her being here," he added, shrugging.

Jax grinned. She remembered Danny and Grace driving her all over New Jersey with a freshly casted wrist one time, for the same reason.

Steve glanced at Danny and Jax, both of whom still had lines of pain and fatigue around their eyes. Danny tilted his head almost imperceptibly at Jax, and Steve noticed again just how exhausted she looked. "Hey, why don't we all just call it early today," he said, "I think we've earned it, and we'll let the lab catch up on all the evidence we've given them to process."

"I thank you, my wife thanks you, my children thank you," Grover said, smiling. "And I'll take you up on that before anything changes." He headed into his office; Jax trailing after him to collect her backpack as well.

"I know, Danny," Steve said, his eyes following her. "Since the Keon case . . . she barely sleeps. Falls asleep, but then wakes up and wanders the house."

"And you're not doing much better," Danny observed, "probably for worrying about her. Maybe when Kono gets back, that will be good. Don't girls like to do stuff, like go get fancy coffee drinks, and do relaxing things?" Danny said.

"Hell if I know, Danny," Steve said. "The last time they went out for lunch I had to sign off on a brutality complaint, remember?" He frowned as his phone rang. "Yes, Governor Jameson? An hour? Yes, ma'am, I will be here." He sighed as he put his phone back in his pocket. "Danny, can you give Jax a ride home? I've got to stay and meet with the governor."

"Sure, babe. Hey, how about we go pick up some pizza, you know, from that one place that doesn't suck?" Danny said.

"Yeah, sounds good," Steve said. "And don't wait for me. Go ahead and eat. She keeps falling asleep before she eats, with these cases running us into the ground . . ."
"No, Governor, I most certainly do not understand," Steve said, pacing in his office.

Governor Jameson sat behind his desk, in his chair, sipping contentedly on a beer. "Steve, you're no longer in Naval Intelligence, remember?"

"I'm in the Reserves," Steve argued, "because you asked me to run your task force, to, and I quote 'get people like him off my island'. Well, Novak is just like Hesse," Steve argued.

"But he's not on my island," the governor retorted, "and if you go chasing after him, you won't be on my island either."

"I'm not entirely convinced that he's not on the island," Steve said. "And there are pictures of my team. My team, Governor. You expect me to just turn that over to . . . to, whom?"

"To Naval Intelligence," the governor replied. "They've already been in contact, asked me to facilitate the transfer of the case and information from Five-O to Naval Intelligence."

"Because they know you sign our paychecks?" Steve asked.

"Because they trust that I have the best interest of everyone involved at heart, and they hope that I can help you see that," she replied. "But make no mistake, Steve, that's the way it's going to happen. Someone from Naval Intel will be here at nine am to accept your evidence and a briefing."

Steve looked at her, a mixture of frustration and betrayal on his face.

"Come on, Steve," she said, "what, are you going to drag the entire team around the world chasing this guy down? How many of your people are recovering from injuries? Would it be the worst thing in the world to have a slow day or two?"

Steve sulked.

"Really?" Governor Jameson laughed. "Oh, my. I see that you think it would be. You and I both answer to the Navy on this one, Steve. As your boss, I'm instructing you to stand down on the Novak case. And Steve, as your friend . . . please . . . take a moment, take a breath."

Steve looked at her, impassive, crossing his arms.

"Need I remind you that I've approved all of the . . . requests you've made of me," she said, staring back at him, nonplussed.

If the governor had been a bit more perceptive, the twitch in Steve's jaw would have concerned her. As it was, she just arched her eyebrow at him and took another swig of her beer.

"Fine," he said. "I'll have the evidence organized and ready for transfer tomorrow morning. Then we will move on to an in-depth evaluation of the clear and present threat to my team, based on the surveillance photos we found among the weapons cache, and measures put in place to ensure the safety of my team and their families. I expect any . . . requests that I make for security will be approved."

"Why do you have aneurysm face?" Danny said, as Steve dropped heavily into the chair beside him. "We're on your beach, your happy place, you're wearing your favorite ratty tank top. The sun
is setting, it's paradise - or so I'm told - there should be no aneurysm face."

"The governor is taking the Novak case and handing it over to the Navy," Steve said.

"Well, babe," Danny said, "Novak isn't on the island, right? He headed out toward international
waters; who knows where he is now. Wasn't tracking him part of your job when you were in the
Navy?"

"Yes, Danny, yes. Tracking Novak was my job," Steve said tersely. "I stopped tracking Novak to
track Hesse, and that got Freddie and my dad killed. And now Novak is playing with me by going
after my team; threatening my team. They're a bunch of damn parasites, Danny, and they're going
to keep coming, and coming, until they've hurt everyone that I care about and ." 

Steve broke off, and glanced around, suddenly alarmed. "Where's Jax? Where is she, Danny?"

"Steve, she's in the garage," Danny said, putting a calming hand on his friend's arm. "Take a
moment, partner. Breathe."

"That's exactly what the governor said, Danny," Steve grunted.

"Oh, I'm so sorry that your boss, who no doubt has noted that you and your team have been run
into the ground chasing down escaped prisoners, has suggested some down time," Danny
mocked.

"No, it's . . . Danny, she's manipulating me. She came into my office today, and sat at my desk.
Classic power play. She brought up all the favors she's done for me - oh, she didn't say it in so
many words, but it's clear that's what she was doing. I don't like it, Danny. I don't like being
manipulated."

Danny was thoughtful for a moment. "Wow," he said finally. "You're sure?"

"I'd bet my life on it, Danny. I don't know what, I don't know why, but Jameson is playing us."

"What do we do?"

Steve shook his head. "Hell if I know, Danny. But I'm trying to keep the rest of you as far away
from this as possible, at least until I know what I'm dealing with."

"That's code for 'don't mention it to the others','" Danny guessed.

"For now," Steve said. "I don't know what this is or where it goes. You've already been
threatened by Novak; you don't need to be on the governor's radar as well."

"You don't have to go all lone wolf, Steve," Danny reminded him. "You built this crazy family;
we're all in it together."

"I know, Danny, just let me do some looking, quietly and carefully, before we say anything,
okay? I don't want the team acting or operating differently. It will raise suspicions."

Danny nodded. "Fair enough. Hey, did you get food? Go get food. You don't look much better
than Jax. You crazy people, think you can run on adrenaline and caffeine alone."

"You're such a good mom, Danno," Steve teased, but he hauled himself out of the chair in search
of food all the same.

#*#*#*#*#
"Hey," Jax said, looking up from under the hood of the car.

"Hey, yourself," Steve said, grinning at her. She was wearing the old cut-off shorts that apparently lived in the garage, and one of her old Newark PD t-shirts, sleeves long since ripped away. Her cheek was smudged with motor oil, and her hair appeared to be trying to escape from . . . "is that a zip-tie?"

She absently tugged on her hair. "Oh, yeah, I forgot an elastic thingy, this was handy," she said, scratching her cheek and smudging more oil in the process.

Steve placed the pizza box and two Longboards on the workbench and came to stand next to her. "How's it coming?"

"Really, really good, considering my boss works me non-stop and I haven't had any decent wrench time lately," she said, bumping her hip against his as she tightened the connection on a cable. "Help me reach - there. Thank you. Okay, that's all I can do until the next batch of parts come in. Shipping is slow from Detroit. I'm thinking, maybe after the Marquis is finished . . . I might look into a project car for myself."

She struggled to reach high enough to lower the hood of the car, and he stepped closely behind her, reaching over her easily to help. He lowered the hood until it latched with a quiet snick, and then wrapped his arms around her, inhaling the familiar scent of her hair. It grounded him and he took a moment to try to settle the swirl of questions in his mind.

*Home*, his brain sighed, and he tightened his arms around her.

"Hey," she said quietly, turning around and reaching up, cupping his face in her small, strong hand. "What is it?" The tiny lines around his eyes were deeper, and his expression belied a fatigue that went beyond a lack of sleep.

He leaned his face into her hand and smiled tiredly at her. "Rough day at the office," he said simply. "Hey, how about another slice of pizza? I haven't had any yet."

"It doesn't suck," she said helpfully. "And it doesn't have pineapple on it."

Steve boosted her easily to sit on the workbench and opened the box, pulling out a slice for himself. "So," he mumbled around a bite, "tomorrow morning, we have to turn everything on Novak over to Naval Intelligence."

"Why?" Jax asked, her brow furrowing in confusion. "I would think you'd be the person most likely to track him down."

"The governor and the Navy say that since he's off the island, he's out of Five-O's jurisdiction," Steve explained.

Jax was silent for a long moment. "So, will you go back?"

"Go back - what?" Steve asked, confused.

"Go back to active duty. Naval Intelligence. So you can track down Novak," Jax said. "Come on, Steve, I might be new to the story but I can follow the plot."

Steve sighed. "Okay, it crossed my mind. And I won't say that it couldn't happen, at some point. I'm still in the Reserves. It's not unheard of. But that's not on my radar at the moment, and if it comes up, you and I will have a long, long conversation. For right now, my place is here, with Five-O." He wrapped her curls around his fingers. "With you."
"I wouldn't ask you not to go," she said, even as she pulled him closer, tracing her fingers over the intricate ink on his biceps. "Not now, not later. I wouldn't ask you to stay, for me. It's... it's the Navy," she shrugged. "It's part of you, and if it came up, it would be for a good reason. I wouldn't ask you to stay."

He tried to imagine leaving the island again, leaving Jax, leaving Five-O, and for the life of him, he just couldn't. Funny; he had been away from Hawai'i as long as he had lived there, and he'd never felt like he would be homesick for it before.

_Ohana_, his brain supplied, as he tilted Jax's head back and kissed her, gently at first and then with the focused intensity that he usually reserved for disarming small explosives. She wrapped her legs around his hips, and he put his hands in her back pockets, pulling her closer.

"Okay," she said breathlessly, "I wouldn't ask you to stay but I might ask to go with you..."

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_The moonlight spilled through the windows, illuminating the bedroom in a pale silver light. Steve turned and brushed his hand over the empty space in the bed beside him. The sheets were cold... she'd been up for a while, then._

"Jax?" he mumbled sleepily.

"She's otherwise... occupied." Novak's cold, arrogant voice came from the chair in the corner of the bedroom.

Steve sat up, grabbing his backup out of the bedside table and pointing it, furious, toward the voice. "Where the hell is she?" he demanded.

"Where do you think? Go ahead; go and look."

_Steve bolted down the stairs, his feet barely touching them. He rounded at the bottom of the stairs. She was there, hands and feet tied to the chair, just like..._  

He woke with a gasp, reaching out instinctively for Jax. The bed was empty next to him, the sheets cold. His heart was racing as he grabbed his backup out of the nightstand. He cleared the bedroom, then the bathroom, then crept quietly down the stairs. Clearing the kitchen, he moved silently through the house, clearing each room as he moved toward the back door.

Jax was on the lanai, wrapped in an old quilt and nestled into one of the chairs, looked up as the door squeaked open. "Whoa," she said, sitting perfectly still as Steve's SIG was trained on her. "You okay?"

Steve huffed out a sigh of relief and flicked the safety back on his weapon, placing it securely on the shelf next to the back door. He knelt on the floor next to Jax, wrapping her in his arms and pulling her close to him, his big hand cupping the back of her head and tucking it under his chin.

"I thought..." he paused. "I guess it was a dream, and you were... scared the shit out of me," he murmured into her hair. "What are you doing out here, anyway?"

She shrugged. "I can't sleep, didn't want to keep you awake."

"Jax," he whispered, "what can I do? Tell me."

"It will pass, eventually," she said, fidgeting with the blanket. "It always does. You've done this, right? Surely... after Freddie, your dad. You have a few days, a few weeks... it gets better.
Valerie Keon . . . anyway. It will get better. You get it, right?"

"Yeah, I get it, ku'uipo," he said gently, "and yeah, it gets better. What can I do to help make it better?

"Can there be coffee?" she asked hopefully.

He kissed the top of her head. "Yes, there can be coffee," he said.

Malia wrapped her robe around her and found Chin on the porch. It was still dark, and she was no stranger to waking at odd hours. He turned to smile at her, gratefully accepting one of the cups of coffee she held toward him.

"Hmm, thank you," he said quietly. "Is Kono okay?"

"Still sleeping," Malia said, "and you could be. What's wrong?"

Chin sighed. "The high profile arms dealer that ended up in and out of Halawa? Had surveillance photos of the team. I'm thinking of installing a security system here . . . I'm so sorry, Malia. This isn't fair to you."

"Nonsense. Do you think that an emergency department comes without risk? Just let me know, please, if you put any friends from HPD in my path. Let's not have a repeat of that last time."

"I was embarrassed on behalf of that young officer that you clobbered with your clipboard," Chin chuckled. "I promise, for your sake and theirs, I will keep you in the loop this time."

Danny sighed as he looked at his phone. It was early; entirely too early to be awake. Still awake. He gave up the idea of further sleep and gathered his trainers and basketball shorts. For all his taunting of Steve's running and swimming, Danny was no couch potato. Jersey hadn't been a place for developing outdoor fitness routines; it was a place for a solid gym membership. His latest apartment may have left many things to be desired, but the complex had a decent gym, accessible twenty four hours a day.

Within half an hour, Danny had stretched - carefully, mindful of his stitches - and was moving fluidly through the weight sets that minimized any strain to his midsection. He finished the repetitions on auto-pilot; his mind full of the images of Novak's surveillance photos.

It was always, always unnerving to see yourself or your loved ones the subject of someone else's surveillance. Most of the photos had been taken at active scenes. Anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of Five-O, picked up on any public website, would have known to look for them there.

But then there were the other few photos: the team coming out of Sidestreets . . . Chin coming out of the bike shop . . . Steve coming out of the surplus store just outside Hickam. Okay, that one wouldn't have been a stretch, maybe. No pictures of Grace's school, or Queens, where Malia worked. No pictures of Rachel coming out of the coffee shop, or Stan's office. No pictures that they knew of. And that was what had kept Danny awake much of the night. What if there were more photos? What if their families were, in fact, in specific danger?

What if his Monkey was in danger, right this minute?
And what the hell should he do about it?

Danny sighed and moved to the treadmill.

*#*#*#*#*

The team arrived promptly, if tiredly, at the palace. Grover was the last to arrive, but he was greeted enthusiastically by the rest of the team clustered around the central console - he came bearing a tray of coffees and a bag of malasadas.

"Grover, you are a god among men," Danny sighed, helping him with the coffees.

"You people are looking just a little the worse for wear," Grover said, smiling as Kono relieved him of the bakery bag with a huge, dimpled smile. "Welcome back."

"Thanks, man," Steve said, accepting a coffee with a nod of thanks. "Okay, someone from Pearl should be here in about fifteen minutes to get all of our evidence and our reports on Novak. I want copies of everything - absolutely everything - saved to our internal hard drives. We may be turning over the case and the evidence, but no one has suggested that we can't retain all of the information. So that's what we're doing. Chin, you've set up the designated files? Excellent; transfer two copies of everything - one to the file designated for transfer to the portable hard drive for Naval Intel and one to our internal drive."

Chin nodded as he, Grover, and Steve headed off to their offices and fired up their laptops.

"So, we need to do stuff with the inventory stuff?" Jax asked uncertainly. "Right?" She looked at Danny for confirmation. Navigating the computer had never been Danny's forte, and Jax hadn't fared much better.

Danny, as usual, looked at Kono and grinned. She rolled her eyes. "Yes, Danny, since I don't have my own work on this case, I will gladly come show you what Steve is talking about." She laughed and followed Danny and Jax into Danny's office.

Kono demonstrated the intricacies of multiple file management, not that she was especially hopeful that Danny would remember later. Maybe there was hope for Jax.

"Okay, Jax, enter your password," Kono instructed, and then grinned as Jax typed it in with two fingers. Maybe not. "Where's the hard copy?"

"It's still downstairs with the physical inventory. Should I get it?" Jax asked.

"Yeah, we will be asked to turn that over, I'm sure," Danny groused.

Jax took the elevator down to the basement and signed in with the HPD clerk to enter the evidence bay. As she turned the final corner, a young, overeager intern barrelled into her with a rolling cart full of evidence being transferred to the courthouse. Tired and distracted, Jax fell over hard, and backwards, when the cart made violent contact with the row of stitches in her thigh.

"Oh, gosh, I'm terribly sorry," the young man said, rushing around the cart to offer Jax a hand up. She glared at him, but accepted his hand and pulled herself up easily onto her feet. "No problem," she gritted out between clenched teeth, and waved him off. She limped into the evidence room as pain momentarily took her breath away and gray spots danced in her eyes. "Holy fucking shit," she sighed, closing her eyes and leaning on one of the crates, "damn baby interns running the hell around the basement with their shit mail carts. Bloody stupid stitches. Fuckwit Novak and his damn knife and his stupid family fucking crest. Bollocks."
"Wow," a low, amused voice said behind her.

"Shit," Jax swore again in surprise, whirling around to see who was behind her and almost losing her balance. "Fuck," she added for good measure, as she tweaked her now throbbing leg. The voice behind her belonged to a very put-together looking woman, in what Jax recognized now as the Navy working uniform. "Sorry," she apologized.

"No need, I spend my life surrounded by sailors," the woman said, extending her hand. "You have to be Officer Nolan," she guessed.

"Yes, ma'am," Jax said, shaking her hand. "How did . . ." Five-O didn't wear name tags, so Jax wasn't sure how she'd been so easily identified.

"Sounds like Jersey swearing, with a dash of British, and I heard that a friend of Danny's had joined the team," the dark-haired woman said. "Lieutenant Catherine Rollins; nice to meet you."

Jax's eyes widened a bit comically, but she recovered quickly. "It's very nice to meet you, as well. Are you here to collect the inventory and evidence?"

"Yes; I have a team right behind me to collect the actual inventory but I wanted to see it for myself. Wow," she said, glancing at the pile of neatly stacked crates.

"Yeah, there's some great stuff in here," Jax said, wistfully.

Catherine laughed softly. "I'm sorry to take it away. Is it all there?" she asked, teasing.

"Yes," Jax said sadly. She held out the clipboard a bit awkwardly. "This is the hard copy; Danny thought you might want it, as well as the electronic files?"

"Thank you," Catherine said, accepting the clipboard. Jax produced a chain of evidence form, which Catherine signed and handed back to her. "Shall we head up to the office?"

Jax nodded and they headed to the elevator; Jax limping slightly.

"You're injured," Catherine observed.

"Stitches," Jax said. "Freshly contused by an evidence cart."

"Oh," Catherine nodded, as they boarded the elevator together, "the damn baby intern?"

"That would be the one," Jax said, pressing the button for the second floor. The door closed and Jax leaned against the wall of the elevator.

"This is, I suppose, just a bit awkward," Catherine said, smiling at Jax. "I really am sincerely happy to meet you. And happy for Steve. And you."

"Thank you," Jax said quietly. "I don't really understand . . . the whole awkward . . . I've never been good at the whole, you know. Dating. Being the . . . whatever." She sighed in frustration. "I don't have enough experience at relationships to know what's supposed to be awkward and what isn't," she finally said, in a rush.

Catherine laughed. "Well, that explains quite a lot. Let's just not bother being awkward then."

Jax smiled in relief, her face open and delighted, her green eyes twinkling. "That would be great," she said, nodding enthusiastically, a curl escaping from the loose clip holding it back from her face.
They exited the elevator together and approached the rest of the team standing at the center console.

"Close your mouth, brah, seriously," Kono hissed under her breath at Steve.

Catherine sat across from Steve's desk, smiling at him.

"What?" he said suspiciously.

"You didn't mention that she was so very pretty," Catherine said. "God, that hair is to die for. She has no idea, does she?"

"Not a clue," Steve agreed, grinning back at her.

"And the swearing?" Catherine smirked.

"Hey, blame Jersey, and Danny, and Danny's ex-wife," Steve protested. "So, you're taking the lead on tracking down Novak? Stateside or are they sending you out?" He tried not to sound just the tiniest bit jealous.

"I'm staying stateside," Catherine said. "I'm at Pearl for a while, but I'm in charge of satellite surveillance of Novak. I understand there were hard copy photos of the team?"

"Yeah," Steve said. "You know the Navy and the governor pulled us off of this, right?"

"And I take it you're not entirely happy with that?"

Steve didn't reply.

"Ah. Okay, sailor, how about I keep you in the loop on anything that would remotely affect your team?"

"That's a start," Steve said. "I need an objective risk assessment. Not just of the immediate team, but of their families as well. Novak very, very specifically targeted Danny and Jax in the Halawa fiasco."

Catherine nodded. "I'm not completely objective when it comes to you and your team, you know that, right?"

"You're the right kind of objective," Steve insisted. "Keep me in the loop. Me," he emphasized. Catherine arched an eyebrow. She could read between the lines. "Off record?"

"That a problem?"

"Not for me; it might be for the Navy. I'll do what I can. Dare I ask why?"

Steve shrugged. "Hunch. Unsubstantiated."

Catherine studied Steve for a moment, concern evident on her face. "Take care, sailor," she said softly, as she stood up. It felt just a little bit like goodbye, and she was surprised by a prick of tears that she blinked back quickly.

"You too, lieutenant," Steve said, coming around the corner of his desk. He decided to toss
protocol for a moment, and gathered Catherine in a gentle hug. "Be well, Cath," he whispered, kissing the top of her head.

Catherine started to head out of Steve's office, and paused as she watched the rest of the team moving about the open center room. Steve followed her gaze with his own, and smiled at the sight of Jax, absently batting Danny's hand away from fussing over her leg.

"Oh," Catherine said softly, looking up at Steve. "There it is. That was never there for me."

"What?" Steve asked, looking down at her fondly.

"Your heart," Catherine said, smiling at him.
"Now what?" Kono asked, as Catherine and her team left the building.

"We aren't officially tracking Novak," Steve said, "but we need to address the fact that there were surveillance photos of the team in the crates of weapons that Novak put in Lassiter's hands. So, the next thing we do is evaluate security. And to do that, we need to know everything we can about any connection between Novak and Lassiter."

"Sang Min," Grover said. "Sang Min might know . . . I don't know, something useful. It's happened before."

"He might have something genuine, you're right," Steve said. "And in the meantime, we better do all the paperwork. The governor is dropping hints. We'll have to coordinate with the U.S. Marshal's office to get it all done properly."

Kono tried not to look too pleased, she really did, but Chin's raised eyebrow and Jax's beaming smile told her that she was failing.

"Nolan, beating your head against the desk is not going to get the paperwork done any faster," Grover pointed out, bemused, hours later. "Plus, you don't have a great track record with concussions. I wouldn't push it."

"Death. By. Paperwork," Jax groaned. "Does SWAT have this much paperwork? Is it too late to transfer back? Maybe I should ask Halia about his civilian job. I bet he doesn't have to account for . . . what's the code for destruction of state property, again?"

Grover watched her for a moment. "Well, for starters - where did you learn - do you even know how to type?" he asked, incredulous.

"What?" Jax protested. "There wasn't a typing test for SWAT. I did, however, score very high on other tests. Like marksmanship, for example. And I can stop and start your heart with chemicals and electricity."

"Yeah, and I will die of old age before you finish typing that report, at the rate you're going," Grover said. He took a deep breath. An antsy Jax was driving him crazy. "Why don't you go restock your gear, make sure you've replaced whatever you used on this last case, okay? I'll type everything up, just hand it to me."

Jax dumped her papers on Grover's desk and headed for the armory before he could change his mind. As she headed by Kono's office, she saw Caviness sitting in a chair opposite Kono's desk, his back to the glass. Both of them were typing furiously on their laptops, but Kono's eyes were sparkling and her dimples were showing. Jax paused long enough to catch Kono's gaze and make a slightly obscene gesture, laughing when Kono blushed. She pulled an innocent face when Marshal Caviness turned around, then continued toward the elevator.

The basement was quiet; just the hum of the HVAC and the utilitarian fluorescent lights. No one in interrogation today; no one on Max's table. Even the lab techs had knocked off early. Jax sighed; it was like this in SWAT, too - a frenzy of activity followed by days of paperwork, and then, if you were especially unlucky, court appearances. She picked up her medic bag and put it on the utility table next to the cabinet, and began methodically going through the gear; putting
each item back in its proper spot, pulling fresh supplies from the cabinet to replenish what had
been used.

She was vaguely aware of the elevator opening and closing behind her, and wasn't startled when
Steve's arms wrapped around her. He buried his face in her hair and inhaled the familiar scent.

"Did your partner send you to the basement because you were getting on his nerves?" Jax asked,
smiling as she leaned back against him. "Because that's how I ended up here."

"Maybe I wanted to come give you a formal reprimand for unprofessionalism," Steve mumbled,
grinning.

"Hey, I know my Jersey language isn't appropriate for Hawaii, I'm sorry, but that kid just slammed
right into me with the evidence cart," Jax started to protest, then stopped. "Wait, what are we
talking about?"

"Well, I was talking about your little sign language with Kono," Steve drawled, "but now that you
mention it, yeah, Lieutenant Rollins was impressed with your sailor-worthy vocabulary."

"Was she," Jax said. She cringed and bit her lip uncertainly, turning around to face Steve. "Sorry;
I'm sure that was a great first impression."

"Yeah, actually, it was," Steve said, tucking her hair back away from her face. "She also
mentioned that you were limping after your altercation with the baby intern and the evidence cart.
You okay?"

"Ummhmm," Jax mumbled. "You can kiss it better later," she added, smirking up at him.

Steve groaned. "Danny warned me about this. This is what happens when you get bored. Please,
inventory something before we get into any more trouble with the governor."

Jax narrowed her eyes. "We're in trouble with the governor? What?"

"Things are just a little . . . I don't know. I'm being watchful, let's put it that way. I mentioned it to
Danny, but I don't want to make a thing of it, okay?" Steve said, rubbing her arms lightly. "You
willing to just trust me on this one? I'll tell the whole team if there's something to tell."

"Yeah, fair enough," Jax said. "Now, shoo, you'll distract me from my counting."

"Distract you?" Steve said, stepping into her space and smirking down at her. "Oh, how could I
distract you? Like this?" He bent and kissed her gently, his hand wrapping around her hip and his
thumb, as always, caressing the scar he knew by heart.

"I'll have to annoy Grover more often," Jax said.

The rest of the afternoon passed, finally, as the exhausted team put final signatures on paperwork.
Chin, Kono, and Caviness had made the drive to Halawa, and questioned Sang Min. Aside from
almost getting himself strangled for making a pass at Kono, nothing came of the visit - Sang Min
had never seen Novak and Lassiter together.

"Well, it's a closure, of sorts," Danny said, as they drug themselves out into the oppressive heat
and humidity. It was one of the sorts of days that Danny just could not enjoy, despite the beautiful
scenery.

"It's a dead end, and a bunch of unanswered questions," Steve said.
"But we've done everything we can on our end," Danny persisted. "Babe, you're going to have to just let this one go for now. Let Catherine's team follow up on it, and we'll all watch each others backs. What else can we do?"

"Nothing," Steve sighed, "and that's what I hate. Come on, Danny, I know you don't have Gracie tonight. Beers and hockey at my place?"

"Yes, let's watch a sport involving ice - maybe we can pretend it's cooler," Jax said. "I'll cook for you, Danny. I found some really good mozz. I'll make those sandwiches you like."

Danny pondered. "Don't you guys get sick of me? The sandwiches with the pepperoncini?"

"Yeah, Danny, the pepperoncini. Come hang out with us," Jax said.

"Okay but I'm not sleeping over. Steve's house has thin walls and you people are scaring me for life," Danny pretended to grouse, even as his blue eyes crinkled in a smile.

Danny groaned as hauled himself up from the sofa. "Don't pause the game; I'm just going to put my gym shorts on. Shouldn'a had that second sandwich."

Steve chuckled and grabbed their empties, heading to the kitchen. He returned with a cup of coffee for Jax and the kitchen first aid kit.

"Umm, thank you," Jax said, sighing into the coffee. "It's been too hot for coffee but it feels nice in here tonight."

"I'm blasting the AC," Steve admitted. "You and Danny were looking a little heatstroked. I figured, you were making the good sandwiches, I'd try to make it feel a little more like home for the two of you." He sat down on the sofa and pulled Jax's legs into his lap. She had changed the minute they got home, into her usual gym shorts and his old Annapolis t-shirt. She'd gathered her curls, which had gone wild in the humidity, into a loose bun at the nape of her neck, and tendrils were escaping and curling around her face.

"What?" Jax demanded, as Steve sat, staring at her.

"You're something else," he breathed out, stroking her cheek with the back of his finger.

"I'm glad this mess does it for you, sailor, because lately, it's all I can manage," Jax said. "I'm not as squared away as Lieutenant Rollins, I'm afraid."

"Squared away?" Steve smiled. "You haven't been living with me long enough to pick that up. That must be from your dad."

Jax went still and silent.

"Hey," Steve said gently, "I'm sorry. You never talk about your folks; I'm not trying to make you. Okay?"

"Okay," Jax said. Her shoulders stayed tense. She didn't offer anything further, and Steve didn't pry. Instead, he carefully eased away the bandage over the stitches on her leg.

"Shit, Jax," Steve muttered. There was bruising around her stitches, and a slight swelling was pulling on a few of them.
Jax peered at her leg curiously. "Damn baby intern," she muttered, but there was no real heat or malice in her tone. "I think those stitches are going to need to come out."

"I agree," Steve said, and pulled the bag from the coffee table to sit next to him on the sofa.

"I can do it," Jax protested, but he just smiled and rubbed her leg gently.

"Humor me," he said.

"Oh, for crying out loud," Danny complained, as he shuffled back into the living room. "Are you two playing doctor again? What is this, some sort of foreplay? Don't answer that." He paused, and looked down at Jax's leg. "Babe, that looks terrible."

"It's fine, Danny, just a bruise," she said, waving him off. She winced, though, as Steve began carefully cutting the stitches, and bit off a muffled curse as he pulled the first one free.

"You," he said, pointing at her with a fine-tip forceps, "should take your pain meds tonight. The ones they set you up with in New York. You're hurting, you haven't slept through the night in forever . . ."

Jax looked at him dubiously.

"If you sleep well, then I can sleep well," Steve said, pretending to focus on her stitches. He'd been saving that tactic for a rainy day.

"Fine," she said morosely. "In an hour, though, not right on top of the beer. It's bad enough without mixing it with alcohol."

Steve nodded in satisfaction and continued his task, while Danny settled in on the other side of Jax.

"Come'ere," he said, pulling her back to lean against him, and he held her hand and kept up a running, colorful commentary of the game.

Steve finished with the final stitch, and delicately spread the analgesic antibiotic cream over the area before covering it with a fresh bandage. "There you go, ku'uipo," he said, "good as new." He looked up, and grinned as he realized that she had dozed off.

Danny grinned back at him over the riot of red curls on his shoulder. "Thought you said she was having trouble sleeping," he said.

"Oh, she is," Steve replied. "I think, with this case dragging on, and getting hurt . . . and then treating Valerie Keon . . . it's been a little too much for her. Not that she'd admit it. You ever been just too tired to sleep?"

"Yep," Danny said. "When Gracie was teething."

They watched the game a little longer, until Jax stirred, stretching against Danny.

"Hey, rookie," Danny said, dropping a kiss onto the top of her head. "Nice nap?"

She rubbed her eyes. "What'd I miss?"

"Nothing. Here," Steve said, handing her a glass of water and the set of tablets.

Jax tossed the tablets back and chased them with a few sips of water. "To the good stuff," she joked, clinking her water glass against Danny's bottle. The hockey game had ended, and Danny
had queued up one of the Fast and Furious movies.

He looked at Steve, who still had a little frown of worry going on. "Steven," Danny said. "You've done as much as you could, remember? Now, look. You and I are both here, and Chin has gone home to Malia. I heard Kono making plans with Caviness. Stan has informed his security company on the outside chance there's any danger to Gracie or Rachel. So, as much as you can, ever, you hyped up Super SEAL, please try to relax, okay? Jax isn't the only one exhausted."

Steve nodded and settled in a little deeper to the sofa, his big hand rubbing soothing circles over Jax's legs, still in his lap. They continued watching the movie in companionable silence, letting their thoughts drift and their muscles slowly untense.

"Is that even possible?" Danny asked, at one particularly unlikely looking scene.

"Ummhmm," Jax nodded absently. "Although there's no way you'd get through that with your shocks intact. And that? There?" she pointed at the screen. "No way. That can't be done. Sorry. You would think, if you downshifted coming out of the turn, that you could do it. Buuuuuut no. Nope. You go into a skid, every time."

"Jax," Danny said, amused, "how are you feeling, babe?"

"I feel awesome, Danny," Jax said. "My leg doesn't hurt, my arm doesn't hurt, those taser burns . . . pffffffttttt, they don't hurt. None of the old stuff hurts, none of the new stuff hurts. But, the new stuff hasn't counted for a long time, Danny, not for a long time, so don't go trying to make rules. It was sweet but we are well past that point now. Well past that point -"

Steve cut her off by putting his hand gently over her mouth. "Overshare, ku'uipo," he whispered. She licked his hand delicately and he jerked it back as she laughed. "Behave," he added, gently putting her legs back on the sofa. "I'm going to clean up the dishes."

"I can help," Danny said, but Steve waved him off.

"No, stay put and keep her out of trouble," Steve said, laughing, as he headed to the kitchen.

"I'm going to miss him," Jax said, leaning her head against Danny's shoulder. "But you'll be here, right?"

"While he's in the kitchen?" Danny asked, amused. "Sure thing, babe."

"No, when he goes back to the Navy," Jax said. "I'll miss him when he goes back, Danny."

"Jax, honey, what are you talking about? Steve's not going back to the Navy. Just for his reserve weekends," Danny said, confused.

"He misses it, sometimes," Jax said. "And Lieutenant Rollins . . . she's so pretty, Danny. Like, really and truly, she's beautiful. And she's very squared away. Lieutenant. Good rank. I bet she has a degree. You know, Steve has a degree. More than one. They're in his office. You and Chin have degrees. So I'm sure Lieutenant Rollins has a degree. Probably in . . . in intelligence. Intelligence. Or something." Jax fell silent for a while, and Danny just stroked her arm gently, trying to figure out where she'd gotten the idea that Steve was going back into the Navy. Surely, he hadn't . . .

"And did you notice," Jax said earnestly, trying to turn around to look at Danny, "how pretty Lieutenant Rollins is? Like, she and Steve are . . . equal amounts of pretty. I mean, Steve is -" Jax broke off and made several vague hand gestures, which Danny wasn't entirely sure he wanted to interpret too closely, but he got the gist of it. "And Lieutenant Rollins is -" more hand gestures.
"And them I'm -" more hand gestures followed. Jax tugged up the edge of her t-shirt, and pointed to the scars on her side. "And I'm all. Damaged. Spleenless, even. I bet Lieutenant Rollins has all her parts."

"Jax," Danny said firmly, grabbing her hand before she managed to put his eye out, "if Steve wanted to be with Catherine, he would be with Catherine. They dated; neither of them wanted anything serious. It wasn't like it is with you. All of us can see the difference."

"But Danny," Jax said, as if she was explaining something to someone very, very slow on the uptake. "Have you seen Steve? I mean, seriously, Danny. I know you're straight, but you'd totally do him, right? Wait, Danny, are you straight? Because, you know, since Rachel . . . and I'm totally fine with it, if you want to do guys. But not Steve. I wouldn't be fine with that. I mean, I totally get it if you want to, but I'm not saying you can. But, like, if you and he were both, you'd totally do him, right?"

Danny choked and sputtered. "Steve!" he yelled. This was ridiculous, he needed reinforcements. He settled Jax carefully back onto the sofa and headed to the kitchen.

"I take that as a yes," Jax said, nodding smugly at his retreating back. "Of course you'd do him. Anyone in their right mind would do him. He's gorgeous."

Danny stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. He didn't look back at Jax, but hurried to the kitchen.

"What is it?" Steve said, wiping his hands on a towel as Danny came into the kitchen. "She okay?"

"No, Steven, she is most emphatically not okay," Danny said. "Tell me straight up: are you thinking of going back into the Navy?"

"No, Danny, where on earth - okay, she said something about that the other night in the garage, but I told her then I wasn't thinking about it. Because I'm not," Steve said. "Danny, I would have told you; I would have told the team. I wouldn't do that. She's just looped out on the meds and confused."

"Well, I know how she gets on the pain meds, but there's a lot of raw honesty that comes out when she's like this. For one thing, she's completely hung up on how pretty Catherine is. Says that you and Catherine are 'equally pretty'. Steve . . ." Danny hesitated, his voice softer, "she calls herself damaged. She's comparing herself to Catherine, and this is what she comes up with: that Catherine is beautiful, your equal, and that she is damaged. And somewhere in there, she's thinking you'll go back to the Navy, and to Catherine."


"Okay, well, you might need to remind her of that," Danny said. "I'm glad you're not thinking of going back to the Navy, you Neanderthal."

"You'd miss me, Danny," Steve teased. "What else did she say?"

"Nothing else that I'm gonna repeat," Danny said firmly as they walked back into the living room, "on the grounds that you already have a big enough ego."

Jax overheard the last bit, and nodded sagely. "He can have a big ego. Totally justified," she said solemnly, making another hand gesture, this one not at all vague or difficult to interpret.

Danny had never seen a Navy SEAL blush. That was a first.
"Okay, say goodnight to Danny," Steve said hurriedly, scooping Jax up into his arms and heading up the stairs.

"Night Danny," Jax yelled over Steve's shoulder.

###

When Jax woke up the next morning, Steve was gone. She followed the smell of coffee down to the kitchen, and smiled at the note propped next to the coffee maker, which let her know that Steve was taking his usual swim. She poured a cup of coffee and wandered to the chairs to watch for him, too lazy and relaxed to consider swimming herself. The morning sun was warm, not blazing, and there was a strong breeze. It felt perfect.

Naturally, Steve's phone rang.

Groaning, Jax looked . . . Chin Ho's smiling face appeared on the screen. She picked it up.

"Chin, please tell me you're calling to ask if we want malasadas. Because the answer is yes, duh, and it's too early and pretty and perfect of a morning to have to rush into the office," Jax said. She could just make out Steve swimming toward shore, his strong shoulders cutting cleanly and effortlessly through the water.

"Sorry, Jax," Chin said. "We've caught a case. I had a call directly from the governor's secretary. See you at the office."

"Sure, Chin," Jax said, sighing. "Steve is just headed in from swimming; we'll be there as soon as possible."

Jax took a few more sips of her coffee as Steve quickly closed the distance to shore, and walked out of the water, shaking the water off of himself and grinning at her.

"Hey," he said, dropping a kiss on her head as he grabbed his towel. She held his phone clear of the dripping water.

"Hey yourself," she said, offering him a sip of her coffee. "We've got to book it. Call from the governor; we have a case."

"As long as it doesn't involve Halawa, I'm not going to complain," Steve said, as they headed toward the house.

"Why did Chin get the call?" Jax asked, curious.

"Oh, for calls from the governor, if I don't answer, the call rolls to Chin, and then to Danny," Steve explained. "It was supposed to go to Kono after Danny, but there was an . . . incident. And now Kono doesn't take calls from the governor. At all. Ever."

Jax laughed. "I can't wait to hear this story . . ."

###

Chin was already in the office when the Steve, Jax, and Kono arrived.

"Early bird gets the worm, brah?" Kono asked, bundling her still-damp hair into a messy ponytail.

"Malia had an early shift today," Chin explained, "so I was up early to fix her breakfast and coffee. Danny and Grover were both driving their kids to school today, so they'll be a few minutes
getting here still. We'll catch them up. Here's what we have." Chin flicked a series of photos onto the plasma screen as he talked. "There's been a series of incidents at the Royal Kona Resort, on the Big Island - Hawaii, the island itself," he added, for Jax's benefit. "So far we've had four tourists disappear for anywhere from a day to almost a week, while their traveling companion went crazy with worry, only to reappear, completely disoriented, with little to no memory of what happened."

Grover appeared off the elevator. "Alien abduction?" he asked. "Good morning, guys."

"Well, that explanation makes as much sense as anything the local law enforcement has to go on," Chin said wryly. "The one thing all of the women obviously have in common is that they are clearly not locals, not Hawaiians. Two were traveling with their husbands, one with a sister, and one with a girlfriend - likewise, all clearly not locals."

"That's an unusual pattern, isn't it?" Steve asked.

"Very unusual," Chin agreed. "As is the dissimilarities in their conditions, and injuries, when they reappeared, all of them at the resort beach at sunrise. One woman appeared to have walked for an incredible distance, based on severe injuries to her feet and ankles; it's assumed that she escaped and somehow made her way back to the resort. The other two appear to have been dropped of by boat just before sunrise, in the dark, and then discovered by resort staff. One woman had ligature marks on her wrists and ankles; and another woman disappeared with long hair and was returned with her head shaved - no apparent injuries."

"Whoa, please tell me we do not have a serial killer," Danny said, as he came off the elevator.

"No, a bizarre series of disappearances," Kono said.

"You've described the injuries of the first three women," Steve said. "What about the fourth?"

"The strangest of them all," Chin said, flashing another image onto the screen. "And the most severe: deep lacerations from ligatures on wrists, elbows, knees, and ankles; a series of contusions on the torso and lower back; and a concussion."

"My guess is she was a fighter," Grover said, nodding in approval. "Good for her."

Danny was studying the photos and accompanying information, catching up. "All clearly from out of town. And no commonality as to traveling companion. Superficially random; we'll have to dig deeper for any connections. Any signs of sexual assault?"

"Well, it's not a hundred percent clear," Chin said. "No obvious physical indications or injuries; however, one of the women was missing for four days, and one for six, so it's possible. With the amount of rohypnol and other drugs in their tox screens, if anything happened, it definitely wouldn't have been consensual."

"So, someone - or several someones - are roofying women, abducting them, and then returning them?" Steve said. "What about the woman who apparently escaped? If she was coherent enough to get away, find her way back, did she remember anything?"

"Nothing useful," Chin said. "She may have been led back; forced to walk."

"Where are the women now?" Jax asked. "Do we interview them?"

"Local LEOs did the best they could with evidence and interviews," Chin explained, "but obviously these women were traumatized and wanted to go home as quickly as possible. It seemed cruel to keep them here. They've all returned to their homes, although all of them have
agreed to speak with us as needed. They've all been referred for counseling, of course, and if they remember anything, they've been given our office contact information. It's not ideal, but . . . 

"Keeping them here would have only added to the trauma," Jax said. "I'm looking at the dates . . . the most recent of these cases was three weeks ago. I'm not technically an investigator, but that seems like a very cold trail to follow. Why are we only being contacted now?"

"Someone picked up the four separate incidents and connected some dots," Chin said. "The governor's office is concerned about the impact on tourism; wants to be sure it's obvious that the incidents are being taken seriously and handled by the state's elite task force."

"Well, by all means, let's handle it," Steve said, grumpily. Kono and Chin both arched their trademark eyebrows at him. "Sorry," he said. "Of course, we are going to investigate this. We don't have any reason to think it won't happen again. I just hate that there has to be an apparent economic threat before we're called in."

Grover nodded in agreement. "I agree. But, we've been called now, at least. My guess is that we should assume that the perp is potentially still at, or near, the resort. There's as much as eight weeks between incidents, based on that timeline," he said, pointing to an image on the screen, "so we could easily be anywhere from one day to five weeks away from another incident."

Steve had been studying the information on the screens. "I think we're going to have to put people in undercover, see if we can flush this person, or these people, out. We can try to create a scenario that seems tempting, based on what we know about the four victims. Obviously, all were from the mainland. All fair-skinned; both the women and each of their companions."

"Well, Chin and I can only offer back-up, then," Kono offered, apologetically.

"I see two other commonalities, now that I'm studying the victim stats," Danny said slowly. "All of the victims were on the petite side; the tallest was five foot five. And, look at where they're from: Minnesota, Georgia, Texas, Boston, and Louisiana."

"What's common . . . oh," Chin said. "Accents?"

"If they each were natives of those regions, definitely," Grover said. "Distinctive accents." He turned and looked at Danny and Jax.

"What?" Danny and Jax said, in unison.

"Distinctive accents," Chin said, nodding. "Jersey is pretty distinctive."

"And Jax is petite, and you're both fair-skinned," Kono added.

"To be honest, they're both . . ." Steve started to say, but Danny cut him off with a wild gesture.

"I will strangle you, so help me, Steven McGarrett," Danny said. "But, okay. I get the point. Jax and I are the logical choice."

"No," Jax said, and Steve's heart stuttered. She'd said, after finishing her last undercover assignment, that she'd be willing to do undercover work again, at some point, but not as Jade. Perhaps she wasn't ready. Had he missed something? Was she still regrouping from that case?

"Not with Danny. No way. No freaking way," Jax said, gearing up for a rant. Steve grinned. Jax hadn't really ranted much since her earliest days at Five-O, and he'd always found it endearing. And clearly, it wasn't the idea of being undercover that had her riled up. "I am not going undercover with Danny as a . . . as some sort of . . . no. Just no. It's . . . it's incestuous. Gross. No.
"No way."

"I was going to suggest you go in as siblings," Chin said gently. "One of the victims was traveling with a sister."

"Oh," Jax said. "Okay." She looked at Danny and shrugged. "Shouldn't be too hard to pull off."

"Trust me, it won't be," Steve said, smiling fondly at the two of them.

"Yes, Governor, we are putting plans in place as we speak," Steve said, leaning back in his chair as he spoke with the governor on the phone. "Detective Williams and Officer Nolan will be going in undercover, as they match the few common traits of the victims: petite, fair-skinned, traveling with a companion, and with a distinctive regional mainland accent." Steve paused. "Yes, ma'am, as a brother and sister. Well, one of the victims was traveling with a sister." Another pause; and he rubbed his hand over his face. "No, ma'am, if you have a press release you will likely spook the perpetrator, and risk blowing Danny and Jax's cover; in which case, the person or persons responsible will best case scenario never be held accountable, and worst case, simply move on to another location. Yes, ma'am. Thank you."

Danny had appeared in his doorway around the mention of the press release, and shook his head in disbelief. When Steve hung up the phone, he placed it on his desk with eerie calmness.

"Steve?" Danny said. "You okay?"

"I'm trying, Danny, trying very hard to be a professional right now," Steve said. "There are words, lots of them, that I want to say, very loudly, and I'm trying very hard not to say them. Also, would you hold my phone for me? I've already thrown one into the harbor this month, and I don't want to have to requisition a new one after I throw this one against the wall."

Danny picked up Steve's phone and put it in his pocket. "Should I hold your gun, too, babe?"

"No," Steve said slowly, "no, I don't think I'm going to actually shoot anything."

"Not entirely reassuring, I gotta say," Danny said. "When you feel like you can handle it, come join us. I think we have a plan."
"So . . . Caviness," Jax said, paying not one bit of attention to the selection of sundresses and pretty tanks that Kono was pointing out to her.

Kono sighed. She was no girly-girl herself, but damn, Jax was almost hopeless. "If I spill, will you try on the clothes? We have to get you ready for this."

"Yes, yes, I'll try them on," Jax said, grinning and bouncing a little on the balls of her feet.

"Which ones do you like?" Kono asked, holding up several choices.

Jax blinked at her owlishly for a moment. "I usually wear blue," she offered hesitantly.

"Because all of your clothes are still HPD swat," Kono groaned. "Okay, we're going with the green tank, because the bikini Malia picked out for you is this color, and it's perfect on you; and these jeans - they're a linen blend, not too hot. And then this black sundress. And absolutely, positively, this blue bikini."

"What's wrong with the green one?" Jax asked.

"Absolutely nothing," Kono said, "but you need more than one, and the green one is more . . . sporty. This one is more . . . attention getting."

Kono followed Jax into the dressing room and stood on the other side of the door, dodging the cargo pants and tshirt that Jax tossed haphazardly over it.

"Okay, you promised," Jax said, her voice muffled by clothing, "tell me about Caviness."

"Well," Kono said, "he doesn't know how to surf. Because, you know, he's from New Mexico. So, we started teaching him how to surf."

"And?" Jax prompted, opening the door for Kono's approval.

"Jax, those jeans look amazing," Kono said, appraising Jax. "And the green is perfect; I knew it would be."

"I don't know," Jax said dubiously. "These are skinny jeans. I am not a skinny person."

"If by that, you mean that you actually have an ass, then no," Kono said. "And trust me, the jeans do it justice."

"Fine, yay for my ass," Jax said, disappearing back behind the door. "So. Surfing . . . means you discovered the ink, right?"

"Ummmmmm," Kono said. "I still can't believe you wouldn't even give me a hint. It was . . . wow. Very nice."

Jax laughed. Clearly, Kono approved of the intricate Celtic design on Caviness' shoulder that Jax had noticed while tending to his injury on a recent case.

"I'm not sure that I'm really a dress kinda person, Kono," Jax mumbled as she pulled the dress over her head. She hesitantly opened the door so that Kono could weigh in.
"You are absolutely that dress kind of person," Kono said emphatically. "Please promise me you will wear this after the case is over. Really."

"Really?" Jax said, looking in the mirror. "Okay, I guess it looks . . . nice."

Kono took a deep breath and fought the urge to smack her head into the dressing room wall.

"So," came Jax's voice from the dressing room stall again. "What happened after surfing?"

Danny and Jax settled into the seats of the small plane that would carry them to the Big Island.

"This feels a little bit like a vacation," Jax whispered, grinning at Danny.

"You deserve one, babe," Danny said. "Though if the puppy dog eyes were any indication, I think a certain SEAL was having a hard time letting you go this morning."

The rest of the team was staggering their arrival at and near the resort, and Steve especially was having to keep distance from Danny and Jax. For better or worse, Five-O's involvement in high profile cases had landed them on the news more than once, and Steve was becoming recognizable.

"So, the plan is we act like we're from Jersey?" Jax confirmed.

"Believe it or not, that's pretty much it. I don't like the idea of dangling you out as bait, again, but if this perp goes for out of town people with distinct accents, then for once, our tendency to stick out like sore thumbs on this pineapple infested volcanic rock will work to our advantage," Danny said. "Just please, please make sure you don't get separated from your GPS signal," he added, tapping her wristwatch. Chin had set it up with a simple, but effective, GPS tracking device, which he, Grover, and Steve would be monitoring from a room in the resort adjacent to the Royal Kona.

"I'll be fine, Danny," Jax said.

"Hey," Danny said, gently turning her face toward him. "You'll be careful. I mean it, Jax. This idea that you can just take careless, reckless, thoughtless chances with your life needs to have been left behind, in New York. Promise me."

"Okay, Danny, I promise."

"That's more like it. Now, as soon as we land, we're gonna call my sister and have a nice chat. If that doesn't refresh our native accent, nothing will," Danny laughed.

"This feels creepy," Steve commented, looking through the sophisticated telescope aimed at the Royal Kona lobby. He could see Danny and Jax getting out of the resort shuttle van and making their way up the crushed shell pathway to the front entry. Danny's hands were moving animatedly, and Jax was laughing at him. It didn't take much effort for the two of them to pull off the sibling act.

"Tell me again, what exactly is in that urn, that's supposed to be their mother's ashes?" Grover asked. "Max set them up; I'm concerned."

Chin laughed. "Just ashes left over from the last bonfire on the beach," he said. "Nothing organic, I assure you. Danny threatened to take it to an independent laboratory."
Chin was looking through the telescope aimed at the beach. Kono was the only other member of the team staying at the Royal Kona, and would spend most of her time surfing or lounging on the beach, where the victims had all reappeared as mysteriously as they had vanished.

"Best. Assignment. Ever," Kono had yelled, fistbumping Steve in some sort of elaborate surfer handshake that only Chin had recognized.

"She's still got it, wow," Chin said, shaking his head. "Remind me to tell her to tone it down a notch; we don't need her attracting too much attention."

#*#*#*#*#

The concierge was duly attentive and aiming for the right combination of sympathetic and upbeat, as Danny and Jax were checking in.

"I understand that you are here on a rather unique visit," he said, indicating the small silver rolling case resting next to Danny's suitcase. "I do hope that you will allow us to assist you in any way possible, as you honor your mother's memory."

"Thank you," Danny said. "We appreciate it. It seemed fitting for her ashes to be returned, as our father's were, to their beloved honeymoon location. Right, sis?" he added, turning to Jax.

"Um, yeah," she mumbled, fidgeting with her suitcase.

The concierge raised an eyebrow at Danny, as if to commiserate with recalcitrant sisters, and Danny nodded and shrugged. "What-are-ya-gonna-do, right?"

"That wasn't terribly convincing," Danny said quietly, as they headed toward their room. "I thought you were a hotshot at undercover. 'Um, yeah'? That was the best you could do? You're supposed to be an emotional, grieving daughter, here with your strong, supportive big brother, to spread your mother's ashes. You're gonna have to do better then 'um, yeah'."

"Maybe not all of us wear our emotions all on the outside for everyone to see, Danny," Jax snapped. Danny stopped, put a hand on her shoulder. "Sorry," she mumbled. She took a deep breath. "Maybe I'm conflicted," she said, aiming for a lighthearted tone. "Daughters have complicated relationships with their mothers, I'm told. Maybe I'm conflicted and complicated."

Danny looked at her searchingly for a moment. "Oh, you have no idea how conflicted and complicated, babe. Tell me you can handle this assignment. Right now."

"Danny, I've got it," Jax said. "Seriously. Grieving people get snappy and grumpy, too. Besides, the most important part of our cover is looking like we're from Jersey. I'm not even going to have to act."

"True," Danny said, grinning.

#*#*#*#*#

The next two days passed quickly for the members of the team who were able to enjoy all of the amenities of the resort. Kono spent hours between surf and sand: watching, observing, looking for anyone who seemed to have an unusual pattern, especially anything that would explain their victims having appeared at dawn on the beach.

Chin shook his head as he watched her head out over the breakers for the fourth time in a row; late afternoon of their second day at the resort.
"She okay?" Steve asked, noting Chin's concerned expression.

"She's going to be exhausted," Chin said. "This is pushing it, even for her."

"Do you want me to bring her in?" Steve said. "I'll pull rank, just say the word."

Chin smiled. Steve was a good friend, and a great leader. "No," Chin said, "she says that sitting on the board, facing the beach, she can watch and observe without tipping anyone off. You know how it is; change of perspective, change of angle when you're out there, looking back. Besides, she has more energy than anyone I've ever met. Just because I'm tired looking at her, doesn't mean she actually is."

"So true," Grover said ruefully. "I've seen her come off a twenty-hour stake-out, go for drinks and dancing with friends, do some night surfing, and show up for work the next morning, fresh as a daisy. Sometimes I downright resent the energy and resilience of the young."

"What's happening with Danny and Jax?" Chin asked Steve. "They pick up on anything?"

"Not yet," Steve said, rubbing the back of his neck. He was both tense and bored, a miserable combination. "They've been hanging around the resort, mostly. They went on an excursion this morning hoping that the bus ride would give them the opportunity to be noticed. Danny said they called Stella again last night, so there's no doubt the accents are back in full force."

"It's uncanny," Chin agreed, smiling. It was always easy to tell when Danny had been on the phone with his family. Even Gracie would shake her head and laugh.

"Speaking of getting noticed," Grover said. "They're heading out on the beach now. That red hair is sure easy to pick out of a crowd."

Steve grinned and playfully shoved Grover away from the telescope, taking over his spot.

"I thought you said it was creepy," Chin reminded him.

"Shut up, I haven't seen Jax for two days," Steve retorted. "I'll resort to creepy. Wow."

"What, wow?" Grover demanded.

"Um, Kono took Jax shopping again," Steve said, as if that explained the wow, which it didn't, as far as Grover was concerned. But Chin was nodding solemnly.

"Well, you wanted them to attract attention," Chin said, turning his scope to match the direction of Steve's. "Oh, yes, that bikini is clearly Kono's influence. I didn't know Jax had ink," he added absently.

Steve scowled a bit. They watched as Danny and Jax spread out towels and situated themselves on the beach. Danny was waving his hands around, becoming increasingly animated, with Jax apparently holding her own in the conversation; one hand on her hip, the other poking a finger in Danny's direction.

"Oh yeah, that's Jersey," Grover observed, having picked up the spare pair of binoculars.

"Kono's heading in," Chin pointed out, as Kono rode the next wave toward shore. They'd risked setting her up with a tiny transmitter, sewn into the corner of her beach towel. There was no way to hide an earpiece for her, so it was one-way conversation, but it was communication at least.

The radio crackled as Kono picked up the towel, and spoke into the microphone as she patted her
face with the towel.

"Boss, I hope you're enjoying the view," she said, chuckling. "Hey, guys, check out the gawker in the red trunks, to my ten o'clock. He seems to be terribly interested in our siblings."

Steve, Chin, and Grover all turned the attention to the man pointed out by Kono. Sure enough, he was watching Danny and Jax, seemingly fixated.

"What do you think?" Chin asked Steve. "Could be he's just staring at a pretty girl. Gotta admit, Steve, that red hair, and that royal blue bikini... Jax stands out."

As if on cue, Kono sauntered through the man's line of vision. He seemed not to even notice her.

"No way he's just admiring beauties," Grover said, "because he didn't even blink at Kono. Sorry, but Kono walks within two feet of someone? They have to be blind or deliberately concentrating on something else not to notice."

"Okay, we're officially watching this asshole," Steve said, his voice somewhat unnecessarily hostile.

Chin raised an eyebrow.

"What? I don't like the way he's looking at Jax," Steve retorted.

Grover opened his mouth and then closed it again.

"What?" Steve demanded.

"I was gonna say maybe her being at Five-O is a little too close, and then I realized that's absolutely and utterly beside the point," Grover said. "You'd be having a hissy fit if she was an accountant. Sorry, man, it's the burden we bear, when gorgeous women mysteriously agree to be part of our lives. Am I right, Chin?"

"Yes," Chin agreed, "yes, you are."

###

The next morning, the agreed upon plan was put into place. No one else had seemed to pay any particular attention to Danny and Jax, so the as-yet unidentified man in the red swim trunks was their only lead.

Danny and Jax sat on the breakfast patio, sipping coffee, hoping to see the man again. It would be an indication that they were getting close to something. Jax was picking at a muffin and looking miserable, and Danny was strongly suspicious that she wasn't acting.

"Babe, come on," he said gently. "Tell your big brother all your troubles." His blue eyes crinkled in a smile, and he tenderly rubbed the back of her hand, wrapped around her coffee cup.

She bit her lip and looked at him. "I'm fine Danny," she said, shaking her head almost imperceptibly. This was no time for actual conversation; they were hoping that they were being watched by a kidnapper, for crying out loud.

But Danny, being Danny, decided to multi-task. "Are you sad about... our parents?"

Jax stared at him for a long moment, frustrated, then sighed. "Your relationship with... our parents is very different than mine. Was. Was very different. There's all this... unconditional
love, and support, and . . . it was just different for me, okay?"

"I'm sorry," Danny said. "You never talk about . . . mom and dad. As much as you talk about Billy, you never talk about them. We try not to pry but it's kinda painfully obvious. If you ever do want to, you know. We're here for you. Not just me and -" Danny caught himself before he started saying names, just in case. "Not just me and your boyfriend; you know, your friends. All of them."

Danny was shocked to see Jax's eyes fill with tears, but before he could question her, she held her coffee cup in front of her mouth.

"Your six o'clock," she murmured. "Let's see if he takes the bait; roll with it."

She put the cup down and looked back at Danny. "You know it's true; you were the favorite, the golden child. And no matter how much you love me, it doesn't change the fact that they didn't," she said. "Stop trying to deny it. They're gone, and you're all I have left, but you were all I had to begin with."

Danny was convinced now that the tears spilling out of Jax's eyes and down her cheeks were genuine, and it took everything he had not to follow after her, to try to comfort her, as she stood abruptly and walked away from the table. She headed toward the side of the patio, towards another crushed shell path which led into a shaded garden. Danny sighed, acting every bit the longsuffering big brother, and then casually turned in time to see someone slip into the shade behind her.

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"Got it, Danny," Chin said, fingers flying over the keyboard. He looked up at Steve and Grover. "Looks like our kidnapper took the bait. The guy from the beach yesterday just followed Jax into a garden." He jumped up, grabbing his tablet. "We've got movement; Danny's waiting for us at the edge of the garden. Kono is moving into position on the balcony above the garden."

The three took off, covering the short distance between their surveillance room and catching up to Danny. Steve handed him a vest, along with his gun and badge.

"According to this, Jax is still moving slowly through the garden," Chin said, following a red dot on his screen. "Our guy must not have made his move yet."

They followed Steve's silent hand motions and moved into the garden, Chin leading the way with the tracking signal.

The sound of a scuffle prompted them to move more quickly, rounding a blind curve.

"Oh, nicely done," Danny said, looking at the scene before him. Jax grinned up at him from her position, her knee firmly planted in their target's back, his arm yanked up awkwardly behind him. She was flushed, her eyes sparkling.

Hot damn, Steve's subconscious chimed in.

"Need any help, there, Jax?" Steve drawled, a slow smile spreading over his face.

"Nah, I got it," she said, yanking the guy to his feet. She looked at Steve. "Can I say it this time? Please?"

"You earned it," he said, nodding.
"Book 'em, Danno," Jax said triumphantly, shoving their kidnapper toward Danny and brushing her unruly curls out of her face.


They let the would-be kidnapper stew in the local police department interrogation room while they ran his fingerprints.

"You're not going to believe this," Chin said, coming out of the tech lab with a file. "The man we have in custody is Fai Nani. Oldest son of the owner of the resort. He's been missing for years, presumed dead."

"You're kidding," Steve said, taking the file from Chin and glancing through it. "Motive?"

"Let's find out," Danny suggested, pointing to the interrogation room. "Jax, this was your collar, you want in?"

Jax shook her head and shrugged. "I'm content with take downs and patch ups, Danny - you know, confident in my usefulness as a SWAT-trained medic. I'll leave the case solving to detectives and the like."

Kono sidled up to her. "Interrogation can be fun, though, seriously. You should at least watch."

Grover and Chin shook their heads as Kono and Jax exchanged smirks and walked into the room adjacent to the interrogation room, outfitted with a one way mirror.

"Do you ever get the feeling that we are just barely holding on to an illusion of control with those two?" Grover asked.

"I gave up the illusion when Kono started driving and dating," Chin said. "But they can definitely kick butt."

"I'm glad they're on our side," Grover agreed.

Fai slouched insolently in his chair as Danny and Steve entered the room. Danny found himself missing the oddly-lit interrogation rooms at Five-O; this room, with its comfortable furnishings and sunny overhead lighting just didn't have the same effect.

"Welcome back from the dead, Mr. Nani," Steve said, leaning against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest.

Danny took a seat at the table. He opened a file and spread out photos of the victims, one by one, across the table. "You recognize these women?"

Fai shrugged. "Look like a bunch of haoles."

"Interesting you should mention that," Steve said, pacing behind Danny. "Is that why you targeted them? You have something against outsiders?"

"I have something against anyone who doesn't honor the old ways," Fai said.
"Oh, profound," Danny said. "Is that why you drugged these women, kidnapped them, injured them? Evidence was meticulously collected, from each and every one of them. It's just a matter of lab results before we match your DNA to that evidence."

"I haven't given you a DNA sample," Fai sneered.

"Haven't you?" Steve said, leaning over the table. "What do you think those scratches are on your arm?"

"These?" Fai said, turning his arm over. "These are the basis of my police brutality lawsuit."

Steve laughed. "Good luck taking that to court. Sit in a courtroom with Officer Nolan. I'm sure you'll be very convincing. Besides, we're not police, we're Five-O. We have this little thing called immunity and means, and it allows us to collect your DNA from her fingernails. So let's skip all of this posturing. Tell us about the kidnappings."

Fai sighed. "I was a good son. I helped my father build the resort, helped him run it for years. He taught me the old ways of the island, and I honored his ways. I honored him. Kael, my younger brother - the golden one - he went off to the mainland. He came home, head full of haole ideas, and my father . . . my father let him make all of these changes to the resort. We had a huge fight, and I left in my boat. There was a storm . . . I knew they thought I was dead . . . I didn't come home. Just wandered, picked up odd jobs."

"What brought you back?" Danny asked.

"I got tired of living like a homeless person," Fai shrugged.

"The prodigal son returned," Danny murmured.

"The resort was thriving . . . I heard rumors, that my father was going to turn the resort over to Kael. Kael, who never honored the island, never honored the old ways . . . " Fai said, becoming agitated.

"So you decided to destroy the reputation of the resort, rather than let your brother run it?" Steve guessed. "By causing trouble at the resort. Word gets out there's a kidnapper striking here, people don't want to come vacation."

"It was working, too," Fai said. "Dozens of cancellations in the last month. I should have known that my father would call on the governor, call in a favor. I wouldn't have pegged the little redhead for a cop, though."

Steve and Danny left the interrogation room, and the team gathered in the hall.

"You buy it?" Steve asked.

"What, sibling rivalry and jealousy as motive?" Danny said. "Babe, didn't your parents ever take you to Sunday school? Sibling rivalry and jealousy were the motive for the very first murder."

"Well, I guess that's a wrap. We better go pack," Grover said.

Steve looked around at his team. Coming off the Halawa fiasco, they'd been burning the candle at both ends: exhausted, recovering from injuries, still spooked and jittery from having surveillance and protection surrounding their families.

"No," he said. "Nobody packs."
He pulled out his phone and pressed a number while the rest of the team looked on curiously.

"Yes, governor, we believe we have only one perpetrator, and he's in custody. Yes ma'am, a solid case. Unfortunately, there have been dozens of cancellations at the resort this month . . . yes ma'am, it would be a concern if people were discouraged from visiting," Steve said. "I thought that perhaps it might help if our visit here looked less like a case, and more like a . . . retreat. I was hoping you'd approve a couple of extra nights for us, make it a public relations opportunity."

Steve paused. "Yes, ma'am, I agree. We'll be back in the office on Monday, then, unless something comes up."

Steve hung up the phone and grinned at the rest of the team.

"Two more nights, all expenses," he said. "The governor is calling the owner herself."

Kono whooped with joy and threw herself at Steve, her lanky frame enveloping him in an enthusiastic hug. Danny, Chin, and Grover looked happy, and gave Steve good-natured slaps on the back.

Jax took her cue from the others, and schooled her features into a pleased expression, despite feeling anxious. Days? With no work, no case . . . and with the agreement she and Steve had made that they would be professional on duty, the prospect of sleeping alone in strange, unfamiliar surroundings. Still, everyone seemed thrilled, and watching their delighted expressions soon had a genuine smile on her face.

The resort manager greeted them when they arrived back in the main lobby.

"Mr. Nani is understandably taking some time to contact his family lawyer, but he asked that I extend to you his appreciation for your handling of the case, and your efforts to respect his family's privacy and the interests of the resort," he said. "The governor's office called and explained that you wish to stay on; again, many thanks. We've taken the liberty of reserving a block of rooms for you, on the top floor; three sets of adjoining rooms, one set of course, for the ladies."

Kono started to open her mouth in protest, but Jax put her hand gently on her wrist and answered the manager.

"That's lovely, thank you," she said

"You and Steve aren't fighting, are you?" Kono whispered, concerned, as she tugged Jax toward the elevator.

"No," Jax said. "We just agreed . . . look, we're technically here as a team. We have an agreement, when we're on duty we don't . . . we want to keep it professional."

"Then you probably should stay out of the armory, but okay, we'll go with that explanation," Kono said dubiously. "If you change your mind about the room, which I suggest you do, you should know that I'm a very light sleeper and I'm not above making recordings for posterity. Or blackmail."

"Noted," Jax said, looking at her with a horrified expression on her face.

"Do we want to know?" Grover wondered, as Kono burst into peals of laughter.

"No," Danny said emphatically. "We most certainly do not."

"I might be just a little curious," Steve admitted.
They were informed that a table had been reserved for them for dinner; secluded enough that they really could discuss business, if they needed, but just visible enough to accomplish their public relations task.

"I'm surprised you went for the photo op vacation, Steve," Danny said, as they took the elevator down. "And I thought things were already tense with you and the governor. Not that I'm complaining; just surprised."

Steve shifted uncomfortably. It was true; playing nice with the public wasn't his favorite thing to do and he was starting to have misgivings about the governor's priority. "The unit comes first, Danny."

"Unit . . . wow, I haven't heard you call us a unit for months. Are we back to being your SEAL team?" Danny teased gently.

"Old habits die hard, Danny," Steve retorted mildly. "The team comes first. That Halawa mess took the wind out of our sails, I have to admit it. And for the record, yeah, I would have done the same for my SEAL team."

"You took your SEAL team to island resorts?" Danny grinned.

"No, to Qatar," Steve replied seriously. "There was an actual armed services approved resort there. Good fishing."

Danny blinked at him incredulously as they found their way to Chin and Grover, who were already enjoying the ocean view from their dining area.

"I gotta say, this didn't happen in SWAT," Grover said, raising his glass to Steve. "To our quick thinking team leader."

"Here, here," Chin and Danny agreed, and Steve grinned sheepishly.

"You guys have more than earned it," he said, and then he was trying to remember how to breathe, as Kono and Jax came toward them.

His brain filtered through another dozen or so of Danny's word-a-day calendar . . . apparently this was something that was going to happen to him, from time to time, and he'd learned just to go with it . . . and once again, it settled inelegantly on **holy shit**.

Kono looked stunning, as usual, in a simple russet sundress that set off her golden skin and dark hair. She always managed to slip easily between elegant evening wear, beach wear, and tactical gear; carrying off each style with a completely unselfconscious ease and grace. The guys were, at this point, used to doing a bit of a double take when she was undercover or on the rare times that a team event required formal wear. She usually looked downright sultry on such occasions, much to Chin's dismay, but tonight she was smirking mischievously at the poleaxed expression on Steve's face.

"Goof," Danny muttered fondly, glancing at Steve, who was now grinning like an idiot at Jax.

Jax was wearing the black sundress that was more Jersey than island, since it had been selected for her undercover role. Instead of looking out of place, she simply looked striking and unique . . . and totally herself. The day on the beach with Danny had turned her skin golden, though they'd discovered that her fair skin never really tanned so much as glowed, and the sun had caught
golden highlights in her hair, which tumbled around her face and brushed her neck in soft curls.

"Ladies, you look lovely," Chin said, since someone needed to say something, before Steve had a coronary.

"I had no idea my partner cleaned up so nice," Grover added, smiling at Jax. "You," he added to Kono, "were already legendary, and now I see for myself why that is."

"Resort life agrees with you, babe," Danny said quietly to Jax, "I think Malia will be relieved; I know I am. You look a little less like a starved kitten."

"Aw, Danny, you say the sweetest things," Jax sniped, rolling her eyes. It was true, though, a couple of days of relative relaxation, and the need to be obviously and visibly dining on the resort's delicious food, had gently rounded out Jax's usual curves.

"I try," Danny said. "Let me get you a drink, since Steve is still standing there like a schmuck." He stepped over to the drink cart where the rest of the team had gathered.

Jax smiled up at Steve, who did look a little stunned, now that she noticed. "Everything okay?" she asked, looking up at him. She bit her lip as she always did, when she was hesitant or uncertain.

Maybe the dress is just too Jersey, Jax thought. Why did I let Kono talk me into this?

Professionalism be damned, Steve decided, and tucked his fingers under her chin, pulling her lip gently out from her teeth with the pad of his thumb. He kissed her, soft and chaste, and stroked her cheek with the back of his fingers.

"Everything is okay," he assured her. "You look . . . wow."

Steve had fallen for her, hard and fast, when she'd arrived on the island, battered and bruised. She was feisty, and stubborn, and oh yeah . . . she dislocated his thumb and landed him on his back within the first twenty four hours. He'd thought she was beautiful, in spite of and because of whatever injuries she sported, in her relentless pursuit to protect others. But this . . . this was Jax, healthy and whole and radiant, and it made him weak in the knees in a whole different way.

Kono drifted behind him. "I can be bribed to trade rooms with you, brah," she whispered. "I can share a suite with Chin, we're family, no one's panties will be in a wad. Just sayin'."

Steve congratulated himself on his exceptional eye for talent. He knew Kono would make a great team member, the first day he met her.

Dinner passed pleasantly, and conversation drifted from personal stories to case review and back again. Steve decided that the governor was getting more than her money's worth in strengthening the team dynamic, and if his hand kept drifting of its own accord to softly stroke Jax's shoulder, warm and glowing and perfect in the evening sun, well, the team seemed perfectly fine with that.

Kono perked up at the sound of music playing. "Okay," she said, pushing back from the table, "who's dancing?"

To their surprise and delight, Grover was the first on his feet, holding his hand out to Kono and whirling her across the floor.

"Wow, he's light on his feet for a big guy," Chin commented, impressed. Kono, of course, with her natural grace and athleticism was a fantastic dancer, to no one's surprise.
Steve looked at Jax and raised an eyebrow in question.

"No, oh no no no no," Jax said. "Believe me. This is not in my skill set. Ask Danny."

"Sad but true," Danny said. "She actually has no rhythm. None. Wait for a slow song . . . if you lead, she isn't completely hopeless."

Steve laughed heartily while Jax smacked Danny good-naturedly on the shoulder.

Grover made it admirably through two songs, but moved to sit down despite Kono's protests.

"Come on, Danny, don't leave Kono without a partner," Jax said, nudging Danny with her foot.

Danny rolled his eyes but gamely stood and took Kono's outstretched hand.

"You know he's really amazing, right?" Jax asked Steve.

"Danny? Really?" Steve said, leaning forward curiously. He watched for a few minutes. "Wow," he said, leaning back in his seat. "No kidding."

The rest of the team enjoyed watching Danny and Kono, as she taught him several new moves and he kept up with her effortlessly.

"How did we not know this about him?" Chin mused.

"He probably didn't want to be the undercover for any club cases," Jax smirked. "Ooops."

After several fast dance songs, the band switched to a slow ballad.

"I'm going to cut in and dance with my baby cousin," Chin decided, standing up.

Steve reached out a hand to Jax. "Want to go be . . . not hopeless, was it?"

She hesitated a moment, then shrugged and took Steve's hand. "Watch your toes," she warned.

He smiled, pulling her into his arms. "I'll manage," he assured her, leading her toward Chin and Kono. "Though I'm no Danny, that's for sure," he added. "I guess the misadventures of our youth didn't include hitting the clubs. Annapolis wasn't known for the party scene."

Jax grinned up at him. "I was busy with cars during high school, and New Jersey Police Academy didn't exactly have a rocking party scene, either. Something tells me, though, that you can more than hold your own, sailor. Come on, all those ports of call? And don't try to convince me that someone who surfs like you doesn't have a few good moves."

"Nothing that would hold a candle to slow dancing with you, ku'uiopo," he said sincerely. "Besides, we now know that Danny and Kono are our go-to for undercover club cases. No one really wants to draw that short straw."

Jax chuckled and rested her head on his shoulder. He was leading her so confidently that she barely had to think, and she hadn't stepped on his toes once. She sighed contentedly and Steve really, really regretted his noble intentions of not sharing a room on a team overnight.

The band switched to another slow song, and when it was over, they stopped for the night, nodding at the muted applause from the resort diners.

Kono yawned. "Why am I so tired?" she complained.
"Because it's been a hell of a few weeks," Danny reminded her. "And you spent most of the day in the water. Not to mention our stellar workout on the dance floor just now."

"Danny, you've been holding out on us," Kono said. "And you're right; it has been a long few weeks. It's been a lovely evening, guys, thanks for dancing with me. I'm going to sleep until noon tomorrow and then collapse like a slug on the beach."

Grover and Chin decided to call it a day as well, citing a need to check in with Renee and Malia, and get some well-deserved rest.

Danny kissed Jax on the cheek. "I'm going to go call Gracie," he said. "Good work today, Jax. It's nice to see you back to kicking ass. See you tomorrow, guys."

Steve watched Danny's retreating back disappear into the resort, and then he grabbed Jax's hand firmly and started walking.

"Where are we - oh," Jax gasped, as they stepped into a secluded alcove, created by a trellis of climbing jasmine. "Oh," she said again, looking up at the stars, and out at the moon on the ocean, "beautiful."

"Yeah," Steve agreed, looking at Jax. He trailed his fingers over her collarbone, tracing the delicate strap of the sundress. "This is . . . wow."

"It's not my usual cargo pants and boots," Jax said, ducking her head self-consciously. "I was going to wear it when Danny and I spread our fake mother's ashes," she added, grinning back up at him. "It's very Jersey."

"I like Jersey," Steve said absently, as his fingers tangled in her curls. "You were Jersey when I met you; don't apologize for being who you are. I'm glad you like the island; I'm glad you liked it enough to want to stay but . . . " he lost his train of thought when Jax smiled at him, so he gave up and kissed her instead. Trailing kisses down her neck, he mumbled against her soft skin. "It's been cruel and unusual, having to watch you the last couple of days . . . I don't know what I would have done if the case had dragged on . . . "

"Added two more nights as a team retreat?" Jax suggested, proud of herself for being only slightly breathless.

Steve groaned. "I'm a stupid man and I agreed to a stupid agreement about professionalism."

"Oh, yeah, this is totally professional, right here," Jax said, her lips grazing over the soft spot behind his ear that predictably made his breath hitch and his arms tighten around her.

He looked down at her, blinking slow with those ridiculous lashes, and smiled; that rare, relaxed smile that made her feel like she had somehow given him something important without even realizing it.

"What?" she said, smiling back at him, sappy and goofy and not even caring.

"You . . . is it a Jersey thing or a Danny thing or what," he mused, kissing her cheek, her jaw, soft little kisses like punctuation, "you make me crazy, you don't give me an inch, you call me out on everything."

She laughed, low and sweet. "Someone has to; you'd be insufferable otherwise."

"Insufferable?" he chuckled.
"Yeah," she said, warming to the topic, "you, with all the 'commanderness', and the muscles, and the tattoos, and the . . ." she was momentarily distracted by his lips on her neck, not able to suppress a little shiver from his stubble grazing her tender skin, " . . . the - oh - elite task force."

"Elite," he agreed, "Also, Navy SEAL."

"Oh, it always comes back to - oh - that, yes," she said, "the Navy SEAL thing."

"You love it," he insisted, teasing.

"I do," she admitted, shaking her head in mock ruefulness. "I tried to resist but it was futile. I'm a sucker for a badass in cargo pants and combat boots."

"Ditto," he said, "although the dress is nice, too." He kissed her again, slow and sweet, willing himself back into the control that he was hanging on to by a thread.

Screw professionalism, his subconscious suggested.

"I want so badly to take you back to my room right now," he whispered into her hair, wrapping her in his arms and holding her against him.

"You're a Neanderthal, you know that, right?" she mumbled against his chest. "Also, your pocket is buzzing."

"What?"

"Phone," Jax suggested.

"Oh," he said, pulling his phone out and frowning at the screen. "If we've caught a case, I'm . . ."

Brah, you'll find that your key card no longer unlocks the room adjoining Chin's. It does, however, unlock the room, formerly mine, that adjoins Jax's. You're welcome.

Steve grinned broadly.

"What?" Jax asked. That grin usually meant someone was going to get to drive fast or shoot something.

"I need to either fire Kono for insubordination, or give her a promotion and a raise," he said, flipping his phone around so Jax could read the text message.


Steve's fingers flew over the phone.

I thank you. Jax thanks you. The state of Hawaii thanks you.

Thank Chin; he moved your stuff. Said I was too curious about the whole boxers/briefs situation.

You guys are the best.

Please, I knew what I was doing when I took Jax shopping. Why are you still texting me?

Bye.

#*#*#*#*#
"There are probably security cameras in this elevator," Jax commented, on the ride up to the top floor.

"I'm sure there are," Steve said. "In fact, I know there are. We reviewed footage, remember?"

"Hm. Yes." Jax tapped her foot impatiently.

"In the hall, too," Steve said quietly, as they exited - finally - on their floor and started walking toward their rooms.

"I remember," Jax agreed, stopping at her door and sliding her key card into the lock.

Steve took a few more steps, to the next door, and smirked at Jax. He fumbled his key card out of his pocket, and sure enough, it magically worked in what had been Kono's door.

Jax stepped into her room and closed the door, sliding the security lock into place, and then gave a very undignified squeak as she turned around and stepped into a solid six plus feet of Navy muscle.

"How -" she started to asked, and then decided it didn't matter, since Steve's fingers were deftly figuring out the straps of the sundress. She kicked her shoes in the general direction of the closet, and started tugging on his shirt.

"You wore a shirt with buttons," she said accusingly.

"It happens sometimes," he nodded.

Her dress and his shirt hit the floor in unison, and then his shoes were landing on top of hers, and her strong, capable fingers were tackling the fly of his cargo pants.

"More buttons," she groused. "Too many stupid buttons. Why is this taking so long? It doesn't take this long at home."

"It hasn't been days at home," Steve mumbled, as his kissed down her neck and across her collarbone to her shoulder. "And at home we're usually in boardies and t-shirts."

"Hmm," Jax agreed, not bothering with coherence. The buttons had succumbed to her deft fingers, and Steve's cargo pants were now hanging low on his hips. She sighed in approval and appreciation, that soft little sigh that had made Steve crazy in the early days, when he noted her appreciation of coffee and guns, and kept bringing her a steady supply of both, just to hear that delicious sound.

"No stitches," he marveled, tracing his hands reverently over every inch of skin he could reach.

"No concussion," she added, "...not even a - oh, shit - bruise."

"Me either," he said, his breath hitching as Jax decided that she'd appreciated the low slung cargo pants long enough, and started shoving them out of her way.

"This means," she said, heading with dangerous intent and deadly accuracy back to that little spot behind his ear, "that no one has to be... careful."

_Hooyah_, Steve's brain supplied, just before he lost coherent thought altogether.
Sibling Rivalry 3

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a bit short, but it wraps up our team's time away and sets the stage for a new adventure.

The story is AU but I've retained some of the elements of canon that I especially enjoy, such as the questionable motives of Gov. Jameson and the ongoing threat of an arch-nemesis (Novak is, of course, inspired by both Hesse and WoFat). I haven't decided whether or not the whole Doris story will bleed into this universe; that idea may be reflected in Jax's obvious parental issues instead.

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When Steve woke up the next morning, the bed was empty next to him, and he had a moment of panic.

"Jax?" he rasped out, looking around the small but well-appointed room. He relaxed as his eyes fell on her, standing on the balcony just outside a set of sliding doors. She was wearing her brother's old FDNY t-shirt, clutching a cup of coffee, and watching, entranced, as the sun came up over the water. Her riotous red curls glinted with gold in the morning light.

She turned at the sound of his voice and smiled at him, still sleepy. "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you," she said.

"You didn't," he assured her, untangling his long limbs from the sheets and joining her, wrapping his arms around her and nuzzling into her neck. He took the cup from her hand and helped himself to some of her coffee. "How'd you manage coffee?"

"I have my ways," she said, giggling as his morning stubble tickled her neck. "Okay, Chin had it sent up and left outside my door. I went to grab a t-shirt, and I could smell the coffee, and I found the coffee, and then . . . sunrise." She pointed in explanation at the water.

"It's beautiful," Steve agreed, taking another sip of her coffee.

"I like the sunsets better at our house," she said, "but yeah, it is."

Steve's arms tightened around her. "Our house," he whispered.

"Is that okay?" Jax asked, hesitant.

"More than okay; I want you to think of it as our house," he assured her, cupping her face in his hands and kissing her to show her exactly how okay it was. "We should paint something," he blurted suddenly.

Jax blinked at him. "Paint," she repeated. "Paint, really?" she asked, placing her cup on the balcony railing, and wrapping her arms around his neck.
Less talking more kissing, Steve's subconscious prompted him.

"Let's choose our own color, and repaint the bedroom," Steve said. "But let's talk about it later," he added quickly, tangling his hands in her hair.

He somehow managed to multi-task walking them backwards and settling in the comfortable wicker chair while kissing her senseless, and she followed his lead just as easily as she had on the dance floor the night before. When he felt the back of his knees hit the chair, he sat down, wrapping his hands around the curve of her hips and pulling her into his lap.

She leaned forward and kissed the little spot behind his ear, and grinned as his hands tightened around her and his breath hitched. It was almost wicked, really, how much she loved having him at her mercy with that square inch of skin, and it never got old.

"Remember when I said I went back to my room to grab a t-shirt?" she whispered in his ear, her voice full of innocence.

"Ummhmm," he mumbled, kissing across her collarbone.

"That's all I took time to grab," she informed him, sliding a little closer.

Steve forgot all about paint.

###

Steve had been the one to suggest showering separately, in their own rooms, in an attempt to actually make it out the doors to join the rest of the team. His plan backfired, however, when he wandered in search of his phone, back into her room, board shorts still untied and hanging low around his hips.

"Hey, have you seen -" Steve started to ask, and broke off, standing mutely as Jax came out of the en suite, hair damp and caught up loosely at the nape of her neck, wearing the royal blue bikini that he'd only seen from a distance, the stylized ink of the NYPD firehouse number just visible at the edge.

But it was her eyes, really, that stopped him in his tracks: flashing and sparking as she unapologetically stared right back at him. That, and the noise that she made as she dropped her towel and padded toward him, the familiar little sigh of appreciation deepening into something more like a growl and . . .

Holy shi, his subconscious supplied.

Later, as they untangled her bikini from his board shorts, and tried again to gather up sunscreen and water bottles, he stroked her cheek gently and tucked a wayward curl back behind her ear.

"This is . . . I haven't really seen this side of you until now," he said softly.

She bit her lip in uncertainty and looked down, fidgeting with the edge of her beach towel.

"What is it," he prompted, cupping his big hand around her jaw, and brushing his thumb over her lip,

She shrugged, still not meeting his eyes. "I told you, at the beginning . . . the person limping around bleeding in your kitchen wasn't me," she reminded him. "Then, New York was . . . I was still recovering. Now, today, New York seems like another life. I'm sorry if it's . . . if I'm not what you . . ."
"Hey," he protested softly, turning her face up to look in her eyes. "I'm not complaining, ku'uipo. Really, really not complaining. I just hope that . . . I didn't rush things, before. If you weren't ready."

She grinned. "I seem to recall demanding that you shed your soaking wet gear and have your wicked way with me, sailor," she reminded him.

"Yeah, there was that," he said, smiling as he kissed her again, soft and sweet. "You're shameless, really."

"Yep," she agreed readily. "Oh, God."

"What?" he asked, still dropping kisses across her collarbone.

"Do you think there's any chance the rest of the team is still sleeping?" she asked hopefully.

Steve looked at the time and groaned. "Only if we caught the wrong guy and they all got roofied."

It was almost noon before they managed to join the others on the beach, and Kono gave them a standing ovation.

#*#*#*#*#

Chin and Steve sat on their boards, past the breakers, looking back toward the others on the sand.

"So, things are obviously going well," Chin said, smiling at Steve.

Steve was watching Kono and Jax at the edge of the surf; Kono was still showing Jax some of the finer points of managing her board. The water here was rougher than on Steve's beach, but Jax didn't seem fazed.

"She's . . . recovered, or recovering," Steve said. "From a lot of the stuff that happened in New York; just before she came here. And before that."

Chin nodded. "I'm glad. Malia, of course, hasn't said anything specific, but I can read between the lines. I'm glad she's healing, physically and emotionally. The island and our ohana has been good for her. You've been good for her. Chin hesitated. "You understand, though, there will be setbacks?" he added gently.

"Yeah," Steve said, trailing his hand through the water. "I mean, shit, the PTSD from 9/11 is enough, even without . . . well. There's been a lot; more than any one person should ever have to deal with. But she's strong, Chin. Stubborn, even." He grinned, and Chin laughed. "Things have been . . . amazing, from the beginning. I didn't realize that it could get even better . . . but having her here, uninjured, rested, coming off a successful case . . ."

"That good, yeah?" Chin said. "I'm truly happy for you, Steve. Your dad would be so happy; he would have loved Jax."

"I want to repaint the bedroom," Steve commented. "I'd never even thought about doing that . . . I want to pick something together. Me and Jax. Is that crazy?"

Chin laughed. "No, Steve. It's about time you stop treating that house like a museum to your parents. I think it's a great idea. She's not the only one healing, you know. We're all happy to see you happy, Steve."

"Yeah," Steve said, ducking his head a bit. "Is it okay, you think? I mean, me and Jax - how does
it affect the team dynamic? Tell me your honest opinion."

Chin nodded. "Valid concern, Steve, but I think we only have positive things to say. She has contributed so much . . . this is the second time she's been uniquely qualified to go undercover. And her work in taking down Dillon Rivera . . . she's more than held her own. And you know Kono loves having her on the team; I don't think Kono has ever had a close female friend before, and it's been great for her. Danny, of course, is pleased as punch, though I think secretly he's happiest to have her where he can keep an eye on her. She and Grover have been welcome additions to the team, Steve, and especially with . . ." Chin hesitated.

"What is it, Chin?" Steve prompted.

"Well, I hate to put any kind of damper on our amazing time here, but something came up in the interrogation yesterday that made me thankful we've brought Grover on, with his experience in gang-related crime," Chin said.

Steve nodded. He'd picked up on it as well. "Our guy kept talking about his dad and the 'old ways'. You think he meant Yakuza?"

"It crossed my mind," Chin said, relieved that Steve had already thought of it. "Or even older."

"The Company?" Steve guessed.

"The father, the original owner of the resort, would definitely be the right generation for that to be a possibility," Chin said. "And the youngest son, Kael . . . he went to college on the mainland, came back with all sorts of new ideas, and the resort started to prosper."

Steve looked sharply at Chin. "You think the resort didn't just start to profit because of his ideas?"

"He went to college in Los Angeles," Chin said.

"Shit," Steve swore, making the connection. "MS-13. You think the resort is tangled up in gang activity?"

"I have nothing but suspicion at this point," Chin pointed out, "but I think maybe . . ." He hesitated again. "Fai mentioned that he wasn't surprised that his father 'called in a favor'. I hate to even bring it up, but . . ."

"The owner knows the governor, and if they're tangled up in gang activity, she could be aware," Steve said bluntly. "Aware, or even complicit."

Chin looked at him, shocked. "You know something?"

"She made a power play in my office the other day; pulling us off the Novak case," Steve explained. "It raised . . . questions. I mentioned it to Danny; I wasn't going to tell the rest of the team until I had a reason to bring it up."

"Wow," Chin said. "What now?"

"We fill in the rest, and proceed very cautiously," Steve said. "But we proceed. I'm going to do the job the governor hired me to do - I'm going after corruption, Chin, even if it takes us straight to her office."

"Agreed," Chin said. "I'm sorry, Steve. I'm sure the idea of her being involved . . . it must feel like a betrayal."
Steve nodded; if the governor was indeed corrupt, there really wasn’t going to be anything that anyone could say or do to make it sting less.

#*#*#*#*

Grover and Danny were content in the shade, watching the others indulge in their enjoyment of the waves.

"That's quite an officer you trained, there, Williams," Grover said, nodding in Jax's direction. "Though she and Kono together, man, they are gonna give us a heart attack one of these days. Look at them," he chuckled.

Kono and Jax were once again comparing their latest war wounds, completely oblivious to the effect their curious touches were having on several admiring onlookers.

"I hope those boys over there don't say or do anything stupid," Danny commented. "If there's anything left of them after Jax and Kono finish, Steve and Chin will throw the pieces to the sharks."

"I don't think Steve and Chin would even get a turn," Grover said. "I wish I could have seen Jax take that guy down yesterday. I mean, he may not have been trained, but still - he had a good six or seven inches and about seventy pounds on her."

"She's never let that intimidate her," Danny said, remembering. "Grace was the same way; I guess Jax picked it up from her."

"She picked a few things up from you, too," Grover assured him. "I'm proud to have her as my partner, Danny. You did good. I just live in fear of her being seriously injured on my watch; I don't want to have to face you and Steve when that happens. I still can't believe . . . man, I'm sorry about what went down at Halawa."

"You've got to stop second-guessing yourself on that, Lou," Danny said, his blue eyes crinkling in a sincere smile. "That's not on you. Besides, she and Steve are the same brand of crazy. Trying to keep them in one piece is pretty much a team effort. I'm hoping that having found each other, they'll have a reason to practice a little more self-preservation."

"I second that," Grover said, tipping his lemonade to clink against Danny's. "Self-preservation is something best learned by those of us who have children, though, don't you think?"

"Yeah, having a little monkey to go home to at the end of the day puts things in a different perspective," Danny agreed.

Grover looked at Jax, and past her to Steve. "You think - I wonder if McGarrett will ever settle down, start a family?"

Danny didn't reply, just grinned.

Grover raised his eyebrows. "Seriously? You think this will be the one?"

"He may have made a passing comment about a small version of Jax," Danny said slyly. "Not that he's had the emotional capacity or relationship skills to mention that to her, of course . . . but . . ."

"Jax is a small version of Jax," Grover said, laughing. "But how about that. Well, there you go. Wouldn't that be just something?"

#*#*#*#*#
The rest of the day and evening passed quickly, and after dinner, Steve located a small, secluded bar away from the resort and suggested the team go there for drinks and pool.

When Danny and Grover had finished neatly wiping out the rest of the team, Steve nodded his head toward a large corner booth, and the six of them filled in the comfortable seats, Longboards in hand.

"We need to discuss something," Steve said, apologetically. "And I needed to get the team away from the resort, and it's better to put this out on the table away from the office. I don't know the best way to go about handling this; I've never been in this position, and I hate to put you all in this position." He paused, and took a deep breath, as the rest of the team studied him with quiet concern. "When the governor pulled us off the Novak case, she did so in such a way that it made me suspicious of her motives."

"Can you explain that, Boss?" Kono asked.

Steve nodded. "It wasn't so much that she turned the case over to Naval Intel - there's definitely logic to that. I forget, sometimes, honestly, that I'm not still neck deep in the game. But it was how she did it. She came into my office, sat at my desk . . . classic manipulation tactics to put me on my back foot." He glanced at Jax. "She made a lot of references to the 'favors' she's done for the team, especially for Jax. I could be wrong - I hope I'm wrong - but it came across as a subtle threat. And then, we picked up on something in the interrogation of Fai Nani yesterday."

"He mentioned the 'old ways' of his father," Chin continued, as Steve took a long pull on his beer, and wrapped his hand around Jax's, which was clenched in a fist under the table. Chin glanced at Kono.

"Old ways . . . like Yakuza," Kono said. "Or The Company."

"And tangling with them means tangling with MS-13," Grover finished.

"And Mr. Nani called the governor to ask for our help," Danny put another piece together. "So you guys," he said, pointing to Steve and Chin, "think the governor is mixed up with gang activity?"

"The resort took a sudden turn for the prosperous when the younger son, Kael, came back from college," Chin said.

"In Los Angeles," Steve added.

Grover shook his head. "So it's possible that the MS-13 insurgency began here, on this island, even before Honolulu? That's a frightening possibility. Five-O has a wide range of operation, correct?"

"That's what I was told," Steve said. "With immunity and means; our original task was to rid Honolulu, and the island of Hawaii, from corruption, the likes of Hesse. So that means scum like Novak, and the gangs that often mutually benefit from arms dealers, should be our primary targets."

"But why would the governor hire you specifically to go after corruption, if she's corrupt?" Jax asked, her voice low.

"Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer," Steve said. "Classic control and diversion. If - and it's a big if, at this point, you understand - she's in any way involved or complicit. She could be involved and not aware; or even if she is cooperating in some way, we can't assume that she's a
willing participant. She could be under some sort of duress."

"So, what do we do?" Kono asked. "We've got your back, Boss, just tell us what you want from us."

Steve smiled. That was Kono - fearless and loyal. "For now, we carry on, investigating everything that comes our way, just like we've always done. If anything - any shred of evidence, any witness statement, anything - leads back to the governor's office, bring it to my attention immediately. We'll handle it as discreetly as possible."

"To protect the governor's reputation?" Chin asked.

"To give her the benefit of the doubt," Steve answered. "But mostly to protect the team. If there is corruption at the highest levels . . . and there's a threat of exposure - we become targets. Professionally and literally."

The team sat quietly as they absorbed the information.

Steve rubbed his hand over his face. "I'm sorry, guys," he said. "I hate to put a damper on our well-deserved R & R. But I couldn't think of a better place, away from the office, to bring this up, so that we're all on the same page and keeping our eyes and minds open."

"You think the office is bugged?" Jax asked, slightly horrified.

Danny pointed at her. "That'll teach you to behave yourself in the armory, missy," he said, successfully lightening the mood as the team laughed softly.

"I'll be checking as soon as we get back," Steve said quietly. The team was somber at the thought. "Come on, guys," he added. "We don't know anything. All of this could be completely unfounded. We carry on with the business at hand. And right now, the business at hand is for some of us to try to redeem ourselves from getting slaughtered by the Jersey and Chicago pool sharks."

###

The moon was high over the water, and Steve still couldn't sleep. He crept out of the bed, hoping not to wake Jax, and stepped out onto the balcony, settling into the wicker chair. Despite the worry, he couldn't help a slow smile spreading over his face as he thought back to falling into that very chair earlier in the day.

He felt Jax's strong hands settle on his shoulders.

"I didn't mean to wake you," he said quietly.

"Nonsense," she retorted, pressing her fingers firmly into his tense and knotted muscles. "You're a mess," she pointed out. "Is it bad, you think? The thing with the governor?"

"I don't know," he said. "I hope not. If she's corrupt in any way . . . it diminishes what Five-O has accomplished."

"I refuse to accept that," Jax said, continuing to work loose the tight muscles, as Steve let his head fall forward. "The work Five-O has done stands on its own merit."

"I'm sorry I got you into this," Steve said. "I had no idea, I swear . . . when I asked you and Grover to transfer to Five-O, this had never crossed my mind."
"Shhh," Jax soothed, pressing a kiss to the back of his neck. "Of course not. But don't go getting any ideas, McGarrett. I'm not going anywhere. You're not going to be rid of me that easily."

He reached behind him and wrapped her wrist in his big hand, tugging her around and pulling her down into his lap.

"What did I do to deserve you?" he whispered. "And such a loyal team. No one could ask for better."

"We're good," Jax nodded emphatically, "and don't you forget it. We've got your back, Steve." She ran her fingers through his hair, soothing him as if he was a skittish pet. "Don't go getting any more gray hair over this," she teased.

"Hey, most of this gray hair has to be your fault," he protested.

"How do you figure?" Jax demanded. "No way. You had some silver when I met you. I remember, in the Camaro when you picked me up from the airport. I thought it was sexy as hell."

"Yeah? Well I had more after the first case, when you stopped breathing, and a lot more after the Halawa mess, when I watched you flatline," Steve said. "If Danny wasn't blond, he'd be turning gray, too."

"You're picking up on the wrong threads of the conversation, Commander," Jax said.

"I am?" Steve asked, in mock innocence. "What thread should I be picking up?"

"Well," Jax whispered, kissing up the side of his neck, "probably not the one that involves you talking about Danny . . ." She stopped, pulling back, and looking into his eyes. "This is going to be okay, Steve. We'll take it as it comes, yeah?"

He nodded, holding her close and pressing his face into the crook of her neck, letting the familiar scent of gunpowder and honeysuckle soothe him. Her fingers continued to rub random patterns through his hair.

"Come back to bed," she whispered. "Get some sleep."

He was skeptical, but allowed her to lead him back to bed. The last thing he remembered was the brush of her lips across the back of his neck, and her arm wrapping around him as she sleepily ordered him to stop thinking and sleep, Commander.

And then, it was morning, and the team was gathering to check out of the hotel.

"Let's do this," Kono said firmly, as she hefted her bag and stepped onto the small plane that would take them back to reality, and one by one, each of the team members took their places.

"Look," Steve said quietly, as he fastened his seatbelt and glanced around at the team. "If any of you want to quietly transfer, I'll sign off on it. I would understand. You have careers and families to think about . . ."

"Right. We have family to think about, Steve. This family. Our Five-O family," Chin said, as the others nodded in agreement.

Steve felt a weight lifted off his shoulders.

Then he began thinking about where he needed to first sweep for bugs in Five-O headquarters.
Remember

Chapter Notes

A/N: This chapter is in no way intended to be flippant or disrespectful regarding the very real events of September 11. With that tragedy as an integral part of Jax and Danny’s back-story, it seems logical that they would take note of the anniversary. If any readers feel that I am not handling the topic with appropriate sensitivity, or if I just plain get it wrong, please let me know. I’ll do my best to fix it or just remove the chapter.

While I’m playing a little loose with timeline and canon (including Grover as part of the team, for example, and replacing the idea of Hesse and WoFat with the original arch nemesis Novak), this universe is set in the early days of Five-O; so this chapter is not present-day September, even though I’m posting the chapter on September 11th, but more like September 2012, which would mean Gracie is still only eleven or so. It also conveniently allows me to go back in time and re-write the story with the benefit of picking and choosing from what we’ve learned since.

Also true to canon would be the fact that Steve’s mission with Freddie would likely have taken place early in the month of September, given that it was as a result of that mission that he had Hesse in custody and was transporting him. We know from images of John McGarrett’s tombstone that he was murdered on September 20th. Even allowing time for Steve to rush back to Hawaii, the funeral likely took place before the end of the month, with Steve meeting Danny and recruiting Chin at the same time.

In other words, angst.

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The team had been back from their case-turned-retreat long enough for things to have settled into something of routine. To Steve’s relief, a thorough sweep of Five-O headquarters had not yielded any indication of listening devices or other interference, and while he was still concerned about the governor’s intentions, he had been breathing a little easier.

Then the bottom had fallen out, with two back-to-back cases that had them running on adrenaline and caffeine. More than one night had been spent in the office, though Steve tried to make sure that Danny didn’t miss any nights with Gracie, and that Grover made it home to his family at least
on alternate evenings. Chin had barely been able to see Malia, between the string of robberies Five-O was investigating, and her rotating schedule in the Emergency Department. The night he spent there with Kono, while she was treated for dehydration and a pulled muscle in her bad knee, did not count -- or so Malia had informed him when they stopped by with clean clothes for the two cousins the next morning.

And Kono had pointed out that although Caviness was a stand-up guy who came to sit by her bed and hold her hand, that Steve had better make damn sure that she had a full weekend off. Soon.

And so it was, that the last day of August had come and gone and then some, and Steve found himself at his desk, on the tenth of September, catching up on an ungodly stack of paperwork. He put it off as long as he could, but eventually he had taken a deep breath, and pulled the August page off his desk calendar. As always, he folded it neatly and put it in a file -- experience had taught him that sometimes the random handwritten notes or phone numbers jotted down at his desk came in handy. He had closed the file drawer and sat for a moment, looking at the expanse of September in front of him.

It was a bittersweet month. He’d lost Freddie in early September. The exact date of the mission, of course, was classified and blurred by accounting for several different time zones, so it would never appear written on a calendar, but the moments were ingrained in his memory and replayed. Jax knew the dialogue; so did Danny, for that matter. They’d heard it, in bits and scattered pieces, in the dark hours of countless nights.

His dad had been killed on the twentieth . . . that was another event, played out on repeat, sometimes his brain offering alternate endings, but inevitably the dream wound back to a gunshot and Steve sitting bolt upright in bed, gasping out one name: Dad. But not all of September’s memories were nightmares. By the end of the month, he’d pulled together the most amazing team he’d ever worked with -- though he’d be careful not to come out and say that in front of his SEAL buddies -- and of course, with the team, with Danny, eventually he’d found Jax.

His eye drifted to the eleventh, the stuff of Jax’s nightmares. On one of her very first nights in Steve’s house, she’d made it all the way outside, disoriented, the sand under her feet finally grounding her to time and place. Did she appreciate the distraction of work? Maybe they’d have a case. Or maybe she preferred to be alone. This would be her first September away from New York . . . maybe she wished she could go back? Should he offer?

“Steve?” Kono’s voice drifted to him, hesitant, and he realized that she’d called his name several times.

“Hey, Kono,” he said, smiling up at her. “Sorry, I was just . . .”
“Thinking about the fact that September sucks balls?” she asked quietly, her eyes sad and fond.

He chuckled. “I was going to say that September was a month of mixed emotions, but yeah. There’s days in September that suck balls. But not the days that I started working with Danny and Chin, and definitely -- most definitely -- not the day that you introduced yourself by knocking a guy senseless with a right cross. Thanks to you guys, September has some happy memories, too.”

“I’m glad to know that,” Kono said, a genuine smile dimpling her face.

“What did you need?” Steve asked, clearing his throat and shoving a file over the word September, which seemed to be mocking him in cheery Arial font.

Kono gently moved the file away and ran her long, tan fingers over the word. “It can wait. What do you need, boss?”

He sighed and pushed back in his chair a little. “The eleventh . . . it’s tomorrow, and I don’t know how to approach it with Jax. What do you think? I don’t want to push her by bringing it up, but I don’t want to be a . . . schmuck, to put it in Danny-speak, and ignore it. Any ideas?”

Kono tilted her head at him. “If you’re asking me to get my feminine perspective, that’s sweet, but misguided. I think the best person to answer that is Jax, but if you’re wanting advice on how to approach her, you should ask Danny. He knew her then, he’s probably been in touch with her on the anniversary before, he might have some ideas. What does Danny usually do?”

“Last year, he took Gracie back to New Jersey to be with his family. She knew the story of his partner, how she died on 9/11, and I think he may have introduced Gracie to her family, spent some time with them,” Steve explained.

“Wow, no wonder Gracie is growing up to be so grounded and mature,” Kono said. “That’s a lot to live up to. I’m honestly surprised that Rachel allowed it.”

“Part of the divorce settlement, babe,” Danny said, coming into Steve’s office.

Kono brushed his cheek with a quick kiss and Danny smiled at her. It had taken him a while to adjust to the affectionate habits of the island’s residents, but he was never one to turn down a kiss,
“Steve’s wondering about the anniversary, you know, with Jax,” Kono said.

“Ah, ‘the anniversary’; spoken like a true New Yorker, Kono,” Danny said. “I’m touched.”

“I know last year, you took Gracie back to Jersey to visit your folks,” Steve said. “But other than that, Danny, I’m sorry -- I’ve not thought to ask you if you wanted time off this year. And I basically don’t know if, or how, to approach it with Jax.”

Danny nodded. “Taking Gracie back to New Jersey last year was a kinda one-time thing. It’s not my weekend to have her, although -- get this -- Rachel called me yesterday to offer for me to have Gracie for the day, if I want, since it falls on a weekend.”

“That was thoughtful,” Steve said. “Are you going to go get her?”

“I wasn’t planning on it,” Danny said, shaking his head. “Not that I wasn’t tempted, but it’s different for Gracie; she wasn’t even born when it happened, and while I want her to know, and to honor the memory . . . she’s a sensitive little thing. I don’t want her to . . . dwell, you know?”

“That seems wise, Danny,” Steve said. “How did Jax usually spend the day, do you know?”

Danny grimaced. “Well, as best as I can recall, she seemed to spend the day picking up as many shifts as possible. You know her -- denial and distraction. And, let me guess, based on the nightmares that you’re probably privy to, how did that work out for her?”

“Not well,” Steve answered simply. He wasn’t betraying any confidences -- Kono and Jax often spent the weekend together when he was on reserve duty, and Kono had confessed to having her sleep interrupted by one of Jax’s more vivid nightmares. And just two nights ago, while the team collapsed on sofas to catch a few hours sleep while evidence was processed, one of the lab techs had burned a bag of microwave popcorn. Grover had suffered a bruise on his jaw when he’d attempted to wake Jax from the nightmare that the burning smell had triggered.

“Right,” Danny said. “So what she wants to do, and what she should do, may be two different things. You’re going to have to man up and actually talk to her about it. Using words.”
“Yeah, yeah,” Steve said, waving his hand at Danny, but smiling. “Okay, for starters, you two -- get out of here. Unless we have a triple homicide serial killer selling drugs to toddlers, I don’t want to see anyone in this office until Monday. Kono, does this count as a weekend off?”

“No, this counts as a Sunday off, which we are well past due for already, and I hurt my knee,” Kono pouted.

“But I did hear Caviness say that he had no open cases right now,” Steve pointed out. “He wanted me to know in case you were too looped to remember.”

“Oh, yeah,” Kono said, brightening. “I hoped I hadn’t imagined that.” She hesitated, looking at Danny. “I’m sorry, it seems . . . disrespectful, planning something fun . . . “


“You want to come over tomorrow, Danny?” Steve said.

Danny gave him an appraising look. “If, after having an actual conversation with Jax, you determine that is what would be good for the day, then yes. But I’m not going to be the buffer that keeps the two of you from having conversations that need to be had, Steven.”

“Okay, Danny,” Steve said, uncharacteristically subdued.

“Babe, look -- it’s -- I know you, and I know Jax. You’d rather scale a wall under heavy fire to take out a sniper than discuss your feelings. I get that. It’s part of the whole tough-but-tender thing you both do, where you rush in to save the day with grenades and tourniquets, and are impossibly compassionate with everyone else but refuse to cut yourselves any slack. And its endearing, really, and I know that you’re making progress, at least in talking to each other. And I’m proud of you,” Danny said, smiling at Steve. “But clearly -- okay, look, the smell of burning popcorn put her over the edge the other night, Steven, and she nearly knocked her partner unconscious. I’m saying, and I know I’m not the only one saying, there is some processing yet to be done. That’s all I’m saying.”

“I know, Danny,” Steve said. “I was asking if you wanted to come over because, you know. You lost someone on 9/11, too. I was asking if maybe, since you didn’t plan to have Gracie, I thought maybe you didn’t want to be alone. Either.” Steve shrugged.

“You were -- oh,” Danny said. “That was -- and I broke into a lecture. Sorry, babe.”
“Danny?” Steve said, standing up and starting to gather his things.

“Yeah, Steve?”

“You weren’t wrong. With the lecture. And you’re welcome to come over tomorrow. That’s not something I need to ask Jax, by the way, because she’s made it clear that she loves spending time with you. She needs time with you, Danny, you’re the reason she came to Hawaii in the first place. You’re our ohana, you know?” Steve said.

“After almost fifteen days running without a break?” Danny asked skeptically.


Danny cut him off by placing his hand firmly over Steve’s mouth. “No. Please, for the love of God, stop talking.”

“When you two are done making out,” Grover drawled, propping a shoulder against Steve’s office door. “I was going to ask if I could call it; head home to the family for what’s left of the weekend.”


“By the power of your will?” Grover asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“He’s a SEAL; they probably teach some kind of spooky mass mind control as part of BUDs training,” Danny groused. “Hey, where’s your pocket partner?”

“Don’t let her hear you call her that,” Grover said, absently rubbing his jaw where Jax had caught him solidly. “She said she was going to the armory to check medic inventory, but to be honest, I think she’s ducking the computers.” Grover sighed. “It started this morning -- pictures, videos, memes -- people mean well in wanting to honor the memory but man, I wish for her sake they could do it with something other than living color of those towers burning and falling. We couldn’t pull up a single file without somehow coming across it. Sorry, man,” he said, turning to Danny. “I know it’s a bad day for you, too.”
“Yeah, but not in the same way,” Danny said. “I was barely aware of the larger situation that day; I was just focused on my partner. I have to admit, I was buffered from it; isolated. Jax was . . . well, people and debris were falling on her. I can understand why the pictures would get to her.”

Steve had been listening, silent. “Go ahead, guys, get out of here. Get Chin out the door, too, before we lose our preferred status with our favorite emergency department doc. I’ll catch up with Jax, clean up and lock up here.”

Danny and Grover gratefully gathered their things; but Danny lingered and stepped back into Steve’s office after Grover was gone.

“Steve,” he said quietly, “the last year I was in Jersey on the anniversary, I got a call about 2 am to come pick her up at some guy’s apartment. She apparently hadn’t been able to pick up enough shifts to get her through, ended up at a bar, went home with someone and sobered up enough on the way there to regret it. Thankfully she’d picked a firefighter’s bar and the guy pieced it together enough to find my number in her phone. When I got there, he had her wrapped in a blanket drinking coffee while he stood outside waiting for me.” Danny smiled a bit at the memory; the poor guy had been rather terrified when he’d found out that Jax’s emergency contact was a cop. “My point is, that was just three years ago,” Danny finished.

Steve nodded soberly. “Thanks, Danno.”

“Don’t contaminate the armory, you Neanderthal,” Danny called, in a parting word to Steve as he got into the elevator. “And yeah, I’ll catch up to you tomorrow.”

#*#*#*#*

Pull it together, Jax chided herself. You knew this was coming. It comes every year. It should be easier by now. Pull it together.

Her hands were shaking as she mindlessly sorted gauze pads and sterile wipes, finding some comfort in the familiar shapes and textures of medical supplies. It had been a crazy run of cases, and while she hadn’t had to treat more than a handful of minor scrapes and cuts -- and send Kono packing, protesting loudly, to the ER -- the supply cabinet had been neglected. The powdered Gatorade and protein bars were seriously depleted, she noticed, as she pulled out an empty box. Her hand fell on something soft behind it.
Billy’s t-shirt. She’d forgotten at what point it had found its way there; probably in one of her gym bags or on one of the bleary nights when they’d been called in to review lab results in the wee hours of the morning. Her fingers traced over the firehouse number screen printed on the back of the shirt, and she held it to her face. It smelled more like Steve’s detergent now than anything, but that was okay; that was a good smell.

The whoosh of the elevator alerted her to the arrival of someone else in the basement, and she shoved the shirt back into the cabinet. The long, sure strides were unmistakably Steve’s.

*Pull your shit together, Nolan*, she told herself firmly. *You’ve been holding it together so well these last couple months, you’re almost like a normal person. You can do this. Don’t let him down.* She shoved the shirt back into the cabinet and put the Gatorade box back in front of it.

“Hey, ku’uipo,” Steve said softly, as he stepped up behind her. He rested his hands lightly on her waist, and bent to kiss the top of her tousled curls.

“Hey,” she said, proud of herself for her voice sounding almost normal. “We need to restock the protein bars; they were thoroughly pilfered when we were too slammed to get food. And the Gatorade mixes, too.” She shook her head. “I should have noticed that Kono was getting dehydrated and slowed her down, made her drink something.”

“Kono has lived on this island her whole life,” Steve said. “She knows to hydrate. She was in that sniper’s nest a lot longer than we intended; dehydration is common for snipers. She’s fine. You recognized it, made her go get checked out.”

“Still, I--” Jax started to protest, but Steve stopped her, placing his hand over hers on the empty Gatorade box and moving it back out of the way. He pulled out the tshirt and turned it over in his hands, his fingers tracing over the firehouse number just as Jax’s had moments before.

“We’ve been so busy, I didn’t realize . . . until today, when I was cleaning up my desk and changed the calendar. I’m sorry; I should have asked you sooner, if you wanted to go back to New York or anything,” he said, folding the shirt carefully and handing it back to Jax.

She turned and put the shirt in the cabinet, not meeting his eyes. “Don’t be ridiculous; I can’t go flying back to New York on a whim. I’m fine.”

He put his hand back on her waist, his thumb rubbing gently over the scars of her injuries from that day. “It’s okay not to be fine, Jax.”
She stepped away from his hand. “September is a bad month for a lot of people, Steve. You lost people in September. Danny lost people in September. I’m not special and I’m not going to have some epic meltdown, I promise.” She cringed at the harsh tone of her voice. That wasn’t exactly proving her point.

She turned and looked up at Steve. _Shit. Kicked Puppy Face._ Danny had named that one well.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t -- I’m --. Shit. I’m just trying really hard, here, okay? I didn’t mean to snap at you. You’re being very thoughtful and I’m . . . okay I’m not used to that, right?”

Steve smiled faintly. She hadn’t been away from NYPD nearly long enough to lose the accent and speech patterns, especially when she was upset. Like she was now.

“September is a bad month for you, and Danny, and me,” Steve agreed. “But tomorrow is a bad day for you. What do we need to do tomorrow? I’m not used to this either, Jax. I’ve never . . . there’s never been anyone close enough for me to get through the anniversaries, either. We’re both new to this.”

Jax groaned. “Danny told you to use your words, didn’t he?”

“Yep. I believe his exact phrase was ‘man up’,” Steve confessed. “So. Obviously, we want to avoid TV and social media.”

Jax looked like she was going to start arguing the whole point again, but then her shoulders slumped, defeated. “We try not to complain,” she said quietly. “We don’t want people to forget; it’s good that people don’t forget. It’s just that . . . the pictures. Video. It’s -- it’s too much, I can’t --”


“Well, I used to cover as many shifts as possible in the busiest precincts, and failing that, I would drink myself stupid,” Jax said, a little sharply again. “I’m not -- damn it, Steve, I am not good at this. I don’t talk about it, I don’t use words, I’m not Danny. I thought you of all people would understand that.”
“I do, Jax,” he answered. “I understand it perfectly. I understand that last year, on the twentieth, Danny showed up at my house and pulled me and my bottle of Scotch away from the bloodstain on the floor of my house, where my dad -- I understand.”

“Then why can’t we just . . . ” she trailed off, not even sure what she was going to say.

“Just keep doing what we’ve been doing?” Steve asked. “How’s that been working out for us, Jax? You’re not NYPD now, you can’t throw yourself into picking up beat shifts for other cops. And I’m damn sure not going to let you go to some bar and go home with--” he stopped abruptly.

“He told you?” Jax asked, incredulous. “Not one of my finest moments. Glad to know the two of you could have a good chuckle over it.”

“Jax, I am out of my depth here,” Steve said, desperate to make her understand. “I wanted to know what I could do to make this easier for you. I was asking Danny what I could do, so that I wouldn’t make it worse.”

They looked at each other; Jax, vibrating with anger and humiliation; Steve, beleaguered and frustrated. Finally, a corner of Jax’s mouth twitched up in a smirk.

“Irony,” she said. “Danny’s word-a-day calendar today. Irony.”

Steve laughed, then. “Yeah. How am I doing with the whole not-making-it-worse thing?”

“You suck at it,” Jax said, smiling. “I’m not helping, either. I’m sorry.”

“Me, too,” Steve said, stepping closer to Jax, raising his eyebrows in silent question, asking permission. Her hand wrapping around the back of his neck seemed to indicate yes.

“Did we just have a fight?” Jax murmured, pulling him down for a gentle kiss.

“I’m pretty sure we had a fight, and a mutual apology,” Steve agreed. “Danny would be proud.”
“Steven, Steven,” Jax sighed. “When are you going to learn there are times where it behooves you not to mention Danny?”

“Would now be one of those times?” he asked, hopeful, trailing the back of his hand up her ribs, firm enough not to tickle.

“It would,” Jax said, nodding. “I hear that there’s this thing that sometimes happens after a fight.”

“Yeah? What would that be?” Steve’s breath hitched as she targeted the little spot behind his ear that made it hard to think.

“There’s a lock on the armory door, right?” she asked, sliding her hands into his back pockets and pulling him closer. “I think we can figure it out.”

Steve lost himself for a minute in kissing her, surrounding himself with the taste and feel of her. But something nagged at him, pulling at his subconscious. He opened his eyes and saw Billy’s t-shirt, right above her head on the shelf.

“Jax,” he murmured, pulling away, his breath ragged. “This isn’t what I came here for, ku’uipo. I need to be sure you’re -- is this just a distraction? I don’t want to be the asshole who takes advantage . . . I want to be the stand up guy who wraps you in a blanket and waits outside. What do you need, Jax? Tell me what you need.”

She looked up at him, her eyes unreadable, full of some emotion that he couldn’t quite nail down.

“I need you,” she said.

Fear, he realized. That was what he was seeing in her eyes. Fear?

“I’m here, Jax,” he murmured. “What’s wrong? What are you afraid of?”

“I’m afraid of needing you,” she replied, barely above a whisper.
He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to him, cradling her head against his chest. One hand tangled in her curls while the other rubbed gentle circles on her back, her muscles tense and knotted with fatigue and stress.

“I’m taking you home,” he said quietly. “We’ll contaminate the armory some other time.”

#*#*#*#*#

She dozed on the ride home, despite her best efforts to stay awake. The last two weeks were a blur of sleep caught in hours on office sofas, interspersed with showers in the locker rooms. Even on the nights they managed to slip home, usually because Danny or Grover pointedly mentioned that everyone would be happier if Steve and Jax were a little less agitated, they made it a point to be back at headquarters early, with trays of coffee and baked goods as tokens of appreciation. Or peace offerings. They’d been running on fumes for days and it had caught up with Jax.

“’S’not fair,” she grumbled, when Steve shook her knee gently to wake her up after he parked the truck in front of his house.

“What’s not fair?” he asked, amused, as he kept her from face-planting in her effort to exit the cab.

“You,” she muttered. “I’m all --” she gestured in frustration at herself, as she struggled to make her feet cooperate and carry her up the sidewalk. “And you’re all --” she waved her hand absently at Steve, who gave every appearance of being as controlled and coherent as ever.

“It’s a SEAL thing,” he said, just a bit smug, and she tried to flip him off, but her fine motor skills were shot.

She made it into the house on her own power, but stumbled over her feet at the bottom of the stairs while Steve was locking the front door.

“Okay, that’s it,” he said, scooping her up into his arms and carrying her up the stairs.

She would have protested but her head was nestled so perfectly in that spot between his neck and shoulder, that she just couldn’t summon the will to get a good rant going. She inhaled deeply, soothing herself with the now-familiar scent that was part detergent, part aftershave, and and
always a healthy dose of ocean.

“Hmm,” she sighed, content.

Steve chuckled, and because he still sounded a bit smug, she licked him delicately on that little patch of skin again, just to make him stumble.

“Oh, that’s not fair,” he protested.

“I love that you’re such an easy mark,” she mumbled, grinning because she knew that her lips were still hovering over the target. “If the bad guys knew this, we’d be in trouble.”

He turned on the small lamp just inside the master bedroom, and deposited Jax without protest onto the bathroom counter. There was just enough light coming in from the lamp, and from the almost full moon at the window, to inspire him to change his mind about flipping on the overhead light in the bathroom. Instead, he toed off his boots, and proceeded to remove Jax’s boots, and their clothing, with military precision and efficiency, while the water warmed up in the shower.

He wasn’t even sure if Jax’s eyes were open when he steered her under the heavy spray, wetting her hair and rubbing shampoo through it gently. She sighed as he massaged her head, and he inhaled the soft honeysuckle scent. He wasn’t sure where the shampoo came from, honestly, but he’d gladly have cases of it shipped from the mainland if necessary. She let him turn her this way and that under the shower, too exhausted to be anything but happily compliant. He made quick work of his own shower, not trusting her to stand too long without losing her balance.

“Aren’t you . . . you know . . . “ she mumbled sleepily as he wrapped her completely in one of the towels he’d purchased to suit his six foot plus frame and placed her on the bed.

He laughed as he pulled on a pair of gym shorts. “Of course I am, ku’uipo, I always am when I’m with you,” he said, squeezing the water out of her hair. He was definitely not vigorously towel-drying it as he did his own. He knew better, since that one time, when she’d been looped out on pain meds, and he’d tried to help. “But you’re so far past the point of exhaustion that I think there’d be an issue with consent.”

“Psssh,” she scoffed, her voice muffled as he pulled the Annapolis t-shirt over her head. “Figures the one person who would never need to ask for consent is just about the only person who does.”
He knew that she was practically talking in her sleep, unfiltered and unguarded, and the brutal honesty of her statement punched the air out of his lungs. Unwilling to let go of her long enough to walk around to his usual side of the bed, he slipped in behind her, holding her close and pulling the light blanket over them. He kissed the back of her neck and she sighed happily, her breathing evening out almost immediately as she fell sound asleep.

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Jax could hear Steve puttering around in the shower as she woke, blinking slowly in the soft morning light. She stretched, grinning at the delicious hint of soreness from having assured Steve of her most enthusiastic, heartfelt consent at some point during the night.

Knowing Steve, he’s probably already gone for a swim and a run while I sleep like a damn civilian, Jax thought to herself, as she absently checked her phone for the time.

The date flashed up first, followed by the slow ticking of the news feed.

Steve heard Jax swear quietly as he turned off the shower. He hesitated, but resisted the urge to rush to her. She tended to appreciate some space to pull herself together. His patience was rewarded in a few minutes, as she padded into the bathroom and started to brush her teeth. He stood next to her at the sink, gently smiling at her and bumping her hip out of the way to grab the toothpaste. It was completely domestic and mundane, and he was surprised at how very significant it felt. At how much he had come to depend on it. Need it.

He understood what she meant last night. It was terrifying.

“Okay,” Jax said firmly. “We need a plan. I need a plan. Please don’t lecture me about how it isn’t healthy to focus on distraction. I have Danny for that. I need you to . . . I need a plan.”

“Okay,” he agreed. “Whatever you need.”

“First, for the love of all I hold dear on the east coast, hold my damn phone for me today,” she said. “I don’t need the constant stream of pop-up perky news reports about how far we’ve come as a nation in the years since . . . you know.” She talked to him as she pulled out clothes and dressed; layering board shorts and a simple tank top over her favorite sporty bikini. The green one. Steve grinned. He liked the green one, and he loved that she apparently planned to spend time in the water today. He grabbed a clean pair of board shorts and pulled them on, along with one of his SEAL team t-shirts.
He grabbed her phone and put it in his pocket.

“Done,” he said. “What else?”

“We need to check on Danny,” she said. “He came home last year, with Gracie. He’s such a self-sacrificing asshole, you know that right? Made it all about her family, and checking on me, and going with his dad down to the local firestation . . . his partner was murdered, right in front of him, while all the units were flooding past him into the city. We check on Danny.”

“I’d planned on it,” Steve said. “In fact, I would have insisted that he come here last night, but he had some rant about not letting us use him as a buffer.”

Jax pondered that for a moment. “Typical of Danny. Self-sacrificing asshole. We shoulda brought him home with us last night. We’d have probably scarred him for life, but it woulda served him right.”

“You’re very Jersey today,” Steve commented, grinning.

“Sorry.”

“I like it, don’t apologize,” he said. “What else?”

Jax hesitated. “Well, there is one other thing I usually do, aside from either trying to work a straight thirty-six, or drink myself into oblivion.”

Steve cringed at the thought of Jax, alone in New York, trying to navigate the onslaught of memories and emotions of the day. If it was difficult in Hawaii, it would have been damn impossible there. No wonder Danny got a call in the middle of the night.

“What is it? Name it, I’ll make it happen,” he said, with the confidence that came from being a highly decorated military officer with immunity and means.

“I donate blood,” she said, looking at him to see his reaction. “It’s a big thing with EMS in New
York, it’s kinda our way to . . . you know. Do something positive, I guess. Everyone rushed to donate blood that day but . . . there weren’t -- I mean, some of the emergency personnel were injured but there wasn’t the demand they expected because there weren’t . . . we didn’t have many survivors.”

He stepped close to her, slipping his hand under her tank and rubbing the scar on her side.

“You needed blood that day, during surgery,” he reminded her. “I think it’s a perfect thing to do. I’ll call Danny, we can bully him into donating, too. I’m sure the Red Cross has something going somewhere close by; if not, we’ll call Tripler.”

“Thanks,” Jax whispered, pleased that he understood.

He tucked his fingers under her chin, and turned her face up to his. “You’re welcome. I meant it, Jax. Whatever you need.”

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“Danny, you’re on speaker phone,” Steve announced cheerily into the phone.

“Steven,” Danny said, “why are you calling me at . . . oh, wow. Ten-thirty. Okay, fair enough. Please do not tell me we have a case.”

“We do not have a case,” Steve said. “Jax wanted to ask you a favor.”

“What can I do for the fair Jacqueline this morning?” Danny asked.

“Come with us to donate blood,” Jax said. “Please?”

Danny smiled. Of course, that was Jax’s personal ritual. He’d forgotten that, since usually he’d been so stressed about the way she chose to spend the rest of her day in reckless abandon of personal safety and common sense.
“You picking me up?” he asked.

“On our way now,” Steve said.

“Well, there better be coffee and malasadas after,” Danny said, “that’s all I’m sayin’.”

“Duly noted,” Jax said, rolling her eyes.

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“Well, that did not go well,” Danny muttered, as they returned to Steve’s house later.

“No, that did not,” Steve agreed quietly, not ashamed to be keeping a safe distance from the anger and frustration radiating from Jax as she disappeared around the side of the house, not even bothering to go inside.

The two men went inside and put away the generous supply of Longboards and steaks they’d picked up at the market. Steve pulled out a few potatoes, wrapped them in foil, and put them in the oven.

“Well, there’s calories at least,” Danny said.

Steve nodded morosely and grabbed at the bandage on the inside of his elbow, yanking it off angrily and tossing it in the bin. Danny did the same. He’d caught Jax looking at their matching bandages several times as the three of them had silently collected groceries at the market, after making the stop at the Red Cross donation set-up. She had been denied the privilege of donating blood that day: according to the rather prim technician, Jax’s weight to height ratio was insufficient.

Danny took a deep breath. “Let’s go. We can’t leave her out there alone, she’ll try to swim to the mainland just to prove how healthy she is.”

Steve grabbed an extra handful of towels and a six-pack of Longboards. That was it, he was done for the day, no intentions of driving anywhere. Maybe Jax’s idea of drowning out the day in alcohol hadn’t been so bad, all things considered.
She was sitting in one of the chairs by the water, soaking wet but looking marginally less pissed by the time they got outside.

“I’m gonna risk your boyfriend kicking my ass, but I’m gonna say it,” Danny said, handing her a Longboard and smiling at her fondly, “you look damn good for someone who is too skinny to donate blood. But babe, really--”

Steve put a hand on Danny’s shoulder and shook his head. “If you value your life at all, Danny, I’d stop at ‘damn good’, and spare the lecture.”

Steve grabbed a bottle and handed one to Danny as they settled in to the chairs on either side of Jax. Steve reached over and snagged her hand, engulfing it in his own, and idly rubbing his thumb across her knuckles.

“I’m sorry that didn’t work out the way you’d hoped,” he said, quietly. “We could have left, you know.”

“Nah, and deprive the waiting world of two pints of top grade red cells? No way,” Jax said, smiling in spite of her frustration. “Next time I’m wearing full tac gear. Boots, vest, gloves, the whole nine yards. Try to tell me then I don’t meet the weight requirement.”

“I support that arrangement,” Steve said, closing his eyes and resting his head against the back of the chair.

“You just get all hot and bothered when Jax is in tac gear,” Danny groused.

“It’s the gloves,” Steve mumbled absently, prompting a giggle from Jax.

“Nice,” Danny said. “Ply me with alcohol so that I can’t drive, and then trap me here to listen to this nonsense.”

“Also, you don’t have a car here,” Jax pointed out helpfully.
“You people,” Danny complained, but there was no heat to it. He grabbed an extra towel and tossed it over himself so that he wouldn’t burn to a crisp, and let himself doze.

“This okay?” Steve asked, glancing at Jax.

She looked at the water, at Danny, at Steve, and nodded. “Honestly? This is . . . this is much harder than working a straight thirty-six or curling up alone with a bottle of whiskey. I feel a little bit like I want to crawl out of my skin.”

“I know,” Steve nodded, and trailed his fingers gently back and forth across the back of her hand.

“But it’s better. Harder, but better,” Jax decided.

“Yeah,” Steve agreed.

The afternoon passed quickly, and as the sun began to set, Steve tossed the steaks on the grill and brought out the baked potatoes to the table on the lanai. As they tucked into their food, Danny told Steve some of the funny stories from Jax’s days as a rookie with himself and his partner Grace. Steve, in turn, had them laughing with a recounting of some of his more notable escapades with Freddie; at least, the things that weren’t classified.

Steve noticed Danny watching Jax’s plate anxiously. She caught the glance, too, and sighed and took a sip of wine.

“Whoa, there was a whole conversation that just happened there,” Steve said, looking slowly between Danny and Jax. “I know sibling subtext when I see it.”

“Danny,” Jax said, quiet. Pleading. “Not today.”

“Okay, babe,” he said, quiet. Relenting. He studied her for a moment, smiled gently at her. He raised his glass. “To Grace,” he suggested.

“And Freddie,” Jax added.
Steve reached out and took Jax’s free hand with his. “And to Billy and Jake,” he finished.

They gently touched their glasses in a toast.

“You can talk about them, you know,” Steve said softly to Jax. “Sometimes it helps, to be able to share good memories. I know all about Grace, but nothing about Billy and Jake.”

Danny nodded encouragingly.

Jax very deliberately and carefully put down her glass, and criss-crossed her knife and fork over her barely touched food.

“I didn’t . . . when I got out of the hospital, I . . . there was mandatory stuff but no one explained. I didn’t understand,” she said, so quietly that both men had to strain to hear her. “I threw myself into my work and I just wanted to hold it together -- I put everything in that box except for a couple of Billy’s t-shirts, and until Danny had it shipped here I hadn’t even . . . that was the first time that I’d -- I hadn’t really even said their names, not really. I thought I could just keep working, keep moving.”

“Oh, babe,” Danny said, sighing.

“I can’t remember what their voices sounded like. I could, for a while, because in my nightmares they were always calling for me, and I could never get to them, and finally I couldn’t take it any more, and I let myself --” her voice broke as she pushed herself away from the table. “I let myself forget what their voices sounded like and now I can’t remember.”

Danny and Steve sat stunned as she turned and walked toward the water.

“Shit,” Steve swore softly, watching her. She bypassed the chairs and sat down on the sand, wrapping her arms around her knees.

“Let me clean this up,” Danny said. “You go. And Steve --” he hesitated. “I have video. Of the boys. Their graduation from fire academy; her graduation from police academy. I recently had a bunch of old video converted to digital and emailed to me, so I could pull it up. If she wants.”
“Thanks, Danny,” Steve said. “Danny, I --”

“I know, I know, you don’t know how you would manage without me, I got it,” Danny said. “And Steve?”

“Yeah?”

Danny pointed to Jax’s plate. “This can’t go on indefinitely, man. They teach you about survivor guilt in the Army, right?” Danny asked, pretending, for Steve’s sake, to get it wrong again.

“It’s the Navy, Danny,” Steve said, pretending to go along. “And yeah. They do.”

Steve grabbed an old quilt from the lanai. It was a relatively warm evening, but Jax tended to run cold, especially when she was tired and stressed.

And underweight, Steve’s brain scolded him. Schmuck. His brain, apparently, had been taking cues from Danny.

He wrapped the quilt around Jax’s shoulders and tucked it securely around her feet, creating a little cocoon for her, just the way he knew she liked it.

He sat next to her, not quite touching, but close enough that she would only need to move an inch or so to lean up against him.

“I’m sorry,” she said, her voice muffled in the quilt.

“What do you think you need to apologize for, Jax?” he asked.

“I’ve been holding it together really well these last few months,” she said. “And then in the last couple of days . . . I’ve thrown a punch at my partner, made today miserable for everyone . . . I’m sorry. I’ll pull it together, I swear I will. I can do it.”

Steve shook his head. He didn’t even know where to begin to unravel everything that was wrong
with that idea.

“I was sixteen when my mom died, you know?” he said. “And I went to military school, and then Annapolis, and then the Navy. And for twenty years, I’ve been trying to remember what the last thing she said was. I can’t. I can’t remember the last thing my mom said to me, and it used to drive me crazy.”

He smiled as she scooted a little closer to him and leaned her head against his shoulder.

“And then one day, I realized it didn’t matter,” he continued, bracing a strong arm behind her. “I remembered that morning, she made waffles for breakfast. And as I ran out the door, I turned back and thanked her for the waffles, and told her that I loved her. So, I decided to be content with that. I don’t know if I’ll ever remember the last thing she said to me. It was probably something like, ‘brush your teeth’, or ‘deal with those nasty football pads’.”

Jax laughed softly.

“But I remember that last morning. I remember waffles, and I remember telling her that I loved her,” he said. “And that became enough, you know? I quit torturing myself to try to remember things that I couldn’t, and enjoyed the memory that I could.” He paused. “Maybe, I don’t know. Maybe if you try to remember an image, instead of a voice. The day that Jake took that picture of you and Billy; that looked like a good day. If you want to,” he added quickly.

She was quiet for a moment, reflecting, and Steve was starting to wonder if he’d completely missed the mark.

Then she chuckled. “Yeah,” she said. “We all had the day off; that never happened. Billy and I were in that crummy little apartment by then, and Jake showed up that morning and convinced us to go outside. The air was so clear that day. Unusually clear for late summer. We had pretzels, I remember that -- you know, the ones you get from the street vendors?”

“Yes, Danny has waxed eloquent about these pretzels,” Steve said. “That’s a beautiful memory, Jax.”

“Pretzels?” Jax asked. She was suddenly quiet.

“What is it?” Steve prompted gently.
“Um, just . . . I remember more about that night,” she said. “Day,” she corrected quickly.

Steve curled his head around to look at her, curious. She ducked her head, embarrassed, and covered her face with her hands.

“Oh,” Steve said, realization dawning. “Well, I guess that was a really good day. At least, I hope it was a really good day.”

Jax nodded. “Sorry,” she muttered.

“Hey,” Steve said, pulling her hands away from her face. “Don’t you dare apologize. Is it a good memory?”

She nodded again.

Nodded enthusiastically, Steve’s brain helpfully pointed out, and he resisted the urge to smack himself on the back of the head.

“Then you hang on to that memory, Jax,” he said, brushing her hair away from her face, and pulling her close to him.

She sighed and relaxed into him. “Thank you,” she whispered, tucking her head under his chin.

They sat there for a while, content, and he was just about to congratulate himself when he felt her breathing change; from slow, steady, even breaths to short little gasps.

“Jax,” he said, spinning around and kneeling in front of her. “Jax, ku’uipo, talk to me. What’s happening?”

“I can’t . . . I let myself remember and now I can’t stop,” she said, pressing the heels of her hands into her eyes. “Damn it. I hate this . . . shit.”
“It’s okay, Jax, sometimes memories turn into flashbacks,” Steve soothed. “You just have to learn to work through it.”

“I don’t want to work through it,” Jax said through gritted teeth. “I want it to stop. I want to stop it. It’s not worth it. Remembering isn’t worth it . . . nothing is worth this.”

“Jax, you’re okay, you’re here,” Steve said, starting to cast an anxious glance back toward the house for any sign of Danny.

“I know I’m here,” she said, her voice breaking. “That’s just the thing, isn’t it? They’re gone and I’m here. How do you and Danny do this? How do you do this to yourselves, talking about Grace and Freddie, when you know, you know how it ends for them? Why do you do this to yourselves?” She stood up, tangled in the quilt, blinded by a rush of tears, and would have fallen had it not been for Steve’s quick reflexes.

He was on his feet in a split second, long arms wrapped around her, holding her steady.

“Why would you do this to me?” she asked, trying to push him away. “You, and Danny, why? Why do you want me to remember?”

He tried to hold her shoulders gently, so he wouldn’t hurt her (hurt her more, his brain supplied), so she wouldn’t fall, and so she couldn’t run away from him. But not so that she’d feel restrained, because God knows he couldn’t risk opening that can of worms tonight.

“Because, Jax,” he said, desperately, “because even I know the difference between compartmentalizing and dissociating, and I’m starting to think that you don’t. And whatever it is that you’re doing, or trying to do, to try to cope with this, to deal with everything you’ve been through, Jax, it isn’t working.”

She became so still that Steve suspected she’d stopped breathing altogether. He tried to think of some way to explain to her, something that she would understand . . .

“Jax,” he said, “it’s like setting a broken bone. Or physical therapy. Or . . . or a chest tube for a tension pneumothorax.”
She looked up at him. Good, he’d gotten through to her.

“A tension pneumothorax?” she asked, dubious, but intrigued.

“Yeah. The pressure, it builds and builds, crushing the lung. If you don’t catch it, it crushes the heart. To fix it, you insert a catheter, right?” Steve asked. He’d used various non-catheter objects in the field, but that was beside the point.

“Right, to release the pressure before the patient suffocates,” Jax said.

“Does it hurt?” Steve pressed.

“The tension pneumo?” Jax asked. “Of course.”

“Does it hurt when you put the catheter in?” Steve asked, gently.

“Well, yeah but --” Jax stopped. “Oh. Yeah, it hurts like crazy going in, if you don’t have time for a local, but then . . . ”

Steve brushed her hair away from her face again, waiting patiently.

“Then, the pressure is released, and the crushing pain in the chest cavity is relieved. The pain from the tiny incision and the catheter is nothing compared to the . . . oh,” she said again.

“That’s why we want you to remember, Jax,” he said, kissing her cheek and stroking her jaw with his thumb. “You’ve compartmentalized for so long, it might hurt like a bitch to drag some of this back up, but I swear, if you keep going the way you’re going, this is going to crush you.”

She nodded, biting her lip.

“I -- I don’t know if this is a good idea or not,” Steve said, hesitating, “but when you’re up to it . . . Danny found some video.”
“Video . . . “ Jax said slowly. “Of the boys?”

Steve nodded. “No pressure; not from me or Danny, I swear. But he wanted you to know that it existed. Since, you know, you were upset that you couldn’t remember their voices.”

“I’m not ready,” she whispered. “Not tonight; not yet.”

“Oh, okay,” he assured her. “It’s okay. Someday, if you’re ready.”

She nodded and leaned against him, exhausted. He rubbed her shoulders in sympathy; he knew that he’d pulled her back from an edge of a full-blown flashback, and he knew from experience the wrung-out feeling that followed.

“What do you need, right now?” he asked.

“Coffee?” she mumbled hopefully against his chest. “A hot shower. And then coffee.”

He chuckled. “We can make that happen. Come on.” He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and started walking toward the house.

“Do you . . . with Freddie, and your dad . . . you can remember, without . . . “ she wondered aloud.

“But can I think about them, remember them, without having flashbacks?” he asked. “Yeah, definitely, when I’m awake. When I’m asleep . . . well, you’ve been there for that. Not so much.”

“And Danny?” she asked, as they came inside.

“And Danny what?” Danny asked, looking up at them from his perch at the kitchen island. His eyebrows shot up in alarm as he took in Jax’s pale, shaky appearance, coupled with Steve’s expression of concern.
“You can remember Grace without . . . “ Jax trailed off, uncertain as to how to explain.

“I can remember Grace without . . . oh,” Danny said, putting pieces together. “Without actually reliving the -- oh, yeah, babe. Yeah, I can do that. What, you -- that’s -- you can’t do that?”

“Not very well,” Jax said simply, shaking her head. “I’m going to go take a shower, get warmed up.” She put the quilt neatly into the laundry room and trudged up the stairs.

Steve collapsed onto the stool next to Danny.

“Danny,” he said hoarsely. “And people say the military does a lousy job of . . . and you thought I was messed up . . . shit, Danny. She was doing fine; she was remembering a good day -- a really good day, as it turns out -- and then, it just kept going, and next thing I know, she’s in over her head.”

Steve got up, started fixing a pot of coffee. “But, I think I got through to her, Danny. You’ll be proud.”

“Tell me, grasshopper,” Danny said.

“I explained it to her like this: it’s like a tension pneumothorax,” Steve said, pleased with himself.

“Really,” Danny said, unimpressed.

“Yeah, the air leaking out of the lung collapses the chest cavity, collapses the lung, and it can actually crush the heart. You suffocate, Danny,” Steve said.

“And this helped?” Danny asked.

“Well yeah, because in order to save the patient, you have to, you know --” Steve made a stabbing motion with the end of the coffee scoop.
“You have to stab them in the heart with a coffee scoop? You’re losing something in translation, babe,” Danny said.

“No, Danny,” Steve started.

“Ah, Constipated Hamster face,” Danny observed. “Sorry, carry on.”

“It hurts. When you insert the catheter, or the ... well, sometimes in the field you have to improvise, there was this one time in -- well, I can’t tell you, but I used a piece of -- well, I better not say, but anyway -- it hurts, but it’s the only way to relieve the pressure and save the victim’s life,” Steve said. “Jax understood it, anyway.”

“And that’s what matters,” Danny said, nodding. He was still stuck on the stabbing motion.

“And you were right, Danny,” Steve added quietly, noting that the water had turned off upstairs. “I knew about the PTSD, I mean, we all know, that’s obvious.”

“Ask Grover,” Danny said, wincing.

“Yeah,” Steve said. “But you were right about the other thing -- the survivor’s guilt. It’s eating her up, Danny. It slipped out tonight, that she’s here and they aren’t.”

Danny nodded. “It’s one of the few reasons I can think of that someone wouldn’t enjoy your steaks.”

“Right,” Steve said, pouring some coffee. He added a generous scoop of butter to Jax’s mug. “Hey, it’s fat and calories,” he said, when Danny made a face. “So anyway, the Navy teaches us stuff, about PTSD and survivor’s guilt and ... well, she obviously respects how you’ve managed to cope with Grace’s death ... so, I think we can do this.”

“Do this,” Danny said slowly, looking at Steve.

“We can help Jax,” Steve said, smiling at Danny.
Danny took a deep breath. Steve was beaming as if he’d won first prize in the psychology science fair, and Jax’s foot falls were coming down the stairs, so now was clearly not the time to divest Steve of this batshit idea that somehow they could pull Jax out of the abyss. Now was the time to hold on to whatever small breakthrough that by some miracle might have occurred tonight, and hope and pray that no one had the misguided sense of patriotism that would inspire them to set off fireworks. Danny wasn’t sure that he would survive the combined fallout of Steve and Jax; they were both pretty close to the edge.

Jax appeared in the kitchen, wrapped in one of Steve’s ancient USNA hoodies. She slid on the stool next to Danny and wrapped her hands around the mug Steve handed her. She wrinkled her nose at the coffee, but sipped it without comment.

“You want something to eat?” Danny asked quietly. “I wrapped up your dinner, it’s in the fridge.”

“No, thanks,” Jax said, shaking her head. “I -- I’ll try to do better tomorrow, okay?”

Danny wrapped an arm around Jax’s shoulder, and pressed his lips to her temple. “Babe, no one is asking you to try harder or do better . . . okay? I’m worried. I want you to weigh enough to donate blood. I want the lab tech to be able to burn the damn popcorn without you going ninja on Grover. Okay?”

“Okay, Danny,” Jax said. “I understand. It’s like a tension pneumothorax. It’s gonna hurt a little but the alternative is that I get crushed to death from the inside out.”

Danny gave her another squeeze. Maybe, just maybe, he hadn’t given Steve quite enough credit. It was a start, anyway.
It was, for a change, a quiet weekday morning. Steve paused in the middle of a requisition form to glance out of his office, a soft smile of contentment spreading over his face.

Kono and Chin were busy at the central computer, looking over data from a recent burglary at one of the island's most exclusive estates. They'd solved it quickly, with the help of HPD, but at Chin's suggestion they were logging the details into a databased he'd created, in the event that what appeared to be an isolated incident was in fact a series, or a ring.

He could see into the office shared by Grover and Jax; Grover's huge frame bent over the desk as he helped Jax navigate the computer software to complete her report. Steve chuckled as Jax waved her hands in obvious frustration, prompting Grover to take a step back from the desk. The temper matched her red hair, and the hand waving . . . well, she might have picked that up from Danny.

Steve frowned, glancing at his watch. Where was Danny? He'd mentioned needing to drop Grace at school that morning, but he was usually at work by this time, even on drop-off days. Steve grabbed his phone and hit the button to dial Danny's number.

After several rings, the call went to voice mail.

"Danny," Steve said, "I'm guessing you spent a little extra time taking Gracie to school, or maybe you had another errand . . . just give us a call when you have a minute. Thanks, partner."

He put his phone back on his desk and tried to ignore a growing sense of concern. Glancing back toward Jax's office, he wasn't surprised to see her watching him. He was probably radiating worry by this point.

"Hey, partner, our boss looks stressed," Jax murmured. "You mind?"

Grover started to grumble about lame excuses for not finishing reports, until he caught sight of Steve's anxious expression. "Go, Nolan; I'll finish up the final screen. See what's up."

Jax gave Grover an appreciative squeeze on the shoulder as she took over the seat at her desk. She walked toward Steve's office, returning his tense smile.

"Hey," she said quietly, slipping inside the glass door. "What's wrong?"

"Have you heard from Danny this morning?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't think so," Jax said, checking her phone. "No, I haven't. Didn't he mention drop-off this morning?"

"Yeah, but he's usually here well before this time, even on Gracie mornings," Steve said. "Maybe she had a delayed start . . . I'm going to try him again."

Jax waited silently as Steve dialed Danny on speakerphone, ending the call when it went directly to voicemail. Within seconds, Steve's phone rang, and he grinned in relief.

"We must have been calling at the same time," he said, hitting the green button. "Danny, we were starting to-"

Steve broke off, alarmed, at the sound of Danny gasping incoherently. Jax looked up at him, her
green eyes wide with dismay and fear.

"Danny, what's wrong?" she asked, following Steve as he grabbed the phone, still on speaker, and hurried to the central computer table.

Chin and Kono quickly cleared the other screens as Steve placed his phone on the table. A small blinking red light indicated the location of Danny's phone, midway between Gracie's school and the palace.

Danny was in obvious distress; his breath coming in sharp gasps. "There was - a wreck, I think - oh God, I think she's dead, I think I killed her -"


"Gracie's at school," Danny managed to get out, and the five team members sighed in relief. "There was - in the road - there was a little girl. I can't see her now . . . I don't . . . what if she's under the car?" His voice broke off in a sob. They could hear a grinding sound, as Danny tried to open an apparently damaged car door.

"Danny, you need to slow your breathing," Jax said, her medic training taking over as she picked up the phone. Chin, Kono, and Grover started grabbing gear for everyone, and they moved as a unit to the elevators. "Did you lose consciousness?"

"I don't think so," Danny said. "I don't know."

"Are you bleeding?" Jax was demanding. They could hear movement, and Danny's harsh breathing.

"I don't think so," Danny said breathless. "I don't care. I'm trying to find - I don't see her. I don't see the little girl."

Steve took the phone from Jax's hand as they exited the building. "Danny, we're on the way. Hold on."

"I rode the bike in this morning," Chin said, "I'm with Steve."

"I'm driving," Jax demanded, holding out her hand to Grover. "It's Danny."

He shook his head firmly. "No, you're not driving, precisely because it's Danny. Shotgun, Nolan."

Jax rolled her eyes and jumped in the passenger seat of Grover's SUV.

Lights flashing and sirens blaring, the team sped to the scene, Chin keeping an eye on his tablet to confirm Danny's location.

"Should be around this corner, Steve," Chin cautioned, as Steve was pushing the limits of speed and physics with his huge pickup.

They slowed marginally as they came around the curve, and Steve braked and pulled off at the sight of Danny's Camaro, Grover and Kono falling in behind him.

"Danny?" Steve called out, and a miserable blond head appeared over the hood of the car, which was crumpled against a low stone wall. Danny had practically crawled under the car, and he emerged, disheveled and bleeding.

Jax stepped quickly to Danny's side, grabbing a penlight and some gauze pads from her pockets.
She took his elbow and gently but firmly guided him to sit down on the wall.

"Air bag?" she asked, with a tilt of her head toward the car, and Kono checked for her.

"Yeah, it deployed," Kono confirmed.

"Ow," Danny protested, as Jax flashed the penlight in his eyes. "I'm fine, we need to find the little girl."

"Danny, what happened?" Steve asked, keeping his voice calm, in an effort to offset Danny's obvious panic.

"I dropped Gracie off at school, grabbed a coffee, and headed toward work, just like any other Gracie day," Danny said. "As I came around the curve, I caught sight of what looked like a little girl, walking on this wall here - on top of it, which was crazy -" He broke off, and indicated the steep drop on the other side of the wall. "And then next thing I know -"

Jax had traced the source of the blood streaked randomly on Danny's clothes to a small, but deep, cut on his forearm. Danny hissed in pain as she applied firm pressure.

"What happened, Danny?" Steve prompted gently.

"I - I couldn't see the little girl, for a split second, I couldn't see where she'd gone, and then there was a thump and then . . . we have to find her, she has to be here. She's hurt, we have to find her," Danny insisted, his voice betraying his growing agitation. Chin, Grover, and Kono were searching the area, scanning over the area where Danny's frantic efforts had already trampled down foliage and disturbed rocks.

"There's no sign of a little girl, Danny," Chin said. "Was there another car? A van? Anything?"

"No, there was no other vehicle," Danny said.

Grover studied the road. "No other skids marks, not that I can tell."

"You have to find her. She has blond hair, in a ponytail; blue dress, red canvas sneakers," Danny said.

"Danny," Jax said, wrapping the gauze into place, "you're mildly concussed; do you think maybe you got confused? Disoriented? Maybe it was an animal, and you swerved, and then when you hit your head, you remembered it wrong. That's a lot of specific detail, don't you think?"

Jax looked at Danny expectantly, hoping that a mild head injury could explain away the situation.

Danny's eyes filled with tears. "It's a lot of detail, because I saw her. I lost sight of her, and then there was the God-awful thumping sound, and then I saw her as she went over the hood of my car. So yes, the detail is specific, God help me."

His head dropped into his hands, elbows on his knees. As Jax wrapped her arms around him, his shoulders began to shake in silent sobs.

Steve walked over to the wall and looked down the steep, overgrown embankment. Chin came and stood next to him, as Grover and Kono continued to search around and under the car.

"Steve," Grover said behind them, quiet, and solemn.

Steve turned, and followed the line of Grover's hand, pointing at the broken headlight on the
Camaro, streaked with blood.

"Oh, shit," Steve breathed out quietly, glancing back at Danny. "Oh no."

"Wait, that could be where Danny cut his arm," Kono suggested, demonstrating how her forearm might rest against the jagged edge of the car as she got down on her knees to look under it."

"That's true," Chin said. "We can hope for that, cuz, but . . ."

"We're going to have to get a CSI team out here," Grover finished.

"Call in HPD?" Steve asked, looking sharply at Grover. "Danny is ours."

"Which is why we can't risk future accusations of mishandling evidence and conflicts of interest," Grover said, meeting Steve's glare with a mild expression.

Steve sighed, and rubbed his hand over his face. "You're right," he said, deflating.

"I know," Grover said. "Doesn't mean I like it any more than you."

"Make the call, Grover," Steve instructed. "We'll coordinate and cooperate with HPD but I want you, Max, and Charlie out here with the CSI team." He paused, looking down the embankment again. "I have two sets of climbing gear in the truck. Chin, Kono?"

"I'll do it, boss," Kono offered quickly. "What are we looking for?"

Steve looked at the blood on the headlight, and back at Kono, his eyes filled with concern.

"We're looking for a body, Kono," he said gently. He studied her for a moment, while she processed what he was saying.

"Oh, God, boss, you think maybe . . ." she trailed off, her eyes filling with tears.

"I hope not, but we have to check," Steve said.

"You want me to go with Steve?" Chin offered.

Kono squared her shoulders. "No," she said firmly, "I can do it. It's been a while but I'm a good climber. Let's get the gear."

Chin and Grover stepped aside to make the quiet call to HPD, while Steve and Kono geared up.

"What are they doing?" Danny asked, watching them disappear over the side of the steep embankment. "Do they - oh, God, Jax is she down there?"

"They are just checking, Danny," Jax said. "Let me call a bus for you, Danny. We can get you away from here, get you checked out."

"No," Danny shook his head stubbornly. "I'm not leaving the scene."

Chin and Grover returned, standing over Danny awkwardly and solemnly.

"HPD is sending a CSI team," Grover said. "They'll want to take another statement, okay, Danny?"

Danny nodded miserably.
Steve and Kono finally reappeared, exhausted and sweating, as the CSI team finished swabbing and collecting evidence from the broken headlight of Danny's Camaro.

"Easy, boss," Kono murmured, as Steve tensed at the sight of the HPD team swarming around the car and hovering around Danny. "They're just doing their jobs."

"Anything?" Chin said, approaching them quietly.

"Nothing;" Steve said. "No indication whatsoever that anything, human or otherwise, went over that edge. What does CSI have so far?"

Chin sighed. "The blood appears to be human," he said.

"Shit, Chin," Steve swore quietly. "This is gonna kill Danny."

"Well, we don't know anything definitively," Chin said. "It will go to the lab, of course."

Duke approached them, accompanied by Grover. "Good morning - well, afternoon, now. I'm sorry about all of this. I took Danny's statement myself; he's distraught, to say the least. No charges are going to be filed; not right now. A reckless driving charge might be pending, but we'll wait until the investigation is completed."


"I know," Duke nodded. "But there's a broken headlight, smeared with what appears to be human blood, and Danny claiming that he hit a little girl. We have to find some sort of explanation, Steve."

Steve nodded, watching Danny, still hunched over on the stone wall. Jax had given up trying to comfort him or tend to his injuries, and was standing, talking quietly with Kono.

"It goes without saying that he doesn't leave the area," Duke instructed. "Not that we think he would."


The Camaro was towed back to HPD evidence. Chin hitched a ride with Kono, Grover felt sorry enough for Jax to let her drive, and that left a silent and shaken Danny to ride with Steve.

"Danny," Steve said quietly, his features etched with concern, "we're going to get to the bottom of this."

"I hit, and probably killed a little girl, Steve," Danny said, looking out the window. "What if she's hurt, all alone, lying on the side of the road?"

"We would have found something, Danny," Steve insisted. "We combed every inch of the area; all of us. So did HPD. There's nothing, Danny."

"Great," Danny huffed. "Then I'm losing my mind. Either way, it's safe to assume that my career is in jeopardy. I won't be a cop anymore. Rachel will be happy. Married to someone else, now, of course."

"Danny, stop," Steve said firmly. "You gotta have faith, man. We'll figure this out."
Danny, stop," Steve said firmly. "You gotta have faith, man. We'll figure this out."
Danny sat in his office, staring at his phone. He couldn't bring himself to pick Gracie up this afternoon, and he needed to let Rachel know quickly, so that other arrangements could be made. He took a deep breath and dialed.

"Daniel? Everything okay?" Rachel's voice came over the line.

"Rachel," Danny started, and then stopped, his throat closing in panic.

"Danny?" she pressed, "what's happened? Are you hurt? Oh my God, is it Grace?"

He pulled himself together and took a deep breath. "Grace is fine, Rachel. I was supposed to pick her up this afternoon, and . . . I'm not going to be able to. I'm sorry. Can you or the driver get her today, and can she . . . I can't have her tonight, Rachel."

"Okay, Danny," Rachel said, carefully. Danny wasn't falling over himself to apologize, which made her think that perhaps it wasn't anything so simple as just a case running late into the night. "What is happening?"

"Rachel, I . . . I may have hit someone with my car on the way back from dropping Gracie at school this morning," Daniel said. "HPD is working the case . . . the scene . . . we couldn't find, but, there was blood -" he broke off again.

"Daniel, I'm so sorry," Rachel said, horrified. "Of course, Grace will come home this afternoon, and until . . . until all of this is worked out."

"I'm sorry, Rachel, I . . . please tell Gracie I'm so sorry," Danny said. "I just . . . I can't. Not right now. I can't have her."


Danny smiled. "You're sweet, babe. There's nothing anyone can do right now but . . . thanks. I didn't expect . . . thank you."

"Danny," Rachel said, softly. "I never . . . just because we didn't work out, that doesn't mean I don't . . . " She paused, and Danny could tell her phone was ringing in another call. "Danny, I need to get this," she said, reluctantly, "but I'll take care of everything on this end, don't worry. Bye, love."

Danny sat looking at his phone until Steve came to his office door.

"Hey, partner," Steve said quietly. "How are you holding up?"

"Is there anything from the lab?" Danny asked, avoiding Steve's question.

"Nothing more," Steve said. "Hey, we're about done for the day. Let's swing by your place and pick some stuff up for you. Come home with us tonight, Danny."

Danny shook his head. "Just drop me off, Steve, I'll be fine."

"Jax says otherwise," Steve said, smiling. "She says you have a concussion and some pretty impressive bruising from the airbag and the seat belt. Humor her."
Danny looked anxiously toward the open office space.

"Everyone else has gone home already, Danny," Steve said quietly. "I understand. I know what it's like to not want to talk about it. It's okay. But we're not letting you go home alone, either."

Danny tilted his head at Steve for a moment. "Okay, babe; on one condition," Danny said.

"What's that, Danny?"

"I hadn't forgotten, Steven," Danny said quietly, "the date that I was given the case that changed my life; and yours."

Steve swallowed hard. He hadn't forgotten, either, the date September 20th yet another that would be etched permanently in his mind, the date that he stood in the middle of chaos and destruction and heard the gunshot that ended his father's life.

"So, if you want to make a stop today, we're not letting you go alone," Danny continued. "We'll wait in the truck, or whatever you need, but we're not letting you go home alone, either. I watched you throw yourself into taking care of everyone else's needs for too long, Steve. Have you even allowed yourself time to grieve for your dad?"

Steve exhaled sharply. "Danny, I . . . we have an open investigation right now," he said.

"I realize that, Steve," Danny nodded. "I'm at the center of it. I'm not likely to forget. But allowing yourself a few minutes on the way home, to stop at your dad's grave, is not going to interfere with that investigation. If that's something you want to do. No pressure; just a thought."

"Yeah, I'll . . . we'll probably do that, Danny," Steve said. "Thanks, Danny."

Jax appeared in the doorway of Steve's office, her pack slung casually over her shoulder. "Ready to head out, guys? Did you get Gracie situated, Danny?"

"Yeah, Rachel was actually really great about it," Danny said. "I'll grab my stuff."

#*#*#*#*#

Jax and Steve sat in the truck, waiting for Danny to grab some clothes from his apartment. His usual go-bag had been towed away in the back of the Camaro. He politely declined their offer to help, and taking in the tense lines of his face, and the barely restrained emotion, they didn't push.

"Anything else from HPD or the lab?" Jax asked quietly, once he was out of earshot.

Steve shook his head. "There's no proof that he hit anyone. But there's blood . . ." he sighed. "I don't know, Jax. I don't know what to think. If it turns out that he did . . ." Steve groaned. "I don't think I can take this day being any more devastating," he murmured.

Something in his tone caught Jax's attention, and she thought hard for a moment.

"Oh, shit, babe," she said, linking her fingers in his and resting her head on his shoulder. "Your dad. I'm so sorry, I didn't realize."

He kissed the top of her head and squeezed her hand. "It's our first September together, Jax; and you had so much on your mind today, don't apologize. There was . . . Danny suggested that if I wanted to stop by the . . . the, um grave . . ."

"Of course," Jax said. "Do you - is that something you want to do alone, or . . . whatever you
Steve rubbed his thumb over the side of her hand, letting himself be pleasantly distracted by marveling at how completely his hand engulfed hers.

"I think . . . if you'd be okay with it, I think I'd like you to be with me," Steve said quietly.

Jax nodded, and looked up as Danny came out of his apartment, duffel bag in hand. He smiled tiredly at his friends and headed to the truck.

"You set, Danny?" Steve asked, as Danny limped slightly to the truck and wearily hoisted himself back into the back seat.

Danny nodded. "Yeah, called Gracie to say goodnight while I was gathering up some clothes. I didn't know what to tell her. Settled on telling her that I had an accident today and that I was bruised and didn't have a car to drive."

"That's truth, the Danny," Jax said gently. "That's all we know for a fact right now."

Steve steered the truck toward the military cemetery where his father was laid to rest, and Danny nodded at him, meeting his eyes in the rear view mirror. The rush hour traffic had cleared, and it was a short drive in the gently waning sunlight. Steve pulled into the manicured setting and parked the truck. He sat for a moment, looking pensively out the window.

"I didn't have anyone to stand next to at the funeral," he said quietly. "I came back alone and thought I would leave the same way."

Danny reached forward from the backseat and squeezed his shoulder. "Two years . . . makes a difference, yeah, babe?"

Steve nodded. "Yeah." He took a deep breath and opened his door. "Two years, and I don't have to be here alone." His long legs easily slid out of the truck, and he glanced, amused as always, as Jax had to use the running board to step down.

"My knee is killing me," Danny said. "You guys go ahead; take your time."

Steve smiled at him, the lopsided, soft smile that said that he knew exactly what Danny was doing, and appreciated it. He stepped to the passenger side of the truck, where Jax was waiting quietly, and took her hand. They walked the few steps from the drive to his father's grave.

"He would have adored you, ku'uipo," Steve said quietly. "Both of my parents would have. But I think dad, especially. He would have taken you to the range," he added, laughing softly, "and man, the fun you would have had together working on the Mercury . . ."

"I would have enjoyed that," Jax said. "And I would have cooked for him. What would have have liked?"

"He would have liked your risotto," Steve said. "You would have had to explain to him what it was, of course, because he was a steak and potato guy; but he would have loved it. God, I miss him. I wish . . . I always thought there'd be time."

Jax nodded. The wish for more time was the constant; in every case, in every accident that went sideways, those left behind always wished for more time.

"I think . . . I'm still pretty sure it's my fault," Steve said, barely in a whisper. "If I had reacted differently, maybe . . ."
Jax shook her head. "You were all the way around the world," she reminded him. "And Danny said . . . it wouldn't have mattered. Hesse . . . he wouldn't have kept his word, Steve, you know that. There was absolutely nothing you could have done."

Steve nodded dubiously and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her close.

"Does it help?" Jax asked, in a whisper.

"Hmm?" Steve tilted his head down at her.

"Does it help . . . visiting here?" she clarified, looking up at him, searching his face for answers.

He thought for a moment. "It didn't. I stayed away, until Danny started nudging," he said, smiling. "At first, I thought . . . it was a reminder. But then, yeah, after a while, it started to help. I . . . I know it sounds crazy, but I came here, the day after you started working on the Mercury. I just - I wanted so badly, just for him to be able to see you work on that car. I realized then that it wasn't just that I missed him . . . I miss what could have been. I miss him knowing the team, knowing you. Sometimes, I come here so I can tell him. Is that crazy?"

"I don't think it's crazy," Jax said. "It's . . . it's very peaceful, here."

Steve nodded. "What about . . . did you ever go to the memorial? In Manhattan?"

Jax shook her head. "I got within a block, once . . . they just finished it a few months before I applied to SWAT. But before it was built, during the clean up and construction, I went back to the site."

"Did it help?" Steve asked, rubbing her shoulder absently.

She shook her head, emphatically. "It wasn't peaceful, like this. There wasn't . . . I could still imagine, that day . . . it didn't help."

Steve nodded. "For the first few months, I went in the back door of the house. Just the back door."

"I understand," Jax said. "What changed?"

"Danny," Steve said, laughing. "I started opening the front door for Danny to come in, and somehow . . . and then he started bringing Gracie over, and there was life in the house again, and it was okay."

Jax glanced back at the truck. "So Danny . . ."

Steve smiled at her slowly. "Danny, your mentor, is the heart of Five-O. I'm not sure he realizes it; but the rest of us do."

At first, Jax couldn't figure out what woke her up. She rubbed her eyes and checked her phone for the time. 2 am. There was a noise . . . a voice. An unfamiliar voice, downstairs. She reached for her SIG, silently opening her bedside drawer.

"It's infomercials," Steve murmured in her ear, stretching over her and putting his hand over hers, and pushing the drawer closed. He kissed a sleepy path down her neck, to her shoulder, while he was at it. "Danny watches infomercials when he can't sleep."

"Seriously?" Jax muttered.
"Oh yeah," Steve said, chuckling. "He says it drowns out the sound of the waves."

"Concussion check," Jax said quietly, "and then I'll sit with him."

Steve nodded. "I'll relieve you in a couple hours, so you can get a little more sleep."

"Hmm," Jax said, noncommitted. She slipped out of bed and pulled on a pair of gym shorts.

Danny sighed when he heard Jax's soft footfalls on the stairs.

"I'm sorry, babe," he said quietly. "I didn't mean to wake you up."

"Hey, I'm here to check on my patient," Jax said, sitting down on the coffee table in front of him. She picked up the penlight she'd left on the table earlier, and flashed it in his eyes, carefully, one at a time. "You should have let us take you in, Danny. You definitely have a concussion."

"I know," Danny said, "but that's all it is. Besides, I have you."

"And the limping?" Jax said. "How many fingers?"

"Two. And I may have tweaked my bad knee," Danny responded.

"Gimme," Jax said, gesturing to his knee.

Danny winced as he rearranged himself on the sofa so that Jax could investigate. Her deft fingers probed the swollen knee, and he hissed in pain.

"It's sprained, Danny," she chided. "I'll get ice packs."

She returned from the kitchen with two soft cold packs. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"What was I supposed to say?" Danny asked. "Oh, yeah, I may have killed a little girl, but please, by all means, look at my knee, it's a little sore?"

"Danny," Jax said, sliding next to him on the sofa. She linked her arm through his and held his hand, twining their fingers together. Grabbing the remote out of his hand, she flipped through the channels until she found a hockey game. "There's no evidence. You don't know that you hurt anyone."

"I just keep seeing her, Jax. Her little red shoes . . ." Danny swallowed hard.

"I know, Danny, but we couldn't find a thing," Jax reminded him. "Not a shred of evidence of a child."

Danny nodded. "I hope there's some other explanation. I'm not sure I'll be sleeping until we do." He stopped and tilted his head at the TV. "Hockey? Really?"

"What, Danny? It relaxes me," Jax shrugged. She snuggled close to him and nestled her head on his shoulder.

Danny grinned as he felt himself relax in spite of his distress. He pressed a kiss to her unruly curls. "Thanks, babe," he whispered.

Steve found them in the same position in two hours.

"Hey," Danny whispered, as Steve folded himself into the recliner. "She's asleep; why don't you
Danny shook his head. "You were standing at your dad's grave just a handful of hours ago. How are you?"

"It's . . . harder," Steve admitted quietly. "It's harder now than it was, at first. That first six months, hell, the first year . . . I just - it was all about solving the case, you know? And making sure the paperwork was done, and setting up the financial stuff for Mary. Starting Five-O."

Danny nodded. "And now?"

"Now . . . it's like, every new thing that happens, I realize I won't get to share it with him. I won't get to introduce him to Jax. I won't get to see the two of them work on the car together," Steve said, leaning forward and rubbing a hand over his face. He drew in a shaky breath. "There's just . . . I would have liked to have been able to tell him, you know?"

"I'm sorry, babe," Danny said quietly. Jax shifted next to him and he rubbed her hand absently.

"Is there coffee?" Jax mumbled.

Danny and Steve both chuckled.

"There may as well be coffee," Danny sighed. "I don't think there's going to be any more sleep."

Kono watched the sun rise over the water. She still came out, once or twice a week, if the case load wasn't too heavy, to surf the early morning waves. Before the tourists, before most of the island. She loved the quiet, the power of the waves, the sound of the gulls.

Today she'd come to a little spot close to a pier . . . not the safest place to surf, but there was a stand that would open just about the time she finished, that had the most amazing malasadas. She was waiting now, letting the gradually intensifying rays of the sun warm her skin. Local fishermen were starting to dot along the pier and she watched them idly, mesmerized by the repetitive, familiar movements.

An elderly gentleman was using a cast net to gather his bait for the day. Over and over, he tossed the net, pulled it back. If Kono fixed her eyes on the water below the pier, it looked as if it just appeared and disappeared, like magic. Toss, pull . . . toss, pull . . . in the water, and then gone.

Something nagged at the back of Kono's mind as she watched.

Toss, pull . . . there, gone . . .

Danny, the Camaro, the broken headlight, the blood. His insistence that there was a little girl, but no evidence. Nothing.
"Holy shit," Kono exclaimed loudly, drawing a disapproving glare from the woman setting up the stand. "Sorry, auntie," Kono said, cringing as she gathered up her board and towel. Malasadas forgotten, she jogged to her car, strapped down her board, and headed for the palace.

#*#*#*#*

Kono wasn't surprised to see Steve's Silverado parked when she arrived. Too impatient to wait for the elevator, she ran up the stairs into the main office. Glancing around, she could see Steve, Danny, and Jax, all sitting quietly in their offices. Steve and Jax appeared to be filling out reports, but Danny . . . vibrant, larger than life, perpetual motion Danny . . . sat at his desk, staring out the window.

"Guys," Kono called out, "I have an idea. You might think I'm crazy, but . . . " Her fingers flew rapidly over the touch screen keyboard and a graphic appeared on the plasma.

The three came out of their offices, curious.

"What is it, Kono?" Steve asked. "Are you okay?" he added, taking in her damp and disheveled appearance.

"I'm fine . . . I was surfing by the pier this morning - I know, I know," she added, at Steve's frown. "I was going to get malasadas, you know, from the stand . . . but I was watching . . . okay, look at this."

A short video demonstrating the use of the cast net appeared on the plasma.

"What are we looking at?" Danny asked.

"Okay, you were convinced, right, that you saw a little girl?" Kono asked.

Danny nodded miserably. "I swear, she went over the hood of my car," he said. "I can't get it out of my mind."

"Okay, and then we couldn't find a single shred of physical evidence," Kono continued. "Just . . . just look at the video. Is it possible?"

Steve studied the video, playing on a loop.

"You mean, someone tossed a little girl . . . " he asked, still confused.

"Not a little girl," Kono said, shaking her head. "Something . . . a doll, a mannequin, something to make Danny think he hit a little girl. And then yanked it back and disappeared."

The four watched the video over and over.

"It's possible," Steve said. "I think it's possible."

Danny nodded slowly. "But why . . . or who?"

"You've worked plenty of high-profile cases, Danny," Steve said. "We all have enemies." Steve paced around the table. "And then, there are plenty of people who would just like to discredit Five-O."
"Including the person who suggested starting it?" Danny asked quietly. "Have we gotten too close to something?"

Steve shook his head. "We go back to the scene; look at it differently. Kono and Jax, call Chin and Grover. Have them meet us there."

"You okay, Danny?" Steve asked, as they rounded the corner and parked at the scene of the accident.

"No, not really," Danny said. "Steve . . . it was so real. Every time I closed my eyes last night, I saw it. Over and over. I heard it. Her. I heard her, hitting the hood of the car."

"Wait, Danny . . . say that again," Steve said, turning to look at Danny.

"I heard her hitting the hood of the car?" Danny repeated, confused.

"Yes. That's not the first time you've said it that way, either," Steve said. "That you 'heard her hitting the hood of the car'."

"I dunno, Steve, you might just be reading in to it," Danny sighed.

"I don't think so," Steve said emphatically. "You have an attention to detail unlike anyone I've ever met, Danny. I think it's significant. I think that's how you remember, really remember, what happened - that something hit the hood of your car. Not that you hit something."

Danny rubbed his eyes, exhausted, and blew out a sharp breath. "Okay. Okay, yeah. Let's go with this idea, then and see what we can find. We might as well, because otherwise, I -" his voice broke with strain. "Otherwise I'm not sure how I'm gonna get past this."

Steve squeezed his shoulder. "I know, Danno," he said. "Come on, let's see what we can find."

The team scoured the surrounding area, working silently, until Chin called out.

"I think I might have something," he said.

The rest of the team jogged toward him. In his gloved hand, there was a small section of cording. He held it up to Steve.

"That looks like military grade," Steve murmured. "Let's get it back to the lab."

"Wow," Charlie Fong said, as Steve and Danny came into the lab. "You guys are good. I was just getting ready to call you."

"We were bringing you something to look at," Steve said, "but you go first."

"I'm not sure how, or why . . . or if you'll even believe me," Charlie said, "but I've run the test repeatedly. The blood on the broken headlight of the Camaro?"

"Yeah," Danny said, a feeling of dread in his stomach.

"It's Steve's," Charlie said.
"What?!” both men exclaimed.

"That's impossible," Steve said.

"I don't know what to tell you," Charlie said. "But there's absolutely no doubt. It's Steve's blood on Danny's car."
"Charlie, I don't even have a paper cut on me," Steve protested. "How could the blood on Danny's car be mine?"

"That will be something for your team to figure out, McGarrett," Charlie said, shaking his head. "We ran it against missing persons, and came up with nothing. Someone suggested running it against local law enforcement and military, since so many military personnel live on the islands. Perfect match. The blood is yours."

They gave Charlie the small section of elastic cording found at the scene, and headed back upstairs.

"Anything?" Kono asked anxiously, as Danny and Steve came off the elevator. "What?" she added, taking in their beleaguered expressions.

"Charlie is going to run the cording, but," Steve hesitated, "yeah, the blood on the broken headlight? Turns out it's mine."

"How?" Chin asked, surprised.

"Who the hell cares," Danny blurted out. "Tell me if I'm getting even crazier as the day goes on, because I didn't sleep last night, and maybe I'm hallucinating: but if the blood on the car is Steve's, and Steve is standing right here, safe and sound, then does this mean I didn't hit a little girl?"

"It would certainly appear that way to me," Grover said, the rest of the team nodding in agreement. "Add to that Kono's theory, and finding what Steve thinks is military grade elastic cording at the scene, and I think - Danny?" Grover broke off as Danny paled and looked as if he was going to collapse.

"Whoa there, babe," Jax said, grabbing him by the elbow and turning him to lean against the center table. His hands were shaking as she grabbed his wrist to confirm that his pulse was racing. Jax pulled her ever-present penlight out of one of her cargo pockets, and flashed it in his eyes. "Danny, you okay?"

"I'm okay," Danny laughed, his voice shaky. "It's just... the last twenty-four hours have been almost my worst nightmare, you know? I mean, other than anything happening to Gracie, I can't think of anything more horrifying than being responsible for hurting or, oh, God... I thought I had killed someone's little girl, Jax. You can't imagine... not entirely... you will, someday, when you have kids. Once you have a baby, the idea of a child being hurt... it's just totally different to you. Am I right, Grover?" Danny added, smiling up at Grover who nodded in understanding.

Jax let go of Danny's wrist and tapped her penlight into her palm. "I think my batteries are going," she said, turning away from the team and heading to the elevator, "I better grab some new ones while I'm thinking about it."

"Okay," Steve said, turning his attention back to the plasma screens. "Until we have a reason to think otherwise, we go with Kono's theory. Someone is trying to set Danny up; and we need to know who, and why."

"I hate to even suggest it, but..." Chin hesitated. "I know when we first got started, things were pretty tense between you and Rachel, Danny; trying to sort out custody of Gracie. Do you think..."
there's any possibility?"

Danny shook his head. "I understand the question, Chin, and I'm not saying we shouldn't rule it out. But my gut instinct? Rachel and Stan have nothing to do with this. Things have been mutually agreeable for quite a while now. But, it's an obvious question. No offense taken."

"Okay, so it could be someone with a personal vendetta against Danny, which means we need to look at some of his cases," Grover suggested.

"Or it could be someone trying to discredit the team," Kono added.

Steve glanced up at her. "In which case, this may be just the beginning. So everyone needs to be alert for anything suspicious."

Kono looked at him, her eyes wide with skepticism. "Boss, you do realize who you're talking to here, right? We're, like, magnets for suspicious activity."

Chin chuckled. "You have a point, cuz."

"Speaking of suspicious," Grover said, glancing toward the elevator, "I'm gonna go see what's keeping my partner. I don't trust her in the armory unattended . . . Lord help us if the boys at motor pool have asked her to check on one of the vehicles; we'll never get her back."

Steve smiled as Grover ambled off toward the elevator.

"Okay, so, Danny, you'll need to focus on a review of your cases starting from when you made detective in New Jersey; it's an outside chance, but stranger things have happened. Kono, work the angle that someone is trying to discredit us as a group; I don't know where to tell you to begin, but I trust your instincts. Chin, you're the one least likely to stick your foot in it, so would you make some very discreet inquiries; start with Stan's lawyer. I'll have Grover and Jax focus specifically on any gang-related cases that Danny's worked, especially any that cross-reference between Jersey and HPD," Steve said.

"Way to delegate, boss," Kono said, her dimples flashing. "What are you going to do, go surfing?"

Steve grimaced. "I wish. I'm going to have to have a chat with the governor. She needs to be kept in the loop on this."

"And you're going to see if you can get a feel for how much she already knows," Chin guessed.

"Yeah," Steve said, his shoulders already starting to feel the strain of tension and stress. "That, too."

Chin gave his shoulder a sympathetic squeeze on the way to his office.

#*#*#*#*#

Jax found herself in front of the medical supply cabinet, berating herself for yet again running like a little kid to her blanket fort.

"Nolan, you're an idiot," she mumbled to herself.

The elevator whooshed open behind her, and she glanced over her shoulder. "Hey, Grover," she said, "Sorry, I . . . there should be a box of batteries in here, somewhere."
"Ummhmm," Grover said, walking slowly to stand next to her. "Maybe on the top shelf? That's a little out of your reach. Let me check." He gently and carefully moved the neatly labeled boxes around. "Or you could have just pulled the batteries out of your top right desk drawer, where you keep them," he added softly.

Jax stood motionless.

"See, the thing about McGarrett," Grover continued, his voice soft and slow, "is he builds a good team. It's like an instinct with him; although I'm guessing the Navy taught him a few things. He's put together the maturity and experience of Chin; the fresh eyes and gung-ho of Kono; Danny, of course, one of the finest detectives any of us have ever worked with. Then he added you and me: you're a crack medic, which Lord knows this team needs, and you're fearless undercover. But me . . . sometimes I wonder what I contribute to the team; why McGarrett gave me a shot."

"Hey, you're SWAT, right? What other explanation is needed? Plus you're an expert on gang related violence and crime," Jax reminded him, curious about where he was going with this conversation, but relieved that it didn't seem to be about her. She continued to straighten the boxes that neatly lined the shelf of the cabinet.

"True," Grover nodded. "I have a fair share of experience there. Lotta years on the force, worked my way up through the ranks . . . I like to think I have a lot of experience as a good partner."

"You're an awesome partner, Grover," Jax said.

"I hope so," he answered. "Hope all my old partners would say that; you know, I hope even more that my wife would say that. Lots of things in common with a good marriage and a good partnership, you know? That's why people are always teasing McGarrett and Williams about being married."

Jax chuckled. "It's true."

"Yeah, lots of similarities. Patience, compromise . . . picking up on the little things, you know?" Grover said. "Renee picks up on the little things. She can tell when I've had a case involving kids, for example. She says I get a certain look. I bet Danny does, too; bet Steve picks up on it."

Jax nodded and flicked open a package of pressure bandages, noting that it was less than half full. She checked off a box on the clipboard hung inside the cabinet door.

"I try to pick up on the little things. Like, when Danny said that you'd understand some day, when you had kids . . . all of a sudden, your penlight didn't work," Grover said. His tone was conversational, and he continued to line up the boxes on the top shelf, turning them so that the labels were facing forward. "Now, I haven't been your partner very long, but I can put pieces together."

Jax leaned her forehead against the shelf. "Grover, please," she whispered. "Don't."

"Okay," Grover said mildly, "Maybe I misread. Possibly it just reminded me of the years that Renee and I were wanting to have a baby, and it looked like maybe we weren't going to be able to. People said things, offhand, not meaning anything by it . . . sometimes, Renee would need to go check something on the stove, or refill her glass . . . so she could just have a minute, you know, to work through how that made her feel. Maybe it just reminded me of that." Grover paused, resting his hand on Jax's shoulder, the one he knew still ached sometimes. He squeezed it gently, not forcing her to look up or turn around. Solid, comforting. "You think, maybe that's what it reminded me of?" he asked gently.
Jax nodded silently, not trusting her voice to respond.

"Well, that could be," Grover said. "Those were tough years. Tougher on Renee, I think, because she had this crazy idea that somehow she was disappointing me. Nothing could have been further from the truth, by the way. Anyway, I hope you find the batteries. If not, maybe there's some in the office. You know, when you've finished looking down here."

Grover gave her shoulder another squeeze and started to amble off toward the elevator again.

"Grover," Jax said quietly. "Thanks. Thanks for, um, helping me look for the batteries."

"Commander McGarrett, to what do I owe the privilege?" Governor Jameson asked, standing up and shaking Steve's hand. "I was about to call you; I have an assignment for your team, but first, let me know what's happening. You said that there was a situation with Detective Williams? Is he okay?"

"Yes, ma'am," Steve said, sitting down in the chair indicated by the governor. "He was in what at first appeared to be a minor car accident yesterday morning." Steve watched the governor's face carefully for any indication of a response.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "Was he injured?"

"Mild concussion, and he strained his knee a bit," Steve said. "But, of course, that was nothing compared to the mental anguish he's experienced, thinking that he struck a little girl with his car."

"Oh, how horrible," the governor gasped, covering her mouth with her hand. "But - you said, 'thinking' that he struck a little girl. Is that not the case?"

"No, ma'am, not as far as we can tell," Steve continued. "In fact, there doesn't seem to be evidence that he struck anyone. HPD has been involved, and their CSI teams have conducted a thorough search and investigation. There's absolutely no evidence that another car, or person, was involved. In fact, there's some evidence to the contrary." He kept the detail of his blood being found on Danny's car to himself.

"Well, I'm sure that must be a relief," Governor Jameson said.

"It is," Steve replied, "however, it leaves us with the current theory that someone is trying to set Danny up. That, as you can imagine, is a troubling situation."

"It is, indeed," the governor said. "Whatever you need, Commander, you'll have the full cooperation of this office. Keep me posted."

"Yes, ma'am," Steve said. "Now, you said that you had an assignment for my team? Obviously, we'll need to keep investigating this incident, but we'll do our best to manage that alongside whatever it is that you need."

"Thank you, Steve," the governor said, slipping easily, as she often did, between the more formal and informal address. "There is a high profile businessman coming in from Okinawa for a few days. His company develops banking and finance software, very high end, and for the highest level of security. In fact, he's here to discuss deals with both the Bank of Hawaii, and also to put in his first bid as a civilian contractor for the state offices. As you can imagine, security is a concern."

"Yes, ma'am," Steve said. "I'm sure my team can handle it. Does he have a security team? I'm happy to coordinate." Steve shifted somewhat uncomfortably in his seat. Truth be told, he rarely
was "happy" to coordinate with other teams, but he knew that as a government task force, he would be expected to play nicely with the visitors.

"He does, and my office will contact you with all of that information. However, I've asked that he instruct his team to let you and your team take the lead on all security matters while he is our guest," the governor said. "And, he's also made a special request, one which I think your team is uniquely qualified to honor."

"What would that be, ma'am?" Steve asked.

"There are, as usual, many business dinners and social events also on Mr. Kantaro's agenda for the five days he plans to be here," the governor began. "I'm not sure how the military does it, but in the business world, the bigger the deal, the . . . well, the bigger the deal, to put it simply. And these contracts are very, very big deals. All of the corporate executives, along with their significant others, will expect to entertain Mr. Kantaro at dinners, cocktail hours, and so on."

"I understand," Steve said, starting to feel suspicious.

"Obviously, security is as high of a priority at these events, and yet harder to arrange," the governor continued. "Also, Mr. Kantaro, who is single, usually has his sister accompany him. It can be . . . awkward, to say the least, to mingle alone in a predominantly couple-oriented social gathering. However, Mr. Kantaro's sister is unable to make the trip this time, so he has personally requested that a member of the security team be assigned as his companion at these events. I've agreed that it would be a good plan, to kill two birds with one stone, if you will: eliminate the awkwardness of having to attend events solo, as well as have a member of the security team as close as possible to Mr. Kantaro."

Steve studied the governor for a moment. "Forgive me, Governor Jameson, but it almost sounds to me like Mr. Kantaro has asked for a . . . personal escort for his trip; and it sounds like you've agreed. And volunteered one of my team without so much as consulting me."

"It seemed to be a reasonable request," the governor said defensively.

"Fine, then," Steve said, nodding his head toward her. "I'll be delighted to accompany Mr. Kantaro myself."

"But that's not - you're not - he wouldn't -" the governor sputtered.

"Problem, governor?" Steve drawled. "Last I checked, even the Navy had repealed DADT. Are you assuming that Mr. Kantaro would require a female companion? Maybe you should check."

Governor Jameson smoothed down the front of her expensive tailored jacket and collected herself. "Amusing, Commander McGarrett. Yes, Mr. Kantaro does, in fact, require a female companion."

"And in the future, Governor, I'd appreciate it if that is a conversation that you would defer to my team," Steve said tersely. "I'll have Kono briefed for the role of primary personal security for Mr. Kantaro. She's already had some experience. She's familiar with the protocol, and she can hold her own with close quarter martial arts."

"Well, that would work under normal circumstances," the governor said nervously. "But I'm afraid in this case that would be completely unsuitable."

"And why would that be?" Steve said, standing up and crossing his arms over his chest.

Governor Jameson, not to be intimidated, stood as well. "Mr. Kantaro, like many Asian gentlemen, is . . .smaller in stature. He's specifically requested that he be assigned someone who
will not tower over him. You've obviously never had to take that into consideration, but . . .” she trailed off uncertainly, finding herself in the cross hairs of a patented SEAL stare.

"So you're saying you've already agreed that Officer Nolan will serve as Mr. Kantaro's . . . primary security officer," Steve said coldly. "You could have just said so, Governor, and saved yourself the mental gymnastics of justifying why you're treating this task force like an escort service."

Governor Jameson flinched as Steve's voice rose in volume and intensity on the last phrase. She pulled herself up to her full height and fixed Steve with a haughty gaze.

"May I remind you, Commander, that Officer Nolan is indebted to this office?" she said coolly, gesturing around her office with a manicured finger.

"No, ma'am, with all due respect, you may not," Steve said. "This office is, however, indebted to Officer Nolan. In the brief time that she's been a member of HPD and Five-O, Officer Nolan has gone undercover three times, bringing in a serial killer, a high-ranking MS13 member, and a kidnapper who was threatening the safety and financial interests of one of your personal associates. She's served admirably and effectively, protecting the state of Hawaii and its citizens. Before that, she was a highly decorated officer, and if you'd taken time to review her file, you would know that anything - anything - this office can do for her, is a mere token of appreciation on behalf of the United States government, which you claim to represent, in honor of her service on 9/11, which incidentally, was so far above and beyond the call of duty that it could have justifiably ended her career with a full benefits medical retirement. So, no, governor, you may not remind me, that Officer Nolan, or any other members of my team, are indebted to this office."

Governor Jameson stood speechless.

"Now, if you'll connect me with Mr. Kantaro's team, we'll begin coordinating with them, starting by making sure they understand that Mr. Kantaro as been, in agreement with your office, assigned one of the most exceptional officers ever to have served our fine state," Steve said, turning sharply to leave. "I'm sure that Mr. Kantaro, and his team, will have no problem treating Officer Nolan with the respect and courtesy she deserves. In fact," Steve added, "I'm reasonably sure that once you have taken time to . . . refresh your memory as to her qualifications, you'll agree that she was long overdue a promotion in rank while at HPD; and I expect her next salary and benefits statement to reflect that fact."

Steve didn't look back as he strode out of the office. He was thankful for the silent, solitary drive back to the palace as an opportunity to gather his thoughts. It didn't help much, and he was still radiating frustration and nervous energy as he stalked back into the Five-O offices, a dark scowl on his face.

"Whoa, babe," Danny said, raising his eyebrows. "I take it that did not go well?"

"No, it did not," Steve said tersely, pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes as the rest of the team filed out of their offices, curious as to the cause of his obvious frustration. "Guys, I'm sorry, but we're going to have to juggle two cases now: the investigation into Danny's little 'accident', and now we have a security detail we have to oversee."

Kono groaned. "Please, boss, not another rich businessman or politician," she pleaded. "Can't we just, I don't know - go shoot something?"

"I don't know," Danny said, attempting to lighten the mood. "These things usually mean we get to see you in evening wear, which, I must say, is always a delight."
The look on Steve's face told Danny that his attempt at humor was misguided.

"Or not," Danny added quickly. "Geez, Steven, who pissed in your Cheerios?"

Steve looked around, frowning. "Where's Jax? It would seem that the governor has taken it upon herself to volunteer her for a specific role in our next production."

Grover was the last to join them at the table. "She should be up in just a minute," he said easily. "Went to get batteries and took a few minutes to check inventory. What's up?"

"Security detail," Chin said grimly, and Grover rolled his eyes.

The elevator dinged, and Jax stepped out. When all the eyes of the team turned to her, she shot a panicked glance at Grover. He realized instantly that she'd misread the situation.

"Jax," Grover said quickly, "it seems the governor of our fair state has a special job just for you."

Danny tilted his head at Jax; he'd not missed the look of panic, nor the expression of relief that followed. She ignored him and looked at Steve instead.

"Why do I get the distinct impression I'm not gonna like my job?" she demanded, putting her hands on her hips. Kono stood next to her, in a show of feminine solidarity, her arms crossed.

"It was not my fault," Steve protested. "This guy we're protecting, Mr. Kantaro, needs someone to attend social events and provide security. Apparently, he's specifically ruled out someone taller than him," Steve said, glancing apologetically at Kono and Jax.

"Oh for crying out loud," Jax muttered. "All those years of police experience, all those paramedic classes - why bother, when all I needed was to be a haole. A short haole."

"What's this guy's deal?" Danny asked, frowning. "Is he just insecure about his height, or is he on some sort of power trip?"

"I have no idea," Steve said, reaching for his phone, which was buzzing in his pocket. "We can find out; the governor's office just sent over the preliminary file on Mr. Kantaro." Steve placed his phone on the smart table, and with a deft movement of his elegant fingers, Chin had the file open for viewing on the plasma screen.

"Well, no apparent reason for him to be insecure," Kono murmured appreciatively. The photos of Mr. Kantaro revealed a handsome, barely middle-aged man, built much like Danny: shorter, yes, but undeniably fit, with powerful shoulders. His dark, almost black hair had streaks of silver at the temples.

Steve scowled even further and Kono repressed a giggle in the interest of his blood pressure.

"Kantaro will be here in twenty-four hours," Chin noted, flipping through the other information and trying to get the team back on track. "That's not a lot of time to prepare. How do you want to divide the workload between security detail and investigating the set-up?"

"We keep the same focus on the set-up; we'll just have to work in paperwork and research around security," Steve said. "Sorry, Danny; you know we want answers."

"I know, babe," Danny said. "We'll get it figured out."

"Okay, as far as the security detail goes," Steve said, "we'll have to work out the final details once I can consult with Kantaro's team. They've been told that we will take lead while they're on the
island, but we'll use whatever information they give us, especially intel on any perceived threats. In the meantime, Chin, you'll take tech - we'll need two-ways, especially a discreet earpiece for Jax. Danny, you'll work with Chin on this one, since you're still not at one hundred percent with your knee, and you'll both be comms and surveillance. Grover, you and I will be in the background, in full tac. Kono, I'm going to insist that you shadow Kantaro and Jax. You'll have an invitation to any social events; we'll see if we can pair you up with someone in his personal detail."

"If not, I imagine we could enlist support from, oh, say, the US Marshal Service," Danny teased, his eyes twinkling.

"Jax, you'll be the closest and final line of defense for Kantaro himself. If someone gets to him, that means they've made it past us," Steve said. "You'll need to brush up on your close quarter combat. In fact, you and Kono go ahead - work in some sparring this afternoon."

"Right now?" Kono asked, excitement lighting up her features.

"Yes, yes, right now," Steve said, waving them off.

Jax shot him a delighted grin, and he found himself smiling back at her, some of the tension and strain evaporating.

"Bye," Kono yelled over her shoulder. She tugged Jax into the elevator, wanting to make their escape before something happened to detain them.

"Should we warn HPD that they're coming over to use the gym?" Chin wondered aloud.

"Are you kidding?" Grover asked, incredulous. "Every officer on shift would find some reason to be in the gym. Law and order would be overthrown while HPD watches them spar."

Steve grinned, nodded and then returned to pulling up the files with Chin, looking at the preliminary information. They murmured over arrival procedures, already engrossed in planning.

Danny chuckled, then glanced at the closing elevator doors. "Hey, what did we miss, earlier?" he asked quietly, looking at Grover. "There was a look. I definitely saw a look."

Grover looked down at Danny, impassive. "You've got more than enough on your mind right now, Williams," he said, kindly. "And I don't want to put what is just speculation on my part on top of that. She's fine; if I thought otherwise, I'd say so. On that you have my word."

Danny studied Grover for a moment, then smiled, satisfied with his answer. "Well, it goes against my instincts not to meddle, but you're a good partner, and Jax trusts you, so I will too." He turned and called to his partner. "Steve, let's go see what Charlie has in the lab."

Steve nodded, indicating a file to Chin, and then fell in step with Danny and headed to the elevator.

"Charlie, anything?" Steve asked, pushing through the double doors into the lab.

"Invista IR compliant nylon," Charlie said.

"In English?" Danny retorted.

"Definitely military grade," Steve said. "Which may or may not be significant; it can be purchased at surplus, I'm sure."
"But someone who would have access to both Steve's blood, and military grade elastic cording . . ." Danny said. "That combination seems significant."

"No kidding," Steve said. "Thanks, Charlie."

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When Steve and Danny returned to the office, Chin was waiting for them with an update.

"We've heard from Mr. Kantaro's security team," he said. "It consists of six members; three of whom are already en route here. They expect to arrive at our office in the morning for preliminary briefing. The other three are with Mr. Kantaro on his flight."

"It's a tight time schedule," Steve said, "which is a challenge for us, but from a security perspective, I like it. If we don't have a lot of notice, that means no one else does, either. Any indication of whether or not they suspect a threat?"

"Not that I can tell," Chin replied, "it seems fairly routine."

"That would be nice, for a change," Danny said.

"Since I assume we will be pretty much on-duty for twenty-four seven during this security detail," Grover said, coming out of his office, "I'd sure like to go on home and spend the evening with Renee and the kids."

"Absolutely," Steve said. "Go ahead, all of you, get out of here." He frowned, remembering that Danny still didn't have the Camaro back. "Danny, do you have Gracie this evening? We can get a car from HPD motor pool."

Danny looked at his watch. "You know, I haven't called Rachel to update her; I'm sure she'd be fine with me having Gracie this evening. Yeah, that would be great."

"Come on, let's head on over there," Steve suggested. "You can call Rachel on the way."

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They ended up at the gym, while waiting for a car to be brought around for Danny.

"That, my friend, is a thing of beauty," Danny said, watching Kono and Jax spar. They were in a corner of the gym, out of the way, but still attracting more than a few appreciative glances. "It's poetry in motion," Danny added.

Steve scowled again, and a few officers decided they needed to be . . . elsewhere.

"I've never seen you jealous," Danny commented. "You barely noticed the men falling over themselves at Catherine's feet."

Steve looked down, abashed. "I . . . it's different."

"Oh, it's definitely different," Danny agreed. "For one thing, Catherine was well aware of her effect on the male species. As is Kono, for that matter. Jax, on the other hand . . . is delightfully oblivious. Which, honestly, always worried me a little."

"Worried you?" Steve asked. "Block with the flat of your arm, not the side," he called out, and Kono and Jax both nodded.

"Yeah, worried me," Danny continued. "Because, honestly, she didn't understand that guys were
"Yeah, worried me," Danny continued. "Because, honestly, she didn't understand that guys were hitting on her. Like it never crossed her mind that they would. And worried me because . . . well, why wouldn't it cross her mind? I mean, I'm careful to praise Gracie for being smart, and kind, and all that. I know to do that, I'm a good parent. But, I do tell Gracie that she's beautiful, too, you know?

"Gracie is beautiful," Steve agreed, smiling. "She looks like Rachel," he couldn't help but add, and Danny smacked him playfully.

"Yes," Danny said then, sighing. "She does look like Rach, doesn't she?" He fell silent and pensive for a moment, then pulled his attention back to Kono and Jax. "You think she can hold her own? I know she had to be good to make SWAT, but it's been a while."

Steve nodded. "She's looking pretty good; I know she and Kono hit the gym and Kono's had her train with her martial arts instructor a few times. She will always have the element of surprise to her advantage; no one expects her to be dangerous to them, so if she hits first and hits fast she always has an excellent chance of a good outcome."

"Okay," Danny said slowly, "that's how Steve the Navy SEAL would describe one of his team members. Tell me how Steve the person feels about sending Jax in on this operation."

"I don't like it," Steve said bluntly. "I don't like that the governor set it up without discussing it with us; I don't like that we don't know anything about this guy; and I don't like . . . I just don't like the whole idea of it."

"You don't like the idea of Jax accompanying a wealthy, nice-looking guy around the island for several days," Danny said. "And then there's also the idea that she might be put in danger. But mostly, you don't like the idea of Jax hanging out with another guy." Danny raised his eyebrows at Steve, daring him to disagree.

"Fine, Danny," Steve said, exasperated. "I don't like it, okay? But it's the job."

"And if it wasn't the job?" Danny asked. "I think . . . I think you're realizing that you've committed to someone without even realizing it, and now you're wondering if she feels the same way."

Steve's silence was enough answer for Danny.

"You big lug," Danny said. "Nut up and tell her. Here comes Travis, he must have brought the car over, I gotta go. Remember what I said, Steve," Danny said, walking away. He called back over his shoulder, perhaps a little more loudly than necessary, "grow a pair."

Kono glanced over, amused, and then staggered backwards when Jax took advantage of her distraction, and landed a neat combination that at full power would have easily knocked her off her feet.

"Hey," Kono said loudly, laughing, and the two of them dissolved into giggles, playfully wrestling and poking each other.

Steve watched them, shaking his head in fond amusement.

"Come on, boss, show us what you've got," Kono called out.

Steve hesitated, then shrugged and went over to the mat. He unlaced his boots and toed them off. "Okay, so both of you need to work on your blocking," he started.

Another hour flew by as Kono and Jax learned and practiced some of the finer points of close
quarter combat. Steve nodded in satisfaction as Jax perfected a tricky block and punch combination.

"Good," he said, absently rubbing his jaw where she'd made contact. "That's excellent," he added, losing his train of thought as she stood in front of him, flushed, eyes sparking, her hair in damp ringlets around her face.

"Now, you have to practice doing that in heels and a dress," Kono pointed out, laughing.

Jax scowled as she started pulling off her sparring gear. "Is it too late to ask for a transfer back to SWAT? Seriously. I never had to wear heels in SWAT."

They met up outside the HPD locker rooms and headed for the parking lot.

"I'm starving," Jax announced, seeming somewhat surprised by the idea.

"Good," Steve said, smiling at her. "Take out or cook?"

"Oh, let's cook," she replied. "We won't see the inside of a kitchen until this guy goes home, I'm sure. If you'll grill something, I'll make those potatoes you like."

"With the green stuff, and the cheese?" Steve asked, his face lighting up.

"Chives," Jax laughed, "and yes."

They were almost to Steve's truck when his phone rang. He reached for it apprehensively. "Danny," he said, relieved. "What's up?" He glanced at Jax, mouthing 'Danny and Gracie for dinner' at her, smiling when she nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah, man, that would be great. We're heading there now. Jax is making those potatoes."

It was a perfect late afternoon; the sun well past the glaring light of mid-day, the air warm, and the breeze gentle. Steve and Jax had slipped into swimwear and waited in the chairs by the water, anticipating Danny and Gracie's arrival, and mulling over the unlikely situation of Steve's blood on Danny's car.

"It's downright creepy, is what it is," Jax was saying, and then they could hear Gracie's voice as she came barrelling around the side of the house.

"Auntie Jax! Uncle Steve!" she called out, her little feet carrying her to them at top speed, her pigtails flying out behind her. Danny followed more slowly, still favoring his knee, but with a wide smile on his face.

"Hey, Gracie!" Steve said, standing and swooping her up as she leapt into his arms. "You smell like sunscreen. What, you think you're going to swim or something? That's a crazy idea."

"Uncle Steve," Gracie laughed, "I don't have any homework! I got it all done while Danno talked to mommy, and they both said that I could swim, if it's okay with you."

"Of course it is," Steve said, putting her down gently. "We had the same idea, see?"

Gracie turned to Jax, and grinned widely when she saw that Jax, too, was wearing a swim top and board shorts. "Auntie Jax, will you swim with me?" she asked, throwing herself into Jax's lap and
winding her arms around Jax enthusiastically. "Danno says that you caught a bad guy by pretending to be his sister and that it was a lot of fun and that for once you didn't get hurt. Can you tell me all about it? That sounds like a case that mommy wouldn't mind me talking about."

Jax chuckled and wrapped her arms around Gracie, dropping a kiss to the top of her head.

"I'm so glad you didn't get hurt, Auntie Jax," Gracie continued, snuggling her head into the crook of Jax's neck. "Mommy says that probably means that you're developing a . . . a long-absent sense of self-preservation. I'm glad. I love you and Uncle Steve, I worry about you getting hurt."

Jax felt Gracie's little arms tighten around her, felt the weight of her head tucked against her shoulder. She rubbed Gracie's back as she stood up, Gracie's legs wrapping around her waist.

"I need to just run and turn the potatoes on to cook, so they'll be ready later," Jax said, gently untangling herself from Gracie. "I'll be right back to swim with you, okay?"

Gracie looked after her as she walked back toward the house.

"Danno," Gracie said, looking up at her father earnestly. "What did I do to make Auntie Jax sad?"


"Danno," Gracie said, giving him the eyebrow arch she inherited from her mother, "her hug was sad, and she hiccuped. You know, like you do when you're about to cry."

Danny looked at Steve, confused, and got a shrug and a head shake in return.

"Okay, Gracie, let's do this," Jax said, coming back out of the house, this time carrying a handful of towels and a Longboard, which she handed to Danny.

"Bless you," Danny said, accepting the drink gratefully.

"Figured, the last couple of days, you earned it," Jax said, standing on tiptoe to kiss his cheek.

Gracie had already pulled Steve into the water, and Jax started to follow, but Danny caught her hand.

"Hey, kid," he said, his blue eyes filled with concern. "You okay? Everything okay?"

"Yeah, Danny," Jax said, smiling back at him. "I mean, this case is wild, with Steve's blood on your car, but you're okay, he's okay . . . and apparently I get to play dress-up and hang around with Hawaii's rich and powerful for a few days. Plus, Gracie time. What's not to be okay?" She squeezed his hand and then took off to join Steve and Gracie in the water.

Danny sighed and settled in the chair, enjoying his beer and watching his two best friends play with his little girl. After a while, Steve emerged from the water and joined him, swiping a swig of his beer and dripping on him.

"Hey," Danny protested half-heartedly.

Steve flopped into the chair beside him. A slow, soft smile spread over his face, prompting Danny to laugh fondly.

"Smitten Face," he pointed out. "Such a nice alternative to the Aneurysm Face you were sporting earlier."

Steve ducked his head and smiled. "You're right, you know," he said.
"Of course I am," Danny responded. "What am I right about this time?"

"Me. Jax. Me and Jax," Steve said. "Me, telling Jax how I feel about her. I'm going to find the right time, and the right place, and tell her that I'm committed to her. That I'm in love with her."

"Well, there you go," Danny said, raising his bottle to Steve. "To growing a pair."

Steve laughed, and they continued to watch Jax with Gracie, teaching her how to dive perfectly through the small breakers. Finally, Gracie had tired and was ready to dry off and have dinner, and she led Jax by the hand back to the chairs.

"Auntie Jax is going to let me help with the potatoes," Gracie said proudly. "Ugh, my legs are so tired they're like jello," she commented, and Steve promptly picked her up and tossed her onto his shoulders. She squealed with delight.

Danny beamed at them, his eyes crinkling in a smile. The crushing weight of anguish over the thought of having hurt someone else's little girl lifted, and he allowed himself to revel in the relief. The only thing missing was Rachel by his side, but he dismissed the thought before it could ruin the moment. Besides, he thought, he did have his adorable former rookie back in his life, that was something.

He reached out for Jax's hand, looking over at her, and caught her watching Steve and Gracie, an expression of wistful longing on her face. He snagged her hand and tugged on it, watched as she schooled her features before looking at him.

"Hey," he said, softly, out of earshot of Steve and a laughing Gracie. "You okay, rookie? It's just . . . something seems off."

"I'm good, Danny," Jax said quickly. "I'm past starving, though, and I bet Gracie is, too. Let's get this show on the road."

Steve deposited Gracie in the kitchen and grabbed a bag of marinating chicken out of the fridge. As he passed behind Jax at the counter, he paused and bent his head, kissing her neck, exposed by the loose elastic holding her curls away from her face. His free hand drifted to her hip, his thumb brushing over the scar peeking up over the waistline of her board shorts.

She shivered a bit, and smacked his hand away playfully, aware of Gracie watching them, her brown eyes wide.

"What," Steve drawled, "Gracie doesn't mind, do you kid?" He winked at her, and she broke into a huge smile.

"Step Stan doesn't do that with mommy," she observed innocently.

"Really? Hunh," Danny said. "Then Step Stan is a foolish, foolish man. Okay, learn how to make Jax's secret potatoes, Gracie, so you can cook for your poor dad later."

Gracie nodded enthusiastically, and Danny followed Steve out to the grill, grabbing each of them a Longboard on the way.

"This is nice," Danny observed, handing Steve a bottle and sighing contentedly.

"Wait, this is you, admitting that you like Hawaii?" Steve teased, arranging the chicken on the grill. "Let me write this down."
"This is me, admitting that I like this," Danny said, gesturing toward Steve and the beach past him, and back toward the kitchen, where they could hear Gracie's giggles. "I just . . . does Jax seem okay to you?"

Steve glanced back toward the house. "She's been a little quiet today, but that happens sometimes. It's . . . maybe it's just September."

"That's true," Danny said, nodding. "You know what - I know September has a lot of bad memories for us, but it also marks the beginning of Five-O. Let's plan something, for the team, once we get past this security detail. Something positive to associate with September, to look forward to."

Steve nodded in agreement, flipping the chicken over. "Danny, that's a great idea."

"Danny had a great idea?" Jax teased, coming out of the kitchen, bearing a bowl of fragrant mashed potatoes. Gracie followed behind, proudly carrying a set of plates and silverware.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I did," Danny said, taking the bowl from Jax. "A first annual celebration of Five-O as a team. This month marks two years, two new team members . . . it's something to be celebrated." He paused, running a rough hand over Jax's unruly curls. "Something to look forward to, every September," he added softly.

Jax glanced at Steve, who was looking at her with the tender smile that she was pretty sure he reserved just for her, the one that made her feel warm and safe inside.

"Yeah," she said, smiling back at him, and nodding at Danny. "That's a great idea, Danny."

"Can I come?" Gracie chimed.

"Of course," Steve said, scooping her up in his arms and handing her the tongs. "In fact, we're going to count on you to help plan the event. Flip the chicken one more time. What do you think we should do to celebrate Five-O?"

"Well, there should be swimming," Gracie said, and proceeded to list a few more activities she considered essential.

Danny had dropped his arm around Jax's shoulders, and pulled her to him, kissing her temple. She leaned against him and sighed, and he was pretty sure that he heard what Gracie had called a hiccup; that little hitch in her breath. He squeezed her tighter. Steve was probably right; September just brought back a lot of painful memories for all of them.

Dinner was delicious, and Gracie was quick to assure Danny that she could duplicate the potatoes at home. As the sun started to set, Danny informed a reluctant Gracie that they needed to help clean up and then head for home. Steve and Jax led the way into the kitchen first, with the leftover food, while Danny and Gracie stacked the plates.

Danny rolled his eyes as he and Gracie entered the kitchen. True to form, Steve had been unable to resist the curve of Jax's neck, and he was busy tracing a line of kisses from under her jaw to her collarbone, his strong arms braced on either side of her, leaning on the kitchen counter.

"Hey," Danny mock protested, covering Gracie's eyes. "Wait and traumatize your own kids with that stuff," he laughed.

Danny saw her hands clench into fists, saw Steve pull back in confusion as he felt her flinch beneath his lips, felt and heard her sharp intake of breath. It all clicked into place in one brilliant, clarifying instant, and sometimes Danny wondered if the intuition that made him such a good
detective was a blessing or a curse. The pieces slotted together like a jigsaw puzzle: that morning, in his office, his offhand comment that being a parent made things different; Gracie's comment that Jax's hug had seemed sad; the expression on her face watching Steve with Gracie.

"Oh, babe," Danny sighed. Steve looked between the two of them, confused.

"Gracie, honey," Danny said quietly, bending down and turning her around to face him. "While there is still plenty of light, I want you to go down to the chairs and gather up the towels for us, okay? Bring them back to the back porch and then wait there for Danno."

Gracie looked between the three adults and nodded solemnly, her eyes wide, and wise beyond her years. "Okay, Danno," she said, and immediately slipped out the back door.

"Jax, honey, I am so sorry," Danny said, leaning against the counter next to her; close, his hip resting against hers. "I didn't mean . . . I've been thoughtless more than once today. It just didn't cross my mind, but it should have."

Steve had taken a half step back, and stood facing the two of them, his face still clouded with confusion. Jax was stubbornly looking at the floor, so Danny looked at Steve instead, patiently, waiting for it to register. Steve wasn't Naval Intelligence for nothing; he just lacked the experience Danny had gained as a husband and father. Steve was looking back at Danny, searching his face for clues.

Danny took Jax's hand again, rubbing his thumb over her knuckles. "Do they know for sure?" he asked, quietly, his eyes still on Steve, watching, waiting . . . and there. Realization.

"No," Jax muttered. "The doctors said that I might not be able . . . nothing for sure, it's just . . . I didn't think I would ever - I didn't think it would ever matter. I hadn't really thought about it, until today. Until . . . today, and with Gracie and -" she stopped, biting her lip.

"Ku'uipo," Steve sighed, settling next to her on the other side. He reached out, giving Danny's shoulder a squeeze of thanks before he wrapped his hand, strong and sure, around Jax's shoulder, kissing the top of her head gently.

Jax let out a strangled giggle. "This is getting ridiculous. You guys must be so sick of this scenario; each of you flanking me while we have some sort of heart-wrenching revelation. At least we're not on the bathroom floor this time; I don't think Danny's knee could take it."

"Babe, no, that's not true," Danny said. "You've just been carrying everything alone for so long, you're just new to the idea that you don't have to. You have people here for you Jax, you know that, right?"

Jax nodded as Danny kissed her on the cheek.

"So, from an injury, sweetheart?" Danny asked, his voice rough with emotion.

Jax nodded again, twisting her fingers together as she studied the tile pattern of the kitchen floor.

Danny couldn't bring himself to ask more; he wasn't sure he wanted to know the answers. Besides, Gracie was waiting patiently. Danny sighed.

"Jacqueline Nolan, I want you to listen to me," he said firmly. "This is just one more evidence that you've survived stuff that would have put most of us in a retirement home, and you're still gearing up and kicking ass. Okay? Don't you forget it. The only problem you have is trying to deal with everything alone, and you don't have to do that anymore. You have the team, and family here . . . and Malia," he reminded her gently. "So, okay, you maybe talk to her, when you're ready. Yeah?"
Danny reached out and gave Steve's arm a firm squeeze. "And Steve?" he added, over his shoulder, as he went out the back to collect Grace, "I'm pretty sure that the right time and place you were going to look for is here and now, buddy."

The sound of the back door opening and closing gently was followed by the sound of the car starting, the unfamiliar engine sounding out of place as it left the driveway, and then there was just the sound of the ocean. Steve's arm was still firmly around Jax, his big hand still wrapped securely around her shoulder, holding her close to his side.

"Jax," he said, softly, not entirely sure what would follow.

She covered her face with her hands, and he curled his arm, pulling her around, and wrapped his other arm around her as well.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled, her voice muffled by her hands, and his chest.

"What for?" he asked, one hand going up to slip the elastic out of her hair. He rubbed his fingers through her curls. "What are you apologizing for, Jax? Because you had damn well better not feel like you need to apologize for having been . . . hurt. At some point."

"It's just . . . it's a weird thing to bring up," she said. "It's . . . and with Danny . . . and you. And you and I - we never - I mean . . . I'm just sorry it came up. It's awkward and humiliating and . . ."

"Shh," he whispered. "No way." He felt her relax a little bit, so he continued letting his fingers comb gently through her curls, until finally, he felt her hands slip away from her face, and slide around his side to wrap around his waist. "That's more like it," he murmured, cradling her face against him.

She could hear his heart beating, steady and strong, and she inhaled the familiar smell of detergent, and ocean, and . . . Gracie's sunscreen. Images of him holding Gracie, carrying Gracie on his shoulders, teaching her to manage the grill . . .

He felt her breathing hitch, and he instinctively tightened his hold on her.

"Hey," he said quietly, "you know how you can see the stars so much better here, than you could in New York?"

She nodded against him.

"And you know how usually we're too late, or too exhausted, or too . . . busy," he chuckled, "to enjoy the stars? Let's go outside."

She looked up at him, confused, but he was just smiling that same slow, tender smile; so she nodded and let him take her hand and lead her outside. He grabbed the soft, familiar quilt from the back of one of the lanai chairs, and headed toward the sand.

He deftly flicked the quilt out and sat down on it, pulling Jax gently down next to him.

"You're . . . smiling," Jax said, befuddled. She cupped his face in her hand, her thumb tracing lightly over his bottom lip.

"Yeah," he agreed, "I'm smiling. Because . . . well, I sat out here not too long ago and admitted to Danny that watching you and Gracie . . . the thought crossed my mind . . . "

She pulled her hand away abruptly.
"Then, you should - you deserve someone -" she broke off, trying desperately not to dissolve into sobs on the spot. She wanted to look away from him, but he was holding her face gently, and the look in his eyes . . .

"You know how you're always having to remind me that I'm missing the point?" he asked.

She couldn't help it; she grinned. It was true. He had a tendency to do that.

"I think you're missing the point," he said, bending and kissing her with careful intent, making her feel like she was infinitely precious.

"What . . . what's the point?" she asked, slightly breathless.

"Jax, the point is that I've never even thought about that before," he said, tracing his finger over her cheek. "I've never looked at another woman and thought about . . . a future. About kids. You're the first, ku'uipo. That's the point."

"Oh," she breathed, her eyes widening. "But then, don't you - I mean, what if -"

"Still missing the point," he said softly, and kissed her again, silencing her objections. "Why tonight? Why did it upset you tonight?"

"Because with this case, with Danny . . . he was so upset, he said I wouldn't understand, until I had kids; and then Gracie came over, and she's so cute, and funny, and . . . watching you with her, God, you're just so amazing with her and it made me want -" she broke off and put her hand over her mouth. Her eyes widened almost comically. "Holy shit," she mumbled.

Steve smiled again, his eyes glinting almost feral in the moonlight. He cupped one hand around her face, the other hand warm on her hip, his thumb tracing over the scar there.

"Say it," he whispered. "Please, say it."

"It made me wish I could have a baby, some day," she whispered.

He pulled her close to him, his lips hovering over hers, his hand sliding around to the back of her neck.

"A baby?" he said, his hand squeezing just slightly.

She shivered slightly; he'd always been so careful with her, so cautious . . . he'd never been possessive and she wondered if she was seeing a side of him that he had kept carefully tucked away. But she hadn't applied to SWAT for nothing; there was always that part of her that loved the thrill of taking a risk, pushing the limits . . .

"Or a puppy," she murmured. "Maybe a hamster -"

She broke off as he growled playfully and kissed her again; short, sharp little nipping kisses.

"Say it," he repeated, and she could feel him smiling against her lips. "Our baby," he whispered, each syllable a kiss brushed against her.

He felt her smile back, felt her actually trying to form the words, and then he was reaching for her as she pulled away from him, her hand pressing against his chest, strong, violent, pushing him back.

She tried, she really did, to say the words; but she couldn't get the sound to go around the lump in
her throat. How could she say it, when it might be the one thing she couldn't give him?

He stilled, frozen, as she held him literally at arm's length, and decided to give him everything that she could, in that moment.

"I love you," she blurted, choking back a sob. "I love you," she whispered, tears spilling over. She started to brush them away impatiently, but his hands were there; soft, careful; and then he was kissing her cheeks.

"Now, ku'uipo," he said, his lips brushing away the tears, "now you've got the point."

He smiled at her again, looking into her eyes, holding her gaze, waiting . . . there.

"Oh," she breathed out, a soft smile starting to form.

He kissed away the last tear. "I love you," he said, "I love you, and I'm not going anywhere. I'm in, Jax. No matter what."

She fisted her hand in his shirt, then, and pulled him in, kissing him without reservation, holding nothing back. When she finally pulled away, slightly dizzy - mentally cursing, again, his damn SEAL lung capacity, which had him smiling smugly at her - he was looking at her with concern.

"Jax?" he whispered, brushing away tears from her cheeks.

She laughed then, rolling her eyes at herself. "I'm such a girl," she muttered.

His hand wrapped around her neck again, and her hip, and he pressed her gently but surely down onto the quilt, easing his body over hers. "I've noticed," he said, his voice raspy, as his hand tightened around her hip. He kissed her, slow and sweet, and then pulled back and looked at her, that glint back in his eyes.

"There's no one else, Jax," he said, "and there won't be anyone else; not as long as I'm with you."

"Is that a news flash or an order . . . Commander?" she asked, running her foot up the back of his calf, making him shiver.

"Both," he said decisively, nipping at her lower lip.

"Aye, aye, sir," she whispered, her hand slipping inside his board shorts.

Once again, his subconscious supplied helpful commentary: *Hooyah.*
Gracie bounded into the house and into Rachel's arms.

"Mommy, there's going to be a Five-O party and I get to help plan it," Gracie informed her, her still damp pigtails bobbing excitedly.

"How lovely! You are a good party planner. Run up and get ready for bed, darling, I'll be up in a bit," Rachel said, kissing her on the cheek.

Rachel looked up to see Danny watching fondly, wistfully, as Gracie went up the stairs.

"Everything okay, Daniel?" Rachel asked quietly, as she turned and grabbed two tea cups. She held one up to him in silent question, and he nodded. She turned the burner on under the kettle, and then turned back to him, her head tilted, waiting patiently for his answer.

"Yeah, it's okay," he sighed, glancing back toward the stairs. "We made a beautiful kid, didn't we, Rach?"

She smiled. "That we did, Danny." She tapped her lip thoughtfully as she selected two tea bags.

"I always took for granted there'd be more," Danny said quietly, sliding onto a stool at the spacious counter. He studied the pattern of the granite.

"I rather did, as well," Rachel replied. The kettle whistled and she turned back to the stove, pouring water into the cups.

"Hey," Danny said, his fingers brushing hers as she handed him the cup. "I'm not complaining; Gracie . . . she's the single most amazing thing in my life."

Rachel gave him a sad smile. "You're a wonderful father, Danny."

"He doesn't deserve you," Danny blurted out. He took a sip of his tea as Rachel looked at him, dumbfounded. "I didn't deserve you, either, I suppose, but damn it, I appreciated you. I always knew you were out of my league, and if he doesn't get that . . ."

"Daniel," Rachel said softly. She started to say more but Gracie's voice called to her from upstairs.

"I need to go," Danny said. "Give Gracie a kiss for me." He put his cup carefully next to the sink and walked out of the kitchen quickly, before he could say anything else . . . incriminating.

#*#*#*#*#

"Jax," Steve whispered, brushing his nose against the back of her neck. The earliest rays of morning sun were highlighting the roof of his house behind him. His blessedly, mostly secluded house.

"Hmmm," she murmured sleepily, stretching.

"We, um, should probably go inside. Before it gets any lighter," he said, reluctantly. "Before we have to explain anything to the neighbors."

"What?" she mumbled, rubbing her eyes. "Ow . . . sand. Why?"
"You are remarkably incoherent this morning," he said, obviously quite pleased with himself. "Sand, because we fell asleep outside."

Jax's eye popped open. Sure enough . . . water. Sand. The quilt, tugged half-way over them.

"Where are my boardies?" she mumbled, starting to giggle.

"I'm not sure," Steve said, propping up on one elbow and glancing around. "I think they may be with mine, on the chairs."

"We weren't anywhere near the chairs," Jax protested. "What, you threw them? Why would you do that?"

"You're missing the point: I landed them on the chairs, out of the sand, in the dark," he explained.

"Hmm." Jax pretended to think about that for a minute. "I wouldn't want to miss the point," she said, softly. "Remind me again; what was the point?"

His arm slid around her waist and he nuzzled just under her ear, his stubble rough against the tender skin there.

"The point, Jacqueline Nolan, is that I love you," he said, "and I am in love with you, and that I am not going anywhere."

"That's a really, really good point," she agreed. "Was that all?"

"Ummhmm," he murmured. "One other thing: there's no one else."

She twined her fingers with his. "No one else," she said, soft but sure. She lifted his hand, their fingers linked, and pressed delicate kisses to his palm. She was fascinated with his hands; deadly at one turn, infinitely gentle at the next. "I love you," she whispered, her lips brushing against the inside of his wrist.

"Mine," he said, breathing out the syllable reverently as he kissed down the side of her neck, lingering over the pulse point.

She shivered and he paused.

"Okay?" he asked, his voice impossibly gentle for someone who knew how to kill you with their pinky.

"Oh yeah," she breathed, "but . . . I have to wear dress up clothes . . . no SWAT t-shirts . . . so . . . ."

He made a small sound of frustration, remembering that she was committed to accompany the soon-arriving Mr. Kantaro, but then he set to work kissing slowly down her side, until he got to the scar on her hip.

"Mine," he repeated, a possessive growl, and she shivered again, and saw no reason whatsoever to stop him when he lingered there.

"Yours," she whispered, her eyes shining in the early morning sun.

The faint sound of a car engine, idling, then stopping, gave Steve pause. "Is that . . ."

"Not the Camaro," Jax mumbled, "don't worry."
Steve sighed and pressed his lips against the back of her neck again, holding her close, the thick tangle of her curls blocking the sun from his eyes. It would be okay, just for a few minutes, just to soak it in: the newness of it, the overwhelming contentment.

A car door closed. It sounded close.

"But Jax," Steve said, smirking. "Danny's not driving the Camaro. He has a car from motor pool."

"Holy shit," Jax squeaked, and then it was a comedy of tangled limbs, and a desperate grab for boardies, and Danny's voice from all the way inside the house and then . . .

"Oh for the love of - you've got to be - seriously?"

"Mornin', Danny," Steve drawled, standing casually behind Jax, who was wrapped in the quilt. He pointed to the chairs. "So, I'm going to step that way and grab my boardies, just fair warning."

Danny spluttered and turned around, holding his hands over his eyes and waving them erratically.

"Morning, Danny," Jax said breezily, as she walked past him into the house; trying, and failing dismally, to maintain some sort of air of dignity about her. There was nothing for it: her hair in wild, reckless curls and her cheeks flushed, wrapped in a quilt that tripped her on every third step.

"Make yourself at home, Danno," Steve said, as he sauntered by, clapping Danny companionably on the shoulder. "Make some coffee, too, if you don't mind."

Danny sighed and then shrugged and fell in behind them.

"I take it you found the right time and place then, Steven?" he said.

"Yup," Steve nodded, grinning over his shoulder at his partner as he headed up the stairs after Jax. "Careful, ku'uiipo," he admonished, as she tripped over the quilt again.

Danny found himself alone in the kitchen. "How is this my life?" he asked the universe aloud, and then he shrugged and started a pot of coffee.

Steve was the first to arrive in the kitchen.

"Hey, Danny," he said, rubbing the back of his neck just a little sheepishly.

Danny smiled, genuinely, because he was genuinely happy for his friends. He was. But then Steve was shaking his head.

"Shit, Danny . . . I never understood. I mean, I tried, you know? I tried to sympathize, to empathize but . . . I never really understood what it meant, that you and Rachel split up," he said quietly.

"She left me," Danny corrected. "We didn't split up. She just . . . she left me. She took Gracie; took my baby girl. And left."

"And you spent six months . . ."

"Drinking myself into oblivion," Danny said, smiling sadly. "Yes. Mattie, God bless him, he held me together."

"Danny. I'm sorry," Steve said. "I'd never want to give up having you as a partner, having you as part of Five-O, but I hate what it took to bring you to Hawaii."
Jax padded into the kitchen, boots in hand. She kissed Danny on the cheek as she went past him, making a beeline for the coffee maker.

"Jax was convinced that we needed to set you up with someone," Steve teased.

"I was under the influence," Jax protested.

"You suggested Mary," Danny reminded her, laughing.

"But seriously, Danny, you could meet someone," Steve said. "We could go out, something casual, a group of us."

Danny shook his head. "Thanks guys, but that will definitely need to wait."

"Wait for what?" Jax said, sipping her coffee. She tilted her head at Danny, curious.

Danny sighed, and dropped his eyes. "It will have to wait until I'm not still crazy in love with Rachel," he said.

"Oh, Danny," Jax murmured, putting her coffee on the counter and grabbing him into a hug. Her strong arms wrapped around him, and he allowed himself a long moment of resting his head on her shoulder. "It's just so cosmically unfair to you. It sucks. I'm sorry."

"I am, too, babe," he said, kissing her temple. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her. "And I know you are. And I would be stupidly, pathetically lonely without you guys. So I appreciate you letting me crash here so much. But please, for the love of God . . . on a work morning? Seriously? You realize you actually could be arrested for indecent exposure."

"Don't worry, Danny, I don't think it will happen again," Jax said.

"It won't?" Steve chimed in. He sounded a little disappointed.

"There's sand, Danny," Jax said, earnestly. "There's sand . . . and it's . . . it's everywhere . . ."
Jax was suddenly and uncharacteristically quiet on the drive in to Five-O headquarters.

"Hey, ku'uiipo, what's up?" Steve asked quietly.

"I need you to promise me something," Jax said seriously, staring at the stopped cars ahead of them.

"What?"

"If it comes down to it, Danny goes home to Gracie," Jax said. She turned and looked at Steve, her green eyes sober. "If there's ever a situation, and you have to make a choice; Danny goes home to Gracie."

"Jax, I -"

"Steve. Just . . . please. Promise me, that you'll at least try. You, the team . . . it's already more than I ever thought I would have in life. You've already made me happier than I ever imagined I could be. So, please, if it comes down to it, I want you to give Gracie the chance to be as happy as I am, right now, this morning. So you choose Danny."

Steve took a deep breath. "You're serious."

"Very."

"I can't - Jax, you can't ask me . . ."

"But I am, Steve. I'm asking you to at the very least . . . don't ever give up a good chance on Danny for a bad chance on me. Can you at least promise me that?" She was turned toward him now, her hand rubbing circles on his knee.

Steve thought about that; a scenario in which saving Jax was highly improbable, but saving Danny was a possibility. His training would demand that he try to save Danny. He looked at her, his eyes troubled.

"Yeah, Jax, I can agree to that," he said slowly. "But why . . . why are we having this conversation?"

She shrugged; an eloquent lift of one shoulder, and Steve smiled because it was so much like Danny.

"I just want you to know, it's what I would want. Okay?"

Steve nodded slowly. "Okay, Jax." He fell silent, trying hard not to think about what it would mean if he were ever in that situation. They were at the palace, and he parked the truck and turned off the ignition. "Why today? Why did it come up today?"

"Until last night, it never occurred to me that you wouldn't choose Danny," she said simply. "I didn't think it needed to be said. Oh, look! The Camaro is back!" She hopped nimbly out of the truck, looking back curiously at Steve as he sat, in shock, staring at her.

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"Boss, nice of you to join us," Kono teased, as Steve came off the elevator. Steve ducked his head sheepishly, and Kono burst into peals of laughter.

"Oh, brah, remind me to invite you to poker night. You've got no game face," she said. "I would have assumed traffic if you hadn't turned six shades of red. Speaking of, where's Jax? Don't tell me you trusted her to go shopping for clothes for this security detail without me; seriously, boss, that's not her skill set."

"Jax went to sign out a smaller handgun from the armory," Steve said. "And I don't see a thing wrong with what Jax wears."

"That's because she mostly wears either cargoes or your old t-shirts," Danny pointed out.

"Yeah," Steve said, unable to keep the fond, goofy grin off his face.

"Wait. What is that face?" Kono demanded, whirling on Steve and pointing a finger at him.

"What? You're as bad as Danny. I don't have a face," he protested.

Kono looked at Danny, who just beamed at her and nodded.

"No way," Kono said.

"Yep," Danny confirmed.

"I'll be back," Kono said, skipping to the elevator.

"What just happened?" Steve asked, looking in confusion between Danny and Chin, who had come out of his office to see what was going on between his teammates.

"Steven, have you not learned yet - nothing gets past Kono," Danny said, shaking his head. "Nothing."

Chin started to ask a question, but as Grover came off the elevator, he simply narrowed his eyes at Steve, and thought better of it.

"Mr. Kantaro's first security team should be arriving within the hour," Chin said, pulling some files up on the plasma. "I took the liberty of running complete background checks, and since Malia had the evening shift last night, I went over them with a fine tooth comb. There's nothing that stands out." Chin paused.

"You don't sound entirely pleased," Grover noted.

"You would expect people who have worked their way into this field to have left some sort of trail," Steve said. "I mean, tell me that we don't all have some misdemeanor assault charges on our records, if you look hard enough."

"My thoughts exactly," Chin said. "They've sent ahead Kantaro's itinerary, so as soon as Kono and Jax come back from the armory," he paused, arching an eyebrow at Danny, "we'll go over it."

Steve nodded and started studying the schedule.

"Looks like mostly meetings; a cocktail party this evening, and an art exhibit opening tomorrow evening," he pointed out. "Everything in typical locations. I think we should be able to provide adequate coverage, between six of us and six of his own people." He frowned, reading the explicit instructions that local police officers were not to be visible.
"I don't like the exclusion of local PD," Steve said.

"No HPD backup?" Jax asked, coming off the elevator, accompanied with a smiling Kono. Chin and Grover looked at both of them suspiciously, but then looked at each other and decided they probably didn't want to know.

"No, apparently Mr. Kantaro thinks it would be bad for business," Chin said. "And, I suppose, he does have a point, to an extent. If they're not really expecting trouble, why give the impression that they are?"

"I guess," Steve said, "but I don't understand people who ask for protection and then get picky."

Steve paused as his phone indicated an incoming call. "Yes, send them right up. Okay, the forward team is headed upstairs as we speak. Chin, as soon as we've made introductions with the team, go ahead and work on getting twelve radios set up - if we're cooperating with Kantaro's security, everyone is going to be on the same channel. Danny, work with Chin so that you can take over comms when we need to be actively securing locations."

Chin and Danny nodded as three men, dressed in impeccable suits, exited the elevator.

"Commander McGarrett," one of them said, taking the lead and walking forward. Confident, bordering on arrogant, the finely cut suit hinted at powerful muscles beneath. "I am Mr. Mutsu; these are my associates Mr. Hike and Mr. Asari. I assume, of course, that you have run background checks on us, so you know our first names, but we find that it is often difficult enough for Americans to manage our surnames."

"Not a problem, Mr. Mutsu," Steve said, shaking his hand. He introduced the team, ending with Jax and Kono.

"Ah, I assume that Officer Nolan will be Mr. Kantaro's escort," Mutsu said, openly appraising Jax.

"Officer Nolan is assigned as Mr. Kantaro's security detail for social events," Steve said, trying to keep his voice even.

"She will do quite nicely," Mutsu said, waving a hand dismissively. He turned his attention to the plasma screens. "I see you have a copy of the itinerary. I go where Mr. Kantaro goes. Mr. Hike goes where Mr. Kantaro's computer goes, and Mr. Asari monitors his hotel suite at all times. You will find that we are quite competent in our roles, and content to stay out of the way of yours."

"And what about the other security team?" Steve asked, "The one arriving with Mr. Kantaro this afternoon?"

"Other team?" Mutsu said, his face a nasty scowl. "There is no other team. The men traveling with Mr. Kantaro are his business associates."

"Okay, well, that changes everything," Steve said, pulling himself up to his full height and crossing his arms over his chest. "Because we were told that there were six security team members, and that we would have twelve people working security to cover one man. Now you're telling me we have nine people to cover four."

Mutsu waved his hand again. "Mr. Kantaro is the only person with whom you need to concern yourself, Commander. What is the American saying . . . ah, yes: too many cooks spoil the broth. I would think you'd prefer to have things your way."

He snapped his fingers and his two associates moved ahead of him to the elevators.
"We'll convene in Mr. Kantaro's hotel suite this evening at 7 pm, just before the cocktail party. Whatever measures you deem appropriate to put into place upon his arrival and transport, I'm sure will be adequate. You'll find, gentlemen, that Mr. Kantaro is a consummate business man; we don't anticipate any problems. No threats have been made; not in Okinawa and not here. Still, one does not hold a position of such wealth and influence without incurring some jealousy and unwanted attention." He turned to head to the elevator which was now being held for him. "And I trust," he added, waving a hand at Jax, "that the officer will be in suitable attire for this evening's event." He looked at her boots in disgust. "The foot, after all, is such an erotic sight. Pity to cover it in . . . those."

While the team stood in shock, Mr. Mutsu swept into the elevator and disappeared.

There was a beat of silence in the squad room.


"That's it, I'm calling the governor," Steve snapped. "No one comes in here and talks to my team that way."

"Don't, Steve," Jax said. "From the sounds of it, we're not in the best position to bargain with the governor. It's just a couple of days, and it won't be that big of a deal."

"Jax, the way he spoke to you was completely inappropriate," Danny protested.

"And disgusting," Kono added, placing a hand on Jax's shoulder.

"So he insulted my boots," Jax laughed. "Look, I can handle some asshole being rude. You think I haven't dealt with worse?"

The silence that fell over the room was stifling. The team was well aware of the "worse" that Jax had dealt with.

"Guys," she said, putting her hands on her hips. "Come on. The guy was a jerk. Please . . . don't do this to me. Give me enough credit to let me do my job, like a professional. Like one of you. Not like the weak link that you have to protect."

Grover was the first to nod. "That's right, that's right - just because we're SWAT doesn't mean we can't finesse," he said, winking at Jax. "Though maybe I better give you some pointers. What if you have to dance? What then, Nolan? You know you've got no rhythm."

Jax grinned broadly. "Maybe I just pretend not to know how to dance so I don't get sent into clubs undercover. Ever think of that?"

"Sadly, no one is that good of an actor," Danny said. "No, the horror that is you on a dance floor is genuine. Our only hope is that Steve will threaten the DJ by hanging him over the edge of a building, in order to ensure that only slow dances are played."

The tension broken, Chin spoke up. "Look, it's not like she's going undercover. We will all be in constant radio contact and Kono, at the very least, with have a line of sight at all times."

Steve took a deep breath. "Yeah, yeah, you're right. But say the word, Jax, and any one of us will come back you up if you need to put someone in their place. Same goes for you, Kono." Steve sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. He couldn't wait for the next few days to be over.

"Okay, Chin and Danny, go set up comms. We'll work on security for transport between
locations, meetings, and the social events.” Steve looked down at Jax as everyone started working on their assigned tasks. "Ku'uipo; you're sure?" he asked quietly.

"Positive," she said, smiling up at him. "It's like Grover said; this isn't undercover. I just have to suffer through wearing dress up clothes while you guys get to be comfy. That's my only objection."

"That's it, hunh?" Steve said. "Okay, then let's do this and get it over with."

Okay, we're ready to leave for the airport; we'll go from there straight to the reception at the Halekulani," Steve said, knocking on the door to Chin's office, where he and Danny were putting the final touches on the radios.

"And the radios are ready for you," Chin said, holding out four elegant looking earpieces.

Steve whistled. "Chin, my man, these are a work of art. These are top-notch," he said, sliding the earpiece into his ear, and looping the discreet microphone around.

"I'm sure the governor would agree," Chin said, smiling. "I requisitioned them from her own security staff. I figure, if we're going to be playing security to the governor's guests, we should be equipped."

"Chin, I like the way you think," Steve said, grinning.

"We'll be able to monitor everything from here," Chin said. "No following you around in a shrimp truck. That was the real reason for justifying the tech, by the way. I didn't think that's what the governor or Mr. Kantaro had in mind. We'll be able to communicate with you, and each of these babies has a built in GPS, so we'll have your location at all times."

"You know, life is definitely simpler without having to manage another team," Steve said. "I'll take it."

"You just watch my girl's back out there, Steven," Danny said, soberly. "I did not like the way that Muttsa guy looked at her, or talked to her."

"I will not let her out of my sight, Danny," Steve said.

Chin whistled as Kono and Jax came out of Kono's office. "I don't think you will have any trouble keeping that promise, Steve."

They were both dressed in simple, elegant cocktail dresses, with smart cap sleeve jackets. Kono looked stunning, as usual, in red, with her hair in an elegant updo, while Jax took Steve's breath away in a fitted dark royal blue, cut short enough that her legs looked miles long despite her petite frame.

"Wow," Danny said, "you ladies look beautiful. Remind me that Kono will not take Gracie shopping for a prom dress, ever."

Chin handed each of them a radio. "I assume the jackets . . ."

Kono and Jax each lifted one side of their jackets, revealing snug shoulder holsters.

Steve's brain went through the word-a-day calendar like an old fashioned animation, and once again, settled unoriginally on holy shit.
"Let's roll," he said, his voice strangled.

#*#*#*#*

Mr. Kantaro's private jet had just touched down and was taxiing to the gate when the team arrived in two government issue SUVs.

"A touch of armor plating never hurt," Kono murmured appreciatively as they stood, waiting for their passengers.

"Commander McGarrett," a voice called out, as Mr. Kantaro strode toward them. His demeanor, and his handshake, seemed genuine and friendly, unlike Mr. Mutsu's. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your team providing assistance for our first visit to your beautiful island. It's a tremendous relief not to have to worry about getting lost. Or driving on the wrong side of the road."

"We're happy to help, Mr. Kantaro," Steve said, feeling a bit relieved. "Part of my team - Captain Lou Grover, Officer Kono Kalakaua, and Officer Jacqueline Nolan."

There were handshakes all around, and Kantaro's eyes lingered on Jax. "I'm sure you must think I am very vain to have made such a specific request for personal security. The Japanese culture adds its own unique burdens to the already typically fragile male ego. Although, having been assigned such a stunning security officer, I can't bring myself to apologize."

Steve fought the urge to lay a possessive hand on Jax, and instead, turned and opened the back door of the SUV for Kantaro. "Mr. Kantaro, I believe we are taking you directly to the Hakekulani."

"And I believe that was a subtle indication that perhaps I was being less than professional," Mr Kantaro said, smiling and bowing his head toward Steve in a manner that suddenly seemed condescending. "My apologies."

"Just trying to keep your itinerary," Steve said mildly, closing the door.

Jax smirked and climbed in the passenger side. She watched in the side view mirror as Kono and Grover waited for Mr. Kantaro's associates, who had remained silent during the entire exchange, to get into the vehicle. When the doors were closed, she nodded to Steve.

"Clear, Grover?" Steve said quietly.

"Affirmative," Grover answered, and they were driving away.

After a few miles, Mr. Kantaro spoke up from the back seat. "You're exceptionally quiet, Commander McGarrett, Officer Nolan."

Steve glanced into the rear view mirror.

"I'm not sure what your understanding was with the governor, Mr. Kantaro, but my understanding was that my team was providing security for you. Perhaps some other time you might like to come on a vacation, and enjoy a guided tour."

The ride passed awkwardly for the remaining miles to the exclusive hotel. While they were dressing for the event, Kono had given Jax a quick background on the hotel - enough to make her feel a bit nervous and out of place. They proceeded through the hotel lobby, flanking Mr. Kantaro discreetly. Mr. Mutsu was waiting for them outside the private elevator, and they stepped on to ride up to the Halekulani Suite in groups; Steve and Jax with Kantaro and Mutsu first.
"Mr. Kantaro," Mr. Mutsu said. "I believe you will find everything here to your satisfaction." He leered at Jax again.

"Excuse me, what was that?" Steve demanded, crossing his arms over his chest. "My team is here for Mr. Kantaro's security, not his satisfaction."

Mutsu held his hands up in mock protest. "I was referring to the suite, Commander. Forgive me if we're violating some sort of American protocol."

The four of them stepped into the shockingly spacious suite, easily as large as Steve's house. Mutsu positioned himself, once again, just by the elevator door, while Kantaro gestured for Steve and Jax to follow him into the suite.

"If you'll just wait here, and let us clear the space," Steve said, gesturing pointedly.

Kantaro looked mildly amused, but did as he was told, and stood at the entrance, while Steve and Jax cleared the rooms. Steve scowled as he cleared the huge bedroom and en suite: two of everything was on obvious display - fluffy robes, wine glasses, even toothbrushes. He pointed silently at the set-up to Jax, who just shrugged.

"It doesn't mean anything," she said. "It's probably just how the hotel sets up."

Steve said clear - more loudly than was reasonably necessary - and went back to Mr. Kantaro. "Are you expecting a guest tonight, Mr. Kantaro?" he asked, his voice bland. "If so, we will need to make that part of our security plan."

Kantaro looked at Jax. "I assumed that my private security officer would be staying with me."

"Oh, you assumed incorrectly," Jax said, sweetly, before Steve could start. "If you're genuinely concerned about your safety, however, then our entire team would be glad to stay over. These sofas look plenty comfy enough, don't they, sir?" she said, turning to Steve.

He wasn't going to deny it; already feeling jealous and possessive, her slight emphasis on sir sent a chill up his spine, and if the sparkle in her green eyes was any indication, she knew it.

"I've slept in trees for forty-eight hours straight," Steve said, throwing Kantaro a challenging stare. "I could manage a sofa."

"Ah, that won't be necessary," Kantaro said. "My most sincere apologies. Clearly, I should have done more cultural preparation before coming to Honolulu."

The rest of the evening went by in an uncomfortable blur of polite mingling, with Jax and Kono sipping on endless glasses of sparkling mineral water. By the end of the night, Steve was practically praying for some sort of altercation to alleviate both his boredom and his jealousy.

"He hasn't laid a hand on me, Steve, relax," Jax chided, not caring that the entire team could hear her comment, spoken quietly into her microphone.

Finally, blessedly, the party ended, and Mr. Kantaro was safely deposited in his suite. He had assured the team that between hotel security, and Mutsu, Hike, and Asari, their services were not needed overnight, and after what seemed like forever, Steve and Jax were finally on their way home.

"It's ridiculously late," Jax yawned. "Is this how rich people live? That was more exhausting than an armed robbery. What's the appeal?"
Steve glanced at her. "Power. Control. It was obvious, Jax, that Kantaro thought you were going to be his escort for the duration of his visit. Round the clock. Damn it, there was a toothbrush there for you."

"Okay, maybe," Jax said, "although I think you're reading a lot into a disposable toothbrush. But I'm not there, in that ridiculous suite, am I? I'm riding in your truck, with you, and we're going home."

"Yeah," Steve muttered, but his face was dark.

"You're the one who's taking me home," Jax repeated. "You're the only one who's taking me home."

Steve relaxed a little, pulling into his driveway. "Every night?" he asked, reaching out and covering her hand with his own.

"Every night," she confirmed, as he leaned over and kissed her, tangling his hand in her hair. "If you stand between me and my gym shorts for one more minute, though, sailor, I'm going to have to break your neck."

#*#*#*#

The team assembled the next morning, all looking a little the worse for wear.

"For an evening of doing absolutely nothing, that was exhausting," Kono said, yawning as she stood at the smart table. She looked up as Chin came off the elevator, bearing a tray of coffees.

"Cuz, you are the best, the absolute best," she said, kissing him on the cheek.

"Well, Danny and I could practically feel the tension over the radios," he said, "and the evening did seem to drag on. I figured we all deserved a shot of the best Kona on the island to get us through the day."

"And what do we have to get through today?" Jax asked, taking a sip of the coffee and sighing appreciatively, causing Steve to absently rub his hand across her lower back. He loved that little sound; had, since the first day he handed her a cup of coffee.

"Closed door business meetings all morning," Steve said. "Grover, Chin, Kono and I will cover security. Jax, you and Danny work on digging into this mysterious not-at-all-an-accident of his. Kantaro doesn't need a date to sign contracts, and I'll be damned if you're forced to interact with Mutsu." The rest of the team nodded heartily in agreement.

"Not gonna argue," Jax said. "Death by small talk and sparkling water? No thank you." She reached out to fist bump Danny, who grinned and returned the gesture. "Williams and I will blow this accident set-up wide open while you all play banker."

"Fine by me," Steve said. "Can you handle comms while you're at it?"

"We can multi-task," Danny said, laughing.

"I sure hope so," Grover said, coming out of his office, suddenly sober.

"Grover?" Jax said, alarmed at his demeanor.

"Guys, one of my buddies over at HPD just gave us a heads up. IA is on the way over here right now. They've been given an anonymous tip, and they've got a warrant for Kono and Chin's
financial records, their offices, their houses . . . everything," Grover said, in utter disbelief.

"What the hell?" Steve exploded. "What kind of anonymous tip? What are they looking for? What's the accusation?"

Grover looked at Chin and Kono apologetically. "Taking bribes. From the Yakuza."

Kono's eyes filled with tears and she looked at Chin helplessly.

For once, Chin was so overwhelmed that he couldn't even comfort her. He simply took his badge and gun and held them out to Steve. "I can't live through this again," he said quietly.

Steve held his hands up. "No. No way, Chin. You don't have to live through this again, because this is nothing like last time. You've got ohana backing both of you up. You got that? Both of you. Grover," Steve said, turning to him. "How can IA even do this? Chin and Kono work for Five-O, not HPD."

Grover shrugged. "That's what I said, right away, but the DA says that Five-O would never investigate one of their own, so HPD gets jurisdiction."

"We voluntarily called HPD in to investigate Danny's accident . . . " Steve said, thinking aloud.

"You're thinking there's a connection," Danny said, quick to pick up Steve's line of thought.


"Hurting an innocent child," Danny said.

"Right. And Chin, what was the single worst experience of your life, the one thing you would never wish on anyone?" Steve asked, pointing at Chin.

"Being accused of being a dirty cop," Chin replied, without hesitation.

"Someone is setting up the team," Jax said. "Danny's worst nightmare; the one thing Chin fears the most, both for himself and for Kono. She told me that you weren't even willing to risk coming to her graduation," Jax added. "The things we fear most . . ."

"This is personal, very personal," Steve said. He glanced down at his watch. "Damn it. Okay, we have to take care of security to and from these business meetings, and then the art exhibit. Change of plans. Grover, Jax, and I handle the security detail. Danny, you're still comms, but mostly I want you keeping an eagle eye out on everything that comes in and out of here today. Chin and Kono, you stay here in your offices - cooperate with HPD but only to the extent you absolutely have to, and don't let anyone go through your stuff without you looking over their shoulders. We are going to get to the bottom of this, I swear."

#*#*#*#*#*#

"Your security team seems smaller today, Commander McGarrett," Mr. Kantaro noted, as they made their way to the late afternoon art exhibit. Jax looked simply stunning in the black sundress she'd worn undercover with Danny, and Kantaro didn't bother to try to disguise his appreciation. Steve wondered if it would be terribly obvious if he switched to combat breathing.

"Would you like to inform us of any particular threats that we don't know about?" Steve said impassively. "Otherwise, the three of us are more than capable of ensuring your safety at this particular venue."
"Oh, I believe you are quite, quite capable," Kantaro said, his eyes lingering on the line of Jax's collarbone.

It was another insufferably long afternoon.

#*#*#*#*#

"Thank goodness Kantaro anticipated jet lag this evening," Jax groused, as she piled into the SUV with Steve and Grover. They'd safely deposited Kantaro at his hotel, back into the hands of his own security team. Before Steve had the opportunity to strangle him, which, if you asked him, was a damn shame.

"Are you ready to admit the man is a giant asshole sleazebag?" Steve demanded. Hostility and frustration rolled off him in waves. Chin's acquisition of sensitive high-end radios meant that he'd had to listen to Kantaro's suggestive comments and off-color remarks to Jax all afternoon.

"Yeah, okay, he's a jerk," Jax said, wrinkling her pert nose in distaste. Kantaro had been careful not to put a finger on her all afternoon, but that hadn't kept him from leering at her, and making the most inappropriate comments about the art. "I don't get it; what's his play?"

"What do you mean?" Grover asked.

"I mean, what's his end game? He's clearly trying to accomplish something, keeping us off-balance." Jax said, cracking her neck. Tension and stress had her in knots.

"Jax, he's . . . okay, you don't get that it's possible that he's just hitting on you?" Steve asked.

"You think it's a distraction? Maybe it's a cover-up for something." Jax wondered.

Grover shook his head. "No wonder you went SWAT. You never woulda made detective."

"What?" Jax demanded. She was pretty sure that was an insult; she thought it was fairly good detective work to try to figure out what Kantaro was really trying to accomplish.

"Jax. You are -" Steve broke off and made an all-encompassing gesture. "Kantaro is being a jerk and hitting on you, because you are a beautiful woman. It's that simple."


Grover threw his hands up in the air, exasperated, and Steve looked at Jax with a mixture of fondness and wistfulness.

"Ku'uipo," he sighed. "What am I gonna do with you, hunh?"

Jax twitched her eyebrows and smirked, making Steve laugh.

"People are unbalanced, is what I'm saying," Grover muttered.

#*#*#*#*#

"Anything, guys? Any leads on anything?" Steve said, as they rushed back into the office.

"Yes," Danny said. "Remember on 9/11, we went and donated blood?" He leaned over the table and slid some files and photos up onto the plasma.
"Yeah," Steve said, leaning against the table. It had been a rough day for all of them; the one idea that seemed to bring Jax some comfort had been following her usual routine of donating blood, and she'd been turned down because she was underweight. He absently glanced in her direction... good. She looked good, healthy... really good... he jerked his attention back to Danny.

"Blood collection station was robbed. That night," Danny said, jabbing a finger toward the screen, "before the Red Cross could even process."

"Oh, hell no, that's no coincidence," Steve said.

Danny was pacing in front of the table. "Someone is trying to set up the team. And they're either doing a half-ass job of it, or..."

"What do you mean, half-ass job?" Jax asked. "I'd say it was a pretty whole-assed job. Danny, you could have been killed; and you spent twenty-four hours in agony."

"Yeah, but whoever did this... they had to know that the lab would find out that the blood was Steve's. And they had to know we would realize that the blood collection station had been robbed. It wasn't exactly stealthy. And now, trying to set up Chin and Kono? I mean, it's ridiculous. Who would believe that Chin and Kono were on the take?" Danny ranted.

Kono's eyes filled with tears, and Chin looked at Danny with a soft smile on his face. "Everyone, Danny. At HPD the last time this happened? Almost everyone. Except for Steve's dad."

"Well, you're at Five-O now," Steve said firmly. "And no one in this room believes it. Not for one minute. Danny's right; someone is working very hard to set us up, get us off balance. And it's very, very personal. Okay, Danny, you said they were doing a half-ass job, or... Or what?"

"Or they're doing an excellent job of being deliberately half-assed. They know we're going to only be a step or two behind them... they're... they're..." Danny broke off, snapping his fingers. The word was on the tip of his tongue, he just couldn't get it.

"Gaslighting the team," Grover suggested.

"Psychological warfare," Steve said quietly. "Someone is trying to destroy the team. They're going after us individually, playing on our worst fears. This is just the beginning."
Wrong Nightmare

Chapter Notes

A/N: This chapter was a long time coming, because I had to write it about six times before I was vaguely satisfied. I knew where I wanted to go and I had a bit of trouble, logistically, getting there. Disclaimers: 1) I've been good. I've been very good, for many chapters, but notice that I haven't changed the genre of the story - I am, and always will be, a h/c writer at heart. So there's that. 2) Nautical terms - boat, ship, dinghy, raft . . . I tried. I did.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

###

"So, Danny's accident was a set up, and Chin and Kono are being framed," Jax said.

"What did HPD find?" Steve asked Chin.

"Bank deposits that we did not make, and that we can not explain," Chin said grimly. "One hundred thousand in my account, seventy-five thousand in Kono's."

"Kantaro is in banking," Grover pointed out. He looked at Jax, raising his eyebrows. "You might be closer to detective than Steve and I gave you credit for, after all."

"Kantaro, and his associates, checked out clean," Chin reminded them.

"What if Kantaro isn't Kantaro?" Steve proposed. "He's coming to the island . . . sets up a distraction just ahead of time, frames Chin and Kono upon arrival . . . has our team distracted, spread thin."

"Then he's here for something other than banking, and counting on getting it past us," Danny said. "It makes sense but . . . what? What is he up to, and what is his motive?"

"I have no idea. We keep looking - we follow the blood bank robbery, these bogus deposits in Chin and Kono's accounts, and we look harder at Kantaro," Steve said.

"What else is left on Kantaro's agenda?" Grover asked. "When does he leave the island?"

"Just one more event; a brunch at the La Mariana Sailing Club tomorrow morning at ten; then transport to the airport, his private plane has a flight plan scheduled for two," Steve said.

The team worked late into the night and came up empty. HPD had no leads on the blood bank robbery; all of the security cameras were disabled, and there wasn't so much as a fingerprint left. The bank deposits were routed through dozens of fake IP addresses on six continents. Exhausted and frustrated, Steve finally declared it a day.

"Okay, let's try to get a few hours sleep," he said, rubbing his hand over his face. "We'll start fresh tomorrow morning."
"I thought the point was to try to get some sleep," Jax said, padding out onto the second story lanai, where Steve sat, looking out over the water. She slid into his lap and nestled her head into the crook of his neck, her fingers tracing over the ink on his bicep.

"Hmm, one of us should be," he said, kissing the top of her head. He inhaled deeply, grounding himself in the familiar scent of her hair. "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"You're worried," Jax observed.

"Yeah," he admitted. "Someone's going after my people, ku'uipo. First Danny, now Chin and Kono. If it's Kantaro, we're barely keeping up. If it's not, we haven't even started."

"You said something today: what if Kantaro isn't Kantaro," Jax said.

"Hmmhmm," he murmured, "he checks out almost too clean. If he - wait."

"What?"

Steve sat up, framed Jax's face in his hands, and kissed her soundly. "Grover is right; you would make detective."

"Pretty sure I was just sitting here admiring your ink," Jax said, tilting her head at Steve in confusion.

"Facial recognition," Steve said, going into the bedroom and pulling on clothes. Jax started following suit, slipping into her usual cargos. "We run facial recognition. Interpol, international warrants, everything. If Kantaro isn't Kantaro, he's probably wanted somewhere, for something."

"Boss?" Kono said, as she came into the office. It was still almost dark outside; just a few minutes into sunrise. Steve was at the smart table, staring at Kantaro's photo, while a series of photos flickered through on an adjacent screen.

"Hey, Kono," he said quietly. She looked past him, into his office, at the sight of Jax curled up, asleep, on his sofa. "Couldn't sleep either?"

"Not with someone trying to frame me for colluding with the Yakuza, no way," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"Facial recognition," he said. "Kantarou checks out clean, as do all of his associates. But if we look for their faces, not their names, maybe we'll find something."

One by one, the team filtered in, all well before eight am. Jax, true to form, rolled off the sofa and wandered out when Grover arrived bearing coffee.

"Okay, we go ahead with the yacht club brunch today," Steve said. "If Kantaro really is here for something other than business meetings, we have to have some sort of evidence. We can't just arrest him or bring him in for questioning; if we have no basis, the governor would be justified in having our badges. If he is here legitimately, then we do our job of providing security. The yacht club is arguably the most exposed situation that he'll be in while he's here. Chin, I want you here running this facial recognition, and Danny, you stay on the blood bank robbery. Whatever shred of information you find, you check with each other, cross reference it. See if you can find any connection."
When they arrived at Kantaro's hotel, they were greeted by Mr. Mutsu.

"Mr. Kantaro will be down momentarily," he said. He looked in distaste at Jax's outfit, which had been heartily approved by Kono. "The escort is dressed . . . casually."

"My team is here to provide security, not a fashion statement," Steve snapped.

"I think Officer Nolan looks delectable," Kantaro said, stepping off the elevator. "I find trousers on women very appealing."

"Mr. Mutsu, if you're accompanying us to the yacht club today, please ride with Officer Kalakaua and Captain Grover," Steve said, doing his best to keep a level head.

"Certainly," Mutsu said, openly leering at Kono.

"It's gonna be a long ass day," Grover muttered.

"The LaMariana Sailing Club is adjacent to both the airport and a wildlife preserve," Steve said, as they drove the short distance from the hotel. "Mr. Kantaro, if there is a particular security concern that you have, it would be in your interest to disclose that information. Of the locations you've visited on the island, this is the most exposed."

Kantaro nodded and met Steve's eyes in the rear view mirror. "I understand, Commander," he said, appearing to be sincere. "To my knowledge, there is no particular concern today. As we said, our request for security was just a precaution."

The club bustled with activity on the beautiful, clear morning. The brunch was hosted by a prestigious stocks and bonds company, and many of Honolulu's wealthiest residents were mingling, sipping on mimosas and nibbling at finger foods.

"Lovely," Mr. Kantaro declared, as they stepped out of the SUV. He opened the passenger door and held out his hand for Jax.

"Officer Kalakaua, Captain Grover, and I will be mingling in the crowd," Steve said. "If we see anything out of the ordinary, we'll alert Officer Nolan, and we'll expect you to comply with her instructions immediately."

"I will gladly let Officer Nolan call the shots," Kantaro said.

Steve shook his head as Kantaro strutted into the crowd of wealthy partiers.

"Okay, let's just get through this event," he said quietly into his radio, "and get these guys off the island. And I promise I'm going to have a long, heartfelt discussion with the governor about future security details."

"Good to know, boss," Kono said. "Before the next arrogant prick asks for a tall native . . . escort."

"I say if one of these jerks asks for a tall escort, we offer up Steve," Grover murmured, walking through the crowd and nodding politely.

"Hey, I offered this time," Steve protested, grinning to himself. "The governor was . . . taken
aback. Grover, Kono, do you have a visual on Mutsu?"

"I've got him on that luxury sport cruiser to your four o'clock, Boss," Kono said, "the Monsoon Season."


"You got a hunch, McGarrett?" Grover asked.

"I don't know," Steve said. "Maybe."

Jax wasn't terribly miserable, mingling alongside Kantaro. The air was pleasant and the food was delicious, and she was dressed comfortably for a change. It was bearable, even with Kantaro keeping up a steady stream of self-aggrandizing chatter. She could see Steve, on a higher level of the dock. He had taken a position against the railing, and was standing, his chin on his hand, looking down at her with a half smile.

She grinned up at him, watching curiously as he pulled his phone out of his pocket. She saw his face harden.

"Okay, guys," he said, quietly, into the microphone. "Keep your game faces on and don't react. Chin got a hit. Kantaro and Mutsu are not who they appear to be. Their official documentation checks out clean, but facial recognition picked them up. There are countless warrants out for their arrest, originating in South Korea."

"On what charges?" Grover murmured.

"Human trafficking," Steve said grimly. "Of minors."

"Mutsu just ducked into the wheelhouse," Kono said.

"Okay, Jax, hold your position," Steve said. "Grover and Kono, get on board that cruiser and take Mutsu into custody. Jax, I'm heading to you, we'll take Kantaro. Or whatever the hell their real names are."

Kono and Grover moved quickly toward the Monsoon Season, and Steve started heading toward Jax.

Kantaro pulled a cell phone out of his pocket, frowning at it, and grabbed Jax by the elbow, jerking her body close to his. He put the phone back in his pocket and pulled out what appeared to be a detonator.

"Congratulations, Commander," he said, his face close to Jax's radio. "Well, despite our tactic of keeping our enemies close, I've been informed that you've stumbled upon something. There really is an app for everything, especially if you're on an international watch list. I'm sure you're quite pleased with yourself. You're going to need to stop right where you are, all three of you, or innocent people are going to die."

Steve's hand went to his gun.

"Ah, ah, Commander," Kantaro said. "You think I got to where I am today by not being prepared? Do you see that lovely cruiser, at the end of the dock? The Autumn Breeze? Lovely little craft. There's a birthday party on board today. Annie Marie Dawson's thirteenth birthday. So many lovely little girls. We have a device on board that ship, and if any of you come one step closer, you'll be picking up pieces of them from the bottom of the bay."
Steve glanced at the *Autumn Breeze*; there was no way to confirm or deny Kantaro's claim. It was obvious, though, that the pretty ship was full of young teenage girls.

"I accomplished what I came here to do," Kantaro continued. "Now I just need enough . . . security to get off the island. And my personal security escort is going to provide that for me. Officer Kalakaua, from your vantage point, you can see into the wheelhouse, can you not? Want to tell your team what you can see?"

"Guys, Mutsu appears to have a hostage," Kono said quietly. "Young woman, blond; he has a gun to her head."

"Tell me what your friend sees," Kantaro said to Jax.

She looked at Steve, who nodded minutely, and Kantaro squeezed her arm viciously, pulling it around her back, making her gasp slightly. "Oh, you look to him for orders, I see. Well, he gave you the nod," Kantaro sneered. "Tell me, what does your friend see?"

"She says Mutsu has a hostage in the wheelhouse," Jax gritted out.

"That's right, now, you're is going to slowly, slowly pull out your weapon and drop it quietly into the water, or my associate is going to put a bullet in that young woman's head. Now, Officer Nolan."

Jax looked at Kono, who nodded in resignation, and then at Steve, who did the same. She drew her SIG out of the holster, and Kantaro held her other arm in a bruising grip while she dropped the gun. It slipped into Mamala Bay with a quiet splash.

"Excellent," Kantaro said. "I'm glad to know that Officer Nolan is so very good at taking direction."

Steve growled in frustration.

Kantaro chuckled. "Oh, what I wouldn't give to have audio of Commander McGarrett . . . that expression is priceless. More than professional outrage, I'd say. It looks like . . . jealousy. Hmm?"

Kantaro ducked his head down until he was speaking into the headset, his lips almost brushing against Jax's cheek. "Is he possessive, Officer Nolan?"

"Let the hostage go," Jax ground out. "You have me, I'm unarmed, let her go. Let Kalakaua pull her badge so the girl knows to go to her."

"You like giving orders, Officer Nolan?" Kantaro demanded, and they heard Jax inhale sharply as his hand slid to her forearm and wrapped around it in a crushing grip. "She is released when you and I are on board, and not before. Let's go; quietly, no attracting attention. If I see a hand go to a gun . . . team . . . both hostages are dead and so are all of those pretty little girls."

Steve, Kono, and Grover watched helplessly as Kantaro pulled Jax on board the *Monsoon Season*; looking for all the world as if he was politely helping her keep her footing.

"Guys, this detonator looks like the real deal," Jax said, "you need to concentrate on evacuating the area. Do you copy? Clear this area of civilians."

They heard the sickening sound of bone on bone, and then a crackle of static and a high pitched screech, and then silence. Seconds later, a young blond woman exited from the wheelhouse, looking around frantically. Kono gestured to her, and she clambered over the side of the boat and took off up the boardwalk to Kono, tears streaming down her face.
"Okay, we're Five-O, I've got you," Kono said, wrapping her arms around the shaking young woman, as Steve and Grover took off toward the boat.

"Grover, if he gets away from the dock," Steve yelled.

"I know, I know," Grover said, his huge frame moving with surprising speed.

They got close to the *Monsoon Season* . . . close enough to see Mutsu pushing the engine to full throttle, and Kantaro with his beefy forearm around Jax's neck, a gun pressed to her temple. As they stood watching helplessly in disbelief, the boat sped toward the horizon.

"What the hell just happened, Lou?" Steve asked, his voice shaking and hoarse.

His cell phone rang and he put it on speaker.

"Commander McGarrett, you made the right call," Kantaro said. "I'm glad those pretty little girls didn't have to die today. When we are safely on our way to an undisclosed location, one with no extradition laws, we will call and give you the location of Officer Nolan. You will be able to collect her then. You see, Commander McGarrett . . . you were exactly the sort of security team we wanted. We feel very, very secure."

They heard a scuffle and then heard Jax yelling. "Have the Coasties blow this ship out of the water, Steve! Don't let these assholes get -" There was another scuffling sound, a sharp crack, and a gritted cry of pain. Grover put a steadying hand on Steve's shoulder.

"Well, I must say, I was dubious of the red hair at first," Kantaro said, sounding slightly out of breath. "But I think I'm going to appreciate it, after all. There's something to be said for temper. If Officer Nolan isn't cooperative, you'll just be picking up what's left of her. I'd keep your phone charged, Commander."

The call disconnected with a click.

Steve was on the phone with Chin immediately. While he waited for him to pick up, he turned to Grover.

"Grover, get HPD, SWAT, and the bomb squad here" he said, pacing. "Chin, get a trace on the last incoming call on my cell phone. And see if you can pick up a signal on Jax's radio. The Coast Guard - Chin, call the Coast Guard and get them after the *Monsoon Season*. Ask them to track it, but tell them not to approach; there are two armed men with a hostage on board."

"On it, Steve," Chin said, "what happened?"

Steve swallowed hard. "Kantaro has Jax. I need - oh, God, Chin, I've got to tell Danny. I've got to tell him I stood here and watched that asshole take Jax and I never even drew on him."

#####

In moments, HPD was crawling on the sailing club grounds; all of the civilians had been evacuated, and the bomb squad canines were sniffing on the *Autumn Breeze*.

"Commander," the bomb tech gestured, and Steve went over to him. "It's the real deal," the tech said. "The ship would have been obliterated; there would have been no survivors."

Steve ran a shaky hand over his face. "Okay, I'm going to send you a list of every place that was on Kantaro's itinerary, then, and you'll need to check all of them. For all we know, he had a contingency plan at every location."
The tech nodded and Steve turned around, feeling lost and unfocused. He practically knocked Danny over.

"Whoa, babe," Danny said, reaching out to steady himself by grabbing Steve's forearm.

"Danny," Steve choked out. "Oh, God, Danny, I'm so sorry."

"Steve," Danny said, "He played us. He played the whole team, hell, he played the governor. You heard the bomb tech; that was not a bluff. He could have killed all of those little girls. You think Jax would have wanted to live with that?"

Steve shook his head, his breath coming in short gasps. Danny wrapped a hand around the back of his neck and squeezed, pressing Steve's forehead to his own. "We'll get her back, Steve," he said. "Yeah?"

Steve nodded. "Yeah." He took a deep breath. "Kantaro, or whatever the hell his name is, says that he'll call with a location on Jax when he and his partner are off the island."

"Do you believe him?" Danny asked.

Steve looked at him, shaking his head. "I don't know, Danny. It's not really in his interest to keep her alive." He hesitated. "Not for too long, anyway."

"Okay, I know where you're going inside that head of yours, Steve, and you can not go there. Do you hear me? You can not go there, because then I'll go there, and we'll both lose our minds, and that is not how we help Jax. How many of them were there?"

"Just the two, Kantaro and Mutsu," Steve said. He looked around, half distracted, his mind going in a million directions. Grover was coordinating with HPD and SWAT; Chin was with Kono, helping take the young woman's statement. Steve felt useless, helpless.

"Well, then, I like our girl's odds," Danny said firmly. "She's been trained by a real live G.I. Joe, after all."

"G.I. Joe was Army, Danny," Steve said, allowing himself a shred of comfort in their familiar banter.

"Yeah, yeah, go Navy, hooyah," Danny said. "Let's get our girl back."

#*#*#*#*#*#

The scene at the sailing club was cleared quickly, and the team headed back to headquarters. They didn't expect to see Lieutenant Cage waiting for them when they got off the elevator.

"Cage," Chin said coolly. He had a sinking feeling. "What can we do to help Internal Affairs this afternoon? As I'm sure you're aware, we are in the middle of an ongoing situation."

"Officers Kelly and Kalakaua, I regret to say that in the absence of a legitimate explanation for the substantial deposits in your bank accounts, I'm going to have to ask that you hand over your badges and service weapons," Cage said.

"You can't do this!" Steve exploded. "You know they're innocent - they're being set up, just like Danny's car was set up. Cage, someone put my blood on Danny's car, and within days, there's phony deposits in Chin and Kono's accounts? All right around the time two men wanted for human trafficking came to the island, under the guise of asking Five-O to provide security. And
now they've got one of my people hostage. You can not possibly pretend not to understand that Chin and Kono are being set up as a distraction, to weaken the team and spread us thin!"

"Be that as it may, Commander," Cage said, "Five-O can not operate outside the law. I've been authorized to place them under arrest."

Cage held out his hand toward Chin and Kono.

"Stop it right there," Steve said, "I'm calling the governor."

"The governor is concerned about the apparent coincidence between your team providing security for internationally wanted criminals, and the timing of the deposits," Cage said. "And now that these men have conveniently escaped your custody . . ."


"They were not in our custody, damn it," Danny yelled. "The governor set us up to provide security for them. Who's asking about that coincidence? And when we made them, they took one of our people hostage to avoid arrest? Hunh? How about that coincidence?"

Cage hesitated. "I have some discretion . . . I won't serve the arrest warrants. But I have to insist on suspension pending an investigation. That means -"

"We know what it means," Chin snapped, "it's not like I lack experience. You're a gutless wonder, Cage." He and Kono handed over their badges and service weapons.

"Suspension is enough," Steve said quietly. "Cage. We've got a team member missing, taken hostage by two men who are wanted for human trafficking of minors."

Cage nodded. "For now, Commander. But they aren't to be on government property, and that includes these offices." He turned to go toward the elevator, and then hesitated. "Our investigation will be ongoing . . . if we determine the source of the deposits, you'll be the first to know."

They watched in disbelief as Cage disappeared into the elevator.

Kono tried hard, she really did, but handing over her badge was the final straw. She tried to stifle the sob that punched its way up from her throat, but she couldn't.

"Hey, cuz," Chin said, wrapping his arms around her, "it's going to be okay."

"I don't think so," Kono said, shaking her head. "Who are these people, and how did this happen? And now they have Jax." Her shoulder shook silently as she buried her head in Chin's shoulder.

Steve had his cell phone to his ear.

"Catherine? I need help," he said, walking into his office.

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Chin and Kono had gone home, and if Chin just happened to have an exceptionally high-powered, Navy-issue laptop in his possession, well, Steve was understandably distracted. Oops.

And Kono, with her sudden and unexpected time off from work, was going to surf the break at Sandy's Beach; the surf, and the riders, were rough and tumble. And if someone of the undesirable element happened to have an inkling of big out-of-town money being thrown around, well, that would be fortuitous.
Grover rationalized that he had enough sleep and plenty of experience to man the office for an all-nighter. The plasma screens showed ongoing updates from the Coast Guard, the FAA, and every harbor master's office. Any movement on or off the island was being checked and double checked by all available authorities. There were no signals to trace . . . not from Jax's radio, or cell phone, or the Monsoon Season itself. It was as if the ship, and the people on board, had simply vanished.

"I assume Catherine will call you directly if she finds anything," Grover said, "and if I get so much as a blip, I'll call you. But Steve, you're a wreck, both you and Danny. Go; at least get a shower and get comfortable for a bit."

And so it was, that Danny was driving them back to Steve's, at almost two am. Danny was driving, as if that wasn't enough to completely unnerve him; Steve hadn't even reached for the keys. He was just sitting there, in the passenger seat, clenching his phone in his hand, until Danny feared it would crack.

"Danny," Steve blurted, out of the blue. "It's okay, man, if you hate me. I get it."

"Steven," Danny sighed. "I don't hate you."

"I keep going over it, over and over, in my mind. What I could have done differently. I could have taken a shot, maybe shot the detonator out of his hand," Steve said.

"Then it might have been your shot that blew up that birthday party," Danny argued patiently.

"If we had moved in faster," Steve said.

"Then the hostage might have been killed," Danny answered. "Stop it, Steve, just stop. You're a damn Navy SEAL; no one has better training, better instincts. You followed protocol and priorities, and no civilians were injured, despite one being held at gunpoint and many others being in the presence of live explosives."

"They got Jax, Danny," Steve said softly, as they pulled into the driveway.

Danny threw the car into park and leapt out of it, his short, powerful stride carrying him to Steve's front door. He punched in the security code, violently, and threw open the front door, making it inside before Steve even got to the porch. As Steve closed and rearmed the security system behind him, Danny turned on him.

"I know damn well that they got Jax, Steve!" he yelled. "You don't have to tell me. Chin told me. He came in my office with this horrible look on his face, and I knew it. I knew the whole thing had gone sideways, I just didn't know which of you had gone down. I know that they have Jax. I know we have every authority on the island and all of our CIs looking for any leads. I'm convinced we're going to find her. I just don't know what we're going to find. Okay? I know. I know they got Jax."

"I'm sorry, Danny," Steve whispered.

"You don't have to apologize, Steven," Danny yelled, "this isn't your fault. There wasn't anything you could have done differently."

"I know, Danny," Steve said. "I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry that someone we love isn't here, with us. I'm sorry for what you're going through; because I know you love Jax, too. I'm sorry because I know you're hurting."

"Oh," Danny said, deflating. He collapsed on the sofa.
Steve paced uncertainly. "You, ah, want a beer or anything, Danny?"

Silence, and a shake of the head.

"I'm going to go up and grab a shower," Steve said.

Danny nodded. "I know my way around the guest bathroom well enough; go ahead."

It was pushing three am when Steve's phone rang. He and Danny were sitting in silence in the darkened living room, feeling helpless, unable to rest. The phone was shrill, and they both jumped.

"McGarrett," Steve ground out, answering on the first ring.

"Commander McGarrett," came a familiar voice.

Steve jumped to his feet and drew his SIG. Danny looked up at him in alarm, drawing his own weapon and pointing it toward the window, the door, looking in confusion at Steve.

"Declan Novak," Steve said. "I am in no mood." He thumbed the phone onto speaker. Danny pulled out his cell and sent Chin a frantic text, hoping that the souped up computer that had made its way home with him could trace the call.

"I know, I know, it's been a rough day," Novak said. "It's not gone according to my plan, either."

"You're behind this," Steve said. "You're behind all of it. Danny's set-up, Chin and Kono's . . ."

"Yes. The Miobe brothers, who you know as Mr. Kantaro and Mr. Matsu, were part of the plan. They were to make the deposits, and Kelly and Kalakaua were supposed to see the inside of a cell. But the brothers deviated from the plan. They were driven by greed, and lust, and decided to take matters into their own hands, to serve their own ends," Novak explained calmly.

"They have Jax," Steve said. "You miserable son of a bitch, you're playing games -"

"Yes, Commander," Novak snapped. "My games, my rules. Your people's worst nightmares, visited on them. This was supposed to be Kelly and Kalakaua's nightmare; not Jax's, not yours. The Miobe brothers broke the rules of the game. It wasn't Jax's turn, and they played out of turn. They've been punished. You should go see what the tide has washed in, Commander."

The call ended abruptly.

"Novak? Novak!" Steve yelled pointlessly into the phone.

"Steve, what does he mean, see what the tide washed in?" Danny asked.

Steve shook his head, then stopped, and took off toward the back door. "The beach, Danny, grab a flashlight from the kitchen!"

He ran outside, looking up and down the beach frantically. The moonlight reflected off the water, and it took his eyes a moment to adjust. There . . . he thought he saw something dark . . .

"Steve!" Danny yelled, turning on a flashlight as Steve dashed into the surf. He ran toward Steve, trying not to trip. Steve was knee deep, then waist deep, and Danny wondered how far in he was going to go, when he was turning and coming back toward the shore, pulling something behind him.

"Danny, get the light over here," he yelled, and Danny closed the remaining space between them,
shining the light, trying to figure out what Steve was dragging behind him.

"Oh my God," Danny breathed out, wedging the flashlight in his pocket and grabbing hold of the raft that Steve was pulling out of the water. "Steve, is . . ."

Danny could hear a soft whimpering sound over the noise of the surf.

"Jax? Babe, is -" Danny peered into the raft. There was a tangle of limbs, definitely more than one person.

"Danny," came a broken reply, and Danny thought he would collapse with relief.

"Pull the raft all the way up to the lanai," Steve said, "so we can see . . . I don't want to try to lift her out until we can figure . . . this is like a stretcher, it's safer . . ." he was panting with exertion, and Danny grabbed the edge of the raft with both hands and pulled hard. They covered the distance quickly and reached the lanai. Danny dashed inside, turning on the light, then grabbed both of their cell phones and the first aid kit.

When he returned, Steve was bent over the raft, his shoulders shaking.

"Jax, ku'uipo, hold on, let me check your spine before I move you," he said.


Danny looked on in disbelief as Steve gently untangled Jax from the bodies on top of her.

"Get me out," Jax pleaded frantically, her voice coming out in gasping sobs. Danny had never heard her voice so panicked.

"The Monsoon Season just washed up on Waikiki Beach," Danny said. "It was torched."

Steve's phone rang again. "Williams," Danny answered tersely. "Yeah, Catherine. Really, on the island? Well, we could have told you that. Yes, we know. I suggest you start by searching in a radius around Steve's fucking house, because he just delivered Jax to us in a liferaft that washed up on Steve's beach."

Danny knelt down next to Steve and got his first close look at the scene inside the liferaft.

Kantaro and Mutsu were obviously, painfully dead, from what appeared to be a bullet to the back of each of their heads. Danny's stomach turned at the sight.

"Get them off me," Jax pleaded, as Steve tried to gently extricate her small frame from underneath the combined dead weight of the two men.

"Danny, her spine is clear but she has -" Steve said, his voice hoarse, "she might have broken bones, I can't tell . . . I'm trying to move them off her and get her out but I'm hurting her . . ."

"Okay, okay, I've got you babe," Danny said. "I'm going to roll Kantaro toward me, hold him against the side, you lift Jax out, yeah?"

Danny swallowed hard against a rush of bile as he pulled the body toward the side of the raft. He absently wondered if they had actually been shot in the raft, there was so much blood, but no, there would be bullet holes . . . he gave himself a mental shake.
"Please, please," Jax was whimpering.

"Almost there," Steve said, his bloody hands slipping as he tried to get a secure grip. Finally he had an arm under her knees and one under her shoulders, and he stood, lifting her free of the tangle of gore of the life raft.

Jax buried her head in Steve's shoulder and sobbed weakly, his hand cradling her blood-soaked hair. He sat down on a bench, holding her against his chest.

"I've got you, Jax," he whispered, over and over. He looked up at Danny, who was hovering anxiously over them. "Danny, call a bus."

"No," Jax protested, "please, can't I just go home? I want to just go home and take a shower. Please."

"Ku'uipo, you are home, I swear," Steve said, looking at Danny in alarm. "Look, we're right outside our back door. But you're hurt; we need to get you checked out. We'll take you to Malia, okay?"

"Untie me, please, please untie me," Jax said, and Danny looked at her wrists and ankles. They were bound, strangely, tied in what looked like red ribbon. She had obviously struggled against the restraints, her skin torn and bloody.

"Evidence bag," Steve said quietly, nodding his head toward the first aid kit.

Danny gloved up and pulled evidence bags and a pair of surgical shears out of the kit, and quickly cut through the restraints, his hands shaking. He sealed the blood-soaked ribbon into the bags and nodded at Steve.

"Novak," Jax mumbled, "said he was returning me to you, gift-wrapped, and delivered."

Steve tightened his grip on her, and she winced in pain. "Sorry, I'm sorry, Jax," Steve murmured. "Where are you hurt? You want me to call a bus?"

Jax shook her head weakly, and Danny took a step back, took a deep breath. His brain, fueled by adrenaline, slipped instantly into investigator mode. She was covered in blood, but it was impossible to know what of it was hers. Her clothing wasn't torn; in fact, her shirt didn't even seem to be untucked. He could see bruising on her face, her forearms . . . her knuckles were a wreck.

"Defensive and offensive injuries," he murmured, and Steve looked up at him. Danny allowed himself a small moment of hopefulness, and nodded down toward Jax. "Clothing is intact." It occurred to Danny that between the two of them, he was the one more coherent. He took a deep breath, and put a hand on Steve's shoulder.

"Just . . . you just hold her, okay, Super SEAL? Because that seems to be helping," Danny said softly. "Jax, babe, you are pretty beat up. Let's take you to Malia, get you checked out. Then we'll sort out what happened. Okay?"

Danny pulled his phone back out and called Chin. This time he was a little more coherent.

"Chin, yeah - Grover caught you up to speed? Is Malia on? Do you think she'd be willing to come in, meet us at Queens? Jax is pretty disoriented, I think someone familiar . . . thanks man. No, I think we're okay bringing her in. She's pretty adamant that she doesn't want a bus." There was a short pause, and Steve noted that Danny's voice dropped, and he half turned away from them. "I don't know, Chin."
"Evidence," Jax blurted out suddenly, pushing weakly against Steve and trying to sit up. "There's . . . we have to get the evidence."

"Ku'uiopo," Steve whispered, his voice choking, "what evidence?"

"There's a flash drive . . . it's . . . look in their pockets, you have to get it, it -" she broke off with a grunt of pain.

"Okay, okay, babe, slow down," Danny said. "A flash drive?"

"Yeah, that's what . . . there was a computer, and I tried . . . and they caught me, and took the flash drive, but it's in Mutsu's pocket, I think. It - there's evidence, evidence that they made the phony deposits and -" she broke off, looking up at Steve in panic. "Steve," she whispered, "I think I'm gonna -"

Steve recognized that particular brand of panic and turned her as gently as he could, and she retched violently.

"Steve!" Danny yelled, alarmed, at the sight of what seemed to be a copious amount of blood.

"It's bright red," Steve said, as if that was supposed to make Danny feel better.

"That's exactly the problem!" Danny said, grabbing a towel from the back of a chair and reaching under Jax to gently dab at her face.

"No, it's - I mean, it's not great, but it's not a sign of internal bleeding," Steve said, trying to roll Jax back toward him without hurting her. "But it is a sign that we need to get you to Malia."

"Get the flashdrive, please," Jax begged. "Otherwise I got the shit beat out of me for nothing. There's - I think they were planning something, there might - Steve, there might be children -" she broke off, coughing.

"Okay, okay," Danny said, looking down at the bodies in distaste. "Mutsu, you think?"

"Yeah," Jax said, as Steve fished around for a blanket to wrap around her shaking body. He carefully avoided her favorite quilt, and grabbed the oversized Kamekona Shrimp towel instead. It was more than large enough to wrap around her and, well . . . it just wasn't his favorite. He always felt a little odd, sitting on Kamekona's face like that.

"Aha!" Danny said, pulling out a flash drive in triumph. He turned and held it aloft, smiling.

"Whoa," he said, his smile disappearing as he took in Jax's appearance, which had somehow gone from bad to worse. The relieved expression on her face was worth going through a dead man's pockets, though.

"Thanks, Danny," Jax said quietly.

"Okay, now, can we please drive to get appropriate medical attention for you?" Danny asked.

"And you, Super SEAL, do you have shoes and dry pants and . . . yeah, a clean shirt would be good." Danny grabbed their cell phones and shoved them in his pocket, and picked up the evidence bags.

"Grab my bag out of the back of the truck, Danny. How about you, you're soaked, too," Steve said, as they hurried around the side of the house. He carried Jax easily, trying not to jostle her too much.
"In the trunk, I'm set," Danny replied. He held the passenger door open for Steve, and handed Jax the evidence bags when Steve settled, still holding Jax securely against him, then quickly ran to Steve's truck to gather his change of clothes.

"Ku'uipo," Steve whispered, while Danny was at the truck. "Sweetheart did . . . okay, they're dead, so we don't need evidence, but do we need to call ahead, have Malia have a kit ready? Do you want us to call Kono?"

Jax shook her head against his collarbone. "No . . . guys like that; they're all talk. I mean, maybe, if Novak hadn't shown up . . . how the hell did that even happen? What is Novak doing -"

Steve put a gentle finger against her mouth. "We'll sort that out. Are you sure, Jax?"

Danny had slipped into the car and started the engine, meeting Steve's eyes over Jax's head.

"I'm sure," Jax whispered. "I would tell you. Or you would find out or . . . I'm sure. They were much more concerned with getting away, and they were on the phone . . . I don't understand any Japanese, or maybe it wasn't Japanese, I'm not sure but . . . and then they got into an argument so I . . . "

"Hmm?" Steve prompted. "Jax?" he asked, louder, when there was no response.

"What?" Jax said, rather irritably.

"Okay, Danny has the flash drive, let's just . . . when you're thinking a little clearer, we'll get a statement, okay?" Steve said, pushing her blood-soaked curls out of her face. He frowned at a deep laceration right at her hairline. "Some of this blood is yours, Jax."

"Hmm," she mumbled, her eyes dropping to half mast. "That might explain the headache."

Danny pressed the gas pedal a little bit more firmly, and decided that lights and sirens were definitely warranted.

They pulled up to Queens, an anxious group waiting for them at the double doors.

Grover reached the passenger door first and opened it for Steve, his big hands helping balance Jax, whose hands tightened around Steve's neck. "Hey, partner, he's got you," Grover said. "It's just me." He stuck his head inside the door. "Danny, go on in, man. I'll park the car."

Danny didn't hesitate; he jumped out of the car. "Thanks, Lou," he said, clapping Grover on the shoulder as he passed him.

"Holy shit," Kono exclaimed softly, as Steve walked toward them, cradling Jax in his arms. Danny mentally echoed the sentiment. He was glad now that the light on Steve's lanai had been dim, diffused. In the brighter lights of the emergency bay, Jax looked like something from an old Stephen King movie: covered in blood and gore, her cheek and jaw purpling, her hands, which were still clutching the evidence bags, were swollen and wrecked.

She shifted and tried to lift her head. "Where?" she rasped.

"Queens," Steve murmured. "The team is here, and Malia."

Jax tried to lift the evidence bags. "Chin . . ." she mumbled.

"Hey, Jax, what do you have?" Chin said, taking the bags gently, and wincing at the sight of her knuckles.
"I'll explain," Danny said, "and we need to get a laptop."

"Trauma 1," Malia said, leading the way. Danny, Chin, and Kono fell in behind Steve.

Malia pushed open the door, and after Steve went through, she held up a patient hand to the rest of the team. "Guys," she said, "come on, you know the drill. Go get Danny cleaned up, then come back and we'll get Steve sorted. Danny, I'm going to assume that it's ok for Steve to stay with Jax?"

"I don't think we could pry him out of her hands at this point, babe," Danny said, smiling tiredly.

Malia nodded and made shooing motions, then closed the door quietly and turned to Steve. He'd placed Jax carefully on the gurney and was standing over her, tracing a finger over her bruised cheek.

"There's a flash drive," she mumbled.

"Hmm, Danny got it," Steve said. "Hey, Malia is going to check you out," he explained, stepping back. She reached for him, a soft grunt of pain escaping her, and he took her hand carefully.

"Jax," Malia said, "I'm going to pull up a stool for Steve, and he can stay right here, okay?" She beamed at Steve as she rolled up a stool, and he ducked his head and smiled. "I'm happy to see you willing to ask for some help, Jacqueline," she said softly. "Let's see what we have here," Malia sighed. "There's..." she looked up at Steve and cleared her throat, shaking her head.

She pressed the call button for the nurse. "I'm going to need help," she said, glancing uncertainly at the sheer volume of blood spattered over Jax.

"Shower?" Jax mumbled hopefully.

"Oh, sweetheart, soon, I hope," Malia said. "But we can't until we figure out where you're injured."

Jax haphazardly pointed a finger at her hairline. "Steve says here," she said, her words slurring a bit. "And my hands hurt. And my arm." She looked up at Steve. "I blocked with the side of my arm. Also, Kantusu grabbed it. Hard."

"Kantaro?" Steve prompted gently, looking up and smiling as Julia, Malia's favorite nurse, slipped into the room. She raised her eyebrows at the scene before her, held up a finger, turned, and left.

"Yeah, him," Jax said. "There's a flash drive, be sure - what?"

"We have the drive, ku'iupo," Steve said patiently. "Shh, let Malia take care of you. Chin is taking care of the evidence."


"We're still trying to piece it together," Steve said. "I literally pulled her out of a life raft, tangled with two dead bodies. She directed us to a flash drive, in one of the guy's pockets', that she says has evidence to clear Kono and Chin, as well as some sort of deal these guys were working on."

Julia pushed back into a room with a rolling cart, equipped with several basins of warm water, and stacks of washcloths and towels. As Malia started on taking Jax's vitals and trying to determine her injuries, Julia painstakingly started the process of trying to find Jax underneath all the blood.
Grover had found the rest of the team in the small family waiting room across the hall from Trauma 1. Armed with coffee, Chin plugged the flash drive into the laptop, as Kono looked anxiously over his shoulder. A series of files uploaded rapidly to the screen.

"Hey, that's my bank account number!" Kono exclaimed, pointing.

"Son of a bitch, she actually did it," Grover said, shaking his head. "She actually got the proof of the set-up. What else is on there, Chin?"

"Well, it looks like page after page of documentation of 'imports' and 'exports','" Chin said. "I'm not sorry these guys are dead, but this would have put them away. We'll get this to Homeland and the FBI; this could be vital information to some open investigations." Chin paused, and glanced at the other evidence bag, the one holding the bloody ribbon. "I'm afraid to ask," he said.

Danny sighed. "Kantaro and Mutsu were sent here by Declan Novak to set you and Kono up. They improvised using Jax as a hostage when we made them on the human trafficking warrants. Novak apparently did not approve of their ad lib, and executed them. Jax said that he told her he was delivering her to Steve . . . gift-wrapped. Along with the bodies."

"That's what . . . so all of that blood wasn't Jax's," Kono confirmed.

"No. It was . . . I've seen a lot, and that was . . . indescribably horrific," Danny said. "She was . . . I've never seen her lose it like that. Pulling her out from underneath those bodies. They were . . . they'd been executed. Single shot, back of the head, close range, and they were . . . she had struggled, in the life raft, and they were tangled." Danny shuddered. "I'm going to be having nightmares about this, I can't even . . . "

"Hey, she made it through 9/11, she'll make it through this," Kono said, hugging Danny. "We're all here for her."

Steve appeared at the door of the waiting room.

"Hey," he said, his voice hoarse. He was still soaked and blood spattered.

"How's our girl?" Danny asked, standing up and pushing Steve down into a chair.

"Concussion, there was some sort of blunt force trauma, that's where she also got that nasty cut. Head wounds always bleed impressively, but Malia was able to close it with surgical glue. She took some good shots to the face, had a lot of post-nasal bleeding - that was the deal with her puking up the blood, Danny, so it wasn't anything serious. Her arm isn't broken, but it probably feels like it; Malia says the bruising goes bone deep; looks like a defensive injury. Her hands are a mess . . . offensive injuries," Steve said. He rubbed a hand over his face, frowning as he realized his hand was still liberally spattered with blood.

"She gave as good as she got," Grover said, proud.

"It would certainly appear that way," Steve said, smiling. "Her wrists and ankles are messed up pretty bad. Malia's hoping that once the swelling . . . it's just hard to tell what's going on. She must have panicked at some point, based on the . . . it's pretty bad, but it'll heal."

"What happened, Steve? How did she get from being taken hostage by the Kiobe brothers to being . . . well, rescued hardly seems like an appropriate word . . . and who did the damage?" Chin asked.
"It's coming in bits and pieces," Steve said, "that's why I came to get you guys - we better try to get a statement before the drugs kick in."

"Won't it be too much, all of us in there?" Chin asked.

Steve grinned. "Nah, she's mostly focused on having found proof that you and Kono were set up; I think she'd be disappointed not to see you."

As Grover, Chin, and Danny filed out toward the trauma room, Kono stopped Steve with a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Boss," she said quietly, "those guys . . . they were such arrogant assholes . . ." She stopped, knowing that Steve would fill in what she couldn't quite bring herself to ask.

"She says not," Steve said. He chuckled. "Says guys like that are usually all talk."

Kono smiled wide with relief. "It's true, boss." She threw her arms around him, and he allowed himself a moment of letting relief wash over him, resting his head on her shoulder, his hands fisting at her waist.

"I was so scared, Kono," he whispered. "And Novak . . . damn it, Novak had his hands on her, Kono, I -"

"Boss," Kono said firmly. "One thing at a time. Let's go see what Jax can tell us, and then I'm getting my badge back, and we'll go after Novak."

I'd say I hate to see the other guys, but I'm pretty sure that's a little too accurate to be funny," Grover murmured to Danny, as they slowly filed into Trauma 1.

"Hey, babe," Danny said, "you look much better."

"You're lying Danny, but I'll take it," Jax said, smiling tiredly at him, lopsided, since one cheek was swollen and blue.

"Jax, I know you need to get some rest and let Malia give you some of the good stuff, but we need to try to piece together what happened," Steve said gently. "It's our best shot at getting our hands on Novak. Catherine already has a Naval Intelligence team scouring the area. Start with the sailing club, and just try to walk us through what happened, if you can."

Jax nodded, wincing as the movement reminded her of the blow to the head.

"The first thing they did, of course, was destroy the radio. My cell phone got tossed over . . . hey!" Jax stopped suddenly. "Do you think there's any chance we could recover my SIG? That's my favorite. I love that gun."

"We could probably get a diver down there," Chin said, smiling. "And yeah, we figured your phone was toast when we couldn't get a signal. What then?"

"They were arguing," Jax said, shifting uncomfortably on the narrow bed. "A lot. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but I don't think taking me hostage was part of the plan."

"It wasn't," Steve said quietly. "Declan Novak sent them to set up Chin and Kono."

"Novak . . . " Jax looked between the team members in confusion, pain and concussion clouding
"We'll get back to that," Steve said. "So, these guys were arguing. Were you on the boat the whole time? The Monsoon Season?"

"Yeah, as soon as we got clear of the bay they shot out a -" Jax made a vague gesture with her hands. "Near the wheel."

"The transponder," Chin said. "No one could pick up a signal."

"Wait," Jax said, struggling and trying to sit up, "the ship, with the birthday party; did -"

"All of the civilians were evacuated safely," Kono said. "Including the young woman they had on the boat before you."

"Good," Jax sighed, sagging back into the pillows. "Sorry. Where was I?"

"They shot out the transponder," Grover prompted gently.

"Yeah. We were still close enough at that point, I thought, while they were distracted, maybe I could go over the side while they were arguing. I tried to get to the door of the wheelhouse, but Kantaro caught me with the grip of his Smith & Wesson," Jax said, touching her fingers gingerly to the side of her head. "It gets a little fuzzy after that."

"Malia said you almost certainly passed out at some point," Steve reminded her. "That's a nasty hit, Jax. It's understandable if it's a little fuzzy. What's the next thing you remember?"

"We were docked somewhere . . . not any of the clubs. Not the docks. I think . . . maybe a private dock? I don't remember seeing anyone else. There was more yelling . . . I was on the floor of the wheelhouse, the door was closed . . . no one was paying attention, so I thought if I could grab the flashdrive," Jax said, looking at Chin. "I know, there's probably a way to upload files or something, but I couldn't think, and I didn't understand anything on the screen, but I thought I could figure out how to drag and drop the files onto the flash. Did it work?"

Chin nodded and smiled at her. "It worked, Jax. We have all the evidence."

"Oh, good," Jax said nodding somewhat absently. "I almost had it . . . I was putting the drive in my pocket, and Mutsu came in. He was upset."

"Upset?" Danny asked, his mouth in a grim line.

"Yeah, he was pretty pissed -" Jax gestured vaguely at the various bruises. "Then he took the flash drive. I saw him put in in his pocket. Then the next thing I know, Declan Novak boarded the boat and all hell broke loose. There was more yelling, and Novak was yelling that it wasn't my turn, that it was Kono and Chin's turn . . ." She looked at Steve in confusion.

"Jax, Novak was behind the set-up on Danny's accident; and he hired - or bribed, or blackmailed - Kantaro and Mutsu to set up Chin and Kono. They weren't supposed to take you as a hostage; they could have gotten away with the explosives on the other ship as their bargaining chip," Steve explained quietly. The team was starting to put all of the pieces together, from Steve and Danny's frantic phone calls, they hadn't been able to sort it all out. "Novak said . . . he said that Kantaro and Mutsu weren't following the rules of the game."

"So it's been Novak," Grover said. "The psychological warfare."

"Yeah," Steve confirmed. "I want to call in Caviness to consult. And we're going to have a long
talk about jurisdiction with the governor and Naval Intelligence. Jax, what happened after Novak boarded?"

Jax was suddenly quiet, her hands shaking. "He . . . he'd disarmed them before I even knew what was going on," she said. "He'd knocked them out cold, laid them out on the deck of the boat. He came in the wheelhouse, grabbed me . . . I figured he was going to just kill all three of us."

Malia looked up from where she'd been standing, quietly, next to Chin, and made a note in Jax's file.

Steve was at her side in two steps, taking her hand gently in his and sitting back down on the stool next to her. He pushed her riot of curls carefully back away from her face. "I'm so sorry, ku'uipo," he whispered. "We're almost done. What happened; what happened with Novak?"

"Well, he didn't kill me . . . there was duct tape, and he taped my wrists . . . my arm hurt . . . When Max - did you have Max come to the house? The scene - " Jax struggled again, as if she was going to sit up.

"Stand down," Grover said. "Max is at Steve's house. He's got it."

"Okay," Jax said, panting slightly. "Sorry."

"It's okay, babe," Danny said, resting his hand lightly on her foot. Her toes, sticking out from under the blanket, didn't look to be too bruised.

"Novak," Steve prompted.

Jax brushed at her eyes. "He . . . tortured them," she whispered. "It was . . . you'll get a report from Max. It was already getting dark . . . it went on for hours. We must have been somewhere remote, if no one called in . . . if someone had heard . . . they would have called it in."

Chin made a note on his tablet. It wouldn't hurt to check.

"Finally, he was done with them. I think they were still alive . . . I don't know. I could hear Novak, he'd gone below, and when he came topside he had the raft, and he set it up . . . he . . . he just shot them. Just, without blinking, just shot them in the back of the head and rolled their bodies into the life raft. I thought he was going to start on me next . . . but he didn't. He started the boat back up, and we rode back out into the water, it seemed like, for a long time. It was dark, I couldn't . . . " Jax was breathing fast, panicking a bit, and Steve wrapped a hand around the back of her neck.

"Jax, I want you to breathe with me a minute, okay?" he said. "Just take a minute. Okay, there you go."

"We stopped. We finally stopped, and he undid the duct tape and he pulled that ribbon out of his pocket and he tied it around my wrists and ankles, and I thought, again, that was it, he was going to shoot me next. But he didn't; he shoved me into the life raft, and he said he had giftwrapped me for you," Jax said, looking up at Steve. "And then he lowered the raft over the side, and there was a . . . a little boat -"

"A dinghy. God forbid you not call it a dinghy," Danny said, smiling, his blue eyes crinkling.

"Yeah, that," Jax said, "and he towed the life raft. And then he left, and I panicked because I was alone, except, their bodies, and I couldn't sit up and it was -"

Kono grabbed the basin just in time as Jax retched violently, spitting out a small bit of bloody
fluid. She set it aside and pressed the nurse's button.

"Shhh, okay, that's enough," Danny said, shooting a glance at Steve. The image of Jax tangled with those bodies was not one they would soon forget. Steve stood abruptly, put a hand on Danny's shoulder, and stalked out of the room, grabbing his phone as he went. Danny slipped onto the rolling stool that Steve had just vacated.

There was a quiet knock at the door, and Julia's head popped into the room. Kono pointed to the basin, and Julia winced in sympathy. "Dr. Waincroft is filling out the order for medication now; I'll ask her to add an anti-emetic. I'll get some ice chips, too." The door closed softly behind her.

Kono slipped to the sink and wet a washcloth, handing it silently to Danny.

"It's over, Jax, you're safe," he murmured, tenderly wiping her face.

"I'm going to get back to the office; get things geared up for what comes next. You're parked in G-5," Grover said, handing the keys to the Camaro over to Danny. "Nolan, I'll get you a phone requisitioned and anything else you need. Maybe one of those tablets, like Chin uses. Lord knows you can't type, even without your knuckles busted."

Jax grinned lopsidedly at him again. "Thanks, partner."

"Jax, we are so grateful," Chin said, holding up the flash drive. "Mahalo. There aren't many people who would have pulled this off in your situation."

"Yes, mahalo, Jax," Kono said, her warm brown eyes filling with tears. "I'll be by in the afternoon, with my badge back, thanks to you, and I'll bring you some ice cream and the latest issue of Guns and Ammo."

"I'll be in the office," Jax insisted.

"Sure," Chin said easily, winking at Danny, who was rolling his eyes at Jax's proclamation. He slung an arm around Kono's shoulder. "Come on, let's get out of here before Malia throws us out."

"You are so whipped, brah," Kono said, winking at Jax as they left. Jax and Danny could hear Steve's voice in the hallway, as the door opened and closed, and it was getting loud.

Danny hesitated, glancing toward the door, as Julia opened it and entered, holding several syringes.

"Go," Jax said, "talk him down, before security tosses him out on his ass. It's fine; look, here's my favorite nurse with good drugs for me, and Malia is here. Go."

Danny chuckled and slipped out.

Grover, Chin, and Kono were standing with Steve, nurses glaring at the group as they walked by, and Danny rolled his eyes and shooed them all back into the waiting room; Steve walking on autopilot as he continued his conversation.

"No, Catherine, that's not good enough," he said. "Declan Novak towed that liferaft within sight of my backyard, and called me on my cell phone. You should be able to drop a cast net and catch him at this point. Trace my cell phone."

Chin shook his head. He'd tried that, immediately, with no results. Still, Naval Intelligence . . .

"Damn it, Catherine, the man is personally threatening my team. He was behind Danny's accident,
and he said that this was Kono and Chin's turn. That means he hasn't even started with Grover, or me. Or Jax." There was a long pause, and they saw Steve's face harden, his jaw twitching. "Yes, Catherine, it's very personal. Because it's my team. You of all people should understand - Fine. I'll be in touch with the Navy. I don't think it would take much to be reactivated to active duty. At which point I will outrank you. Well, then find the bastard who's threatening my people and I won't have to."

Steve jabbed angrily at his phone, then looked up sheepishly at the rest of the team.

"So that went well," Danny said.

Steve sighed. "They have nothing yet. They're processing the boat, of course, but it's charred beyond recognition. I doubt they'll find anything. Our best bet is this location that Jax remembers; remote, private . . . Novak is probably holed up there. Maybe she can somehow . . . " He shook his head as Grover chuckled quietly. Jax had a lousy sense of direction on the best of days.

"Aside from you returning to full Super SEAL, which, by the way, I think is a terrible idea," Danny said, "what next?"

Steve looked around, as if noticing for the first time that the entire team, minus Jax, was in the waiting room. "Wait, is Jax -"

"Malia is still with her, Julia came in with meds, and I assumed probably some other stuff needed to happen that I didn't need to be there for," Danny said. "She's okay."

"Okay, yeah," Steve said. "Kono, please put a call in to Caviness. He profiled our team before; maybe he can help us get inside Novak's head. Grover, will you coordinate with HPD? They need to know this maniac is loose on the island. I want every single officer looking for him. He's probably hiding in plain sight. Chin, first things first, you go to Cage and demand your badges back. Anything less than a full apology and I want to know about it."

There were nods all around.

"I'm going to have that talk with the governor, and I'll be coordinating with Naval Intel. I'm gonna reach out to our friends and ask for extra eyes and ears on all of your families," Steve said, rubbing his hand over his face. "And at some point, everyone grab food and a break."

"That goes for you, too, partner; you are still covered in blood, and wet, and there's probably chafing and who knows what else going on," Danny said, waving his hand in Steve's general direction. "What's my job, by the way?"

"Danny," Steve sighed. "Your job is to keep me from completely losing my shit."

Kono arched an eyebrow appraisingly at Steve, then turned to Danny. "You're going to have to step it up, brah."

Chin, Kono, and Grover headed out, exhausted but relieved, while Steve and Danny made their way back to Jax's room. Malia was standing in the hallway, waiting for them.

"Malia," Steve sighed. "I can't thank you enough for coming in; I know it wasn't your shift."

"If having a familiar face here was one small comfort, it was absolutely worth it," Malia assured him. "You'll be able to take her home by afternoon. I know she looked horrific when you brought her in, but most of that blood wasn't hers. I don't want to minimize the seriousness of the situation, however. First, she does have a nasty concussion. We're going to need to watch that closely, for the customary twenty-four hours, and then beyond, just to be safe. Thankfully, you've had a nice
long run without her being injured, so that's to her advantage."

Steve nodded. "I know what to watch for, Malia, and we'll make sure if there are any alarming symptoms, we get her back in right away."

"Good," Malia said. "I also trust that it did not escape your notice that on no fewer than three separate instances in this situation, she was fairly certain that she was going to be tortured, executed, or both. Three times, at least, in the span of about twelve hours. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure that's not something that even SEAL training can truly prepare you for, much less NYPD. Your task force encounters . . . well, above and beyond. You need to be prepared for there to be some fallout. I'll try to convince her to talk to the hospital counselor before she leaves; but we all know that's unlikely."

Steve and Danny nodded soberly, and Danny glanced anxiously at Steve. He suspected, based on the nature of some of the flashbacks and nightmares he'd witnessed, courtesy of Steve's experience in the Navy, that this was a dynamic with which Steve was all too familiar.

"Last but not least," Malia said, "there's the matter of blood exposure. Could you have samples sent to the lab for testing? Let's test those victims first; then, if there's a need, we'll initiate blood test protocol for all three of you. But we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. For now, we're going to administer some fluids, make sure she's tolerating her pain meds, and watch that concussion very closely for about six hours, just to be sure we didn't miss anything."

Steve and Danny slipped into the room, where Julia was applying bandages to Jax's raw wrists and ankles. Jax appeared to be dozing, dressed in a fresh set of scrubs, her curls damp and relatively clean.

"The good stuff kicking in?" Danny asked.

Julia nodded and smiled. "Yeah; we knew cleaning and dressing these abrasions would be painful, so we waited until the drugs kicked in. Dr. Waincroft says she can go home this afternoon; we'll try to find a slightly more comfortable room for her. I assume one of you will stay with her? Or does duty call?"

Steve hesitated. He hated the thought of leaving her side, but if Declan Novak was on the island . . . .

"They need to go," Jax mumbled. "'M'fine."

"Hey," Steve said, "you still with us?" He stood over the gurney, pushing her hair away from her face.

"Sort of," Jax said, opening one eye and smiling lopsidedly.

"Oh, you are feeling no pain," Steve teased.


Danny smothered a smile, and then a yawn.

"Tell you what," Steve said, "Since Danny doesn't have the clearance to negotiate with the governor and Naval Intel, how about I let Danny stay here with you, because he looks about dead on his feet, and I think you scared another five years off his life. I'll go do some SEAL shit; and then this afternoon, when Malia springs you, I'll try to be here to pick you up. How's that sound?"
Jax studied him, blinking owlishly. "You should take a shower before you meet with the governor," she said dubiously. "You look terrible. And you don't smell very good. Not right now; usually . . . usually you smell awesome."

Danny laughed as he handed Steve the keys. "Oh, I do love our Jersey girl unfiltered."

Malia had managed to find a more comfortable room; more for Danny's benefit than for Jax's, although the window was something that Jax appreciated, as she drifted in and out of a drug induced rest. Danny was fitfully dozing in a recliner, complete with a pillow and blanket, when he heard a soft knock at the door.

He glanced at Jax, who seemed to be resting, and then stood, back popping, and quietly opened the door.

"Rachel?" he said, shocked to see her there.

"Hello, Danny," she said, somewhat uncertainly. "I . . . well, I wanted to ask you something about this weekend, and didn't get you on your cell phone. After what happened the other morning, with the accident, I got a little worried, so I called your office. Captain Grover alerted me to the situation and . . . well, I didn't know if you might need company, or if there was . . . oh my." She broke off in dismay, looking past Danny at Jax's battered appearance. "Oh, Daniel, she's terribly injured; Captain Grover didn't indicate . . . "

"No, no, it's okay," Danny said, taking Rachel gently by the elbow and ushering her into the room. "I mean, yeah, she's beat up really bad, no denying, but there's no broken bones, no internal injuries. Could have been much, much worse. She's pretty looped up at the moment."

"And how are you, Daniel?" Rachel asked quietly.

"I'm . . . relatively okay," he answered honestly.

"Captain Grover couldn't give me many details, of course," Rachel said, "but I gather . . . it was bad?"

"Yeah, it was - Rach, we don't have to talk about it," Danny said. "I appreciate you being here; I know you don't like to talk about the cases. I remember it upset you."

Rachel stepped closer to Jax, gently tugging the blanket up higher on her shoulders. "Maybe if I had been willing to talk, I would have understood. Maybe things would have worked out differently." She paused, and Danny didn't know how to fill the silence, so he didn't. She looked back at him. "Did you find the people who did this?"

"Do you really want to know, Rachel? It's okay, if you don't. You don't have to . . . "

She shook her head. "No, I want to know."

Danny sighed. "The people who did most of the damage were . . . executed. Their bodies were dumped in a life raft, along with Jax, with her wrists and ankles tied. Then someone left the raft in the surf, just behind Steve's house."

Rachel covered her mouth in horror. "You and Steve found her, like that?"

Danny nodded, averting his eyes. He felt Rachel's arms go around him, her hand gently pressing his head down onto her shoulder. "I'm so sorry, Daniel. That must have been horrific."
He nodded, giving himself a moment to accept comfort from her. "I won't unsee it anytime soon."

Rachel pulled back and studied him. "You've been going over twenty-four hours straight, haven't you? You look exhausted. Danny, let me sit with her while you get some rest. Really."

He was too tired to argue. "I can't really fall asleep, I'm worried that she'll wake up..." he said, sinking back into the recliner. Rachel tucked the blanket around him, her cool hand smoothing over his cheek. "Wake me up if she needs anything, yeah?" he mumbled, his eyes already closing.

Rachel pulled up a smaller chair next to Jax's bed and sat, somewhat awkwardly, until Jax shifted and winced, making a quiet sound of pain as her badly bruised arm was jostled. Rachel spotted an extra pillow, and retrieved it, carefully easing it under Jax's arm.


Rachel glanced over, but Danny appeared to be soundly asleep.

"Yes, yes, he's fine; he's sleeping," Rachel said, hesitantly and carefully patting Jax's shoulder. She hadn't done this in a very long time; not since she and Danny had split up. Stan's job didn't exactly put in in harm's way; that was the whole point. Or at least, she thought it had been.

"Are we in Jersey?" Jax asked, completely disoriented by Rachel's appearance.

"No, Jacqueline, we're in Hawaii," Rachel replied, wondering if she needed to call for someone.

Jax smiled. "I thought so. You're here... he must have told you," she said, beaming up at Rachel through a cloud of painkillers.

"Told me what, Jacqueline?" Rachel asked.

"Didn't think he'd have the balls, to be honest," Jax mumbled, her eyes closing again, "to tell you he was still in love with you. Good for him..."

Rachel sat back down in the chair, smoothing the pillow under Jax's arm, and looked at Danny.

"Bloody hell," she whispered.

#*#*#*#*#

Steve showered, threw on a clean set of cargoes, and headed back to headquarters. He was just pulling in the parking lot when his cell phone rang again. Concentrating on driving, he absently thumbed the phone, assuming it would be one of the team.


Steve threw the car into park. "Fine, Declan," he spat out.

"Tell me, Steve: what's worse? Knowing that I had her, that I had my hands on her, touching her, that I had her very life at my disposal? Or knowing that I rescued her from whatever those men had planned for her, when you couldn't even find them? Which makes you feel more enraged, more impotent?"

"You really wanna play, Novak? You and me. Name the time and place, I'll play. I'll rip out your spine and shove it down your fucking throat," Steve growled.
Novak laughed. "I may have been wrong. Maybe this was your nightmare."

The call ended with a click.

Chin and Kono watched from the windows of Chin's office, alarmed, as Steve got out of the car and leaned against the top of it, his shoulders shaking. After a moment, he stopped, squared his shoulders, and then his long legs were carrying him into the building.

"This needs to end, and soon," Chin said quietly.

Chapter End Notes

I've finally started watching Season 6 . . . of course, thanks to fiction, I've had a pretty good notion of most of the story lines, but it's one thing to read and quite another to actually see the episodes. I still have very conflicted feelings about Lynn. And I just watched the episode where Grover goes back to Chicago . . . the big guy has a dark side, doesn't he? I reserve the liberty to play with some of the character traits (and flaws) in recent episodes, even though this universe is still set in the early days.
Steve stormed into the office; a barely contained force of fury. He tossed his cell phone onto the smart table.

"Damn it, Chin, he's calling me on my fucking personal cell phone and taunting me, and I'm to believe that the US Navy and our own task force is incapable of catching him?" Steve said, his voice low but with a deadly intensity that made a chill run up Kono's spine. She came out of her office and stood quietly next to Steve.

"I know, Steve," Chin said quietly, his fingers flying over the touchscreen. Maybe, just maybe, this one time, they would get lucky. Maybe Novak would have somehow not covered his tracks, and they could trace the call. Lines of data started scrolling across the screen. Grover joined them, watching, hoping against hope that they would find something.

"He was in my backyard, Chin."

"I know."

"He had her. For hours. Restrained, at some god-forsaken dock . . . " his voice cracked. He put his hands on the smart table, leaned forward, his head hanging down. Kono put her hand on his; strong, secure.

"She's okay, Steve," Chin reminded him quietly, while shaking his head in dismay at the 'no signal identified' message that mocked him on the plasma screen.

"He got to her before we could," Steve said, his hands white knuckling the edge of the smart table. Kono risked putting her arm around him, pressing her forehead into his shoulder. She supposed, on the one hand, that as a feminist, she could choose to be insulted that Steve would accept these gestures of comfort and support more readily from her than from the guys; but as a teammate and friend, and conscripted younger sister, she was just glad that he was willing.

"He wants you to feel obligated to him?" Kono asked. "Throw you off by making you . . . I don't know, appreciate him, somehow?"

Steve shook his head. "No," he said, decisively. "If that was his goal, he wouldn't have . . . making her watch, while he tortured those men . . . and then tying her wrists and ankles, and shoving her in that liferaft . . . that was pure evil. Psychological torture. No, he doesn't want to make me feel indebted or appreciative. He said it himself - he wants me to feel impotent."

"What do you want us to do?" Grover asked. "What first?"

"First," Steve said, squeezing Kono's hand in appreciation, "you call in every favor, everything you can think of, to get extra eyes and ears on your families. I'm going to go call Catherine."

"You won't really do it, will you? Go back to active duty?" Chin asked, his voice level; not second guessing or passing judgment, just curious.

Steve hesitated. "If I thought it would make the difference, in keeping you guys safe? Yeah. Yeah, I'd do it in a heartbeat. But if I went, and something happened, and I couldn't get back . . . I don't know that I could forgive myself. I can't do it again, Chin. I can't be stuck halfway around the world and . . ."
"I know, Steve," Chin said, and if it had been anyone else, Steve would have found the repetition of that phrase annoying. But from Chin, it was assurance. "For what it's worth, you're here now, and you have us."

"It's worth a lot to me, Chin," Steve said. "Thanks. I'm going to see what the Navy has come up with, then I'm going to call in a few of those favors."

#*#*#*#*

The smell wafted off the elevator before the doors even opened, and Kono, predictably, was the first out of her office. To her surprise, it was Caviness who stepped off the elevator, carrying trays of moco loco.

"Hello, gorgeous," he said quietly, smiling at Kono. "I figured you all probably hadn't stopped to think about food."

"We haven't, and you're amazing," Kono said. "Thank you. For coming, and for thinking of this."

"Thanks, brah," Chin said, joining Kono and helping take the bags. They settled in Steve's office.

"Okay, where's everyone stand with coverage for your family? Everyone good? Need me to make any calls?" Steve asked, half-heartedly poking at his food.

"All set," Grover said, as Chin and Kono nodded. "Steve, we appreciate it, man, and we're taking every precaution . . . but Novak didn't go after Gracie when he targeted Danny; and he didn't go after Malia, or any of Kono's family, when he targeted Chin and Kono. Do you think he'll break his pattern?"

"Honestly?" Steve said, "I don't. But I don't want to take any chances. We're clearly not dealing with a rational person here. Caviness, what's your take?"

"I tend to agree," Caviness said, nodding slowly. "I've read over your report. Novak explicitly said that he was targeting the team with their worst nightmare; surely, Danny's absolute worst nightmare would be something happening to Gracie. Now, Novak played on that in a way that was cruel and twisted, but he didn't lay a finger on Gracie. And he could have, obviously - he knew exactly when Danny was going to come around that curve. If he'd wanted to hurt Gracie, he would have. And when he went after Chin and Kono, he kept it strictly to them, their reputation, their place on the team. He didn't hurt Malia, or any of their family. I also agree with Steve, though, that we take nothing for granted."

"Caviness, you profiled our team once, looking for weakness," Steve said. "I need you to do that again. If we can figure out how Novak is finding his way into our weak spots, maybe we can follow the trail back to his."

"I'm happy to help," Caviness said, "I'm just - well, I don't want to step on toes, or invade your privacy."

"I appreciate that, but our team, and potentially our families and friends, are at risk," Steve said. "Anyone have any objections to Caviness playing devil's advocate here?"

"None," Chin said. "You've proven yourself to be a good friend to Five-O, Marshal. I trust that our information will be handled with discretion." Kono and Grover nodded in agreement.

"I give you my word on that," Caviness said.

"What did you hear from Catherine? Has Navy Intel made any progress?" Kono asked.
"They are cooperating with the Coast Guard and doing a thorough search of every dock that could possibly have served the purpose," Steve answered. He gave up on eating, dropping his fork in the tray, and leaning back in his chair. "They want to take Jax out, see if she recognizes anything."

"It might be worth a try," Grover said, cautiously. "Although . . . that's asking a lot of her, right now."

"She'll want to do it," Kono said. "You have to at least give her the option."

Steve nodded. "I agree, Kono." He glanced at his watch. "Malia is probably writing up her discharge papers as we speak. I'll get HPD to drop me off at the hospital, and I'll bring Danny and Jax back. Keep searching for leads, and someone let me know when Max has a report, yeah?"

Rachel sat quietly next to Jax's bed, pretending to read the latest issue of Architectural Digest, while staring at Danny's sleeping form. Lost in thought, it took her a moment to register the accelerating beeps of the heart monitor which woke Danny.

"Hey, Rachel," he said, "what . . . oh." He looked at the monitor, and back at Jax, then threw his blanket to the side and launched himself out of the chair.

"Danny?" Rachel questioned, looking up at him in confusion.

He stepped next to Jax's bed, taking her least injured hand in his, carefully, mindful of the bruised and swollen knuckles. "Babe," he said, softly. "You need to wake up."

"What . . . oh," Rachel whispered. "Is she having a nightmare?"

"Yeah, probably," Danny said. "You, ah, need to stand back a little."

"Really?" Rachel asked, stepping back. She sounded somewhat impressed.

Danny chuckled. "Yeah; she's nailed me a coupla times . . . Steve, too. Jax, honey, wake up for me. You're safe. You're at Queens."

"Please," Jax murmured, her eyes still closed. "Please . . . stop."

Rachel's eyes filled with tears as she watched Danny ease a hip onto the bed next to Jax and gently cup her bruised face in his hand.

"Jax, come on, babe, wake up," Danny said, a little louder this time.

"No, don't . . . I can't . . ." Jax muttered, her fingers moving restlessly against the bandages around her wrists. Her breath hitched and her eyes fluttered open, wild and panic stricken. "Danny?" she asked, her voice breaking.

"Yeah, there you go," Danny said, pulling her toward him gently, nestling her head in the crook of his neck. He rubbed gentle circles on her back.

"What can I do?" Rachel whispered.

Danny looked up at her, surprised. She'd never handled it well when he was injured on the job, much less cared about his partners. But she looked genuinely concerned, and there was a softness in her eyes that he hadn't seen for a long, long time.
"Probably some ice chips," Danny answered quietly. "If you ask the nurse . . ."

Rachel nodded and slipped out of the room, while Danny continued to murmur nonsense to Jax and trace his hands carefully over her tense shoulders. She didn't protest, or argue that she was okay, or play it off . . . she allowed him to comfort her, trembling against him, and it freaked him right the hell out.

"Honey, are you in pain?" he asked.

She started to shake her head, he could feel it, and then she just shrugged. Rachel came back in with a generous sized cup full of ice chips, and a spoon wrapped in plastic. She placed the cup on the rolling tray and deftly unwrapped the spoon, tucking it into the ice.

"Jax," he coaxed, "let's try a little ice. I bet you're dehydrated, and thirsty."

She lifted her head, and he helped ease her back to rest against the pillows. He scooped up a spoonful of ice and she let him slip it between her lips.

"Thanks," she said, her voice rough. She cleared her throat a bit and tried again. "Thank you," she said, looking at Rachel, then back at Danny. "There was . . . the waves. Broke over the raft and I couldn't . . . there was salt water. The ice is really good." She reached out to take the spoon, but her hand was shaking so badly that she couldn't manage it. "Shit," she whispered, pressing the heels of her hands against her eyes.

"Hey, it's okay, I got it," Danny said. "You're woozy, you're still doped, and your hands are a mess, babe. It's okay to need some help."

She looked at him skeptically.

"It's about time you had people around you willing to help, Jax; and you're going to have to adjust to the idea. The problem here is not that you can't do everything alone; the problem is that you've had to, for far too long," Danny said, continuing to give her small spoonfuls of ice.

Jax dropped her eyes and picked absently at the bandages around her wrists, then looked up suddenly. "Rachel . . . when did you get here? Wait - Gracie? Is everything okay with Gracie?"

Rachel looked at Danny, confused, then back at Jax. "Grace is fine, Jacqueline . . . do you not - I was here earlier, and we talked a bit. Do you not remember? Danny, you were asleep . . ."

"Oh, no," Jax groaned, closing her eyes and dropping her head back onto the pillows. "What fresh humiliation now?"

"I don't understand," Rachel said, completely perplexed, her British composure rapidly disintegrating. "Danny, she's a bit off her trolley. Should I fetch a nurse?"

"No, Rach - when we went to New York and she was in the hospital, they came up with a specific drug protocol for her, for pain and insomnia. Malia makes sure she gets it here; it works great, but . . . well, she tends to become . . . uninhibited. Usually with amusing results. I hate I missed it. What'd she say?" Danny smirked gleefully at Rachel as Jax covered her face with her hands.

"So, you're saying, the things she says . . . are very truthful? Although she might not say them if she were . . . in full control of her faculties?" Rachel asked thoughtfully.

"Oh, yeah, it's like truth serum," Danny confirmed. "It's why she's stubborn and won't take it unless she absolutely has to. Usually just in the hospital or when she's gone home from the
hospital too soon."

"Ah, well, nothing too exciting this time," Rachel said, "just a bit of confusion as to whether or not we were in New Jersey. I think my being here confused her. And I'm sure I should be going now," she added, picking up her things. "I hope you feel better soon, Jacqueline."

"Rachel, really, thank you for coming," Danny said, walking her to the door, his hand automatically going to the small of her back. Rachel had almost forgotten what that felt like; Danny's strong presence, his tactile nature, always quick with a protective or nurturing gesture. She realized, with a pang of wistfulness, that she missed it.

They stepped into the hallway, Danny kissing her cheek briefly, then pulling back. "Sorry," he mumbled. "You, me, hospital rooms . . . old habits." He smiled at her.

"It's okay, Daniel," she said, smiling. "I remember . . . all those times when Jacqueline was with NYPD, and they would call you because she'd been hurt . . . there really was no one else, was there?"

"No," Danny said. "I'm sorry, Rach, I knew it upset you; Gracie was so little, and my hours were so long as it was, but . . . she only had her brother, and there was a guy . . . but she lost them both when the towers fell. There wasn't anyone else, I couldn't just . . . I just always felt like if I could go, I needed to go. I'm sorry."

Rachel shook her head. "No, Danny, I'm sorry that I didn't understand, then. And . . . there were times that you couldn't go?"

"Yeah, I mean, not many, my captain was stand-up about it, he remembered her, of course, from being our rookie. But when I was in the middle of a case, or -" Danny broke off.

"Or when I was being petulant," Rachel finished softly. "You wouldn't go. I'm sorry, Danny."

"Yeah. Well, you came today, and that was a very nice gesture," Danny said. He rubbed his hands over his face. "God, I need . . . I need a shower, a week's sleep . . ."

"Yeah, you do, buddy," Steve said, coming off the elevator. "Rachel, hey. Is everything okay with Gracie?"

"Yes, yes," Rachel said, a bit perturbed. "I came to . . . is it so hard to believe that -" she broke off, sighing. "I came to check on Danny. Jacqueline. I came to check on Jacqueline."

"How's our girl doing, Danny?" Steve asked.

"She's . . . I think she's more than a little shaken up, Steve, to be honest," Danny said. "I'll go get the car and pull it around. Malia should be here any minute with discharge papers and the pharmacy stuff."

Steve left Danny with Rachel in the hallway and slipped into Jax's room. She was busy fiddling with the settings on the IV, and silencing the pulse ox monitor, which she had slipped off her finger.

"Hey, ku'uipo, in a hurry to go somewhere?" Steve drawled quietly, crossing the few steps across the room to reach her.

"Hey," she said, and smiled at him, soft and tired, and through a haze of pain and the tail end of sedatives. She felt unfocused and at loose ends and shaky again and she needed -
His arms were around her then, his hip propped on the side of her bed, pulling her close.

"It's okay, Jax, I've got you," he whispered.

She shook her head. "I don't understand . . . it's not bad. I'm barely even hurt, just bruised, I don't understand why I'm all -" she made a vague gesture of frustration, and Steve couldn't help but smile. Jax's hands spoke volumes.

"Because Novak - Jax, it was torture, okay?" Steve said, gently winding a curl around his finger. "Psychological torture is devastating. That's why it's thrown you. No one expects you to be okay." He paused . . . "I'm so sorry. I should have -"

"No," she protested, "Nothing. There was nothing you could have done." She pulled back, squaring her shoulders, a look of determination crossing her features. "Leads. Do you have any leads?"

He hesitated. "The Coast Guard is compiling a list, of every possible docking situation that could have accommodated the boat, and the logistics . . ."

"Okay, let's go," she said, swinging her legs over the side of the bed. "I'm just bruised, nothing broken, no major damage, let's go. They need me, right, to see if I recognize anything?"

"Yeah, but -" Steve paused. "Are you sure you can handle it?"

She looked at him, biting her bruised lip. "No. I'm not sure. But I am damn sure I can't handle sitting here, doing nothing, so let's give it a try, yeah? Steve. He has - Novak took my badge. He took it, and put it in his pocket. I want it back."

"Okay," Steve said. "We'll go with the Coast Guard."

Danny knocked on the door quietly and poked his head in. "I have discharge papers and a bag from the pharmacy," he said. "Your instructions include a suggestion to meet with the nice counselor -"

She finished sliding the last IV out of her arm. "Nope. Going to meet up with the Coast Guard," she said. "I need to go home, shower, get clothes and . . . boots. I need . . . where are my shoes?"

"All of your clothes are in evidence," Steve reminded her.

"Oh, yeah," she said. "Okay, well, I'll just get some of those non-skid socks from the nurse on the way out." She started moving stiffly, but with purpose, toward the door. "You boys coming, or what?" she demanded. "We're burning daylight here."

"You know she's going to have to process what happened at some point," Danny muttered, poking a finger at Steve. "You don't just walk away from an experience like that."

"I know, Danny."

"It's not gonna be pretty," Danny warned.

"I know, Danny."

Danny sighed. "You know I'll be there to help," he said, looking fondly at Jax as she stood at the nurse's station, politely inquiring regarding socks.
"I know, Danny," Steve said, squeezing Danny's shoulder affectionately.

"Meet you back at the palace," Danny said, as he pulled out of Steve's driveway.

Jax paused and turned her face up to the sun, her eyes closed. Steve waited patiently; he had been pulled out of enough dark holes to understand the need to feel the sun on his face, fill his lungs with fresh air. He put his hand on her shoulder, gently, when she swayed on her feet.

"Steady," he murmured, smiling down at her.

"Damn concussion," she muttered, starting to walk up the porch steps. They slipped through the front door. "You were here," she said. "When Novak called you, from the beach, you were home."

"Yeah," Steve said, nodding. "Grover sent Danny and me packing here to shower and try to grab a few minutes rest. We couldn't sleep, of course, but we were crashed here."

"In the living room," Jax confirmed, glancing around. Steve picked up on her line of thought immediately.

"Lights. You can see the lights of the house from the beach," he said, calculating. "Lights pulling into the driveway. Master bedroom is at the back of the house, overlooking the beach."

"Car lights pull in, bedroom lights go on," Jax said, looking up the stairs, then toward the back of the house. "Bedroom lights go off."

"Kitchen lights on," Steve said, remembering getting another bottle of water from the refrigerator after coming back downstairs.

"I couldn't see the lights," Jax said quietly. "I didn't know where we were. It was dark, I didn't recognize . . . but he knew exactly . . . he was watching. Waiting until you were home. I guess he didn't want to ruin the surprise by letting me drown."

"How long?" Steve asked, running a careful hand through her tangled curls. "How long were you there?"

She shook her head. "It felt like a long, long time, but I was panicked, disoriented. I'm sorry; I can't judge time or distance . . . I'm not helping."

"Hey," he said, wrapping his arms around her and tucking her head against his chest. "We'll figure it out. Max is going over everything."

"Including blood tests on the vics," she said, pulling away from him abruptly. "I need to take a shower. We need to get back to the office, to the lab, meet up with the Coast Guard . . ."

"Do you -" Steve gestured to the bandages on her wrists.

"I'm fine to shower. After, can you -?"

"Yeah, I'll get the kit," he said. "You sure you're up for this? We can put it off, you can rest . . ."

"I did not join Five-O to become the weak link, Steve," she said. "Just - I'll grab a shower, I'll be right back."

He reluctantly watched her go up the stairs; fighting the impulse to follow her, to take the time to
He reluctantly watched her go up the stairs; fighting the impulse to follow her, to take the time to check every inch of her himself, kiss every bruise . . . his hands clenched into fists as Novak’s words played over and over in his mind, taunting him. He went into the kitchen to grab the first aid kit, the yellow crime scene tape on his ground floor lanai catching his eye through the kitchen window. He risked looking out, and then cringed at the condition of the lanai. It was still bloodstained, littered with some debris leftover from the crime lab. He pulled the shutters closed, and made a mental note to have a crew come over and clean. Pressure washing, he thought absently, should do the trick. He'd have them do it during the day. When Jax was gone.

"You don't have to do that," she said, padding into the kitchen, hair damp and boots in hand. "Shit, Jax," Steve said, turning, and grinning at her. "Now I understand why Danny is always threatening to put bells on us." He motioned to the kitchen stool and plopped the first aid kit on the island.

She slid onto the stool. "I'm sorry this landed in your backyard," she said quietly. "Your home should be . . . you shouldn't have to . . . I'm sorry."

"Hey," he said, sliding his hand into her hair. It smelled like honeysuckle again, and it made him smile. Such an improvement over the antiseptic smell from the hospital. "You're here, that's all that matters." He looked down at her wrists. "Damn it, Jax," he muttered, grabbing the anesthetic cream.

She winced as he carefully dabbed the cream onto the broken skin. He rummaged in the bag until he came up with non-stick gauze, then wound it gently around both wrists and secured each one with a generous piece of surgical tape. His strong hand cradled her forearm gently, while he traced over the bruising with his other hand, his fingers brushing over the bruising that was darkening to reveal a distinct handprint.

"Hey," Jax said, ducking her head to catch his eyes. "How about we get my ankles bandaged, get my boots on, get the rest of the team, and go kick some ass?"

"You're smiling. You're both smiling," Danny grumbled good-naturedly, as Steve and Jax came off the elevator and joined the rest of the team, gathered around the smart table, along with Caviness and Max.

"Commander McGarrett," Max said, "I was just getting ready to share my findings with the team. I came upstairs so that I could present the report to the entire team, and space with two victims is a bit tight in the lab. Not to mention, the condition of the victims is quite shocking."

"Go ahead, Max, what did you find?" Steve said, gesturing to the screen.

"Well, the cause of death is obviously the gunshot wound to the back of the head," Max said. "They were alive when they were shot, but the extent of injuries sustained before the fatal injury are astounding. I estimate that they were tortured over a period of ten hours."

Steve glanced down at Jax. "That sound about right?"

"It seemed like at least that long," she said quietly.

Max continued. "The timeline of injuries is consistent for each victim. Novak started with the fingers. Each finger was broken. The bones in the hand, crushed. At this point, the victims would have already been in agonizing pain, and yet Declan Novak continued, moving on, as far as I can tell, to burning the victims with what appears to be a cigar -"
Jax paled and swallowed convulsively. She remembered, all too well, the smell of burning flesh.

Grover held up a hand to pause Max. "Dr. Bergman," he said quietly, "I'm not sure that detailing every injury is going to be pertinent right now."

Max looked to Steve in confusion. "You usually want very detailed reports. I apologize."

"We appreciate your thoroughness, Max, as always," Steve said, "and we will read the report as needed. In this case, though, we aren't looking for clues to identify the killer, so you don't need to itemize the injuries. We know who committed the crime, but did you find anything at all that would help us locate Novak?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I may have," Max said, nodding to Chin, who quickly and gratefully replaced the autopsy photos with a document full of data. "I cross referenced the analysis of the ribbon that was used to restrain Officer Nolan with all of the samples taken from the victim, as well as residue from the charred remains of the Monsoon Season. I found a commonality that may be useful." Max paused, beaming at the group.

"Yes, Max," Chin prompted, "you want to tell us?"

"Indeed," Max said, completely oblivious to the eyes rolling. "There was a unique concentration of limestone, a very close match to the geological profile of the coastal sediment found at Ka'ena Point," Max said triumphantly.

"But not an exact match?" Steve pressed.

"No, and we would not expect it to be exact," Max said, "because of course the ribbon, the residue from the boat, and the residual samples from the victims would have been subsequently diluted with further exposure to sea water and blood, during the transit from that point to the waters behind your house, Commander McGarrett. However, the limestone itself resists dilution, thus it was left behind. I could say with reasonable certainty that the victims, the boat, and the ribbon spent hours at Ka'ena Point."

"Ka'ena Point?" Danny queried.

"It's a protected dune ecosystem," Chin explained. "Closed to the public."

"Remote, practically inaccessible," Kono added.

"No one would have heard . . . " Jax said, quietly. "Can you pull up pictures?"

"Absolutely," Chin said, nodding, and with a few deft keystrokes, the plasma screens filled with photos of the remote, rocky coastline. Jax studied them as Chin scrolled slowly through the images.

"There -" she said, pointing. "That's it. We were anchored just off that pier. The one that looks like it's about to collapse into the water."

"It fits," Steve said firmly. "Gear up; Chin, call the Coast Guard for backup. I'm calling Catherine." He strode purposefully into his office.

###

They decided on a no-holds-barred, inter-agency swarm of Ka'ena Point. On the off chance that Novak's arrogance would have prompted him to stay in one place, they were following the one lead that they had.
Caviness found himself once again teamed with Chin and Kono, as they coordinated with HPD and SWAT to lead a ground team. Catherine and members of Naval Intelligence were joining both the ground team, and the rest of Five-O and Coast Guard who were approaching from the water.

"You sure you're up for this?" Steve asked, as Jax limped slightly down the dock toward the speedboat that would carry them to the dock she had recognized.

"I'm good," Jax replied quietly. Gear had been double and triple checked; vests, holsters, coms. Jax absentely flexed her bruised fingers, wincing, and pulled her tactical gloves out of one of her pockets. She slid them carefully onto her hands. "Now I'm good," she amended, as the gloves supported her swollen joints and covered the bandages around her wrists.

"Down boy," Danny muttered good-naturedly, rolling his eyes at the way Steve predictably brightened at the sight of Jax in tactical gear. "The two of you, I'm telling you, your affinity for thigh holsters and tactical gloves is . . . you know what, never mind."

Grover chuckled as he boarded the small craft. It had been docked hastily, and there was a sizable gap between the edge of the dock and the deck. "Careful, Nolan, we don't want to have to scoop you out of the water with a bait net," he quipped, helping her navigate her way onto the deck.

"You need a hand, Danny?" Jax asked, in mock sweetness, laughing as Danny flipped her off.

Steve took the controls of the unmarked boat and throttled away from the dock, two Coast Guard cutters falling in at a distance behind them.

"Ok, Chin," he said into his radio, as they pulled away, "move in."

They sped toward Ka'ena Point, the light mist of salt spray creating amusing havoc with Jax's curls, and the wind in their faces. The thrum of adrenaline was enough to make Jax oblivious to her injuries, as she double checked her pockets for extra clips.

"You know it's very unlikely that we're going to snag Novak, right?" Danny said, loudly, over the throttle. "He knows we have a good lab, he had to know we would figure out this location. My guess is that he's long gone."

"I know," Steve said, "but it's the only lead we have and it beats sitting on our asses waiting for the next shoe to drop."

Steve throttled back the engine to a purr as they approached. "What do you think, Jax? Does this look familiar?" he asked.

"Yeah, this is it. This is where we tied off, and Novak boarded," she said.

Steve picked up his radio again. "Okay," he said quietly, the boat now nudging toward the pier. "Chin, start moving HPD and SWAT in a spread toward the pier. Captain Carver, let's keep those cutters back around the rock line; be on the lookout if Novak tries to make a break for the open water."

Steve expertly slipped the speed boat in next to the pier, tossed a coiled rope over and tied it off, his long legs stepping easily from the deck to the pier. Jax climbed deftly over, followed by Danny and Grover. Weapons drawn, they eased carefully down the pier, sidestepping over missing planks.

"Chin, anything?" Steve murmured into his com.
"Nothing, Steve," Chin said. "No evidence of Novak or anyone else, for that matter."

"Okay, keep converging toward the pier," Steve said, motioning for Danny, Grover, and Jax to walk in a spread formation. They picked their way through the brush, looking for any sign of evidence.

"Steve," Chin's voice came over the com. "We have something . . . I - you're going to have to have to see it."

They came to a clearing, and found Chin, Kono, and Catherine standing, solemnly.

"Where's HPD?" Steve demanded. "Catherine, where's the rest of your team?"

"We have them moving in an outward radius, looking for any shred of evidence," Chin said calmly. "They didn't need to be right here, Steve."

"What are you - " Steve broke off as he looked just past Chin, at some papers fluttering, stapled to a tree in the center of the clearing.

Four papers - one with neat lettering: McGarrett's Most Wanted. And beneath it, top to bottom, pictures of Declan Novak, Anton Hesse, and Victor Hesse.

Danny let out a low whistle. "Okay, this guy is certifiable," he muttered.

"There's more," Kono said gently. Steve looked toward her, confused, and she stepped closer to Chin, Caviness behind her, his hand on her shoulder. At her feet, wedged into small mounds of earth, were three rudely constructed crosses.

Two bore the same neat lettering as the paper stapled to the tree.

*John McGarrett.*

*Fred Hart, Jr.*

And on the third, Jax's badge, tied to the cross in a sickeningly familiar red ribbon.
Forensic science and computer technology are not my field of expertise . . . I've tried to make the details reasonable, but please read this in the spirit of a creative work, not a research document.

"He's long gone," Steve said flatly, staring at the mock graves. "We won't find him here, not now." He turned to Catherine. "He wasn't working with the Hesse brothers. Not when . . . I would have known. I was tracking Novak first, then Anton and Victor. My team was the best; if Novak had been involved, I would have known. So what is he trying to say?"

Catherine shook her head. "It would be speculation, Steve."

He turned to Caviness. "Speculate for me, Caviness. What do you think he's trying to say?"

"I read it one of two ways," Caviness said slowly. "You said at Halawa that he ranted about wanting you to know that he was as dangerous as the Hesse brothers; that he was insulted that you were sent to track the Hesse brothers instead of him. So, he could be trying to prove that now."

Steve nodded. "But he didn't kill Jax when he had the chance."

"Right," Caviness said.

"Because I could still prove useful in his little game," Jax said quietly. "He could have killed Danny, too."

"Equal parts revenge and respect," Caviness said. "He's punishing you for the loss of his people; he said so at Halawa. And he's doing it in such a way as to rub your nose in the fact that he's a step ahead of you. He's trying to prove himself a more cunning adversary than Victor Hesse."

Steve looked at him sharply. "So I'll go after him instead of Hesse?"

"Protecting the people you still have instead of seeking revenge for those you've already lost," Chin said gently, looking at Steve with the same expression he had the day of John McGarrett's funeral: knowing, sorrowful, wise.

"Which could mean that even though he wasn't actively working with Victor Hesse before, he could be now," Catherine said, filling in the blanks. "And this could be a diversion. We'll look at everything we have on both men from the very beginning, Steve, and if there's a connection I swear to you we'll find it."

"Thanks, Catherine," Steve said. He looked down at Jax, who had been flanked by Danny and Grover. "You okay?" he asked quietly. She was staring at the crosses, and flinched when Danny put a gentle hand between her shoulders.

"Hm? Yeah, I'm good," she said. "What next?"
"We need to get all of this back to the lab," Steve said. "At some point, Novak is going to slip up. His involvement with the Miobe brothers means he's likely branched out from arms dealing to human trafficking. That would explain his presence on the island. So we have to assume that he's going to have ongoing interests here. He'll be back; he's not finished with me or with his criminal activity. We need to set up the system to flag every lead we get on human trafficking cases to be cross referenced with Novak as well."

"Steve," Catherine interrupted softly. "I agree, and you'll get full cooperation from Naval Intelligence on all of that. So why don't you let my team handle the evidence. We'll take it back to Pearl; you'll have the best of the best processing it, and everything will go into international systems."

Steve looked like he wanted to argue; shifting his weight restlessly from one foot to the other.

"Commander McGarrett," Catherine said, "your team is top notch, but only human. There are six of you; I have sixteen or so officers at my disposal."

"But I know Novak; I know his type -" Steve protested, but Catherine held up her hand to stop him.

"If there's a crisis tomorrow; a bank robbery with hostages, a bomb scare, a kidnapping - is your team going to be ready to handle it?" Catherine argued. "Because if that happens, they're not calling me, Steve, they're calling you. I'm not asking you to stand down; just give our lab time to process this evidence. Then we'll evaluate; decide what role you want Five-O to have."

Steve was silent for a long moment, looking at his team. They looked back at him, shoulders back, heads high, ready to follow him come hell or high water, pain and exhaustion be damned.

"We're in, boss, whatever call you make," Kono said.

Steve glanced back at Catherine. He felt it, the way he did sometimes, the pull between his new life with Five-O and his old life with the Navy. Danny could see the tension on his face, the scrunch of worry lines between his eyebrows; just as he could see it lift, the lines smooth back out, as Steve's eyes landed on Jax.

"You'll keep me in the loop," he said, turning back to Catherine. "Anything. Twenty-four seven, I want to know."

"Yes, absolutely," Catherine said.

"Okay." Steve exhaled. "Navy Intelligence collects and processes the evidence. Copies of every report to Five-O."

"Yeah, Steve," Catherine said. "We'll find him. We will." She reached out, touched him just once, lightly, on the hand, and then turned smartly and walked back to join the rest of her team.

Jax didn't realize that she had grabbed for Danny's hand and was holding on tight, until Steve tenderly pried her fingers away, wrapping her small hand in his. He traced the fingers of his other hand over her bruised face, tucking her curls behind her ear.

Danny smiled, because Steve didn't look back at Catherine, not even a little bit.

Steve sighed and looked at the mock graves, his shoulders slumped. Jax leaned against him, and he cradled her head against his chest, kissing the top of her head.

"Catherine's right, Steve," Danny said, squeezing Steve's arm. "This asshole can't hide forever."
Chin tossed the keys of his SUV to Steve. "I'll hitch a ride with Caviness and Kono," he said. "Thanks, man," Steve said, catching the keys easily in mid-air. "Meet you back at the office."

Steve went to the driver's door automatically, and Danny and Grover both went for the back doors.

"Wait," Jax protested. "Grover is, like, seven feet tall. Take shotgun, partner."

"You sure, Nolan?" Grover said.

"Yeah, positive," Jax said, climbing into the back seat.

"Didn't occur to you that I might want to ride in the front?" Danny grumbled, sliding in beside her.

"Nope," she said, scooting next to him and resting her head on his shoulder.

The roads back from Ka'ena Point were narrow and winding, and in the forty-five minutes it took to drive back to the palace, Jax had fallen soundly asleep, her head nestled against Danny's shoulder.

"Jax, babe, wake up," Danny murmured, as they pulled into the palace parking lot.

She shifted against him. "Danno?" she mumbled, rubbing her face. "Ow," she complained, as she encountered her bruised cheek and jaw. "Happ'nd? Grace okay?"

Steve met Danny's eyes in the rearview mirror. Grace. Not Gracie.

"Jax, you're okay," Danny said. "You're confused, though; can you wake up for me?"

"Danny," Jax complained, "what the hell . . . am I concussed or wasted?"

Grover chuckled and glanced at Steve. "Man, she musta been something as a rookie."

"You have no idea," Danny grumbled, trying to shift his arm, which had fallen asleep, without hurting Jax. "Jax," he repeated, brushing her hair out of her face. "Come on, concussion check, you know the drill."

Jax groaned and lifted her head, squinting at Danny. Steve put the SUV in park and slid out. He opened Jax's door and leaned against it, looking down at Jax.

"Hey, ku'uipo," he said cautiously.


"You with us?" Steve asked, cupping her face in his hand and kissing her cheek.

"Yeah," she said. "My head hurts."

"I know," Steve said, slipping his fingers into her curls and rubbing her head gently. "Motrin?"

"Coffee?" she countered, smiling at him. She climbed out of the back of the SUV and started toward the entrance of the palace, moving stiffly but with determination.
"Well, you heard the woman, McGarrett," Grover said, shaking his head. "Let there be coffee."


#*#*#*#*

They weren't surprised to find Chin, Kono, and Caviness in the well-appointed break room. Kono had skipped the single-cup and was brewing a full pot, much to Jax's delight.

"All the nice things Danny said about you are absolutely true," Jax said, closing her eyes and inhaling the aroma.

"Aw, Danny said nice things about me?" Kono beamed.

"Hmmm," Jax mumbled absently, reaching for a mug and waiting anxiously for the beep of the coffee maker. "He said you were McGarrett's brand of crazy in an even hotter package." She stopped, blinking at Kono. "The stuff from the hospital may not have worn off yet."

"Danny thinks I'm hot," Kono said proudly.

"Even hotter than McGarrett," Caviness agreed.

Danny groaned. "I'm gonna go call my baby girl," he said, walking out of the room muttering about damn rookies.

Steve was on his heels, rubbing the back of his neck self-consciously. "I, ah, need to call the governor."

"I'm not leaving this room without coffee," Grover decided, reaching easily over Jax and grabbing a mug. The coffee maker beeped, and both Grover and Caviness stepped back to let Jax and Kono get to the machine first.

"Wait, I thought the two of you were hard-core feminists. No protesting deferential treatment?" Caviness teased.

"Not when coffee is involved," Kono replied, dead serious.

"You'll learn," Chin said, getting his own mug, "not to stand between Kono and caffeine, especially first thing in the morning."

"I really look forward to learning that," Caviness said, speaking to Chin but smiling at Kono.

"Kono does too, but you have that ten date rule," Jax said absently, sipping her coffee as she walked out of the breakroom.

"She's fun when she's concussed, isn't she?" Grover said, beaming at them.

They went to their own offices and started the tedious paperwork that followed every single operation. They could see Steve on the phone, pacing in his office as he talked to the governor. At intervals, he would stop and rub his eyes tiredly, and then resume.

Grover looked over at Jax, squinting at the screen despite her glasses, and hunting and pecking at the keys, still wearing her tactical gloves. He sighed and stood up from his desk, propping a hip on hers and looking down at her.

"Hey, partner," she said, smiling tiredly up at him. "What's up?"
"Did you ever take that Motrin?" he asked, fishing around in her desk drawer and coming up with the well-worn bottle he knew she kept handy. "And don't you want to take the gloves off? I know Steve likes them, but . . . "

She laughed and held out her hand for the bottle. Grover decided she didn't need the aggravation of the child-proof cap, and opened it for her, tilting two tablets into her hand. She raised her eyebrows at him, and he shook his head and tilted out two more.

"Thanks" she mumbled, as she tossed them back with a sip of now-cold coffee.

"Gloves?" he said, pointing at her hands.

"I, um, think the gloves are holding the bandages on at this point," she said, making a face. "It's going to hurt to take them off, and . . ."

"I'm sorry, honey, but . . . isn't it just going to get worse, the longer you leave it?" he asked.

"Yeah," she sighed, "you're right. Let me go get a couple rolls of gauze from downstairs, though. What I have up here isn't non-stick."

Steve caught the movement out of the corner of his eye, and as Jax headed to the elevator, he looked at Grover questioningly. Grover pointed to his wrist and then to Jax, and Steve nodded. A moment later, he put his phone deliberately on his desk and sat down, staring out the window.

Danny knocked on his door as he went in.

"How'd that go?" he asked quietly, sitting down in the chair opposite the desk.

"I have no idea," Steve sighed "She wants us to turn this completely over to the Navy, which . . . okay, I guess it makes sense, on the one hand, but I can't get her to understand that if Novak is possibly cooperating with Hesse, and possibly engaging in human trafficking, this is going to hit way too close to home to make it strictly a Navy problem. It will be exactly the sort of thing that Five-O was created to handle, and yet she seems to be trying to put us at a distance."

"For what reason?" Danny asked, frowning.

"I don't know," Steve said. "Hey, how's Gracie?"

"Yeah, she's good. Rachel's being exceptionally cooperative; she's going to let me have her this weekend, since this case has had me tied up a couple of my weeknights lately," Danny said. "And Gracie is reminding me that we need to have our Five-O anniversary celebration. I explained to her that . . . now might not be a good time."

"But she'll be disappointed if we don't," Steve said. "We need to do it."

"Steve," Danny said gently. "I appreciate your consideration of my kid, but she'll get over it. She's a cop's daughter, she unfortunately understands these things. You've got a lot to deal with right now."

Steve looked at him somewhat blankly.

"Don't do that, Steve," Danny said, leaning forward in his chair. "Don't give me the thousand yard stare and try to convince me that those mock graves we stumbled on today didn't affect you. Your dad's name. Freddie's. There was a cross, Steven, a cross on what looked like a fresh grave, and it had Jax's badge tied to it with a red ribbon. That's going to be what I see when I close my eyes
tonight. Don't try to tell me that it's not that, times three, for you. Because I'm not buying it."

"Danny, it was just Novak trying to play mind games with me. With us," Steve argued. "I'm not
going to let it get to me. We made a promise to Gracie, I'm not going to let some nutcase start
dictating my personal life."

"Not buying it, try again."

Steve sighed. "Okay, would you buy that . . . having the team around makes me feel better?"

Danny studied him for a long moment. "Because you're evolving into a more mature being who is
able to admit that he needs the support of his friends, or because you think that if you have us all
in one place you can single-handedly protect us from harm?"

Steve thought about that for a moment. "Both?" he asked, uncertainly.

"Well, that's a little bit of progress," Danny said, smiling at Steve. "You've come a long way from
the insane loner who pulled a gun on me the first day we met."

"Thanks, I think," Steve said.

"Jax has had an effect on you," Danny observed. "You're marginally less reckless than you used
to be. Speaking of, where has our girl gone off to? She's not in her office."

Steve stood up, frowning. "She was heading down to get stuff to bandage her wrists, I think, but
she hasn't come back. Let's go check, she shouldn't be wandering around the armory concussed."

They met Max coming off the elevator. "Commander, Detective," he greeted them cheerily. "I
have the lab results from the blood tests of the victims. Since the information is sensitive and
contains potential health information of one of your team members, I wanted to deliver the
information myself." He held a sealed envelope in his hands.

"Jax is downstairs," Danny said, "we'll take it to her."

"Excellent idea," Max said. "She may want to read the results in some measure of privacy."

"Why?" Steve demanded.

"I wouldn't know," Max said. "I've not looked at the results. As I said, it's sensitive information." He
held on tight to the envelope.

"Thanks, Max," Steve said. He gestured to Danny. "Danny is Jax's medical proxy; I promise,
we'll take these straight to her."

Max handed over the envelope to Danny with a small flourish. "When receiving medical results, it
is wise to have a friend or family member present. I think in this case it is arguably more
appropriate for Detective Williams to deliver the report to Officer Nolan than for me to do so.
Here you go."

"Thanks, Max," Danny said, as he pressed the button for the basement floor.

"I believe I heard Mr. Fong mention that they were going to process Officer Nolan's badge as
quickly as possible," Max added, as they descended. "I'm sure she is anxious to have it returned to
her possession."

"Yeah, thanks Max," Steve said. "We'll stop by the lab before we go back up."
They parted ways, with Max heading toward his office suite as they headed toward the armory and supply cabinet. As they rounded the corner, they could see Jax, sitting cross legged on the floor, cradling her right wrist in her left hand. Her head was bent over her hands, curls cascading down and hiding her face.

"Jax?" Danny called quietly.

"Hey, ku'uipo, what -" Steve knelt down next to her, gently lifting her hand in his own. "Oh, shit, Jax, this is . . ." He sighed. "I should have thought of this earlier, I'm sorry."

"What -" Danny started to ask, and then broke off as Steve pulled Jax gently to her feet. He caught sight of her hand, the glove half-way off. The bandage was a mess - blood-soaked and crumpled, pressed into the broken and bruised skin, which had swollen over the course of the day.

"You should have asked for help," Steve said, wincing as he gingerly pulled the bandage away.

Jax shook her head stubbornly. "I knew it was going to hurt like hell, and I didn't want . . . I guess I just wanted to lick my wounds privately. I told you, I don't want to be the weak link; I don't want to be coddled and . . . "

"Babe, when are you going to get it through that thick skull of yours that there's nothing weak about asking for help?" Danny asked, exasperated. "What do you need, Steve?"

"Saline and non-stick gauze," Steve said. "And surgical tape." He boosted Jax easily to sit on the sturdy table. While Danny rummaged for supplies, he finished pulling her glove off, murmuring soft words of comfort as she flinched. "One down, let's go ahead and pull this other one off," he said, reaching for her other hand. By the time he finished, there were a few tears streaking down her bruised cheek. He brushed them away with his thumb.

"This is ridiculous," she muttered. "It's just an abrasion."

"Hey, it hurts like a son of a bitch," Steve commiserated. "I know, ku'uipo."

She looked up at him, touching his cheek softly. Of course he knew; and then some.

Danny put the supplies on the table next to Jax's knee. "Classified, I suppose?" he said, rubbing Jax's knee.

"Except for one unfortunate incident involving a great deal of tequila and a blind date," Steve said. He grabbed the bottle of saline and squirted a particularly stubborn section of bandage, teasing it away from Jax's skin gently.

"Will you tell me the story?" Jax asked. "Please?"

"You have to be hurt a lot worse than this for me to feel sorry enough for you to tell you that story," Steve said, grinning at her.

"Great; she's going to take that as a challenge the next time we're in a hail of bullets," Danny complained. "Babe, are you sure you don't need to go back to the ER? That looks terrible."

"There's nothing else they'd do for it, Danny," Jax said. "Hey, will you look for the analgesic antibiotic cream?"

As Danny checked the cabinet again, Jax glanced down at the envelope he'd laid on the table. "What's with the mystery envelope?" she asked.
"Blood test results from the Miobe brothers," Steve said, pulling the last of the stubborn bandage away. "Max brought the lab report."

Jax was silent, chewing on her lip thoughtfully.

"Hey," Steve said, tucking his fingers under her chin and tilting her head up to look into her eyes. "I love you, got it? I'm not going anywhere; nothing's changing that."

"Read it, Danny?" Jax asked, while Steve's hands were still busy with hers.

"You sure, babe?" Danny asked, picking up the envelope slowly.

She nodded, and he opened the envelope and slid the paper out. It took only a moment before his face flooded with relief. "It's all clear. Nothing. Not even chicken pox."

Steve felt her hands start to shake under his. "You're sure?" she said, trying to peer over edge of the lab report.

"Absolutely sure," Danny said, grinning at them.

"Thank God," Jax said, laughing shakily. "I... with everything going on I don't think I realized how scared... okay. This will heal and I'll be good as new. Everything will be fine. I'll be fine."

She slipped nimbly from the table and headed for the elevator, leaving a slightly befuddled Steve and Danny staring after her, medical supplies still clutched in their hands.

"See, she's going to be fine," Steve said, but his tone was dubious. He looked at Danny uncertainly.

Danny sighed. "What have I told you about 'fine'?. Let's go get her badge from the lab. And then, please, dear God, can this day be over?"

#*#*#*#*#

The sun was starting to set by the time they wrapped things up and headed home.

"Are you okay?" Jax asked quietly, rubbing Steve's hand where it casually wrapped around her knee.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he answered quickly. Very quickly. "You hungry? We haven't eaten all day."

She shook her head. "Hurts to chew. I'll grab a protein shake or something."

He frowned. "You need more than that in you to take your meds. I can make some eggs -"

"Not taking those," she said decisively, interrupting him. "Not tonight. For starters. Probably not again, honestly."

"Jax, you need -"

"I need to... what if there's a break in the case? What if Lieutenant Rollins calls with a lead? I can't be wandering around the island, armed, and looped out on that stuff. I hate it. I'm pretty sure I said something vaguely mortifying in the break room today, after I fell asleep in the car and I can't... I can't stand not being in control," she said. "I'm afraid -" She broke off, looking out the window.

Steve felt an unease crawl up his spine. "Jax," he said slowly, "is there something you're not
"What?" she snorted. "That I can't stand not being in control? Pretty sure you knew that was part of the package, sailor."

They were stopped at a red light now, and he looked at her. "I've never heard you say that you were afraid. Of anything."

She was silent, still looking out the window, and the light turned green. He sighed and stepped on the gas.

"You don't want to talk about it, I get that, Jax," he said, finally.

"You gonna try to convince me that you do?" she asked. "Wanna tell me how it felt, seeing your dad's name, Freddie's name, on those damn . . ." She stopped, brushing at her eyes impatiently.

He remembered then that he had her badge in his pocket; he and Danny had picked it up in the lab but by the time they got upstairs he'd had to sign off on everyone's report and deal with another phone call from the governor. He shifted in his seat now, pulling it out of his pocket.

"Wanna tell me how it felt to see your badge hanging there?" he countered. He held her badge out to her, and she took it from him. Her hands were trembling again. "Jax -" he broke off helplessly.

"I don't want to talk about it," she said softly, turning her badge over in her hands. "Not . . . not yet. Please?" She paused. "I'm sorry, I'm being selfish . . . if you want to talk about it, if you need . . ."

He shook his head. "No," he managed to get out, past the strangled feeling in his throat.

They were in front of the house now, and Steve cut the engine. He wrapped his arm around her shoulder and pulled her close, kissing the top of her head.

"It's not too dark yet, you could swim," she suggested. She could feel the tension and nervous energy radiating off him; knew that usually a swim or run helped. "I'd join you but -" she gestured to the bandages on her wrists, and then turned to get out of the truck. Pain and weariness was evident in every movement, and she winced visibly as she landed.

"How about I help you with your dressings and we find a hockey game?" Steve countered, meeting up with her on the sidewalk. His hand was warm and comforting on the small of her back, and she turned on the porch steps to face him. She liked standing on the steps to talk to him; she was less likely to get a crick in her neck that way.

"We're going to be okay, right?" she asked, her voice hesitant. "I know I'm being . . . bitchy. I'm sorry, I just -" she broke off with a frustrated gesture that reminded him again of Danny.

He cupped her face in his hands. "Yes," he said emphatically. "We are going to be okay."

"We need to find him. Novak. We need to find him, and stop him, before . . ." her voice broke again.

He studied her, unable to shake the feeling that there was something she was holding back.

"We will, ku'uipo," he said, kissing her carefully, mindful of the bruising. "What is it? What has you so on edge?"

She hesitated for a moment. "I'm missing a lot of time," she blurted. "From the time I let them get
the drop on me, to the ride to the hospital . . . I'm missing a lot of time, and what I remember is
distorted. I don't remember what really happened and what I was dreaming while I was in the
hospital. Even with the drugs . . . I know some of it wasn't real, because I remember Rachel being
there. So some of it had to be . . . What if I'm forgetting something, or remembering something
wrong, and I'm missing something important? Something that would help with the case?"

"It's possible, but unlikely, Jax. You're trained to remember. You had the presence of mind to
collect evidence that would exonerate Chin and Kono," he reminded her. "But you also had a
concussion and a shitload of trauma to deal with. Do you need me to call Malia? Or Danny?"

She shook her head. "I'm okay, it's just been a long day. Maybe eggs sound good after all. And
coffee."

He chuckled at her hopeful tone. "Eggs and toast," he said, "and coffee. Coming right up."

"Perfect," she said, trudging up the stairs as he went into the kitchen. "I'm just going to grab a
quick shower."

He looked over his shoulder to be sure that she was going up the stairs, and then hazarded a look
out the kitchen window. The crime scene tape was cleared and the lanai had been scrubbed clean.
He heaved a sigh of relief. He'd forgotten to call HPD to ask them to send a crew, so . . . Chin. He
would bet on it. It had been Chin who had sent someone to come clean after his dad -

Shaking himself free of that line of thought, he could hear thumping and muttered cursing coming
from upstairs. He took the stairs two at a time and padded silently into the bedroom. Jax was
sitting on the floor next to the bed, much like she had been in the basement earlier, this time
struggling with her boots.

"Need help?" he asked, and then dodged as a small, but relatively heavy, steel-toed combat boot
came flying at his face. Only his exceptional reflexes saved the lamp on the dresser closest to the
door. "Whoa," he said mildly, setting the boot down and holding his hands out in case he needed
to catch another one. "Good arm. We are so going to cream Honolulu Fire Department in this
years' softball tournament. Want to tell me what brought that on?"

She was still tugging on the second boot. "Dammit," she muttered, her bruised hands fighting to
get a grip.

"Stop it," Steve said firmly. "Move your hands, and let me. This is ridiculous." He sat down
crosslegged on the floor, facing her, and picked up her foot into his lap.

"I know, I'm sorry," she mumbled.

"No, it's not ridiculous that you're having trouble," he clarified. "It's ridiculous that you're trying to
do it alone. Damn, woman, you are stubborn. If the situation were reversed; if this were me, or
Danny, or Kono, you'd be the one helping with boots, and gloves, and bandages."

"I'm supposed to be the one helping with boots and gloves and bandages," she retorted irritably.
"It's my damn job. I'm sick of feeling helpless and incompetent. You shouldn't have to . . . I've
become a liability to you. To the team."

Steve slid the boot off her foot and froze. "What the - where did you get that idea?"

"Don't deny it. You wanted to push the issue today, with Catherine. You could have . . . I don't
know, reactivated or something and gone after Novak. With her. And instead, you're stuck here.
With me," Jax gestured. "With me and my stupid feet."
"Your feet are not stupid," Steve said, setting her boot aside gently and tenderly pulling the bandages from her ankles, one at a time. The boots had been kinder than the gloves, and she only winced slightly where the gauze was stuck. "A little stinky, I'm not going to deny it," he continued, glancing at her through his long lashes, smirking. "But, you know, that's relative. I've done blister checks on my team five days in to a mission in the rainforest."

"Which rainforest?" she asked. It was a fun game, trying to catch him out in giving up a location.

"Classified," he smiled. "There. You're good to shower. Do not come down the stairs, got it? I'm grabbing the kit and some food and we are going to sit right out there," he said, pointing to the second story lanai.

She nodded and let him help her up. As she turned to head into the bathroom, he stopped her.

"Jax."

She turned back toward him. "Yeah?"

"I'm not stuck here," he said, reaching out and tucking her curls away from her face. "I'm not stuck here with you. I left active duty, went into the Reserves, because I wanted to. That was a choice that I made; and it was before I met you. I've never regretted that choice, and I especially don't regret it now."

"But you miss it, sometimes," she said. "I can tell."

"Yeah, maybe, like you miss street racing," he acknowledged. "I can tell. But do you regret leaving that scene, going to the academy, being a cop, being a tactical medic?"

"Never," she said firmly.

"Okay. Then why . . . okay, don't be mad, but Danny's mentioned that you are a little . . . insecure. Is there something that I say or do that makes you feel that way?"

She shook her head and chewed her lip uncertainly. "No, it's just . . . I'm not used to . . . my whole life, I've been a disappointment to . . . um, people. This - the team, a partner I can trust - I'm not used to this. I guess I'm just waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"Well, you can stop," he said, wrapping her in his arms. "Now, can I go downstairs and whip up some eggs, or do you need to throw another boot at me?"

"Coffee, don't forget the coffee," she mumbled into his chest.

#*#*#*#*

The door that led from the bedroom to the second story lanai was ajar when Steve came upstairs, bearing a tray with eggs, toast, and two mugs of steaming coffee. He'd grabbed one of his trademark Navy showers in the downstairs bathroom, and tossed on a clean pair of boardies from the laundry room.

Stepping out onto the second story lanai, he spotted Jax in just his old Coronado t-shirt, leaning on the railing and looking out at the water. The fading rays of the sunset caught on her damp ringlets, burnishing them dark auburn. He placed the tray on the table and stepped behind her, bracing his arms on either side of her and kissing the back of her neck.

"There's coffee," he murmured, and she shivered as his stubble did delightful things to the tender skin of her throat.
"Screw the coffee," she whispered, turning and leaning back against the railing. She traced her fingers over the intricate ink on his biceps.

He swept his eyes over her, first; and then his hands, carefully, thoroughly, as he'd been restless to do since hauling her, covered in blood, out of that damned liferaft and into the hospital. She let him, standing patiently as he looked at her wrists, brushed his fingers over her bruised cheek, assuring himself that she was relatively intact.

Food might have been forgotten altogether, had his stomach not rumbled loudly in protest just about the time his thumb traced over the familiar scar on her hip. She grinned at the noise of his stomach growling, as he frowned at the prominence of her hip bone.

"Hold that thought," he said, smiling down at her. "First, food."

"Second?" she said, her eyes glinting wickedly as he nudged her to the table.

"Second . . . we forget about Novak for one damn hour," he said.

Her cheek, the one that wasn't bruised, nestled perfectly against his collarbone as he absently ran his fingers through her curls. She winced as he grazed too closely to the recently mended cut at her hairline, and he remembered that she was still concussed.

"Shit, Jax," he said, slipping out from under her, settling her gently on a pillow. He propped up on an elbow and raised her eyelids, one at a time, checking her pupil response. "I can't believe . . . ku'uipo, I'm sorry, you're still concussed and . . . "

"And what, sailor?" she asked, pulling him down for a soft kiss. "The agreement was to forget about Novak for an hour, remember? Did you hear me complaining?"

"Complaining? No," he said, smirking. "The neighbors may have heard you, but I don't think they would mistake it for complaining."

"Shut up," she said. "You bring me coffee wearing nothing but those damn board shorts, what do you expect?"

His grin faded as he rubbed his fingers lightly over her temple. "You sure you won't take the pain meds tonight?"

She shook her head. "I can't, Steve."

"Okay," he soothed. "You gonna be able to sleep?"

"Are you?" she countered.

He sighed and slipped out of the bed, retrieving a soft blanket from the chair in the corner and draping it over the corner of the bed where she could reach it. She tended to run cold when injured and fatigued, and after one memorable incident in which she'd nearly taken a header down the stairs, searching for a blanket while disoriented, he'd started thinking ahead.

"I'll sleep better when Novak is behind bars," he said, sliding back into bed and wrapping his arm around her, nuzzling the back of her neck. "What's wrong?" he said, stilling as he felt her flinch and stiffen next to him.

"Sorry, I - your arm is heavy," she said carefully.
He paused in confusion; his arm was heavy every other night, and she hadn't complained. Of course, he realized, that was before she'd had two dead bodies dumped on top of her.

"Shit, Jax," he said, immediately pulling his arm back. "I'm sorry." He wrapped his hand gently around her hip instead, his thumb rubbing a familiar pattern. "This okay?" he whispered.

"Yeah," she mumbled, sleepy. "I'm sorry, it's just -"

"Shh, don't apologize," he said. "It's okay, Jax, it's perfectly understandable."

"They were so heavy," she said absently, whispering, half asleep, in the dark. "I was afraid the raft would sink. I was afraid the raft would sink, and my hands and feet were tied. I didn't want Novak to leave. How crazy is that?"

"Not crazy, ku'uipo," Steve murmured.

"When he left . . . I could hear the motor, and then I couldn't. All I could hear were the waves. Every time a wave washed over the raft, I thought I would drown. I was never afraid of drowning, before, but then after the river, in New York, I was afraid," she rambled, more asleep than awake. "Drowning isn't easy like they make it look . . . it's terrifying. I was afraid . . . I was afraid I would drown, and wash up on your beach, and I didn't want . . . your beach should only have happy memories, I didn't want that to be taken away from you."

His hands clenched into fists so hard that the muscles cramped, and he fought the urge to gather her in his arms and hold her tight, knowing that especially half-asleep it would probably trigger a flashback.

"We'll have happy memories on the beach, I promise," he whispered, trying desperately to replace the images in her mind with something different. "We promised Gracie a Five-O anniversary celebration, remember?"

"Hmm," she hummed, as exhaustion took hold. "We'll need ice . . . and burgers . . ." her voice drifted off, content.

He was awake for a while, thinking of possible scenarios in which Novak would resist arrest, and wondering if the Geneva convention applied in this particular situation.

###

It probably would have been just fine, if they had remembered to close the door and set an alarm. But they didn't; distracted, they'd tumbled into bed without bothering with an alarm, and left the door open. As the night air cooled, Jax predictably got cold, even with the blanket, and Steve predictably curled around her, holding her tight when his subconscious recognized her shivering.

And because they'd left the door open, the sound of the waves easily drifted into the room; the gentle crash on a loop, repeating, working its way into Jax's exhausted, concussed mind.

And because they'd forgotten an alarm, Steve had slept straight through his usual five am wake-up, exhausted from the case and sleep-warm and content with Jax in his arms, the scent of her hair soothing and reassuring.

If they had remembered to close the door and set an alarm, Danny wouldn't have been standing in the kitchen, having let himself in and reset the security system behind him, when he heard Jax's panic-stricken screams from upstairs.
Danny stopped cold and tilted his head toward the stairs. Sure, he'd heard her wake up in the middle of a nightmare before, but this sounded different. He hesitated. Steve would wake her up; he'd give them a few minutes to get sorted.

"Steve!"

The sheer, unadulterated terror in her voice was unmistakable, and Danny felt fear in an icy grip around his heart. Someone was hurting her, and she was calling for Steve, who at this time of morning was likely in the middle of a swim. Or someone had managed to get in the house, and Steve was hurt . . .

He was halfway up the stairs, weapon drawn, by the second time she called out for Steve, a loud crash and a thud following, and a second later, he was in the bedroom, gun pointed at -

Steve. Who was pointing a gun back at him.

"Shit, Danny," Steve said, his voice steady, "stand down. She had a nightmare."

Danny holstered his weapon, with a fleeting sense of the ridiculousness of finding himself in this situation in Steve's house. This never happened in Jersey.

"Danny?" Jax asked, confused, as she tried to extricate herself from a tangle of sheets and blankets.

"Yeah, Danny's here," Steve said, his hands deftly untangling limbs and sheets until Jax was sorted. "You okay?"

She bit her lip and shook her head, and Steve knelt by the side of the bed, gathering her gently in his arms. "Shh, I've got you," he said. "I'm so sorry, Jax. I wasn't awake . . . I didn't mean to scare you."

Danny frowned and crossed his arms, stubbornly leaning in the doorway and refusing to budge.

"Not your fault," Jax mumbled, her face tucked securely into the crook of his neck. "I could hear the waves, and then . . . it just . . ."

"I know, I'm so sorry," he repeated.

"I need to read the reports," she blurted, out of the blue. "I lost too much time, I don't know what happened. I need to see the timeline, read Max's report."

"Jax are you sure?" Steve asked, his big hand cradling her head easily against him. He could feel her nod.

"There might be something significant," she insisted. "What if some of the things I thought were from the concussion, and the hospital . . . what if I'm wrong? What if it happened in real time, and it wasn't part of my statement? We could be overlooking something significant."

"Okay," he agreed. "Okay, we'll go over everything. Together."

She nodded. "I get first dibs on the shower."

" Opportunist," he chuckled, kissing the top of her head. "I'll make coffee."

"Hi, Danny," she said casually, as she slipped out of bed and padded toward the bathroom.
Danny stared at Steve, who was grabbing a t-shirt and pulling it on over his gym shorts.

"Danny," Steve said, rubbing the back of his neck, "can we move this conversation downstairs? Please?"

"You gonna tell me what the hell that was all about?" Danny asked, gesturing wildly as he headed down the stairs. "I've heard her wake up from plenty of nightmares, Steven, and that was . . . I really thought that someone was murdering her, or you, or both."

"It was the combination of the sound of the waves -"

"Scream inducing, I agree," Danny interrupted.

"Because the door was open," Steve continued, "and I guess she got cold, which she does, always, when she's exhausted, or hurt, and usually I . . . um, try to keep her warm." He shrugged self-consciously and turned to put grounds in the coffee maker.

"Ah, so she woke up with the sound of crashing waves, and almost two hundred pounds of you wrapped around her, and panicked," Danny surmised. "But Steve, that was unlike . . . that was the sound of sheer, unadulterated terror. Not confusion, not the tail end of a bad dream."

"That's because it was a flashback, Danny," Steve explained. "I was holding her, and it triggered a flashback. She wasn't dreaming about what happened, or remembering it . . . in that moment, she was there. She was back in that damn raft, with the water coming over the edge, and bodies on top of her, weighing it down . . ."

"Ah," Danny said. "So she talked to you about it?"

Steve shook his head. "Not so much as mumbled about it as she drifted off to sleep. But yeah, enough to let me know . . . it was bad, Danny. Her response is normal."

"Normal. This is normal," Danny said incredulously.

"Yes, Danny, for someone who has been subjected to this type of psychological torture, this is a normal, predictable response," Steve said, crossing his arms and leaning back against the counter defensively.

"Steve, babe, only in your world is it normal to be subjected to psychological torture," Danny reminded him gently.

Steve stared at Danny, horrified. "Danny, I . . . this is my fault -"

"Wait, Steve, no," Danny said, grabbing Steve by the shoulders. "This is not on you, partner. That's not what I meant. It's obvious that you knew how to respond to the situation, and I wouldn't have."

Steve looked at him, with a new face that Danny hadn't categorized yet.

"Hey, look on the bright side partner," Danny said, because he couldn't take that stricken look on Steve's face any longer.

"What?"

"She was terrified, and she was calling for you, Steven. Not Billy, or me, or Jake . . . you. That's something, right?" Danny asked, looking at Steve fondly.
Steve stared back at Danny, clearly fighting a mix of emotions.

"Steve," Danny sighed. "It's okay to be happy about that, buddy."

"And as far as I can tell," Max said solemnly, "that would have been the final injury inflicted before the fatal gunshot."

The team, standing around the smart table, was silent, as they had been since Max started his gruesome review. Caviness, who still had a light case load, had shown up again that morning with coffees for everyone and a chaste kiss on the cheek for Kono. Steve wasn't sure if he had shown up for Kono, for the team, to help track Novak, or simply for moral support, but regardless, he was thankful for his presence. He could see him watching Jax, analyzing her reaction to Max's horrifically detailed report.

She was standing next to Steve, shoulders squared, head high. But she'd flinched more than once during his litany of the torture Novak had inflicted on the Miobe brothers, and he wasn't sure that whatever she was sacrificing to maintain that control was worth it.

"I think," she said, her voice strangled; she cleared her throat and tried again, as Kono went to grab a bottle of water. "I was hoping maybe I just imagined it, or it was part of a nightmare at the hospital, but I think I might have asked Novak to kill them."

Her fingers clenched in a white knuckle grip around the edge of the smart table.

"While he was torturing them?" Caviness prompted gently, exchanging a look with Steve.

She nodded, accepting the water bottle from Kono with shaking hands.

"Jax, even if you did, you have to understand . . . that's on Novak," Steve said. "It's not an uncommon tactic among prisoners of war. It demoralizes the survivors. It doesn't mean that you're responsible."

She nodded silently. "He asked if I would do that for you," she said, looking directly up at Steve. "If I would be willing to beg him to kill you; how far I would be willing to go, what I would be willing to do to convince him to end your suffering. I'm almost certain of it."

Kono put a hand over her mouth, her eyes filling with tears.

"Okay, then maybe that's a clue," Steve said, calm, confident. "Maybe he plans to try to take me, at some point. Caviness, let's go over the surveillance again."

"You can't seriously be thinking of putting yourself out there as bait?" Danny interrupted.

"I'm certainly not ruling it out," Steve retorted.

Caviness was working with Chin to pull up the surveillance photos of the team that they'd found among the crated weapons that Novak had brought onto the island. In a moment, they were all up on the plasmas.

"The photos were superficial, and outdated," Caviness mused. "Jax and Grover are still wearing HPD gear."

"Nothing in these photos indicates an intimate knowledge of the team on Novak's part," Chin observed. "Anyone could have had this much access to us. There's no pictures of our family or
friends."

"And yet, Novak knew just where to hit us," Steve said. "He made Danny think he'd hurt a little girl, tried to set up Chin and Kono as dirty cops . . . and when the Miobe brothers jumped ahead in his little game, he punished them, but then he got opportunistic, went ahead and played on our fears."

"Wait," Caviness said, "you're saying that he came up with ways to target specific fears?"

Steve glanced at Jax, raising his eyebrows in question. She nodded firmly. "Whatever you think will help, Steve; I'm not interested in keeping secrets from our family."

"Jax's fear of drowning," Steve said.

She nodded in agreement. "Restraining my hands, which may have just been part of making me think I was going to drown, or . . . well, it's an issue in and of itself."

Caviness turned to Steve. "What about you?"

"Not being able to protect my people," Steve replied instantly.

"That's a given; you're a Navy SEAL and a task force leader," Caviness said. "He had conversations with you . . . what did he say? Word choice is very telling."

"Well, the last thing he said was that perhaps this was my nightmare; feeling enraged, feeling impotent . . ."

Caviness held up a hand, interrupting him. "Specifically, he used the word impotent?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Well, not to overstep but . . ."

"What, am I shooting blanks?" Steve asked, incredulous. "I don't know. It's never come up."

Jax cleared her throat again and scuffed her boot on the ground. "Yeah, but . . . okay, might be completely unrelated but I might not be able . . . they don't know for sure, but there's some question on my part. I might not be able to have kids."

Kono carefully took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Caviness looked at the photos and back to the team a couple of times.

"The photos are superficial and dated, like Chin's supposed history of being a dirty cop. Superficial - no doubt it made the news; and dated - because obviously his name has been cleared, and then some. But Novak would understand how that lingers, how it affects the family. But then some of his knowledge is intimate," he repeated. "Like information that would be in your medical records. Your department psych records."

"Son of a bitch," Steve ground out.

"Medical records are surprisingly easy to access, or to hack," Caviness continued. "It's one of the things we have to be most careful of when creating new identities. Identifying features, like tattoos, scars, joint replacements . . . these things are as unique as fingerprints. His arrogance . . . he may have just slipped up."

"If the records have been hacked, we should be able to tell," Chin said. "I'll get the tech guys on
"If the records have been hacked, we should be able to tell," Chin said. "I'll get the tech guys on it."

"I'll do you one better," Danny said.

"Toast?" Steve asked, incredulous. He shook his head and laughed. "Okay, well, we want results."

"He didn't cover his tracks very well," Toast mumbled, munching on a handful of trail mix.

"Arrogant bastard never thought we'd look," Steve said.

"Well, there you go," Toast said, casually pointing to a set of coordinates in North Korea. "That's where the hack came from, anyway."

"You're sure?" Danny asked.

"From that one IP address, someone has accessed medical records at two hospitals in Honolulu, and four in the greater New York metropolitan area. I'd say the odds are ever in your favor," Toast said, yawning.

Steve was already heading out the door, and Danny had to break into a light jog to catch up to his long stride.

"Catherine," Steve barked into the phone, "I've got a set of coordinates, I want satellite surveillance, facial recognition from every camera in a hundred mile radius . . ."

It was Danny's evening to have Grace, and besides, everyone was too fidgety and on edge to concentrate on cold cases or requisition forms.

"Go home," Steve said, just before three o'clock. "Or go surfing, or go . . . just go."

"Thank God," Kono muttered. Steve shot her a look and a raised eyebrow. "I love you boss, I do, but your pacing is making me dizzy." Caviness slipped out on her heels, followed by Chin.

"Anything at all comes up, page me," Grover said. "Otherwise, I'll be on the golf course. Feed that partner of mine, make sure she gets some decent rest," he added. "She looks like she's been drug through a hedge backwards."

"I'll be able to pick Gracie up from school," Danny commented. "Thanks, partner."

"Why don't you bring her over to the house?" Steve suggested. "We have a Five-O party to plan."

"You're sure?" Danny asked, surprised. He glanced at Jax.

"You're worried she'll be upset?" Jax asked, her fingers automatically going to the bruising on her face.

"Nah, not my Gracie," Danny said proudly. "Okay, we'll come over."

They usually ate outside, but between the scattered rain showers of the early evening, and the heavier plates of mac and cheese - Gracie's request - they'd shoved the detritus of paperwork off it."
the dining table and spread out with dinner and legal pads to make meal and activity plans for a Five-O anniversary celebration.

Danny followed Steve into the kitchen, his hands full of plates, and almost crashed into him when Steve stopped short, looking back at the dining room.

"What - hey -" Danny sputtered, until he followed Steve's line of vision. "Oh," he said, smiling.

Gracie's bare feet dangled adorably a foot off the floor, and Jax's feet were next to hers, her toes barely grazing the carpet. Gracie was beaming up at Jax, her eyes sparkling in delight at some idea they'd agreed upon.

"Wow," Steve said reverently.

"Yeah," Danny agreed.

#*#*#*#*#

The call came, naturally, at three am.

"Steve?" It was Catherine's voice on the phone, and he was instantly wide awake.

"Yeah, Cath," he said, pulling on pants and grabbing his gun and badge.

Jax sat up at that, and rummaged for her clothing as well, watching Steve intently.

"I want to go," he said. There was a long pause. "Team Five? Yeah. Okay." Another long pause. "We'll see you there."

"They found something?" Jax said, mumbling around her toothbrush.

"They found someone," Steve said, shoving his feet into his boots.

#*#*#*#*#

The situation room was a tight fit, but every single one of the team managed to squeeze in. Caviness had arrived with Kono, whose shirt was on inside out, and Chin was silently contemplating that situation with a raised eyebrow.

"Facial recognition picked Novak up, two miles from the coordinates your . . . colleague gave us," Catherine said, queuing up a grainy night vision broadcast that showed three SEALs and the occasional boot of the fourth, the one wearing the body camera. "We sent in an intelligence officer to confirm and we believe this is indeed Novak's base of operation."

"You only sent in a four man fire team?" Steve asked.

"We were prepped for a squad of eight," Catherine replied, "but there's been no indication of additional personnel. Novak appears to be working alone."

"Most sociopaths do," Caviness said.

They watched in amazement and awe as the four men breached the nondescript cinderblock house. There was no audio, which Danny absently thought might have made it seem a bit more dramatic, and within moments, two of the SEALs had a man between them, his hands zip tied. The third SEAL tilted his face toward the camera.

Catherine picked up a small microphone. "Confirmed. You have Declan Novak in custody." She turned and smiled at the team. "Congratulations. Your six member task force accomplished what my Naval Intelligence team couldn't."

"We couldn't have done it without Naval Intel," Steve said graciously. "Thanks for the satellite."

Catherine rolled her eyes. "Anytime, sailor."

Jax was still staring at the screen, which now showed a jumble of images from the back seat of a rapidly moving armored vehicle. "That's it?" she asked, her voice quiet.

"That's it," Catherine confirmed, a gentle hand on Jax's shoulder. "It's over, Officer Nolan. He's in the custody of the US Navy, and he'll be held on charges of arms and human trafficking and prosecuted by the Department of Justice and the United Nations Security Council."

Jax nodded numbly. "Okay." Danny discreetly took her hand. It was unnerving, to say the least, to be part of taking down an international criminal; this wasn't something they trained for in New Jersey.

They all filed out of the room, thanking the officers who had allowed them into the secure area. Catherine put her hand on Steve's elbow and he turned back to her.

"Steve," she said quietly, "the file sharing went both ways. I just wanted to say, on a personal note... I'm sorry. For what you've been through. For what Jacqueline has been through."

Steve nodded. "Thanks, Catherine. We'll be okay."

"Steve, she... she's a great cop, and a gifted medic, but she wasn't trained for this. I wasn't trained for this. Not like you were. Just because you've been trained to understand the nature of psychological torture, prepare for it on some level, recover from it... she hasn't been," Catherine warned. "If there's anything we can do... you have access to the best the Navy has to offer, just remember that."

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It was late afternoon when they all gathered at Steve's, a little worn around the edges, but they'd all agreed that they would be too wired to rest anyway.

"I can get behind adding celebrating Novak's capture to celebrating two years of Five-O," Chin said, clinking his Longboard against Steve's.

"Hooyah," Steve agreed.

There was a blur of dark pigtails headed for Danny. "Danno!" Gracie yelled, as she came full speed around the side of the house. Danny caught her with ease as she launched herself at him. Rachel appeared a moment later, looking perplexed.

"Gracie?" she called.

"Over here, mommy!" Gracie called back from her perch in Danny's arms.

"I'm sorry, Daniel, she just sprinted off the minute I slowed the car," Rachel said, nervously pushing her hair out of her face.

"It's fine, Rachel," Steve said, loping over to join them. "Gracie is at home here; there's no need to
stand on formalities. You drove her over?"

"Yes, I . . . well, she was quite excited, and Stan is working and the driver is otherwise engaged," Rachel said. "I wasn't going to keep her waiting."

"Thank you, mommy," Gracie chimed in. "You should stay here. We have the best food planned, and I'm going to help grill the chicken, and Auntie Kono said she will help me surf. And Auntie Jax is going to let me help cut up all the fruit, because I'm learning how to use knives safely in the kitchen."

"I don't want to impose . . ." Rachel said, hesitating.

"There's going to be a sandcastle building contest," Gracie continued, "and you can be on the team with me and Danno. Please?"

Rachel looked at Danny. "We'd love to have you stay, Rach," he said. "If you like."

Steve grinned at her and handed her a Longboard. She took a skeptical sip. "Lovely," she said, trying not to make a face.

Jax had wandered up by that point, and she tilted her head back and laughed. "Steve, don't tease," she said, taking Rachel by the hand. "I have a very nice white wine spritzer in the kitchen, Rachel," she said, leading her inside the house.

"This is lovely," Rachel said again, as they entered the kitchen.

"It feels like home," Jax said, as she poured a drink and handed it to Rachel. "I'm glad you're here. It's nice, for Gracie, to have you both here, I think." She shrugged. "I guess. Sorry, I actually don't know the first thing about kids. But she seems happy."

"Thank you for making me feel welcome," Rachel said, "you and Steve. Jax," she hesitated. "I need to ask you something. You said something at the hospital . . ."

Jax groaned and covered her face with her hands. "I knew it. I knew you were just being polite in front of Danny. I'm sorry; what did I say? Something about thigh holsters? Tattoos? God, please don't tell me I made a comment about the size- never mind."

Rachel laughed. It was the first time Jax had heard her laugh since the early days, when Gracie was a toddler, before things had gone wrong. She remembered Danny being crazy in love with Rachel, before the stress and strain of being married to a cop had made Rachel cold and distant.

"No, you didn't . . . actually you said something about Danny," Rachel said.

"Oh no, that's even worse," Jax said. "You have to understand, I've never been legitimately attracted to Danny, but he is sweet, and so kind -"

"And still in love with me?" Rachel blurted out, before she lost her nerve.

Jax paled and sat down on the kitchen stool. "Rachel, I - I don't remember saying that. I was so doped up."

"But it's true?" Rachel asked.

Jax nodded. "Yeah. I'm so sorry. Danny wouldn't . . . we sort of badgered him into saying it one night; we were trying to convince him to start dating again, we didn't realize . . . I didn't mean to betray a confidence. If he wanted you to know that, it should have come from him."
"Jax, you were completely knoced," Rachel said. "No one will blame you, and I won't say anything to Danny. I just . . . I didn't know if it was true, or if you were just rambling."

"Why does it matter to you?" Jax asked quietly.

"Because . . . it might be mutual," Rachel said, taking a sip of her drink.

"Seriously?" Jax blurted. "Do I look like the person to tell secrets to? Rachel, I will do my best to honor your privacy but the next time I get hurt, there's a decent chance I'm gonna spill that out while I'm . . . snockered."

"I'm aware of that," Rachel said, with a shrug. "Now, shall we go see about this sand castle contest? What can you tell me about my competition?"

"That was amazing," Steve said, after the last bottle had been cleared and the kitchen swept. It was well past midnight and they were the best kind of exhausted.

*Second best kind of exhausted, Steve's brain corrected.*

"It was fun," Jax agreed. "Rachel really hit it off with Renee; that was nice."

"And Chin was polite to Caviness," Steve continued, turning off the lights and setting the security system.

"Because Malia threatened him," Jax laughed. "No, Caviness is a good guy. He's . . . perceptive." She started heading up the stairs.

"Hey," Steve said, tugging on her hand, and she stopped and turned, standing a couple of steps above him so that he could see her eyes. "A lot of stuff came up, with Caviness profiling the team, and Novak. Are you okay with that?"

"Yeah, I am," she said, nodding. "I mean, it helped solve the case, right? And, I'm pretty much a disaster . . . not like I'm fooling anybody." She dropped her eyes. "They may as well know," she added, mumbling.

"Ku'uipo," Steve sighed. "I'm still sorry that your privacy had to be impacted in that way." He stepped up one more step and wrapped her in his arms. She sighed happily and snuggled against him.

"People don't keep a lot of secrets around here," she chuckled.

"What?" Steve demanded, holding her at arms' length and smiling down at her. "What do you know?"

She grinned at him. "Classified."

And then there was laughter, and a bit of a scuffle, and somehow Jax found herself off her feet and in Steve's arms.

He placed her carefully in the center of their bed, propped on his elbow next to her. With one finger he traced over the cut just at her hairline, down her still-bruised cheek and jaw. He lifted her hands one at a time and pressed careful kissing against the abrasions around her wrists which had just started to heal.
"I'm sorry I let them get the drop on me," she whispered.

"I'm sorry I can't keep you safe," he whispered back.

"I don't blame you," she protested.

"Then stop blaming yourself," he countered.

"Are we going to have an argument now?" she asked, her eyes twinkling. "I mean, I do have a temper. Arguments are inevitable. But I hear rumors that make-up sex is incredible."

"Let's just skip the argument part," Steve suggested. "And go straight for incredible."

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