



# The Entire Team (Special Forces: Operation Alpha)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Bethany is a love at first sight story.

Sylvie isn't having a great tour with the Navy when she meets the Team.

Will Rave get the opportunity to keep her?

Ashe is caught in a nightmare scenario when Red sees her.

Red returns from a mission that went badly.

After escaping one nightmare will they be able to survive the fall out of this?

Tech is surprised by Amari on mission. Is she willing to consider him?

Kailani is a local girl trying to stay out of the island politics, but Stitch can't stop running into her.

Finding the right person is hard, relationships are harder, does this team stand a chance?

**Total Pages (Source):** 47

# Page 1

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1

Teddy she could smell the iron on his usual scent. “What happened?” Teddy had tried pushing past her. “Are you okay?” she insisted moving into his way, forcing him to stop.

“It’s fine,” he answered. His hands on her arms, moving her out of his way.

“It’s not.” She slapped him in the shin with her sight stick.

“Oww!” He walked past her into the bathroom.

She ducked into the bathroom behind him. If he didn’t know better, he’d swear she was looking straight at him, through the white in her eyes, seeing his black eye and split lip. “Where are you bleeding?”

“I cut my lip,” he gave in.

“On who’s fist?”

Teddy groaned. “Some idiot. Can I get it cleaned up now?”

Bethany stepped closer, “Can I feel?”

“What?!” Teddy jerked back out of her range.

“I just wanna see.”

Teddy debated for a long moment. It was Bethany, they grew up together, she was his sister's friend. What would she feel, what would she think?

She lifted her eyebrow and again, and he swore she saw him.

"Ok," he stepped toward her and grabbing her wrists he guided her hands toward his face.

## Page 2

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2

He had been ten when she had started learning his face through the aftermaths of the fights, he'd get himself into.

At fourteen Teddy's reaction to her touch barely surprised him. He made himself a regular nuisance to his sister when her friends were around, trying to be able to see her. His temper flared easily with no way to let off steam, as his hormones coursed through him. He knew he couldn't have Beth; she was better than him and her family would never approve. His fights increased, allowing him to spend extra time with Beth. As the boys got older the fights got harder. In the latest fight Teddy had ended up with some road rash on his shoulder from grappling. Bethany had walked in on Teddy as he'd pulled his shirt over his head. "You can't help with this," Teddy started.

"Why? Because I can't see?" her voice strained.

Teddy looked up, the anger in her voice surprising him. "You're angry."

The white in her eyes looked more like a sparkle at this point. "Why shouldn't I be?"

Teddy reached for Beth's hands, one curled on the bathroom counter, the other fisted at her side. Out of habit she let him take her hands, placing one on his right shoulder and one over his left eye. Her hands moved over him with experience, her eyebrows knit. "Why should you be? There wasn't anything you could do."

"Why do you keep doing this?"

“I asked first,” said Teddy.

“Don’t play dumb,” Beth answered, her hands coming off him. She turned to leave. Out of habit, Teddy grabbed the handle to the door and pulled the door open for her. Her hand brushed across his arm, around the edge of the door as it opened. She felt the goosebumps rise on Teddy’s arm. Her normal confidence froze and she turned slowly, “I?—”

“You’re too young to understand.”

“And you’re just a stupid boy.” She was back and turned on her heel.

He took a deep breath as she disappeared down the hall.

## Page 3

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3

When Teddy turned sixteen, he designated himself the chaperone for his freshmen sister and friends. During the week Teddy would float through school with a new girl on his arm and on the weekends chauffeur for his sister and friends. More than once his sister, Sarah, would open the door to Teddy's room and find the 'girl of the week' in a compromising position. Teddy would fly across the room as fast as he could, figuring his sister's vision was poor enough to miss most of it. She could hear him from behind the closed door telling his guest, "She didn't see anything."

"I think it's so cute how you take care of her and her little friends. Now where were we?"

And Teddy knew this would be the last time he had that girl over.

By the time he was seventeen he knew Bethany's hands were the only hands he wanted on him.

At 15, Bethany had started getting attention from boys in her classes. Teddy watched the clumsy attempts from kids she'd been in class with for years and years, the smoother attempts of the 'regular' kids she took some classes with, and finally the cool attempts of the boys that figured she was an easy target and would appreciate their attention.

He would laugh as she sniffed out the cocky ones. Be amazed at the gentleness she showed to the classmates she had and the ignorance she could have toward the rest.

When Teddy graduated, he went to the Naval Academy. He wanted to serve and wanted to be a SEAL. He came home frequently, under the guise of watching out for Sarah, keeping an eye on Bethany. His second year into academy he was surprised when he got home for a weekend and Bethany was nowhere to be found. “Where is she?” he asked Sarah, as he was driving her to the mall.

“She’s out with Andrew.”

“Who’s Andrew?”

Sarah’s eyebrow lifted. “He’s new. The girls say he’s good looking. He’s been taking Bethany out for a bit now.”

“What’s ‘a bit’?”

Sarah looked at her brother. “She was tired of waiting for you I suppose.”

“What?” Teddy tried to brush it off casually. “I’m not---”

“Save it for someone else. Despite your whoring high school days, I’m wise to you.”

“Her pare?—”

“What, she’s better than you? Her parents would disapprove?” Sarah acted like she was thinking it over. “You’re right, she is. They might. But she’s wanted you about as long as you’ve wanted her. And you’re gonna graduate and be a SEAL. Who would say ‘No’ to you?”

Teddy drove in silence, parking at the mall.

Sarah finally having to ask, “Are we there?”

Teddy shook his head, back into the moment. “Yeah, where are we going?” He pushed open his door and went around to get his sister.

“It’s prom silly. I need a dress.”

Teddy over exaggerated his groan.

“Best part,” Sarah bumped her shoulder into him. “You’re going with me.”

“What! Didn’t anyone ask you?”

“Not worth mentioning. Besides isn’t my brother always telling me they’re only looking for one thing?”

“Your brother sounds pretty smart,” Teddy bumped her back as they entered JCPenny.

“I do expect you to wear your uniform. Cheaper than a tux.”

“True,” Teddy responded quietly.

“So, lets pick something that’ll go with that.”

“Sarah, it’s white.”

“So, anything. Awesome!”

Teddy smiled at her enthusiasm. He hadn’t even gone to his prom, he’d been tired of his classmates, ready to move on. He didn’t want to deal with the girls he’d hooked up with and all the drama.



Ted was deviously handsome, straight nose, nearly see through blue eyes, dimples when he smiled and at 6', tall enough for most women. In his white uniform he cut a picture-perfect image for recruitment advertising. He waited patiently for his sister to come out of the bathroom. He smiled when she did, she looked beautiful. He was sorry that she was taking him, and sure that every boy left in school was crazy. "You look amazing," he said to her as they headed toward his car.

"Thanks," she answered shyly.

"Are you embarrassed?" He looked at her wide eyed. "Wished you'd said yes to a real boy now?"

Sarah shook her head, rolling her eyes. "No. I'm glad with how this will turn out."

Ted's eyebrows knit as he got behind the wheel.

When they arrived, he was a perfect escort. They did casual pictures, drinks, and he got a table so she could sit down. Sarah knew when Bethany walked in with Andrew; Teddy's face froze, eyes moving with her.

"Bethany," Sarah called out. Both Andrew and Bethany turned their heads, Andrew moving toward her waving.

As they headed toward the table, Teddy looked at Sarah, "What are you doing!?"

“It’s my prom. I’m hanging out with my friend.” She sounded so innocent, Teddy wanted to strangle her.

“Teddy,” Bethany nearly whispered as they got to the table.

Teddy stood, “Bethany. And Andrew I hear,” he held out his hand to Andrew. They shook. As they all sat Sarah took over. It was a small round table, Sarah, Teddy, Bethany, and Andrew.

“Andrew, this is Ted, my brother. He’s going to be a SEAL.”

“Oh wow. I understand that’s really hard training,” Andrew was reaching.

“So, I’ve heard, for good reason,” Teddy answered back.

“Bethany,” Sarah started. “I missed you at dress hunting. I had to take Ted.”

Bethany smiled kindly, “I bet he’s a better driver.”

“No girl talk,” Teddy leaned in.

“I doubt that,” Bethany looked at him. “And your dress is beautiful so maybe you took the right person after all,” she turned back to Sarah.

“Where are you from, Andrew? Sarah said you were a new student.” Ted tried to bring him back into the conversation.

“Andrew, you wanna dance?” Sarah asked abruptly standing up.

Andrew obligingly stood and took Sarah to the dance floor.

“You look amazing,” Teddy said when it was just them.

“Thank you,” Bethany felt like she had to bite out. “You’re in uniform.”

“Yes, Sarah told me to wear it.”

“Of course,” they both smiled about Sarah.

“How long have you been seeing this guy?”

“For a bit.”

“That’s what Sarah said. Have you kissed him?” Teddy could feel his anger rising.

“That’s none of your business.”

Teddy took her hand, yanked her up, and started walking toward an exit, “Come with me.”

Before she could argue, or fight, she felt a brick wall against her back and knew Teddy was standing in front of her, within inches. “I don’t want anyone to touch you, kiss you, be with you.”

“No one? It’s not your call, Te---”

Teddy’s lips fell hard on hers, his hands diving into her long hair, cradling her face. Teddy erased the distance between them, stepping toward her. Her hands snaked up his chest into his short hair pulling, as if to make him get even closer; her mouth opening for him to lay claim. He felt her hips thrust toward him, the bones pressing against him and pulled back his kiss. Trying to compose himself he felt the goosebumps on his arms, mirrored on hers. “God damn it, Bethany.”

“Why now? Because I’m with someone else? All those years you flew through all those girls.”

“I always wanted to be with you. The girls were nothing, a distraction. I thought even if I could convince you, your parents would never allow it.”

“Why should I believe you now? Andrew is a good person.”

“Because you didn’t say you loved Andrew. It’s high school, Bethany!”

“He’s not afraid of my parents or our money.”

“You kissed me back. There won’t be anyone besides me for you, ever.”

“How many have there been at school?”

“There hasn’t been. I was done with that in high school.”

“Just where I could hear about it,” Bethany smirked.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you. I didn’t know what else to do.”

After graduation Teddy had a short break before he left for training. He had already sold his car so he flew home. Bethany had been waiting at the airport when she heard two women near her start carrying on.

“That face is for movies.”

“I could ruin him for any other woman.”

“Oh my god, pretty sure I just came. He has dimples too.”

“Who is he here for?” the women looked around, figuring they’d find a too hot to be true partner.

His eyes froze on Bethany as he hit the bottom of the escalator. His smile faded as he got closer, she looked bothered. “Baby?” he leaned down to take her hand.

The women looked on flabbergasted.

Bethany popped up, nearly headbutting Teddy as he reacted, “Teddy.”

“You okay?” he asked taking her arm in his and pulling her toward baggage claim. He found a quiet corner and settled her in it, barely needing to look down to see her face. He palmed the side of her face and she looked at him, and just like when he was ten, he swore she looked right at him. “You sure you’re okay?”

Her hands had snaked their way up his body. One hand against his chest, the other rested against the side of his neck. She tried to nod, he felt her fingertips petting his neck. He wrapped his arm around her wrist and dropped his mouth to hers. Touching from lips to hips he could feel the tension leave her body. Her right hand moved from his chest, up his neck, into his hair pulling on the short ends. He growled as he deepened their kiss and ground his erection into her. “We have to stop or I’m gonna take you here,” he pulled back dragging in air.

He had taken her back to her apartment. He’d made them dinner and then he tried to settle down to a movie. He gave up and after 15 minutes, hauled Bethany over his shoulder and carried her into the bedroom and dropped her on the bed. “Take your clothes off,” Teddy commanded, also stripping.

“Why me?”

Teddy froze just before getting on the bed, “What!”

“The women today weren’t unique. I’m not a match for you. No one understands why we’re together or why you’re with me anyway.”

Bethany laid out in front of him, “they are clearly not looking at what I am.” He settled over her slowly kissing his way up her body, starting at her knees. She buried her hands into his hair as he settled between her legs. He slid two fingers into her as his mouth sucked on her clit. She ground against his face until she came. He kissed each hip bone, her belly button, and then settled over her nipples. He feasted on one, her hips fighting for contact and then he switched. She was getting frantic for friction.

“Teddy, fuck me god damn it!” she pleaded. With one thrust he was buried inside her. He stilled, it had been awhile, she was fucking tight. When he felt her relax against his size he pulled back and took her hard and fast. She cried out as she came, he followed behind her.

“As soon as I can I’ll call for you, okay?”

Bethany nodded, knowing he could see it. He lifted her hands to his face, feeling her slowly run her fingers down it. “You see me.” He took her hands in his, feeling both their rings, “trust me. You are my everything, Mrs. Williams.”

She brought her hand up, catching him just below his ear, her fingertips petting. He smiled as he leaned in to kiss her.

## Page 6

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Months later Ted was at the airport waiting for Beth. He knew she'd wait until the crowd moved through, she'd be patient, it would make it easier. When he saw her, he couldn't stop grinning. He moved up to greet her, "Beth, you made it!" He grabbed her up and swung her around. He stopped abruptly setting her feet back on the ground. One hand running down to her lower belly.

"We're pregnant," Bethany said. "You're worried."

"What?"

"I can hear you."

"Surprised, worried, amazed." He took her arm and headed toward baggage claim. "You didn't say anything. What has the doctor said? Boy, girl, names."

She squeezed his hand, "there's plenty of time for all that."

Bethany met who would make up the rest of Ted's team before their daughter was born.



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### GENIE

#### Current Day

By the time Ted “Genie” Williams was 31 he was five kids deep; three girls and two boys. Tidiness was the first lesson all the kids learned so their mom wouldn’t trip, rough housing wasn’t allowed inside so furniture didn’t get jostled or shifted.

“Bethany,” Genie called as he shut the door behind him. Genie walked through the house seeing her in the backyard playing fetch with her dog through the accordion window doors.

“Beth,” Genie almost reverently repeated as he stepped up behind his wife, wrapping his arms around her waist. Her dog returned with his ball.

“Release,” she stated. He immediately dropped the ball at her feet. “How was work?” she didn’t turn to look at Genie.

“Work. Is there a plan for dinner?”

“Is it that late already?”

“I’m home,” Genie parried back. He kissed her neck, “I’ll get it.” As he headed back to the house he called over his shoulder, “hot dogs, right?”

Bethany growled.

“I can see you rolling your eyes!” he laughed as he moved through the doors.

### SYLVIE

Sylvie was about a year into her tour. As an Army medic she was serving a tour with the Navy and was currently on a sea tour. They'd been underway for a few months; she hadn't made friends. Being a loner wasn't unusual she always had a hard time making friends. But even with loner status, Sylvie had attracted some unwanted attention.

She was alone in the clinic when her regular antagonist stalked in, as usual overly confident. Stuffing down her inherent dislike for him, Sylvie asked, "Can I help you?"

"You've been avoiding me," Taylor responded as he stepped into her personal space. He mirrored her movements as she backed up, not stopping until her back was against the wall.

"I'm not interested and don't want you, Taylor."

Taylor scoffed. "You've been on this boat for three months and I haven't seen you with anybody else."

"If you don't need anything I was getting ready to close shop."

"Is it the uniform you don't like?" he looked down at his NWUs. His eyes came back up, hoping to catch her looking him over, "or the Navy?"

“It’s the person in the uniform,” she answered blatantly.

In a flash, Taylor slammed her against the wall, his hand around her throat. There was a shuffle at the door, Sylvie seeing what had to be, a Special Warfare Team freeze entering the clinic. Before anyone had a chance to speak Sylvie’s face shifted from mildly bored to hate.

She clasped her hands together, reached up and threw her elbows down into Taylor’s forearm, breaking his hold while his head was turned. As he turned back toward her, Sylvie palmed the back of his head driving his face into her knee. Covering his broken and bleeding nose as he fell to the ground, Sylvie stepped over him. She reached back with her right foot and drove it as hard as she could into his groin. There was a reverberated gasp from the door, mirroring Taylor’s as he moved his hands from his nose to his balls. She stepped back from Taylor’s wriggling body, looked up with a hard gaze still in place at the team frozen in the door, “I was just closing up. You’ll need to come back later.” She headed for the door, the team moving to allow her to leave.

As she hit the threshold, the team split on either side of her, she heard Taylor, “I’m gonna get you, you fucking bitch.”

Two sets of hands grabbed her as she spun around. The two farthest into the clinic faced Taylor, effectively blocking Sylvie from him. The dark haired, crystal blue eyed team member, who was clearly their leader started slowly, “Man, you should think about this. Maybe we can find somebody to look you over?”

The second SEAL, blonde and clean shaven, chimed in, “that nose surely seems broken. Maybe we can find some ice packs for everything.” The final two SEALs moved around the two holding Sylvie and into the clinic to start looking for supplies to clean up Taylor.

One of the two SEALs that restrained Sylvie, Red, dropped his hands and backed up a step, hanging around just for backup. Sylvie felt the adrenaline shakes start, her skin goose bumped. The set of hands that remained on her, instinctively started rubbing her arms, “Are you okay?” he dipped his head trying to catch her gaze.

Her jaw still set she looked up at him, “Why are you helping him?” Rave could have sworn his heart stopped when she stared up at him. She was so defiant, her dark green eyes shooting daggers, her nose flared, mouth set, a muscle in her jaw ticking. His teammate coughed quietly.

Rave blinked back into the present. “To keep you out of as much trouble as possible.” He watched her face relax the tiniest, her eyes still skeptical.

“I don’t care anymore. He hasn’t left me alone since this tour started.” She spared a look back into the clinic, “besides, I don’t think he’d tell anyone I did that to him.” She looked back up at Rave. “His ego is too fragile.” She heard Red stifle a laugh from behind her. Another set of goose bumps spread across her body. She needed to go; the adrenaline was gonna make her look weak; no way in front of these guys after what just happened. Sylvie took a half step back away from Rave’s hands, stumbled on the boots behind her. Red steadied her as she turned to head down the hall. Rave watched her disappear as his teammate headed into the clinic. Rave looked into the clinic and saw his team leader standing over Taylor, now on a table, looking at his broken nose. He glanced back at Sylvie’s back, a stupid grin on his face. He stepped into the clinic and headed toward the mop bucket to start cleaning up the floor.

Sylvie collapsed into her bunk. Crap! What the hell did I do! Fuck! She pounded on her pillow. She didn’t doubt Taylor would come after her, but she was confident he’d have to convince his friends to help without admitting she broke his nose. Never again. This assignment was not working out the way she’d hoped. She’d spend the rest of the time watching her back. She figured she would still be able to see some cool stuff during any shore leave but it would be time to go back to an Army

assignment afterwards.

### RAVE

The team had finished cleaning up the clinic and sent Taylor off, telling him to come back when an Officer would be in. Their team leader, Genie, made it clear it wasn't in Taylor's best interest to seek out Sylvie at the clinic or anywhere else. They headed toward dinner when they walked out.

Rave saw Sylvie sitting by herself in the far corner of the mess deck. He motioned the team in her direction as they finished going through the line. Sylvie looked up surprised as trays came into her line of sight. She sat back in her chair watching as the men assembled around her as much as possible. "Hey," Rave started, settling next to her. "We didn't catch your name earlier."

"I didn't give it."

Rave tried again, "So Taylor is gonna live, he may not procreate--"

"The human race would be better for it." The team tried to hide their smiles.

"I'm Noah, they call me Rave," he started, hand against his chest. Moving counterclockwise around the group, "Tech, Red, Flash, Genie, and Stitch..."

"Sylvie." She relented. "And thank you," she paused trying to think of the right word. Genie raised his eyebrow in anticipation. "for the clinic, I guess?" Sylvie's eyes started to look around as she keyed into background noise. Tech and Stitch followed

the sound of Sailors as well. A couple females were whispering.

“So, this probably wasn’t what you’d hoped for when you were able to take this assignment, huh?” Stitch asked.

Sylvie looked up, directly at Stitch, blond and brown-eyed. “Lonelier than I thought. Guys like Taylor are everywhere.” Genie watched Rave’s expression harden. Not to totally discredit the opportunity she was given, Sylvie continued, “shore leave is cool. You guys definitely have better locations than Army does for time off.” The group settled into silence as they ate. “I guess you guys are here for a short layover, huh?”

Still thinking about the situation they had walked into at the clinic, Rave intercepted the question with his own. Turning to look at her, his expression still hard, “Do we need to tell the CO about Taylor?”

Sylvie shrugged. “I don’t suppose I’m the first. Honestly, you’d think we’d be better at creating a ‘female mafia’ with guys like him around.”

“A what?” the team said in near unison.

“Is that an Army phrase?” She looked at the circle of eyes. “Like a ‘Specialist Mafia,’ a group of Specialists that band together. They team up so everyone succeeds, no one fails.” The team’s expressions hadn’t changed. She put her silverware down; wax on-waxed off encompassing them, “Maybe you don’t have to worry about that with all your ‘Special’.”

“Damn, shots fired.” Red responded with a heavy Irish accent.

Sylvie’s eyes popped open. “You don’t think you’re exempt from this conventional force stuff?” She hadn’t meant to offend the team; they’d been the only non-work conversation she’d had in a long time. She didn’t figure she’d ever be able to call



them friends, but they were being nice.

Genie could see the frustration building in Rave. And sure enough, Rave piped up, “I don’t care about all that!” All eyes went to his. He was focused on Sylvie, “Should we talk to the CO? Are you going to be okay when we aren’t here?”

“I doubt it. He’ll get me somehow. I can’t always be ready. I’d get no sleep; I wouldn’t be able to go anywhere.” Sylvie saw Rave’s lip curl in frustration. “Are you not going to go out on your mission? You have a job to do. I have a job to do. We’re all supposed to be on the same team! We’re not supposed to need SEALs to protect us from each other!” She shook her head, started to stand, grabbing her tray to leave. “You don’t even know me!” she shouted quietly.

“I want to,” Rave answered calmly.

She spun around to look at him, “What!”

“I want to.” The table had fallen silent. His team was equally stunned.

Leaning over her vacated seat, her eyes filling with water, Sylvie snapped. “Fuck you! Is this a game.” She looked at the group, “You have a good laugh later?”

All their jaws set. She straightened and walked off to turn in her tray. She heard as well as they did the surrounding Sailors giggling. She wanted to die. She’d been humiliated, she’d caused it, they’d tried to be nice. God, she wanted this day over.

Genie looked at Rave, “Are you gonna go after her?” Rave shoved his tray at Tech, slid out of his chair and headed in the direction she disappeared in.

His step outpaced hers. “Sylvie, wait.” She ignored him and kept moving. He could see her wiping at her eyes with the heels of her hands. He came up alongside her,

“Syl, stop.” He bumped her into an adjacent hallway when she kept moving.

“Despite what it seems like, I’ve had a pretty rough day. Can you just leave me alone?”

He wanted to laugh at her sarcasm but knew it would only make it worse. “It wasn’t a game.” He was trying to chase down her gaze. “I do want to get to know you.” Traffic coming from multiple directions, he stepped toward her; she mirrored him putting her back against the wall. His fingers barely touching the wall on either side of her. Protective but not caging. He stood a head taller than Sylvie’s 5’6, and he could feel her gaze burning into his chest while she waited for the traffic to pass. “We’ll leave at port.” Sylvie rested her head against the wall, raising her eyes to his. “Can I give you my email? I know you don’t necessarily have cell coverage out on the water.”

Her forehead wrinkled, “Don’t fuck with me. I really can’t handle it.” She looked like she was trying really hard not to cry, it was killing him. His left hand moved on its own. His palm settled against the side of her neck, his fingers around the nape, his thumb on the corner of her jaw. She didn’t pull away.

“How long has he been harassing you?”

“It doesn’t matter. When this rotation is over, so am I. Maybe I can find something land locked with my own kind.” She looked up tired, shrugged her eyebrows. “I’ve got an early shift tomorrow.” She was trying to escape.

“I’ll walk you back to your bunk,” Rave said dropping his hand and straightening.

“You don’t have to do that.”

“I want to.”

“You’ll make it worse for me.”

“How could you possibly have turned a whole ship against you?”

She was thinking now, “I follow the rules. I’m not particularly social. I don’t do girl stuff.” He was smiling down at her. “What!” He shook his head, wiped the grin away. Sylvie’s eyes narrowed at him, “I guess I’m difficult.” She stepped off in the direction of her bunk. She nudged him away from her when he followed.

“When does your shift start?” he smiled in her direction.

“You’re not welcome.” She muttered under her breath.

“Well, you didn’t help us today.” He kept on.

She spun on him, stopping dead in the middle of another hallway. “Come with me,” she grabbed his top and tugged him into an adjoining hallway. She pushed him through a door, making sure it was locked behind her. He looked around realizing they were in a bathroom. With her free hand she grabbed the collar on the other side of his jacket and pulled him down into a kiss. His hands snaked around her as his back hit the wall behind him.

“Fuck,” he muttered against her lips, his cock stiffened when she bit his bottom lip. He reached down, picked her up; her legs twisting around his waist, as he pushed forward and put her against the door they’d come in. She rested her elbows on his shoulders, her hands reaching behind him and grabbing his hair, pulling herself tight and high against him. She was so tight against him he could feel her grinding her pussy against his lower abs. He was jealous that she’d be able to find release that way. He wanted to strip her down on the sink and fuck her brains out. He growled his aggravation at the jackets between them, knowing despite her positioning he couldn’t get at her nipples, even see them through the thick material. She threw her head back

groaning as she got relief from dragging herself against his body. He held her tight against him so she couldn't move. She looked at him, her green eyes glassy. His brown dilated. "I want your jacket off." She leaned back enough to yank the buttons open. He grabbed the collar, twisting and holding it between her shoulder blades, pinning her arms. His mouth grabbed onto an erect nipple through the shirt, he started to suck. Her hips bucked into him and sounding off in frustration, she frantically started moving against him for relief. He switched nipples and felt her shatter in a final drag against him, her body convulsing against him. She is so fucking hot. Slowly, he let her legs down, as she slid down his body her muscles rippled again; her eyes slammed shut and her hands pressed hard against his chest. She opened her eyes and immediately saw Rave's boner.

"Umm," she looked at him questioningly as she shrugged on her jacket and started rebuttoning it.

"I'll worry about it. You were so fucking hot." He watched her demeanor shift as she started to fidget. "Do you need to clean up?"

She wrinkled her nose and avoided his eye contact, "yeah."

"Hey," he tipped her chin up with his hand. "Don't get shy with me after that. That was fucking amazing. I definitely want to continue exploring this." She wanted some privacy and a chance to think. "I'll wait outside."

10

RAVE

They stopped back through the ship after their mission. SOAR was able to refuel and they were able to shower and refit. After initially talking with the CO they headed for food, knowing they wouldn't get a lot of time. The team took a circuitous route to stop by the Clinic. Rave was obviously hoping to see Sylvie again; the guys just wanted to razz him about it. When they stepped in, they were greeted by a Corpsman. "Can I help you? He asked.

"Is Sylvie around?" Rave asked, as the guys fanned out around the room.

"She was transferred off the ship a few days ago. How do you know her?"

"Why?" Genie interrupted the question. The team's ears perked up.

"She slipped, fell down a flight of stairs heading into the main aircraft bay. Doc," he motioned toward a back office, "got her transferred back to the States. Now how do you know her?"

"We met her on our way through last time." Tech answered. Pulling the Corpsman's attention in another direction.

The doctor stepped out of the office. "Can I help you?"

"We were looking for Sylvie," Rave responded.

“Ah, yes, I needed to transfer her after she got hurt.” The team looked at him suspiciously. Sylvie hadn’t struck them as clumsy. “I was sorry to lose her she was a great medic. Able to work on her own, which I don’t always get. As you are friends, you should be able to contact her and get any other information you’re looking for.”

The guys smiled. “Smooth, doc.” Genie answered. “Thanks for the information. We’ll reach out now that we can.”

As they backed out of the clinic and headed to a mess deck they continued amongst themselves. “You got her information before you left, right?” Tech asked.

“Sure. I haven’t heard from her yet though.”

“Well, don’t wait. If she got hurt, she may be delayed getting to her stuff and she likely needs help.”

“Do you really buy that?” Red asked.

“I think either way, she’s definitely off the ship. The closest facility is Tripler.” Genie answered. They settled down to eat. Finishing up their rest stop and regathered with the SOAR crew to get home.

11

SYLVIE

Sylvie had managed to get her cell phone turned back on and was going through the normal catch up of emails, updates, and texts. She'd already been at Tripler for a week in the Med-Surg ward, not sure when she'd be able to leave. She was trying to get herself together and starting to worry about what would happen to her when she was released. She was almost through her emails and came across one from Rave. I guess his mission was pretty short, she thought as she opened it.

We got back and you weren't on the ship. Running is useless. I'll find you. N

She had just opened a reply box when her phone started to ping as text messages came in.

Where are u?

Are u ok?

I need your room number; they're trying to stop us.

She dropped her phone, started to work her way off the bed. They were coming and she did not want to look as bad as she felt. She could not be bedridden when these guys showed up. She had almost gotten her feet on the floor when her doorway darkened.

“You didn’t fall,” Rave said looking at her. The right side of her face was a massive bruise, her eye swollen shut. Stitches around her eyebrow ridge reaching her cheekbone. She was guarding her left ribs. The team finished pushing Rave in and saw the same thing. For a second time around her they were speechless.

“What the fuck!” Red muttered, his voice hard. Clearly, she’d been right. That anyone would do this to a woman was bad enough; and they saw it regularly; but a Sailor was too much.

Sylvie clicked her tongue as she started to push off the side of the bed. Rave was at her side, wrapping an arm around her hip. He felt her jerk away from his fingers, “I’ll fucking kill him.” In the process of trying to get his hands off more bruises, she had put her shoulder into his side and settled for a second, trying to inhale him. He pulled on the waistband of her scrubs to expose the bruises on her hip.

“Hey! I’m standing here,” she slapped his hand away from her clothes. She glared at him through her good eye.

“So, we’ll be outside,” Tech cued the team.

“Sylvie, glad you’re...alive,” Red stumbled over which was met by Flash slapping the back of his head.

“Hope you get to feeling better,” Stitch said following the rest.

Genie took up the rear, “Let us know if you need anything. We’re local for a while.”

Through her embarrassment Sylvie answered them, “Thanks for coming, guys.”

Rave sat down on the edge of the bed, “I left you to that asshole.”



“You had a job to do, that simple. We’ve known each other for like 3 seconds. I’m not talking about this again.”

“How?” He looked up at her.

“I had a migraine.” He watched her replay the memories in her head. “I was in the bathroom, it was too bright, he hit me,” she motioned at the stitches.

“With what? I’ve seen you fight.” Thinking back to their kiss and sizing up the circumference of the stitches he realized the answer to his question.

“Fire extinguisher,” they said in unison.

She shook her head, clearing it. “Don’t look at me like you’re crushed. You don’t have to live with this. This didn’t happen to you.”

“It shouldn’t have happened to you.”

“Well, that’s a moot point isn’t it.” Changing directions, “Are you really stationed here?”

Rave blinked, his forehead wrinkling in question, “Yeah.” He reached up and tucked back the hair that was covering up her swollen eye. “Are you pressing charges? Did they--?”

Sylvie growled.

“It is my business. If I’m gonna be with you I should know, don’t you think?” Rave retorted.

“They did what they could before I got off the ship. Look, you don’t want to be with

me. You don't want to inherit this. This is gonna get so much worse before it gets better." She hesitated, "If it gets better."

"You don't understand, this isn't something I will get rid of. You're it for me, I feel it. I will be whatever you need when you need it, and we'll go from there."

"Why is it every time you start talking it sounds too good to be true?"

"Because you don't know me yet." He answered simply. "Are you supposed to be out of bed? You have injured ribs, bruises, stitches." Sylvie growled again. "I can wait for your doctor, or you can tell me." When she wasn't getting so mad at him, he'd have to tell her how cute it made her look.

"I can walk and the DFAC has awesome coconut macaroons sometimes," she started toward the door slowly. He walked on her right side, to protect that blind side. They were alone in the elevator, but it stopped on the fourth floor and people got on. Sylvie turned in toward Rave, wanting to hide. He gently placed his left arm around her, pulling her in closer. No one would be able to see her face that way. More people got on when the elevator stopped on the second floor. Sylvie shrunk into him even more. When the elevator opened on the first floor she turned right and headed to the dining room.

He stayed tight to her as she walked the line in the serving area, sending off in waves his don't fuck with me attitude . When they got to the cashier, he looked down at her, "You're not eating enough."

The cashier interrupted, "Ma'am, is that all?" It wasn't her first day and she'd seen Rave nearly standing on top of Sylvie the entire time they'd been in there. She thought it was nice he'd grabbed extra macaroons for her tray, but now he seemed controlling. She rang up the cup of soup, three servings of macaroons, and two fountain drink cups on the tray. Sylvie faced the cashier and nodded. The cashier's

eyes widened, and she took in the scrubs. Her gaze went back to Rave and narrowed slightly.

Obliviously, Rave pulled out his wallet and set the money on her counter. He took Sylvie's tray and lifted his chin toward a table by a window. The cashier watched them sit down, concerned about what appeared to be a 'good guy's' attentiveness. Once she was settled, her bruises facing the window, he went to get their drinks.

Sylvie played with her soup. "Are you going to eat?"

"Are you going to entertain me?"

"What do you want to know? I'll entertain if you eat." He smiled at her.

"Family." He leaned forward to start when she followed with, "Is your wife gonna get jealous you're here."

He sat back. "What did you say? I'm not married. Who told you that? I'll kill 'em."

"You're gonna kill a lot of people. Do you have an anger problem we should discuss?" She set a macaroon down in front of him.

He covered her hand, his fingers long enough to reach her wrist; grabbing the macaroon in the other hand he tossed it in his mouth quickly. "If you like these, I promise to leave the cook alive." He winked at her.

Jeezuz. She blinked slowly to regather. This could not happen. She could not handle falling for him and have him walk away during all this shit too.

"Now eat," he directed. "I have an older brother and sister and a younger sister and brother. My mom is a teacher, and my dad is a plumber. Boring and normal."

“What about kids? in-laws?” She paused with a full spoon.

“I see what you’re doing,” he grinned at her. “My older siblings are married. I have some nieces and nephews spread across them.” Gauging how much time he needed to kill for Sylvie to finish her food he continued. “My older sister is a stay-at-home mom; her husband is a lawyer. My older brother and his husband are both teachers. My younger sister is a flight attendant, has probably been to more places than I have. And my younger brother is still in school, pretty sure his major changes every week. I don’t know maybe they don’t even need those anymore.”

Two Security guards approached the table. “Excuse me, Ma’am?” The one closest to the table interrupted. Sylvie craned her neck to look at him. Sylvie and Rave both looked from the partner to the guard who spoke.

“How can we help you?” Rave answered, making direct eye contact and stilling with no expression.

“Sir, I was asking her,” he motioned to Sylvie. “Ma’am, is everything ok?” He turned his gaze on her.

“Sure. I was just getting out of my room?—”

Rave took in the dining room, finally reading it, turned back to Sylvie. “Babe, someone thinks I beat you.”

“Is that what this is about?” She looked from Rave back up to the guard. Rave felt goose bumps under his fingers and watched them spread across her arm. “Where were you a week ago?” she rhetorically asked.

“I’m gonna ask that you come with me, ma’am. Sir, I need you to stay here.” Rave’s hand flattened Sylvie’s under his, a power play the guard didn’t miss. “Sir?—”

“No, please, he didn’t do this. Both of you wouldn’t be able to stop him, even if he did,” Sylvie pleaded with the guard. “The truth is he was out on mission when...this happened. Which is why he’s so over the top right now.” The guard looked skeptical, but Sylvie hoped she’d dropped enough military lingo for him to understand who was sitting across from her.

The guard had not totally backed down, the whole room was focused on them and seeing Sylvie trying to hold everything in check; Rave knew he had to get them out of there. “We were just getting ready to leave. How about we follow you out,” he directed at the guard, “and we can talk somewhere else?” The guard barely nodded, also recognizing Sylvie was at the end of her rope, which regardless of how she blew would cause an even bigger scene. Rave slowly stood, motioned he needed the guard to back up so he could get to Sylvie. He helped her out of her chair, grabbed the tray from behind her as she started past the guards toward the exit. Sylvie didn’t wait for Rave to drop the tray; she went straight out the door and the first guard followed her.

Sylvie stopped facing the wall. “Ma’am, are you sure you’re ok with him?”

Sylvie turned toward the elevators they had come down, giving the guard a profile view of her left side. She turned her face to look him in the eye after a few beats, “I’d be dead if he’d done this to me. I’m safe with him.”

The guard nodded as Rave came out of the door, the second guard on his heels. Sylvie looked like she was suffering from hypothermia. The guard stepped out of his way as he went to her. “I’m sorry?—”

“You were just doing your job. She could’ve used the same attention to detail a couple weeks ago. I hope the rest of your shift is quiet.” Meaning to start toward the elevators, Rave put his hand around her ribs, her arm touching his as he tried to pull her into him. “Jeezuz, woman! You’re freezing!” He couldn’t tell if she nodded or just stared at him. He grabbed her up and headed down the hall. All he could think

was her bed would have blankets. She whimpered and shifted in his grip trying to decrease the rib pain.

12

RAVE

He walked in and saw a push-out chair had been moved in. He sat her down on the side of the bed. Pulled the chair apart, kicked off his shoes off. Motioned for her to follow him to the reclining position he had on the chair. She came toward him, and he yanked the blankets off the bed behind her. He settled into the chair with her in his arms, tucking the blanket around her. Eventually he felt her stop shivering and relax. He texted his team to bring some dinner and clothes for Sylvie, so she'd be warmer.

Two hours later she jerked out of a dream, waking Rave underneath her. When she got oriented, she was surprised she had rolled onto her cracked ribs in her sleep, but not wanting to leave the warmth she settled back into him. Rave started shifting, "go to the bathroom and then come back in here," he ordered, lifting the blankets. "We got time."

Sylvie slowly followed his direction; she did have to pee. As she stepped out of the bathroom, shadowed by the light in the hallway, she stopped. He was watching her. "What?"

"Probably should get some ice on your eye."

"Stop bossing me around," Sylvie retorted. She stepped forward, took the edge of the blankets and started pulling them off Rave, heading toward the bed.

"The hell you say," Rave answered as he reached up and pulled her toward him.

“Just cause that was the first sleep I had without drugs and you are so warm and smell so good.” Rave smiled a cocky grin at her. “Doesn’t mean you get to boss me around. I’ll sleep on this stupid bed and you can leave.”

“The bed’s not warm.”

“I bet they have heated blankets.”

“I’m already warm. No one else has to get you anything.”

“They aren’t as conceited.” She pouted.

“I smell good?” a playful grin back in place.

“Shut up. That was a moment of weakness.”

“But not a false statement.”

The doctor walked in, thankfully breaking up the direction of the conversation. “Afternoon. Go ahead and have a seat,” he directed Sylvie. He watched her get on the bed. “How’s it going today?” He moved to the far side of the bed to check the stitches and her eye.

“It’s fine,” she answered noncommittally.

“I’ll have the nurses bring you in some ice to see if we can get some swelling to dissipate.” She saw Rave out of the corner of her eye, with a shit eating grin on his face. Motioning to her ribs he said, “let’s check these out.” As she started to pull herself out of the scrub top she was wearing the doctor continued, “I don’t think there is any reason to assume once the bruising heals and the swelling goes down that you’ll have any vision issues.” Rave’s demeanor shifted as he saw the bruising across



her torso. The doctor poked and prodded a bit, watching her reactions. “You can cover back up. They seem stable, x-rays didn’t show anything more than the one crack.” Once she managed to get her shirt back on, more difficult with a pull over instead of a button up top he continued, “I don’t think there’s any reason you need to stay here with us. You need time to let those ribs heal and don’t drive with your eye like that but otherwise, you’re good to get out of here. Unless I hear otherwise, we’ll plan on releasing you tomorrow morning. How’s that sound?”

“Fine. Thanks.”

The doctor asked Sylvie, “Have you gotten in touch with Behavioral health?”

“Not yet. I’m not really sure where I’m going after this. I was gonna look into it when I landed wherever that is.” That was the first time Rave realized that they might not be stationed near each other. He shifted back in his seat; he did not like it.

“Ok, well, you might want to get working on that,” the doctor’s gaze slid over to Rave when he shifted back in his seat. Sylvie nodded. “Ok, then. Good Luck, Sylvie. Get some rest tonight. Ice your eye.”

Sylvie laid her head back on the bed, closed her eyes. Trying to put things in order. It was too quiet for Rave who now had a ton of questions, “Wha—” Sylvie raised her hand in his direction, cutting him off. He watched her close back in on herself again, it was lunch all over again. She got out of bed, grabbed a bunch of business cards off the nightstand and started laying them out on the mattress. With her back to him he could not see, could not help; he stood up and came along side the bed. The cards were from the military lawyers, military psychologist, different ranks and positions, “Is this a ‘Welcome to Hawaii’ starter pack?”

“I’m pretty sure this is ‘Welcome to your life is fucked’ pack. I got here with my duffel bag from the ship. They won’t send me back, my exchange isn’t over yet. Who

the hell is my Chain of Command? Whose problem is it right now,” she thought aloud. “Did they tell me, and I forgot?”

“This is a joint facility. They send wounded warriors here. There’s gotta be a liaison somewhere.” He tucked her under his shoulder.

“Jeezuz, I don’t want to walk all over this place,” she muttered into his shirt.

“We made it,” Red burst through the doorway.

Sylvie smiled.

“With food,” Tech was next.

Genie came in with a bag. “Heard you could use some of your own stuff,” he set it down on the bed. He exchanged a look with Rave, after seeing the cards.

Flash and Stitch were helping carry food bags. “Did you guys buy the place out?” Sylvie asked looking at the bags of food.

“We eat a lot,” Flash answered back. “Heard you could—” Stitch punched Flash in the arm, shutting him up. He looked at Flash, rubbing his arm. “Damn, man!”

Sylvie turned her attention to the clothes Genie had brought in. “Thanks, Genie.” She grabbed the bag and headed into the bathroom, knowing the guys were not leaving. Going through the bag in the bathroom, Genie had gotten sizes nearly perfect, it was a little weird. Something to discuss with Rave later. But there was clean underwear too! She opened the door, “Can I shower real quick?” The guys had already pulled out food and spread around the room eating. They looked up a little sheepishly and nodded. While she showered, they fell into their easy banter.

13

RAVE

“Do you not like it?” Red asked watching Sylvie pick through the container of food they had brought her.

Sylvie looked up, “It’s good, sorry.” And it was, who can turn down Kahlua pig and macaroni salad, she was just distracted. She focused on her plate, scooping up mac salad, she did not want to offend these guys who had taken her in.

“What’s next?” Flash asked. “You gotta go stir crazy in here.”

“I just take drugs until the feeling goes away,” Sylvie deadpanned. Stitch grinned, which felt like a huge win because he was so quiet. The rest of the team laughed.

A floor LPN came in, “visiting hours is ending, guys.” He looked around the room, bags, wrappers, containers spread throughout the room that already had more people than it was meant for. “Wrap all of this up, huh?” The guys set about neatening the room.

Genie aimed at Sylvie, “Rave said you get released tomorrow. Where are you staying?” Rave growled at his team leader.

Tech and Red pulled Rave back to help them clean up. “Leave her be for a minute. Genie can handle it.”

“Yeah, he sized her clothes perfectly as far as I can tell,” Flash poked. Stitch got his hands on Rave as he lunged. Red and Tech pushed in opposite directions. Tech pushing Rave and Stitch toward the door, Red getting in Flash’s face and sending him toward the window.

The LPN came down the hall seeing three of the guys pushing out of the room loudly. “What is going on?”

Tech snapped his fingers, “Mark Wahlberg.”

Stitch and Rave stopped in their tracks, looking at the LPN. Stitch tipped his head, “His skin is darker.”

“Not as tall,” Rave contributed. They all nodded.

“Thanks,” the LPN ushered them back into the room. “This is a hospital. I see we’re cleaning but you can’t act like animals. And time really is up.” Looking around and finally seeing his patient. “Sylvie, are you good? Do you need anything. Shift change is gonna slow everything down shortly.”

“Ice,” Rave interrupted.

“Can I get some sleep and pain meds, please?” Sylvie said privately.

He nodded subtly to her and headed out of the room. “Ice,” he motioned toward Rave. “And you all need to leave,” he motioned toward all the rest of the team. He got an echoed ok as he walked up the hall and laughed.

### SYLVIE

When the LPN got back with the meds and ice it was just Sylvie in the righted room. “You ok?” Sylvie looked up at him as she emptied the med cup and grabbed the water on her tray. “They seem intense. Pretty sure there were at least three fights in the time they were here.”

“Too much testosterone,” she rolled her eyes. “But I don’t think you can ask for a better example of friends. They took me in and have stayed.” He smiled. She changed the subject, “And how is your family?”

Rave had walked the team out. When he came back Sylvie was stepping out of the bathroom. Genie had done a god job. She had changed into a grandpa sleep set; button up shirt and matching shorts. His mind immediately wandered to slowly unbuttoning that shirt and pulling off those shorts. She moved to the side of the bed, walking past him, “It’s all yours.” Snapping out of his thoughts he shifted uncomfortably. He was glad her back was turned to him; she hopefully didn’t see what she did to him. He had a feeling it was going to be awhile before they could explore any more of the chemistry they had on the ship. He slipped into the bathroom and came back out. She was in bed, with only ambient light left in the room. He laid down on the pull-out chair. Forty-five minutes later he felt Sylvie looking for space. He reached for her, pulling her down beside him. She was cold, and he could feel the hair at the back of her neck was wet; she’d had a bad dream. He tucked her back against his chest and pulled the blanket she had over them both. Too early, Rave’s alarm went off to get to PT. He got off the chair as carefully as he could, trying not to

disturb her. She settled into his warm spot. On his way out he brushed his lips across her forehead, she humphed in response. “I’ll be back in a couple hours.”

15

RAVE

“Did you guys talk last night? Are you sure this is what you want?” Red asked as they were driving into Tripler.

“No, she was pretty much in bed when I got back.” He sat on the other question as they went through the security gate. “She was amazing on that ship. We had moments and she made me feel alive and she was free. She still has the same fight. One look at her and I can forget all the shit we do.”

Red looked at him through his Jeep. “Ok, let’s go get her.” They walked in the front and saw Sylvie heading into the office to the right. Both followed her.

“Excuse me, you can’t just walk in,” one of the Soldiers tried to stop them just inside the door.

“No, we’re with her,” Red paused long enough to answer pointing in the direction of Rave. Sylvie was seated at a desk trying to explain what was happening. Rave came up behind her, the woman at the desk looked up and would not take her eyes away from him. Rave sat down next to Sylvie and Red took his spot. Sylvie looked around her when the woman didn’t resume. They all looked equally confused.

“Excuse me,” Sylvie looked at her. “They’re discharging me, and I don’t know where I’m reporting.”

“Why aren’t you going back to the unit you belong to?”

“I was on an exchange program, doing a sea tour. I got sent here for treatment and it was like an expedited transfer. So, I don’t know if I go back to the Navy or to an Army assignment.”

“Were you assigned a Special victim lawyer?”

“I guess,” Sylvie flipped through the business cards she had. “Here.”

“Did you contact him?”

“No, he doesn’t really handle assignments, does he?”

“Did anyone talk to you about possible assignment locations?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Do you have any preferences if they ask?”

Rave jumped in, “Here.”

“You are?” The woman asked, looking at Rave.

“I’m her fiancé.”

Sylvie and Red’s eyes flew open. “No, no he isn’t,” Sylvie responded.

“Babe,” Rave looked at Sylvie, “you hit your head.” Turning toward the personnel rep he added, “it was recent. Doc said she may have some holes.”



Following his teammate's lead, Red nodded in agreement.

"Well, unless you're married the military doesn't recognize it. Which means your duty location doesn't have to be accounted for."

"But there are options here."

"Maybe."

"So, when does 'maybe' become actual options?" Sylvie asked.

"I'll work with Retention and see what's available. Let me get your contact number and I'll call."

Sylvie wrote down her number, "that's it?"

"I'll probably talk with your lawyer as well, but yeah."

Rave was out of his seat and pulling Sylvie out of the office. They went back to her room to help her get her stuff. Rave grabbed the duffel bag out of the closet. Sylvie reached for it. He handed it to Red and they went to work gathering and packing. They were done in minutes; she didn't have that much unpacked; just some toiletries and the clothes Genie had bought. Red took point, Rave put his hand on Sylvie's back, slung her bag over his shoulder and escorted her out.

Rave helped her into the Jeep, Red jumped into the back with Sylvie's bag. "Where to?" Red asked as Rave got behind the wheel.

"My place."

"I can't stay with you," Sylvie said bluntly.

“Well, you’re not staying with anyone else,” Rave motioned back toward Red meaning his team.

“Why should I stay with you?”

“We’re engaged,” he smiled at her.

“What if I’m Catholic?”

“I have a spare room.” He answered smoothly as he reversed out of the parking spot and headed for the exit.

Not able to turn around, Sylvie reached back and touched Red on the leg, “Does he always have an answer?”

“He’s kind of annoying that way.” Red answered.

“We could just get married. Then no need for a spare room, no worries about assignment preferences. Seems like a win-win,” Rave kept at her.

“God damn it, can you stop!” Sylvie exploded. Both men sobered. Rave pulled into a residential street and stopped against the curb. Sylvie slid off the seat as her feet hit the sidewalk. She got about twenty-five feet when Rave intercepted her.

“Sylvie, I’m sorry. I go after what I want. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

She looked up at him. He looked so uncomfortable waiting. “I can’t...”

“Can’t what?” he repeated, while thinking please don’t leave . She looked miserable; he realized it only made him feel more fear. He was always confident but not now. If this woman wasn’t so upset, she’d realize how much power she already had over him.

“This isn’t how this is supposed to be. What happened between us on the ship was a lifetime ago.” She looked up at him almost pleading, “What if I don’t ever sleep through the night? What if I’m not staying here? What- “

“Syl,” he took her hands, “there’s no ‘supposed to be’. There’s only what is. I want you in my life and as long as there isn’t another guy, I will take everything I can get from you.” He stepped closer, wrapping his arms around her carefully. She leaned into him, her face resting against his chest. He was scared to move, not wanting to be back at square one again. Then he realized she was crying, the only indication was her body trembling from sobs. He tightened his grip, protectively and waited for her to be done. If he was ever given the opportunity he would kill Taylor. When she was finished, she pulled away enough to wipe the good side of her face with the heel of her hand. “You ready?”

16

SYLVIE

“Why are you really here?” Rave asked. They were sitting on his small deck looking out at the skyline. It wasn’t a great view, but the breeze was nice.

“What?” Sylvie rebutted. “You don’t believe I got the crap kicked out of me?” Her stitches had been removed and the scar around her face was bright white.

Rave watched her quietly.

“The makeup wasn’t good enough, right?”

Rave continued seriously. “Taylor was a jerk, and I buy he’d do something stupid, but I didn’t think that the hospital would be so ill prepared for your transfer.”

“I couldn’t stay on the ship after what happened. How the fleet handled it,” she shrugged, “I don’t know, I’ve not been through it before.”

Rave narrowed his eyes. She was hiding something, he knew it. “Are you still in trouble?”

“I have to be part of the trial.”

“And then it’s over?” Rave gauging the length of the lie.

“It should be.”

“And you’re gonna tell me what this was all about?”

“Does it have to be different than what it looks like?”

Rav leaned toward her, “You just confirmed it.” He rose to go back inside, “I’ve been trained to see it and I don’t like it on you.”

### ASHE

T his figures she thought. The crowd in the bank was larger than she would've assumed for a Monday. Calls were quiet and she'd convinced her partner to stop by the bank before lunch.

There were at least eight people around her when a concussion grenade went off. As she came too, a pregnant woman was on the ground near her. One look and Ashe moved toward her. It was clear her water had broken, likely a stress reaction.

Ashe felt the barrel of a gun smack her in the back of the head, as she knelt at the pregnant woman's feet. Ashe lifted her hands, without turning she responded, "I'm trying to help. This woman is having a baby." The barrel disappeared and Ashe started working. First, she had the woman slide up against a pillar nearby so that she was supported and luckily the woman was wearing a long dress so there was modesty given the scenario.

Ashe was sweating bullets. She had no equipment, no help, no transport; if this birth had any complications, it would be bad and on her hands. She would deliver this baby and get it placed in the mother's arm with no hiccups. "Don't move," she warned the mother, "you haven't delivered the placenta yet. Just wait here, I'll be back."

She followed the next cries for help. An elderly man was on the ground clutching his shoulder while his wife was calling out for help. As Ashe headed toward the elderly couple, about forty feet away, a second explosion went off. This one caused debris to

fall around the old bank, likely Ashe thought something set off in attempt at a vault. She turned the old man onto his back, checking pulse and breathing. She took her hands off the man when she felt a barrel for the second time. "Same as before, only this one is likely a heart attack. He needs to get to a hospital." The barrel of the gun disappeared, Ashe dropped her hands to go back to work, thinking they would step away again. Instead, palming the handgun, the thief slapped Ashe on the side of the head. The momentum from the thief knocked her off her knees and she smacked the floor near the old woman's knees.

As she gathered her bearings she finally heard the man speak, "you talk too much. You're a hostage like the rest, you dumb bitch."

"These people need help," Ashe answered back as she sat looking up at the man, blood starting to run down in front of her right ear. "Dead hostages aren't any good." Irritated because she was right, because this whole thing was not working out the way they had planned; he grabbed her by the shoulder of her shirt yanking her up. Immediately he realized she was wearing a protective vest of some kind under her uniform. He snarled and yanked her toward a couple of the other men he was with.

"What kind of vest do you have on, show me now!" She unbuttoned her blue EMS shirt, taking it off so they could see the second chance vest underneath. "Are you a plant? Why do you have this?"

"It's part of the uniform."

The man stepped into her, driving a 2.5" blade through her vest into the left side of her abdomen. "You talk too much," he bit out as she looked up at him in shock. "Not so invincible now. Take off the vest."

As she pulled the tabs removing the vest, she was mentally assessing her stab wound. Not particularly deep. No critical organs, blood supply. Jeezuz Christ it still hurts.

Shouldn't be lethal. I can't believe he just fucking stabbed me about my uniform. She pulled the vest over her head, barely holding back a cry, holding it out to him with her right hand. He took the vest and his eyes wandered down her torso to where the knife had gone through the vest. Her white undershirt was cut and her blood was spreading.

Ashe met his eyes as he leaned toward her, "Maybe you learn to keep your mouth shut now, huh?" He dismissed her with a head jerk.



18

RED

The team had stopped for lunch across from the bank. They'd heard and then watched the commotion from their table. When police vehicles arrived, they pushed away from the table and headed outside.

Red's chair hit the floor as he stood. "Genie, what the fuck!"

"We don't move until we're cleared," Genie answered calmly. Red grabbed the chair from the floor and slammed it down, taking in a big lungful of air.

Stitch interrupted, "Genie, he's gonna start in brogue and we're all gonna be fucked."

"Someone they work with just got stabbed!" Rave added.

Tech silently continued watching the CCTV feed with Flash. Both assessing from their perspective ways ahead, Tech intel and Flash all the dots. Neither tuned in to the aggravation breaking out at the table. Genie saw Flash's head tilt and stood, looking for the officer in charge.

Making eye contact with the Captain, Genie looked back at his team, "time to go."

Red sidled up to Flash, "what happened?"

"She started CPR on the old man."

Ashe couldn't hear anything but buzzing in her ears, she watched a group of uniformed and non-uniformed come through the bank. She had no idea where the thieves were. She knew the woman and newborn were dead, had watched as falling debris crushed them. She knew the old man was dead, she'd been doing chest compressions on the man for the sixth minute when the flash bang had gone off.

As the police started moving through the mess of people and damage she was pushed against a wall. They were told to stand up; Ashe got her hands on the wall in an attempt before she started puking. She never made it off her knees. She felt an arm go around her waist, supporting her weight so that she wouldn't fall into the mess she'd made. Red rolled to the side when she went limp, keeping them both clear of her vomit. "No more, please, no more" Ashe muttered as she settled into his lap.

"We need to get you to a hospital," Red started. When she didn't respond he asked, "Can you hear me?" No reply. Red adjusted his hold on her and stood. As he moved to get her outside to the ambulance, one of the cops stopped him.

"She's a witness."

"She needs a hospital. I'm sure you can find her. She's got a concussion and needs stitches, get out of my way."

Tech ran interference putting himself between the two men, allowing Red to leave.

As he stepped out onto the street and headed for the ambulances she rolled into him, his grip tightened reflexively. He looked down at her, she was so small. She had seemed larger than life on the CCTV. She wasn't over 5'6" and would've given early 2000's Alyssa Milano a run for her money. He had gotten her blood on his hand when he'd initially grabbed her and was now staining the other side of her shirt with his grip. He carried her into the ambulance and realized he would have to put her down.

“Flash is getting the vehicle. Strap her in so we can go,” Stitch stated as he climbed into the treatment compartment and started shutting the doors with the medic. Red settled her onto the cot, buckling her in as the paramedic came in from the side, closing the side door.

“Let’s go,” the paramedic said toward his partner, who was settling into the driver’s seat with Rave in the passenger seat.

“What do you know?” the paramedic asked as he set up the vitals machine.

“She has a TBI, 2-3” blade there,” Red motioned to her torn, blood-stained shirt.

“Just because she hit her head--” the paramedic pointed at the swelling and cut near her temple but was cut off.

“No,” Red’s accent was coming in heavier now. “She was exposed to at least three explosions. She started puking when she tried to stand up after the last detonation and passed out right afterwards.” The paramedic nodded. Starting at the collar of her shirt, the paramedic slid his scissors down, opening the shirt so he could make sure there weren’t any additional injuries. He hastily bandaged her stab wound, knowing it would come off the second she got into the Emergency Room.

### RED

As she slowly came awake, trying to sensor everything at one time. Ambient lighting, bandaging around her torso, she knew there would be stitches but she couldn't feel them yet, her head was beating a tympani drum at an unnatural rate, the buzzing in her ears was likely gone. She reached up to feel the right side of her head, at least there wasn't a brain bleed. Red cleared his throat to announce his presence; she froze, her fingers over the knot on her head. "Your hearing seems better," Red stated lamely.

He watched her visibly swallow, "Can you come closer? It's hard to see in the dark." He watched her carefully as he rose, her eyes followed his silhouette as he unfolded to his 6'5" height. As he stepped into the light she inhaled sharply. Auburn hair, emerald eyes, massive giant.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he finished, not covering his accent, stepping up to the right side of the bed. "My name's Sean. My friends call me Red."

Barely loud enough to be for anyone but herself, Ashe repeated Red's nickname, "Red, like the color." Louder, clearly involving him, she continued. "Was I teleported somewhere? What's the date? How long have I been unconscious? You are a gorgeous specimen. Are you a doctor? Nurse? Why are you here? My head is killing me. Where is my filter? What am I on?" Overwhelmed Ashe emitted a sharp sigh, letting her head fall back against the pillows, which immediately she regretted as her stomach flexed against the stitches. She flinched toward Red in automatic response to

the pain.

“I don’t think ‘red’ has another meaning. You haven’t missed that much time, you’re at a local hospital. I’m not a medical professional. I’m here because I want to be. I need to know you’re ok. I don’t know what they have going through your IV, but we can call someone in to get you meds for your headache if you want.” Ashe barely nodded, Red hit the call button. “Do you remember what happened today?” Red watched her eyes dart around as her brain started searching for memory to answer the question. The nurse came in and Red sent her to get pain meds. Ashe looked up at Red, anguish across her face and he cursed under his breath, that was not what he wanted her to remember.

He fought with the railing as Ashe muttered, “They all died.” As if possessed, Ashe ripped the IV out of her left hand, flinging her feet over the right side of the bed and bolted into the small bathroom. For a second time, Red settled behind her, wrapped a supportive arm around her as she vomited. He could feel her shaking, knowing she was dry heaving at the end, she wouldn’t be strong enough to get back to bed. “Just leave me here. I can’t make that distance again.”

“I don’t think so, Acushla,” Red picked her up like he had earlier. Carefully lowering her legs in front of the sink so she could wash her mouth out, brush her teeth, whatever she wanted. His hand rested on her left hip; he pressed down lightly on the bandage to make sure she wasn’t bleeding. He picked her back up when she was finished, as he pulled her in tight against him, she dropped her head into his chest, exhausted. As he got through the doorframe her grip tightened around his neck and her right hand palmed his beard, pocketing her nose against his neck on his right side. Her fingers were ice cubes, he was in a frozen heaven; he would never stop her from touching him.

“You took me out of the bank,” Ashe stated pulling away from him enough to look him in the eye. They stood next to the bed, him holding her, staring at each other.

The nurse came in snapping them out of their reverie, “What happened in here? Why are you out of bed? I need to get this cleaned up.” Red had to walk around to the nurse’s side of the bed to set Ashe down, then he took the wrecked IV line and IV pole and pushed it into the hallway. He held a gauze pad against Ashe’s hand and started with alcohol wipes to clean off the blood that had run all over her hand.

Ashe watched Red cleaning up her hand, “I’ve bled on you twice today.”

“That’s twice too many for my liking, Acushla.”

“My name is Ashe.”

“I know. Tomorrow we can talk, go to sleep,” Red answered leaning down and kissing her forehead. It gave her the opportunity to drink in his scent.

Once the nurse was done with the meds, she notified the cleaning crew that the bathroom needed to be cleaned up as well and was on her way to get new orders to get a new IV started and antibiotics running. “You’re not allowed to share the bed. The chair you were on, Mr. O’Sullivan, pulls out so you can sleep there.”

“I’ve got like 30 minutes I figure before the meds kick in,” Ashe started when the room was empty. “So why don’t you spill.”

Dutifully, Red pulled the chair he’d been given up to the bed and sat down. “I bet it works faster, you’re already tired.”

“You could leave,” Ashe’s hand ran into Red’s as they both reached for the call button. “Do you always get your way?” He’d beat her to it.

“For now, I’ve gotten what I can. Make no mistake, Acushla, I haven’t gotten what I wanted yet.”

“You’re lucky I feel like dog crap. I will wake up tomorrow,” she motioned to Red, “this will all be gone. You’re gonna be the best dream I get to go back to. But I still see what he did...I can’t act on anything, because I still have stitches and this headache.”

Red did his best to hide his smile. She was hilarious on whatever med they kept giving her.

“And those people died.”

He sobered quickly. “Ashe, there wasn’t anything else you could’ve done.”

“You weren’t there, how do you know? What if that mother had orphaned another three kids?” Red walked around to the far side of the bed and slid in while Ashe kept spiraling. “That couple had been married for 40 years and she never got to say good-bye.” Red adjusted them, preventing her from flexing against the stitches. He had his arm wrapped hard around her waist to keep pressure against the wound there. The knot at her right temple was up, away from anything. He slid his right arm under her and around her back, pulling her in tight with both arms. His height allowed his chin to easily rest above her head and he was able to pull his knees up under her shins, just enough to support his weight.

“I was there,” he whispered. “Now go to sleep, it’s over, no gun to your head, you’ve done everything you can.”

“Why don’t you use your accent? Super hot.” Ashe mumbled.

“Tomorrow,” Red answered back.

ASHE

Before opening her eyes, Ashe reached toward the scent in front of her. Her fingers closed onto Red's shirt, and she sighed contently as she snuggled into the warmth and smell. Red's grip tightened, pressing her from knee to shoulder hard against him. She knew it would be another day on meds, her head was still killing her; or killing her again. She also realized the wall she was pressed against was Red and therefore not a figment of her drugged imagination. She needed to find a way to get rid of him before she said any additional mortifyingly embarrassing comment. But damn it he felt good. Without moving, or opening his eyes, Red interrupted her internal debate. "Acushla, you're thinking so hard I can smell it."

"Its 'tomorrow'. You aren't supposed to be here and what does 'Acusha' mean?"

Red hit the call button; she needed meds. "You thought I wasn't supposed to be here," he answered with no accent. "AcushLa," he corrected with his natural accent, "Um, a pretty important person." Changing the subject, "Can we go back to sleep, I don't get the opportunity to wake up with someone I want in my arms very often."

"You can't say stuff like that. You don't know me." His grip tightened as she started to push away.

"I know at great risk to yourself you tried to help multiple people yesterday. I know that you do that for a living, hopefully fewer guns in general. It tells me what I need when I'm here watching you weather the storm after, Acushla."



Pushing back so that she could look Red in the eye, she squinted and set her jaw. His lips started to quirk up. “You need to stop calling me that.”

He set his mouth, “No.”

Hearing the nurse coming up the hall, he reluctantly started to untangle his arms from her and push off the bed. “Your meds are here.”

The nurse walked in right behind his statement and Ashe’s eyes darted between the two people standing in the room. Red walked around to make space for the nurse and decided to use the bathroom while she did her thing. As he shut the door, he heard the nurse and Ashe arguing.

“He isn’t supposed to use the bathroom. There are visitor ones in the hallway.”

“There’s also one right here not being used. He’s not messing with any output tracking unless the toilet does that automatically now.”

“It’s policy,” the nurse tried again. Red waited in the bathroom when he was finished to hear how it was going to end, although she had already stood up for him.

Ashe nodded in understanding. “I forgot my toothbrush in the rush to get here yesterday. Could I get one, please?” Red looked at the sink and there was already a toothbrush there.

“It should have been in the room when you arrived,” the nurse answered slightly confused. It was how they prepped rooms every time.

“Maybe that’s what hit the floor when I was puking last night. Please?”

“Of course.” She turned and disappeared to help the next patient.

Red stepped out of the bathroom smiling, “You stood up for me.”

“It’s a dumb policy,” she retorted. A Medical Assistant came in with a toothbrush, handing it to Ashe and spinning on her heel back out of the room.

“I know you have a toothbrush in the bathroom already. Is that for me?” he stepped toward her. Turning her head away from him she held out the toothbrush, barely. He made sure he touched her hand when he took it out of her grasp. Smiling to himself that she wasn’t doing so well trying to drive him away.

When he stepped back out after brushing his teeth, he helped her to the bathroom. She already had managed to maneuver herself to nearly standing, he snatched her up smoothly and took the three steps into the bathroom. “I don’t need to be carried.” He set her down in the bathroom and she saw a set of scrubs that he got for her; her continence softened in that knowledge.

“Does your head hurt?” Ashe nodded. “Does your stomach hurt when you’re trying to brace yourself to move?” Ashe nodded. “I can carry you.” After a beat he added, “One time I got a concussion so bad that when my feet touched the ground it reverberated into my brain. The headache just pounded to each step.”

Ashe looked into the sink mirror to meet his gaze. Around brushing her teeth, she asked, “What do you do?”

Red paused for a beat. “I’m a troubleshooter.”

Ashe had put the toothbrush down by the time he answered and was looking at him through the mirror in disbelief. “All the panties come off when you say shit like that to the ladies around here, don’t they?” Red looked at her surprised. “Oh, come on,” Ashe turned to look straight at him. “That’s not that subtle. We’re on an island covered with military.” She started to shuffle toward the toilet, one hand on his

stomach signaling him out of the bathroom. She shut the door on him, when he heard the toilet flush, he opened the door watching her shuffle back to the sink guarding her side. “Beards AND body...yeah, you might need a new cover story around here.” As she was berating him, he noticed she’d already slid the scrub bottoms on. He grabbed the scrub top and waited to hand it off to her to switch with the standard gown.

“Thank you for this,” she muttered.

“I don’t like your ass hanging out for everyone,” he said bluntly, knowing they were keeping up the Tete tat. He picked her up and headed back to the bed, raising the head so it would be more comfortable sitting. “Maybe I’m purposefully trying to impress you.”

“Oh well, ok. In that case, like I said, all the panties, right?”

“Whose panties,” Stitch said stepping into the room. He was followed by the rest of the team, stuffing the room.

“No one,” Red answered.

Rave set a bag down on the foot of the bed as he stepped in. “Sylvie got you some clothes. Said it was a lifeline when Genie did the same for her, when she was stuck in the hospital. I told her you’re a paramedic, so she probably went shopping for herself.”

“Sylvie is Rave’s fiancé,” Genie cleared up coming in behind Rave.

Red started informal introductions when they were all in the room. “This is my team. Genie is our team leader, Rave, Stitch with the mouth, Flash, and Tech.”

“Half of you have Disney names,” Ashe stated.

“Oh, this is gonna be--,” Flash muttered. Genie gave him a silencing side eye.

“Nicknames are earned. I get things. Flash is oddly thorough, and his instincts are solid. Tech and Red, are self-explanatory. Stitch is our loose cannon. Rave is probably the closest thing we have to a social butterfly. We just came by to make sure everyone was getting what they needed.” Turning toward Red, “PT tomorrow.” Turning to Ashe, “Ashe, what you did yesterday was amazing. I hope food stays down today.” The group started heading back out, slapping Red on the shoulder, and giving a nod to Ashe.

Ashe stalled them, “How do you know what happened yesterday?” Genie looked at her. “I realize that you must have been the non-uniformed folks that came in but...”

Tech answered, “We had access to the CCTV.”

Ashe rolled her eyes, “I mean, of course you did.” Her pause was just long enough to surprise them when she continued. “Everyone just watched while those people were terrorized.” Ticking off on her fingers, “Watched a birth, their death, a heart attack, and a stabbing. The CPR, that was the threshold the cops weren’t comfortable with!” She threw a roll of tape at the wall across from her and stormed into the hall.

“Oh, she’s gonna be fun!” Stitch smiled as the team watched quietly. Red took off after her, the Team followed carefully spreading out to help defuse the situation.

ASHE

Flash found her curled up in a corner of a small hallway of a stairwell exit halfway across the hospital. She had looked like she'd been set down there, her knees up resting against the same wall her head was leaning against. Her back supported by the adjacent wall. She looked up toward him as he approached, he was sliding his phone back into his pocket. "Is it okay if I sit?" He mirrored her position, simply sitting down on the floor on her left, his shoes against the wall her back was against.

"I'm not crazy. I don't understand what the meds are doing to me but I'm not crazy about this. What happened was wrong."

"Everyone on the team would agree with you. But it wasn't your first day. The wheels of governance roll slowly, you know that by now. It's not made for extreme situations. And whether you believe it or not, you did the same thing everyone else stuck in it did. Took the opportunities provided to get what they could get done, done. It's all any of us can do."

"Do you always look so bored and unphased?"

"This is my concerned face," Flash gave her a barely there smile.

"There were almost teeth," Ashe quipped back. "You better lock that up, Sailor." She pretended to scold. Flash's eyebrows raised. "He didn't really say anything." Ashe shrugged.

“Observant,” Flash stated. “Should we go back? Are you okay?” He started to stand up so he could help her as well.

She reached up crossing her body with her right hand because of her stitches. “My headache seems a little better today. I’m really hungry, I haven’t eaten in a while.” Flash pulled her up into him, waiting for her balance to settle before he lowered his hands.

“What do you feel like, we can fix hunger. And we can tell the nurses you need a different med if what you have isn’t working.” He turned and started leading her back toward her room. She nodded about reconsidering the meds. She furtively glanced at Flash as they walked, he wasn’t as tall or massive as Red but taller than her. It wasn’t hard to make her feel short but there also seemed to be a rule against these guys appearing average in any way. Flash was blonde with dark eyes, and clean shaven which accentuated his square jaw. “What?” he met her gaze. “As long as it’s on island, yes, you can request it.”

“Big Kahuna BBQ Chicken Pizza.” Flash nodded. “Why would you guys be willing to do any of this?”

“We all saw yesterday, what you did was crazy, especially for a civilian. We admire the hell out of that. That alone might get you a day pass, but you’re also Red’s now.” Flash looked down; Ashe’s eyes were wide in disbelief. “Make no mistake, sweetheart. We don’t make a habit of sleeping in hospitals for some ‘chick off the street’.”

She stopped in the middle of the hallway, the back of her left-hand caught Flash’s arm stopping him too. “It can’t be like that. We don’t know each other. Can it?”

“I read a study once that soul mates find their partner’s scent attractive. It is one of the ways they might’ve found each other in the past. Maybe how some people find

each other now.” He put his hand on her back to start moving again, “Just a thought.”

She stopped again, “What about high stress experiences and relationships?”

“You didn’t work together so I suspect that’s not relevant here.”

“I don’t have to be in a relationship if I don’t want to. You can’t like team pressure me into one.”

Flash nodded in agreement. “True.” Flash guided them up against the windows, so they were out of the main traffic. “Red won’t disappear. He’ll be like the werewolf in Twilight.” Ashe looked up at him waiting for the punchline. Flash met her skeptical look, raised his eyebrows, and motioned for them to continue. Ashe looked out the window contemplating their conversation. Flash sent her lunch order to the team on his phone. Ashe stiffened, capturing Flash’s attention. She bolted for the bathroom.

Flash calmly walked into the public bathroom behind her, eyes only on Ashe. When she went to slam the stall door shut, he stopped it, and then pushed it closed so he could still get in if he needed to. He ignored the women at the sinks, who hurried out. He watched what he could as she started on her feet, sunk to her knees. He heard the toilet paper roll tears and then a couple attempts to get the toilet to flush. He heard her head hit the divider wall and he pulled open the door. “Ashe,” he started tentatively. He wedged himself into the stall so he could pick her up. He carried her to the sink and then out of the bathroom. Eyes closed; her head tiredly rolled against his shoulder as he walked back to her room.

“Am I gonna die?” She was exhausted after another bout of dry heaving. Her ribs and abdominals hurt so bad. “Nothing’s gonna heal if this doesn’t stop.”

“No. Your bell got rung, hard. We need to get you fluids though, check on the meds, and you need to rest.” Flash came into her room and settled her back into her bed.

Rave stepped out to grab a nurse, Stitch was getting food, Red had stashed the clothes, Tech discreetly put her cell phone down on the nightstand.

Her nurse followed Rave into the room with IV supplies and injectable meds. After the team made sure the meds had a chance to start effect, Stitch showed up with food, Genie pushed everybody but Red out. "Tomorrow PT." it was hard to believe it had barely been 24hrs since the attempted robbery. Ashe didn't stand a chance against the meds she was given and was asleep, her IV still running to get her hydrated. Red settled into his chair for a quiet afternoon.



22

RAVE

Sylvie had never been to the courthouses. Never been part of a criminal proceeding. She wasn't sure what to expect but the nondescript building that was the courthouse sent a message that the government didn't want a scene. The courtroom lacked imagination, just like every other courtroom you'd ever see on TV.

As they settled in the courtroom Genie whispered to Rave, "I think Sylvie may be on the spectrum."

Rave looked at his team leader incredulously. "What are you talking about," he hissed.

"Think about it. She's comfortable in order and tasks. Socially? And she's cold, Rave."

"She's introverted and doesn't know who to trust?—"

"Right now," Genie interrupted. "She didn't get along on the ship well, except for work. She was on that boat for months and based on all her visitors, not one friend."

"She stayed on a ship with no space of her own. She doesn't seem to have issues with my place. She doesn't have any repetitive tics." But Genie had done his part, now Rave watched Sylvie with a different perspective.

Sylvie sat stiff in the courtroom. Rave watched carefully, looking so much calmer than he felt. The team heard the charges being brought up against Taylor and looked at each other surprised. “Larceny?” Rave whispered harshly.

“And battery,” Red responded quietly.

23

SYLVIE

The Courts Martial started with what the Navy had put together on the two charges. Over the next number of days, the prosecution laid out their witnesses and evidence. The Physician Assistant explained after a month of numbers not being right with medications that he had put Sylvie on nights, when the Officers were off shift, and from then on, the medications were fine. A Supply Officer had similar issues with some of the equipment and supplies that were ordered and not arriving in stock.

They called Sylvie to the stand to go over her experience with the issues brought up.

“Were you aware of the missing medication?”

“I know that there seemed to be a problem keeping the numbers right. I know that’s why I got put on nights.”

“Were you asked by anyone to move medication or give it to anyone that wasn’t supposed to have it?”

“No.”

“So, you don’t know who was involved?”

“I didn’t know there was a problem.”

“You were approached by Petty Officer First Class Taylor for what reason?”

“He introduced himself a few weeks into us being at sea. It seemed he was checking out fresh meat.”

“How did your interactions go?”

“I suppose not well. I tried to be professional initially, but he kept coming back. I felt like I was clear.”

“He claims you broke his nose.”

“It’s a good possibility.”

“Can you explain what happened?”

“He came into the clinic right before I closed it. He got in my face again, I told him I wasn’t interested, again. He backed me up against a wall and had his hand around my throat. There was a ruckus at the door of the clinic that created an opportunity for me. I broke his grip on me, drove his face into my knee and watched him fall.”

“Were there any witnesses to verify the events?”

Sylvie’s gaze shifted to Rave. “People were at the door of the clinic. That was what allowed me to get free of Tay—Petty Officer First Class Taylor.”

The defense attorney jumped in both feet.

“Did you have a relationship with Petty Officer First Class Taylor?”

“No.”

“The ‘people’ at the door of the clinic when you attacked Petty Officer First Class Taylor; were you in a relationship with any of them?”

“No.”

“Are you in a relationship with any of them now?”

“Yes.”

“Convenient,” he muttered.

Sylvie sat stoically waiting.

24

RAVE

“A re you ok?” Rave held the door open to his apartment as Sylvie walked through.

“Yep,” she answered through gritted teeth.

“I could use a run,” Rave tried.

Sylvie nodded and headed into her room, shutting the door behind her.

Loudly, not sure if it was only for him or not yet, “So I’m just gonna get ready.” He started unbuttoning his shirt as he walked into his own room.

He was tying his shoes on the couch when he heard her door open. He looked up taking her in from shoes to hair. He smiled as he finished with his laces, she was definitely coming with him.

“What?” she asked self-consciously.

He stood, “glad you’re coming.”

As they headed toward the door, Sylvie said, “I don’t run as fast as you. You don’t have to wait for me.”

“I’m in no rush,” he answered locking the door and turning toward the stairs.

“I just-”

He spun on her, his hands holding her face, “I’m here for you.” He pointed next to her feet, “I’ll stay right here.” They both knew he was not talking about just the workout. She grabbed his shirt, pulling him into a kiss. He had her back against the wall in two steps. She felt his hard on, her self-control disappearing, and broke their kiss. “Fuck,” He muttered. He met her gaze, “tell me you want me.”

“Yeah,” she assented quietly, nodding. He reached down, hooked her legs, flung her over his shoulder, headed back upstairs.

He kicked the door to the apartment shut and headed toward her room. He flung her onto the bed sideways, knelt down to pull her shoes off. He pulled his shirt off as he stood, leaned down stripped her shorts, stepping out of his shoes, dropping his shorts as she pulled off her shirt. She unzipped the front of her sport bra as he came over the top of her. He settled his weight as they kissed. Both breathless and wanting, he pulled back. Her hips bucked up when he latched onto her left breast. His left hand covered her right breast, rolling her nipple; “fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,” Sylvie moaned arching her body into his. She scrambled out from under him so that she was stretched out along the length of the bed. He followed her, his mouth possessive on hers.

He rolled when she pushed, as she straightened, she slid his dick into her. Rave grit his teeth, slammed his eyes shut, sucked in his breath feeling his shaft enveloped. She was wet, tight, and fucking hot. Sylvie took hold of the headboard, her breasts hanging over Rave’s face when he opened his eyes. He sucked a nipple greedily, his hands grabbing hold of her hips. Sylvie rocked forward, throwing her head back; “you’re so sensitive,” He muttered as he broke contact with her skin, his hands kneading her breasts. She rocked back feeling his balls against her butt. His hands ran down her sides, settling at her waist and helping her find his rhythm.

They were laying on the bed. Sylvie was half draped over Rave, “Why in here?”

“You don’t sleep in here. Figured if there were any problems it wouldn’t stop you from coming to my room during the night.”

“Blunt. Probably not wrong.” After a pause, “Guess it’s a good thing they didn’t ask anything more than if we’d had sex.”

Rave sighed, “I was pissed. How do they figure that’s the way? Decide to discredit you by painting you as a slut.” Sylvie set her lips and raised an eyebrow. “What?”

Sylvie shook her head, “I’m not getting into this argument. You are faced with it because of me right now; otherwise, you’d be oblivious to it. This is normal for females. It’s not even a briefing point by the lawyer, except to ask about it so they won’t be surprised.”



25

SYLVIE

Sylvie was on the stand again. This time trying to recount what happened when Taylor had beat her.

“I had a migraine. I had gone into the bathroom to throw up. I was at the sink washing up and caught motion from the side.” her hand movement showed the movement was from the right. “Something crashed down on side of my face, threw me to the left.” Sylvie motioned toward the scar on the right side of her face. “If my vision and recall wasn’t bad enough with just the migraine, it got worse. When I hit the wall Taylor punched me, knocking me to the ground. I got kicked multiple times, ribs and stomach. As I curled up, I’m sure they glanced off my face or jaw, I don’t remember. I woke up being moved. I remember the halogen lights and trying to understand what was happening around me.”

“Anything else?”

“Doc took good care of me and got me off the ship pretty quick. I don’t remember seeing Taylor again.”

26

RED

Red was looking around Ashe's apartment, not impressed. It looked like a poor college student's studio. Even for a studio it was sparsely decorated. "Acushla, this place looks like you barely live in it. You don't have anything in here but necessities."

"I don't need much. And it makes it easier to leave."

"Why would you leave?"

"Why would I stay?" He watched her starting to mess with a hot pot and stepped in to take over.

"How long have you lived here?" He pulled a cup off the shelf in front of him. "What am I making?"

"You mean like this address or Hawaii? The tea behind the pot, please"

"Of course. Both, I guess."

"A couple years, I guess. This place is close to the station I'm based out of."

"Why didn't anyone come visit you?" He poured the tea, looked up, returning his gaze to hers.

“Red, I don’t know,” she shrugged, “maybe you scared them all away. I talk to some coworkers, but I do some rotations to Molokai, and I like it there.”

“When are you going back to work?” He had been disappearing from the hospital for PT in the morning and then would get back in the early afternoon. She shrugged again. “Should we take a weekend trip to Molokai so you can show me the place? Do you wanna take a shower, get out of those clothes. You need more rest.” She took the cup of tea he’d made and walked away as far as she could in the 600 sq ft apartment. She had a chest of drawers she was pulling clothes out of, which drew his attention to her bed. “Holy Jesus and Mary, Acushla! I’m as big as your bed.”

“I’m a lot smaller than you.” He took a deep breath, and she held up her hand to stop him from starting. “You can figure I don’t bring guys back here. So why are you complaining?”

“There aren’t any other guys, Acushla. There’s me. And this bed doesn’t work for me.”

“Red, it’s my place. It works for me. This size is big enough to sleep on and not take up a quarter of the entire space. Honestly there probably shouldn’t be more than a fold out couch.” She might be right, but he didn’t like it.

### MISSION

The team was sent to Brazil where they followed a group of pirates to an oil rig. Hostages were the main reason for their interference in the area. A batch of Americans were on the rig working with the gas company.

The team surfaced from under the boat platform. Red was designated to take out the pirate pulling security. Grabbing him from behind, Red drove a knife into the pirate's carotid, in the short struggle the pirate reached behind him and pulled off Red's hood and mask.

The team moved from level to level, clearing the platform. They dropped into some shadows as the pirates led the six executives across the same deck. A spotlight hit one of the women, Tech inhaled sharply. He'd seen all the packets, he knew the names, faces, and occupations of the six people they were supposed to be rescuing. He thought he was prepared to see her in real life, but he'd heard himself.

Amari was an interpreter by trade. She was hired by the gas company to help speed up communication. She looked like an executive walking in her white suit in the dark; everything seemingly highlighting her presence.

"Are you alright, man?" Stitch asked beside him.

"Fine," Tech answered.

“Shit,” Stitch and Tech muttered together.

Amari was the first one brought in to talk with the pirates. “What you do?”

“You speak Portuguese or Spanish?”

The remainder of their conversation was in Portuguese.

“I’m an interpreter.”

“So, you will help us with all the rest of the people?”

Amari shrugged. “If you’d like help. What are you looking for? Are you aware who’s here?”

“Why are you being helpful?” One of the men asked suspiciously.

“I assume the faster you get what you want the faster you leave.”

Outside the team continued their mission quietly. The five separated hostages were led to the boat platform by Stitch, Rave, and Tech. The remainder of the team handled the pirates. As they brought Amari out onto a deck, Genie spartan kicked one pirate off the platform. The pirate walking closest to Amari bugged out, choosing to willingly jump in the hopes of surviving.

Stitch, Rave and Tech were prepping the pirates’ boat to leave the rig as Amari joined with the rest of their team. Tech watched Amari rejoin the oil executives in the cabin of the boat before he was snapped out of his reverie; literally, as Genie snapped his fingers in front of him.

“Can we get everything accounted for and get out of here?”

“Sure,” Tech hesitated as he turned toward the pile of thermals and drones while Stitch counted up fins and goggles.

“Besides Red’s goggles I think we’re good,” Stitch finished.

Flash was looking over the boat’s controls prepping to captain them out of there back to the mainland.

“Let’s go,” Genie directed as he headed down into the cabin to talk to the executives. Tech followed him once he’d secured the equipment.

The executives were cramped in the small cabin waiting. Genie looked at all the faces, “We’re okay in English?” They nodded. “We’re with the US Navy. My team’s job is to get you back to the States. When we get back to the mainland, we’ll be given instructions to get you all back. Any questions that I can help with?” Everyone was quiet. Genie watched the group, not missing the multiple times Amari and Tech’s eyes caught each other.

28

TECH

When the boat arrived back on the mainland of Brazil the team paired up one on one with the group of civilians. Luckily the group of executives stayed mostly together so the guys could take turns. Tech was following Amari, who didn't stick with the group as well. As an interpreter she was a free lance employee and did her own thing. While the group was waiting for travel arrangements Tech had the opportunity to get to know Amari while she shopped for clothes and they tasted local cuisines.

“Why an interpreter?”

Amari looked at him across the table. He was sensibly drinking water and an appetizer had just been placed between them. Playing with the fruit in her cachaca, “I’m good at languages. I wanted out of my small town.” She motioned up and down herself, “I’m not normal, it made it hard growing up.”

“I think you’re gorgeous,” Tech blurted out. His eyes widened as he realized what he’d said. “I’m sorry.”

Amari half laughed, “You’re cute.” She looked back down at her drink. “You’re a fan of Diandra Forrest too?” she raised her eyes to watch his expression.

Tech looked up from his moqueca, “I don’t know who that is.”

“I remember seeing her hit the scene in 2013, it was amazing. She’s an African

American albino model. I wanted to be like her. I wanted to run the show.”

“She sounds fierce. It doesn’t seem you’re far off.”

Amari finished watching him, shrugged, he seemed honest enough. “Did I get stuck with you because you have a crush?” His eyebrow quirked. She smirked to herself.

His eyes met hers, a fire behind them. “Like I said ‘fierce’.

Shifting slightly Amari decided to change topics. “How did you get into your field?”

“I don’t like talking about work when I’m out. Are you all finished?” As they stood Tech pulled out his phone, looking down quickly to read the message from his team leader. “Looks like travel is all set, time to go.” Amari stood with a flourish that Tech was getting accustomed to, as far as he could tell she swirled in and out of everything, untouchable.



### KAILANI

Kailani was running late, not unusual but tonight she was supposed to be meeting up with her boyfriend. She had just finished her last job and left directly to the restaurant. Uncle's wasn't a place she went too often, definitely not for dinner, and upon hitting the door she felt out of place in her work clothes. She patted down her constantly frizzy hair as she looked around for her boyfriend's table. As she turned to check the bar area she overheard a man, "So where's your MO-ANa?" In her head she was hoping that statement was going to be rescued. She hoped it wasn't the group she was supposed to be sitting down with. She heard a resounding peel of laughter from the group. Her eyes locked on the bartender, also a native Hawaiian, his shoulders stiffened as they shared a look. As she stepped forward, she froze hearing the next statement from her boyfriend, "She is a hot piece of ass." The bartender's gaze was hard as she looked at him in embarrassment.

She turned to leave, dazed by the revelation. She smacked into Stitch hard enough to bounce off. As she fell back his hands grabbed her, one around her waist and the other between her shoulder blades. "Sorry" Kailani started to mutter as she tried sidestepping around him.

"Are you okay?" he cut her off, his grip not loosening. She didn't look up as she pushed his arms away. Stitch stepped back, allowing her space to leave, and watched as she slunk out the door as fast as possible.

Flash, Red, Tech, and Stitch had come in for dinner. Rave and Genie had gone home

from work. They were making their way to the far corner of the restaurant when Stitch turned to catch up. As they sat around the table Tech asked, “what was that?”

“I don’t know. She didn’t say anything. I’ll probably have bruises,” Stitch rubbed his chest, “she hit me like a brick.” Stitch was the smallest of the team at 5’11” with dirty blond hair and light brown eyes.

“Not a surprise, you’re basically tiny,” Red said, his brogue heavy as he laughed. Red was the largest of the team at 6’5” and matched his Irish background.

Stitch gave him a slight smirk as he sat down.

30

RED

Red hadn't heard from Ashe in two days. He tried calling multiple times with no luck. He left work early when Genie realized he wasn't getting anything from him. He showed up at Ashe's apartment and started knocking. She barely opened the door, her body behind it, her face just peeking around the edge of the door. The anger drained out of his body when he saw her. He pushed into the apartment and shut the door. She was in a hoodie and sweatpants, and she was visibly freezing. He snatched her up and took her to bed. When her body sagged into his arms he really started to worry. He pulled up her hoodie and put a hand over the bandage on her side. It was warm and goosebumps were coming up over her newly exposed torso. "Why didn't you call me," he grit out as he righted her sweater, picked her back up, and headed to the door.

"I don't want to go back to the hospital."

"Too bad. I just found you, you aren't getting away from me so easy-"

"Red, I can't sleep," she cut him off and leaned back into the passenger seat of his truck.

"Fine, I'll take you to my place." Red shut the door and got into the driver's seat.

"I can stay at my own house."

Pointing back at her building, Red retorted, “That is an address, girlie.”

Stopped at a red light it hit Red. Without turning to look at Ashe he started, “You were a foster kid.” When he turned to look at her for verification, she was asleep.

When he got to his apartment he pulled Ashe out of her seat, walked her into his room and set her down on his king-sized bed. He realized he had pulled her out of her building so fast she only had thick socks on her feet. She rolled onto her right side. Red signaled his dog, “Toby, this is Ashe. She’s my Acushla, nothing happens to her.” Toby jumped onto the bed and nestled up against her back, his view back toward the door.

31

ASHE

A she woke up hot, she could feel someone breathing against her. She started to push up off the bed and Toby jumped off the bed, she watched him head down the hall. She followed quietly. Red came around the corner, “How are you feeling? Hungry?”

“Yeah,” Red immediately crossed in front of her heading into the kitchen. She followed him and leaned against the closest counter. “You have a dog.”

“Toby’s retired. I was his handler once.” Red was going through cabinets pulling out dishes and food. “Is spaghetti ok?”

“Sounds good. Is it really 9 o’clock?”

“I reset all the clocks to mess with you,” Red deadpanned, then relented. “It’ll be fine. We’ll eat and go back to bed. I do need to take Toby out though.”

“Why--”

“Can we save that topic for dinner?” Red interrupted. “How about we discuss how well you slept. You did, didn’t you?”

Ashe suspected she knew where this was going and smiled at Red’s back, “Why do you suppose that was? Let me guess, you are ultimately the reason, right?”

32

STITCH

Two days later Stitch was getting ready for a run after work. Stepping out of his duplex his neighbor met him. “Nani,” he paused. “What’s going on?”

“There’s something wrong with the gas.”

“Do you need me to take a look?” Stitch stepped toward her door.

“No, boy. I got someone coming over. I’ll wait for them.”

“How about I turn off the gas while you wait,” Stitch pointed around the corner of the building where the meters sat. His elderly neighbor smiled and nodded at him. “I’m gonna do that and then go for a run. I’ll check on you when I get back.” Stitch disappeared around the corner.

A truck pulled up behind Stitch as he was turning off the gas flow to Nani’s meter. “Hey!” a female voice said from behind him. “What are you doing?”

Stitch put his hands in the air and slowly turned around, “I was shutting off my neighbor’s gas.” His face shifted as he recognized the woman from the restaurant. “You hit me!”

Kailani raised a skeptical eyebrow at him, “I don’t think so.”

“At Uncle’s?—”

Remembering that night with embarrassment, Kailani cut him off, “No, Howlie.”

At the slight, Stitch’s eyebrow rose. His hands still up. “You seemed pretty upset; I think you left a bruise.”

Kailani looked him up and down, her eyes stopping on his chest, where he’d lowered one hand. He was dressed for a workout, of course he had a great body. She was mad at herself for noticing. She snapped out of her reverie, “I’m here to fix it. The gas.”

Stitch’s other eyebrow rose, and he pointed with his still raised hand toward the corner of the building, “Nani is waiting.”

Kailani stormed off. Stitch watched her walk around the corner, righted himself, and then turned to head off for his run.

Stitch ducked his head into Nani’s door when he got back from his run. The kitchen was just inside so he immediately made eye contact with both Nani and Kailani. “Just checking that no one died yet.”

Nani laughed, “Tyler, you’re so ridiculous!”

Kailani turned and started putting a couple of tools she’d pulled out of her tool bag back in. Tyler! Of course, ‘Tyler’, could he be whiter? What happened to his shirt?

“Nani, were you making dinner tonight, or was I?” Stitch kept at his neighbor as he stepped fully in.

“You need to take a girl out your own age, boy.” Nani snapped back at him.

Kailani stood to go, dusting her hands off on her pants as she turned to face the two of them so she could leave. “Auntie, I left a card on the counter. If you have any more problems let me know.” She turned on Stitch backing him against the open door, “Excuse me.”

He pushed open the screen for her as she stepped out and headed back for her truck.

“She’s a peach,” Nani said.

Stitch looked down at Nani, “Yeah, a real charmer.”

“Hush boy,” Nani responded smacking Stitch on the chest. “You’ll see.”

“Nani, she does not like me.”

“Hush boy.” Nani looked him up and down realizing for the first time he was standing in his shorts and shoes only. “You need to shower, go.”



33

ASHE

On break while on shift, she was sitting on the wall overlooking Turtle Cove, Ashe saw the team running down the beach. Her eyes froze on Red carrying a brown-haired woman. Turning to leave she bumped into Genie. “You look like the floor is coming out from underneath you.”

“How do you know that?” Ashe asked.

Genie motioned toward the woman Red was carrying, “I’m married and have daughters. I’m familiar.”

“She’s your wife?” Ashe answered. “Why is Red carrying her?”

“Sand can be hard for Bethany to maneuver. We’ve found it’s easier for all of us if we share the load.” Genie watched his unsubtle advice hit her. “Ashe, it’s been just us for a long time. I was married to Bethany before I was part of the team, so she’s been part of the team from the beginning. It’s very normal for us. And you aren’t used to having anyone.”

Sean stopped, looking over at Genie and seeing Ashe. “Ashe is here.”

“What?” Bethany exclaimed. Her grip tightening around Red’s neck. “Where?”

“Over at the wall.”

“Go!” she smacked Red on the chest. “She doesn’t know me. Move!”

Snapping out of his surprise, he took off toward Genie and Ashe.

When he got up to them, he settled Bethany on her feet, next to Genie, and Toby broke in between Red and Ashe. Toby looked up between Red and Ashe smiling.

Bethany shoved her hand out, “Ashe, I’m Bethany. Teddy’s wife.” Genie made a slight adjustment, making sure it was lined up for Ashe to take. “I wanted some beach time and the guys’ look out for me. There’s lots of tourists but the turtles are so cool...I hear.”

Ashe took Bethany’s hand. “I’m just on a break from work, I gotta get back. Hope you have a good day out here.” She patted Toby’s head as she turned to leave.

The rest of the team had stopped on the beach and was taking in the scene. Flash’s attention was drawn to a tall Spainard near a parked SUV on the street, watching Red intently. They met gazes quickly and the Spainard walked off quickly.

34

TECH

Arriving home he realized that Amari was back from her latest trip. Her bags were dropped in the main room of the condo and he could hear the water running in the bathroom. He smiled to himself and then turned toward the small kitchen to see what he could put together for dinner. Her schedule equaled his, erratic sometimes and boring others, her latest job had been a few weeks. He hadn't planned on her being back yet and was pretty sure that the refrigerator showed it.

"You don't have much for dinner," Amari stated as she walked into the main room wrapped in a towel.

"Yeah, I hadn't gone shopping yet." Tech unnecessarily confessed.

"Come apologize and then you can take me to Teddy's," she sashayed back to the main bedroom while dropping her towel on the floor.

"God, I love this woman!" he said to himself following her into the bedroom, snatching up the towel on his way.

35

SYLVIE

As she pulled into the tight parking at Ryder's Poke. Sylvie and Bethany were sitting outside of the small restaurant with their bowls. Amari popped out of a cab shortly after Ashe sat down.

"Amari," Sylvie announced when she approached their small table.

Bethany looked up, "Amari, I understood you were looking for some poke. This place is humble but it's one of the best Teddy and I have found."

"Great, I'm looking forward to it," Amari replied. She reached out to shake hands with the group assembled her first introduction to just the ladies of the team. She went in to order after dropping her jacket over a chair.

Kailani parked her truck. She looked at the assembled women outside Ryder's, such a weird mix in her opinion but they seemed all so confident. As she passed by the table, the green-eyed lady took a second look at her.

"I'm sorry," Sylvie stopped Kailani. "You're doing work at Tyler's place, right?"

"What?" Kailani responded.

"Uh, Laulima St. Duplex at the end. Nani's neighbor."

“How do you know that?”

“We,” Sylvie motioned to the group of women, “look out for the guys when they’re traveling.”

“I’ve been over there. His place is kind of a mess right now. And I recognize your company’s name.” Sylvie pointed at her work truck.

“Yeah, he wanted more natural gas options.” The group smiled knowingly. “What?”

“He wanted to see you more.”

“That can’t be right,” Kailani wanted to dismiss the thought. “I’m gonna go get my lunch,” she pointed toward the restaurant door.

“Come back and sit with us,” Amari responded.

Kailani disappeared inside.

“We planned to be here. Interesting that the cosmos brought her here too,” Bethany posited. “Did the guys know we were meeting?” Bethany suggested.

The group looked at each other and shook their heads, “No way,” they responded in unison then laughed as Kailani came back out.

Ashe scoot to give Kailani space at the table. “This is the first time we’ve gotten together as a group without the guys. Weird that you picked here today to eat, don’t you think?”

“I guess. It’s got really good poke, and I was in the area for work though. So, coincidence, maybe. And I’m not seeing Tyler.”

“Okay,” Amari broke in. “I’m seeing Harry, or maybe Tech. Bethany is married to Teddy. Sylvie’s engaged to Noah. Ashe is with the Irish giant, Sean. So that leaves Thomas’ story.”

Bethany smiled in Amari’s direction. “Kailani, I’m a stay-at-home mom. Teddy and I have five kids, we’ve been together since before I graduated high school. Sylvie is in the Army, she’s a medic stationed here. Ashe is an EMT and works on island with local EMS. Amari is an interpreter; she gets out and about quite a bit; seems pretty glamorous.”

“Great,” Kailani muttered into her bowl. “Kind of an intimidating group.”

Ashe looked at her, “Not any more than you. Sylvie and I work blue collar like you.” Changing direction, “Are you from Oahu originally?”

### CARLOS

He had come through the door right behind her, knocking her to the ground. Kicking her multiple times, he pulled cord from his back pocket and reached down; looping the cord around her throat and then her wrists, effectively making it impossible to use her hands without choking herself. He grabbed her left arm, yanking her up and tossing her toward the island in the room.

Ashe's arms and back hit the short end of the island, she watched him mirror her movement. He backhanded her as she straightened, knocking her off balance again. He unbuttoned her jeans and tossed her on top of the island, leaving her in her shirt and underwear. She strained to reach into a drawer near her left hand, searching for a weapon. She had to pause when her vision tunneled.

He crawled on top of the island, and they struggled as he tried to push between her legs. Ashe's vision cleared enough she gambled and fighting her bindings, she focused on the drawer contents again, her fingers finding the edges of the knife she knew was in there. Carlos reared up and punched down on the ribs he'd originally kicked when he entered. She exhaled sharply trying to breathe, guard her ribs, losing traction on the knife. "Your man fucked me and now I'm gonna fuck you," he sneered as he wedged one knee between her legs and opening his own pants.

It was now or never, and she knew she risked choking herself out. As he leaned down over her, his hand on his dick ready to rape her, she grabbed the filleting knife and drove it up into the man. Both froze momentarily; Carlos out of shock and Ashe

attempting to breathe without letting go of the knife. Carlos straightened, Ashe kept hold of the knife and they watched blood pouring out from under his right ribs. He grabbed his stomach with his right hand, no longer concerned with his dick, blood flowing between his fingers onto Ashe and the island.

Ashe drew up her right knee, her foot hooking his inner thigh. She rotated her hips and shoulders left, twisting him off the island to finish bleeding to death on the floor. The knife fell back into the drawer. She slipped on the blood, falling off the island onto the soon to be corpse in her kitchen. She pushed clear of the body, smeared blood across the floor; passing out on the far end of the island, wrapped around the short end.



### BAKER

Baker entered Ashe's apartment, smacked in the face by the smell of blood. Looking right he saw most of the small studio and why the place smelled of iron. He pulled his cell, dialing 911, as he stepped toward the male body in the small kitchen space. He didn't feel a pulse at the man's neck and recognized him from the picture he'd been given. "Damn it," he muttered, he'd clearly been late. Shifting to his phone, "Yeah, I need to report a break-in at my current location." Looking passed the dead man he saw feet and immediately stepped forward snaking around the island.

Ashe whimpered when he reached down to check her pulse. While talking with the dispatcher on the phone, he pulled a knife from a pocket in his pants and cut Ashe loose from the bindings. Deep bruises had already started from her struggling. "Ashe? Can you hear me?" her hands had fallen listlessly once freed. "Babe, we don't have a lot of time. Cops are on their way." He looked her up and down, her left hand had some relatively superficial cuts, she had smeared blood all around her but looked relatively unharmed. He had just finished taking pictures of the scene and was sliding his phone into his back pocket when the cops came through the door. Baker put his hands up and motioned toward the body, "I came by to see Ashe and found it like this." As if on cue, Ashe moaned, drawing the police's attention.

"Ma'am, are you okay?" the nearest officer asked, kneeling down in front of her.

The second officer cued his radio and requested an ambulance.

Baker moved to be able to see Ashe. She had started to make small movements but was not answering any questions. He could tell she could hear, she just seemed incapable of response. Her gaze landed unsteadily on Baker, first his shoes then up to his face. They had never met and this is not how he would have wanted to meet, oh well. “Ashe,” he started in a whisper, “I’m a friend of Red’s. My name is Baker.” Ashe tried to wet her lips, but nothing followed. She blinked slowly trying to focus from the burning in her throat and make her voice work. The EMS crew arrived; Baker backed off just enough to let them access Ashe without moving out of her sight.

“Ashe?” the male EMT questioned. Everyone paused and looked at the two. “Ashe, can you talk to us?” After a beat he continued, “you have some nasty bruising, swelling around your throat.” Ashe reached for her throat, her fingertips carefully palpating where she felt the burning. “Can you sit up?” he reached instinctively to help Ashe and she took it, slowly sliding her hips and legs under her and into a sitting position. “How about we get out of here?”

“Wait, there’s been a crime here,” one of the Officers said.

The female paramedic looked up from the notes she was making, “She works at our station. She needs medical attention.” The second Officer nodded.

38

BAKER

As the team came off the aircraft, Baker was waiting. “Red, Ashe is at the hospital. Everyone else was fine.”

“Go,” Genie ordered in Red’s direction. “Thanks, Baker.” Red fell into step with Baker as they headed toward his truck.

“What happened?” he asked as he dropped his gear in the bed of the truck and pulled at the door handle on the passenger side.

“I got there late. I don’t know the details,” he started as they snapped in seatbelts and Baker put the truck into reverse. “Her place was a mess. I managed to cut some of the bindings before the police got there and she was breathing. He’d tied her hands behind her and anchored them around her neck---“

“I’m gonna kill that motherfucker!” Red punched the dashboard.

“She beat you to it.” Red turned toward Baker. “It had to have been luck given how she was tied up but sure as shit, he was dead when I got there, and she looked like she’d drug herself clear of him before she finally passed out.” They sat in silence for the rest of the drive to the hospital.

Baker let Red out at the entrance, “I’ll park and be there. She should still be in the ER. She should be in a private room.”

Red burst into the ER, his size and demeanor drawing attention. The security guard stood up and Red headed toward him. “I’m looking for?—“

The security guard started to point in the direction of administration “That’s?—“

“No. She was brought in with an escort.” Baker came up behind Red. The security guard looked between the two men and keyed his radio.

39

RED

The officer at her door was standing as they approached.

“She’s in a fishbowl,” Red was irritated.

“She is the sole survivor of an incident which resulted in one dead. The incident is under investigation. There’s no phones, no electronics.”

Red nodded as he emptied his pockets, his work phone staying in his pocket.

Silently he entered the room, the door clicking shut behind him. He stood quietly, alert, taking in the details he could in the dim night lighting of the room. He couldn’t see her. He debated knowing he just needed her in his arms, make sure she was okay, not sure if she even wanted to see him, or what she would want. Feeling like a coward and a failure as he continued hesitating. The far side of the room was dark enough to make out a chair and curtains.

He stepped toward the bathroom. Started to push the door open, letting more light into the room, when he made out the edge of a blanket behind the chair. “Ashe?” he whispered as he slid toward the blanket, dropping to a knee. He felt her hand against his neck, his hands wrapped around her instinctively; pulling her into him as he slid against her. He crossed his ankles, Ashe tucked between his knees. She turned into Red, her bandaged left hand taking hold of the collar on his shirt as best she could. “Acushla,” he whispered wrapping his arms tightly around her, releasing a breath he

hadn't known was stuck. She was in his arms. She dropped her head into his neck. "Can you talk to me?" He felt her shake her head. "I was scared," he admitted.

He felt her relax, her breath slowing as she fell asleep. The faint acrid smell wouldn't go away. He knew he wasn't a picture of fresh shower smell after 20+ hours of traveling, but this was different. He'd have to wait for light to figure it out. In the meantime, she was asleep in his arms. She was breathing and the threat to her was dead.

As dawn broke into the room Red shifted to put his back against the wall. It trapped the blanket wrapping it tightly around Ashe. She started to thrash to get loose. "Acushla, its ok," he tried to soothe as he yanked at the blanket under him. Red went silent when she started to whimper and pull away from the sound of his voice. He finished yanking the blanket clear and then saw the source of the smell on Ashe. She still had blood on her from the incident, her left hand was bandaged, she was wearing a bra and the underwear they'd found her in; his blood rolled toward boiling. No kidding she needed a blanket! Where are her clothes, who's blood, why blood, what the hell is going on? Red pulled his phone out and sent a message to Flash, then stood and grabbed Ashe up, making sure she was covered with the blanket. As he stood, he saw Baker asleep in a chair outside the room. Baker looked up, Red motioned with his head, and he stepped in quietly. "I don't trust these guys. She's got blood on her, and I assume she's wearing what she was picked up in."

Baker answered, "Whatever you need."

"Flash is gonna pick up some clean clothes from my place and bring them. I need to get her cleaned up."

"Got it," Baker took up sentry at the bathroom.

"Acushla, water's ready, I need you to wake up," Red started. He'd managed to keep

hold of her and get the shower on without waking her. “Start at your feet, I gotta put you down.” Bending down and lowering her legs he felt her jerk in awareness as her hands reached for his chest. Her fingers grabbed his shirt as if she was taking hold of his bulletproof vest, her left hand was a little clumsy with the bandages. He saw her black and blue wrists before her body covered them, her biceps flexing, pulling her body into him. Keeping one arm around her, he pulled everything out of his pockets; first one side, then the other; then stepped straight forward into the shower. He turned so he was facing the shower head and Ashe was facing away while under the running water. He felt her start to relax under the warm water, her death grip loosening on his shirt. “We want to get the blood off, Ashe.” She stepped back a fraction of a step as she inspected herself, she shook her head and leaned back into him. He pulled her left hand up over his shoulder to protect it from the water. He started rubbing the blood off, by the time he was finished Tech had arrived.

Red got Ashe dressed in sweatpants and thermal shirt Flash had grabbed for her and changed into dry clothes before leaving Ashe in the bathroom to finish. His brogue was back when he turned to Baker, “where are the investigators?” As if on cue, two plain clothes police officers stepped into the room.

“Quite a crowd,” the largest one said.

The bathroom door opened; Ashe stood still watching the five men sizing each other up. Without looking Red waved Ashe to step behind him, her right hand near his elbow, his hand at her hip. Flash and Baker automatically shifted to cover Red’s flanks.

“We’re all on the same side,” the police officer spoke again.

“Are we?” Red’s accent was heavy. “You left a witness covered in blood and nearly naked in here.”

“We’ve been working all night on this,” the second officer said. “We’re sorry about that. We did have protection at the door,” he motioned toward the door.

“What do you have?” Can you tell us what happened?” Flash took over.

“We were hoping that Ashe could help,” the officers looked at her. “The only other person that was there is dead.”

Baker saw the goosebumps rise on Ashe’s arms. “Maybe we come back to that. What do you have?”

“The deceased was a known associate to a cartel. Had been moving freely across the border. Arrived a week ago, was staying in Waikiki. Not a large electronic signature, must have been paying cash. We have no idea what else he may have been here for.” The older officer listed. “What do you know?” He directed at Red.

“Sounds like he was a bad man that got what he deserved. Congratulations, Officers.”

“I don’t think that’s it,” the officer looked at the men, not buying the easy way.

“You’re more than welcome to take your concerns to our boss. I can give you his information.” Red responded calmly.

“Yeah, we’ll take that.” Directing the next comment at Ashe, the older officer continued, “We do need to get your statement. Please let us know when you’re ready for that, ok?”

Ashe wasn’t ignorant of the testosterone filling the room. Nor was she ready to go over what had happened, but she did want out of the hospital, and no one would stand down. She was about to acquiesce, writing her statement down, knowing how long it would take, when a doctor walked in. Now the room was super crowded.



“Morning,” the doctor said. “Everyone’s up early. Came to talk discharge,” he looked through the three bodyguards at Ashe. Ashe nodded. “Ok, I need to do an exam, and we can get the paperwork finished.” Unphased, he stepped between Baker and Red, spread his arms, showing Ashe the way back to the hospital bed.

Red looked at the police officers, “you can leave.” Baker and Flash walked the two officers out, leaving Red in the room with the doctor and patient.

As the doctor went through the myriad of beating injuries Ashe had, including the bruised wrists and ribs, he verbally went over the damage to her throat and hand. “In a couple days the swelling should start to decrease and while it may be raspy, or weak, you should be able to talk again. Just do what you can or feel like, you don’t have to rush it. And when the stitches are out of your hand and fingers you should follow up with occupational therapy to make sure all the motion and strength come back. Until then keep the stitches dry and clean. Any questions?” Ashe shook her head. “Okay,” turning toward the door the doctor continued, “You guys have a good day.”

Flash took Red and Ashe to Red’s. The team had already moved his vehicle. Red escorted Ashe inside. Toby was waiting. She sat down gingerly on the couch, Red headed back out to grab his gear from Flash’s trunk. “Get your own gear. Your stuff’s heavy.”

Red shrugged, remembering to be nice, “I’m bigger than you. Thanks for the assist this morning.”

“Obviously,” Flash shut his trunk and headed around. “Let us know if you need anything the next couple days.”

“Obviously,” Red grinned as he headed back toward his apartment.

Red dropped his gear inside the door. Toby and Ashe were laid out on the couch together, her arms wrapped around him. The click of the door shutting was louder than he remembered, and his eyes shut reflexively, hoping it didn't disturb the two of them. Leaving his gear where it was, he locked the door and headed silently to his room to shower and get some sleep, if possible.

40

STITCH

Genie's six-year-old, Billy had a soccer game and most of the team was there. Bethany and Genie with their four other kids, Rave and Sylvie, Flash, Tech, and Stitch took up half the bleachers. Stitch looked across the field and froze recognizing one of the referees. "She's here," he nudged Flash.

"What?"

"From the restaurant. Look. She's a referee." Stitch pointed her out.

Flash followed Stitch's direction, "You sure?"

"She was at my neighbor's house. Yes, I'm sure."

"Ok. Go talk to her at halftime."

"She doesn't like me."

"Why are we having this conversation?"

"Trying to watch the game," Rave leaned in.

Sylvie leaned in, "What are you talking about?"

“Stitch likes the referee.” Flash answered.

“I thought he liked the propane girl?”

“It’s the same one,” Stitch bit out as the game moved toward them on the field.

“Wait, we saw her at Ryder’s,” Sylvie looked at the referee.

“Shut up, shut up, shut up,” Stitch repeated as she came running down the base line.

41

RED

A she was changing the dressing on her hand. She was leaning against the counter, her left hand unwrapped, palm up. Sixteen stitches ran across her fingers and the top of her palm. "I don't need you to take care of my hand," Ashe rasped out at Red.

"I want to."

"I don't need you to."

His accent came out, "I want to." He grabbed her by the waist, lifting her onto the counter. "Show me what to do." She glared at him. He leaned across her and made a show of washing his hands. When he finished drying his hands, he looked at her again, "please, show me what to do." He rested his hand against her thigh, she pulled away, he clenched his hand with his fingernails digging into his palm.

"You take the knots and move them to the other side," she demonstrated on one. He looked at her hand again and took over.

She closed her eyes and felt the threads moving one by one. She was startled out of her thoughts when Red asked, "What did this?"

She met Red's eyes, "a knife."

"You held the blade?"

“Probably.”

Red finished moving the stitches, “what next?”

“Cover them.”

The guys were at PT a few mornings later. “How’s Ashe doing?” Genie asked.

“She’s going in for her interview later today.” Red was irritated and all the guys could tell.

“Man, we saw the pictures. However that went down, it was nasty.” Tech took a stab at the source of irritation.

“You’re planning on being there, right?” Genie followed up.

“Man, I wanna be there. I wanna hear what happened,” Rave added.

“Did you show Sylvie?!” Red shot back.

“What? No. But she’d probably say the same thing. She’d high-five her, you remember how we met.”

The guys laughed, Rave wasn’t wrong. The guys had met Sylvie on a ship when they walked in on her beating up a Sailor harassing her.

“If it’s quiet yeah, I’d like to be there. I’m not sure she cares where I am honestly.”

“Does she know why that guy came after her?” Stitch asked.

“No.”

“Red, that’s not gonna work.” Stitch chimed in. She killed a guy. Best case scenario, she was in the hospital because of you. Worst case, that guy raped her.” Red turned on Stitch. “You can be mad at me but I’m not wrong.”

Rave pulled Red’s attention, “He’s right. You gotta give her a reason to trust you. First mission you leave on and she nearly ends up dead?”

Red threw up his hands, “What can I tell her! It must be so nice that all your women are fine!” He stormed off leaving the guys watching him.

“He’s not wrong either,” Genie muttered.

42

ASHE

Red sat quietly in the observation room watching Ashe settling into the interview room with the assigned officers.

After setting up the necessary information for the recording and going over Miranda rights the younger officer started off, “Can you tell us what happened?”

“I walked into my apartment. The door busted open behind me,” Ashe’s voice was quiet and raw. “I was on the ground, getting kicked. I got yanked up, stripped down, tied up, thrown against the kitchen island. Everything was so fast I couldn’t do anything; I couldn’t process anything. I was on the island, I heard him say he was fucked so, I knew what was coming and I was dead either way. I scrambled against how I was tied up, found a knife in the drawer, and stabbed him as he came down over me.” Ashe’s eyes closed, her face contorted in disgust as the image hit her of him leaning over her, his dick in his hand.

“What happened after that?”

“I rolled him off me, slipped on the counter and fell onto him. I had to get away, I squirmed away until I must have passed out. Next thing I remember, Police and EMS were there.”

“You have no idea why he targeted you?”



“No,” Ashe shook her head, looking at the table.

“You’re sure?”

Ashe looked up at the Officer, “I’d never seen the guy before.”

“Would it surprise you that he was linked to a drug cartel?” the Officers watched for her reaction.

Everything about her reaction said don’t know, don’t care. Her eyes widened, eyebrows lifted, shoulders shrugged. “Ok. Seems like a ‘you’ problem.”

“It doesn’t help make sense of anything?”

“I don’t do drugs. I don’t sell drugs. I treat people on drugs, but by then it’s already bought and paid for. So no,” her voice lifted as if ending in a question.

One of the Officers looked down at his notes. “A few months ago, you were involved in a bank robbery.”

After a pregnant pause Ashe questioned, “Do you think it’s connected?”

“Do you?”

“I’m not an investigator.” The room stayed quiet. “I was stuck in that bank like everyone else. It was an opportunity stop, not planned, not routine.”

“Any changes in your life between these two events?”

“I haven’t been working much, trying to recover.”

“Have you been staying at your place much?” The younger Officer was trying to lead the conversation, she hadn’t taken the bait yet.

Ashe’s eyes looked at the two men. “No, my—you think Sean has something to do with this?”

“Who’s Sean?”

“You know who he is.” Now she was starting to get irritated. She looked at the older Officer, “I’m so silly. I thought you needed to investigate a crime that took place.” She looked at both Officers, “My apartment was broken into, I was beaten, nearly raped. By luck, the guy that did these things is dead. By some miracle that knife hit his liver when it went in, that’s the only way I could explain the amount of blood and result. I don’t suppose I’d be able to reproduce that result in a thousand attempts if all the same things were in place again.” Ashe was shaking as she stood, pushing her chair under the table, “As far as I could tell, it was him or me. I’m glad it was him.” Goosebumps had broken out on her arms as she settled her hands on the back of the chair. “If that guy has something to do with Sean, I don’t think that’s in your jurisdiction.” Using a hitchhiker thumb, Ashe pointed toward the door. “I’m gonna go now, if you have any more questions you can visit.”

Red wasn’t sure how she made it to the door without stumbling, having watched the whole thing, but he was waiting for her when she came through it. He immediately started to wrap his arms around her. Her hand came up instinctively settling on his lower chest, warning him, he got one arm around her and headed toward the exit.

43

RED

He got her in his truck and when he was settled, he sat quietly. She was looking out the windshield, without seeing anything. “Acushla, you did great in there,” he started quietly.

“Are they right?” she replied and then turned her head to look at him.

“Ba—“

“Yes.” The cab of the truck was deathly silent. “Can you take me to my place, please.”

“Ashe—“

Once again, her hand went up and she slowly shook her head, “I’m not yelling. This isn’t getting crazy. If you don’t take me, I’ll just get out.” Her gaze was out the windshield again, her hand reaching for the door handle.

Red growled as he put the vehicle in reverse.

Ashe started to slide out of the truck when Red pulled up to the sidewalk in front of her apartment. He made a clumsy grab, catching her shirt at the ribs. She looked at him. “I didn’t know until it was too late.”

Ashe nodded, "I believe you." Red exhaled loudly in relief. "Cause I can't for the life of me figure out why you'd do it on purpose." She slipped out of his grasp and shut the door, heading for the entrance to the apartment. Red staring at her, like he'd just been slapped.

He threw the vehicle in Park and took off after her. He came up behind her as she stood paralyzed at the threshold of her apartment. The police tape was down but the cleaning hadn't taken place yet. The place was wrecked and smelt of blood.

"Ashe?" He wedged into the door frame looking around Ashe, into the kitchen/bedroom area. His left hand was braced against the doorframe next to Ashe's head. Her head leaned back into his forearm. She stepped forward, away from him, as he shifted to pull her closer to him. He grit his teeth, punching the doorframe as he followed her into the room.

"Baker came because of you," Ashe almost questioned, without turning to look at him, her eyes glued to the island.

"Yes. He would've handled it," Red stayed behind her, out of sight.

"He was late."

"He'll never forgive himself."

"I'm supposed to help people," Ashe looked at the space between the island and kitchen sink.

"Ashe," he paused, watching the back of her head, not moving. "I'm so sorry."

Ashe turned to face Red. "I can't help people like this." She looked so overwhelmed; it crushed him.

“I don’t know how to fix this. I’d do anything I can.”

“I don’t know either. You can’t be everywhere. You won’t give up your work. I suppose this doesn’t happen in your work often.”

Red hesitated as he thought about his answer. “It’s never happened on the team before,” he replied honestly.

“What did happen?”

“Sylvie, Rave’s woman. But it was a guy she worked with that caused a problem. We showed up and tried to help him.”

### TECH

Tech was surprised by the doorbell ringing. He jumped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around his waist and padding wet footed through the house.

Kailani stepped back, holding her tool bag, surprised as the door opened to reveal Tyler, half-naked. “Um, here to hook up-” Tyler’s eyebrows lifted at the same time Kailani realized what she said. “I mean, hook--connect, damn it. Connect the...stuff.”

Tech stepped back to let her in as she dropped her head embarrassed. “I’ll be a few minutes getting dressed. I can leave the door open...”

“I’m not looking,” Kailani was intensely staring at the stove in the kitchen.

Tech laughed as he headed back down the short hall.

“APPLIANCES!” Kailani shouted as the word finally hit her. “hook up, damn it, connect, connect the appliances,” she muttered to herself. “You’re such an idiot!” she continued as she started pulling out tools.

“Wha---!” Tech had started back out into the hall when he slipped on the wet floor and crashed down.

Kailani’s head came around the corner of the kitchen. “Noth---Are you—oookay, that’s a lot.” She threw her hand up as if to block her view. Tech’s towel opened as he

was rolling to get back up and his butt was on full display.

“That’s gonna leave a bruise.” Tech said ducking back into his room, rubbing his butt.

Tech stepped back into the hallway once he was dressed. “So, you’re gonna be done today, right?” Kailani had moved into the small closet housing the water heater.

“Yes.”

“So not working here anymore.”

“Right.”

“So, I can ask you on a date?”

Kailani looked up from her work, it wasn’t convincing.

“You’ve been pretty clear that you don’t like white guys in general.”

“Oh, great. Cause I thought maybe you’d missed it.”

“I don’t think you’re as racist as you’d like to think.” He was purposely poking.

“So, you’re willing to give me a chance to prove how openminded I can be?” She turned back to her work.

“I can’t stop thinking about you. Based on the blush at my front door I think you like me despite your best effort.”

“I might kill you if we go out.”

“I’ll make sure it’s public.” More sensitively, he looked down to try and catch her gaze, “We don’t have to go to Uncle’s.”

Kailani looked up turning her wrench and knocking knuckles against the heater. Her face signaled the pain in her hand for a fraction of a second. “He was an asshole,” she bit out.

“My gain.”



45

ASHE

Thomas stepped out of the shadows when Ashe finished ordering.

“What are you doing here?” Ashe asked, expecting Sean to pop out next.

“What are you doing here?” Thomas repeated back to her. “You know why I’m here.”

“I needed to get away. Where is everyone else?” Ashe was handed her bread at the midnight bakery opening.

“I came alone.” He fell in step with Ashe as she walked away. “That looks really good. Where are we going?”

Ashe handed him the strawberry and cream cheese hot bread she’d ordered. “The hotel.”

“Did you walk here?” He tore off some of the bread.

“I’m not busy and the place isn’t too big.”

“You know you’re killing him, right? He has no idea where you are.”

“And yet you found me.”

“Is it safe to walk here?” Flash referenced the side of the ‘highway’ they were walking down.

“It’s all there is.” Motioning to the bag, “Is there any left?”

“Are you working here?” Flash handed the bag back over.

“I’ve worked a couple shifts.”

“It’s going ok?”

“It’s been okay.”

They finished the walk to the hotel in silence, sharing the hot bread.

Flash followed Ashe straight into her suite, locking the door behind him.

“How did you find me?” Ashe repeated.

“I remembered months ago that Red said you liked Molokai. Genie and I debated it for about a second.” Flash settled into a chair at the counter.

“Why didn’t you just tell Sean?”

“If you didn’t want to see him, you’d just run again.”

“So, you’re here because you don’t have a family?”

“You are my family, all of you,” Flash responded automatically.

Ashe sat down next to him, facing him. “Why are you alone?”

Flash sighed. “Not tonight. It’s too late.”

“It’s morning,” Ashe pointed out.

“Not funny. Get some sleep,” he motioned up the ladder to the loft.

“Don’t you have a room?”

“So, you can disappear again?” He raised an eyebrow skeptically at her. “You’ll find me against the door.”

46

FLASH

“Y ou’re not leaving my sight,” Flash said from the floor, against the door like he’d said, when Ashe came downstairs in shorts and tank.

“I’m going for a run. The pier is nice. You can come. There’s a laundromat we can hit later.”

Flash grunted as he got off the floor and headed toward his backpack to pull out clothes.

They finished a run with a few laps around the pier. Ashe stopped at the Pizza Café. After they ordered Ashe looked across the booth at Flash, “Now, what happened?”

Flash sat back and sighed.

“We were in middle school when we met. Lacey was a year younger than me. Oh man, all the guys wanted her. She was Korean and had beautiful green eyes. One in a million.

I was a swimmer. She must have liked my body,” Flash winked at Ashe. “Honestly, I saw her and that was it. I would’ve done anything for her. She loved skiing. She was really good. I took her skiing whenever we could.

Her parents didn’t like it initially, they got over it eventually. My junior year in

college, Lacey got sick couldn't shake it. She was diagnosed with Leukemia. During treatment she ended up with febrile neutropenia."

"Your junior year, in college," Ashe emphasized. "You guys were together 7-8 years by then."

"I told you she was it. She was my life, Ashe."

"You quit school."

"I had to be at the hospital with her. Now, if I had graduated I wouldn't be on the team. Things worked out, I don't regret any of it."

"That was a decade ago," Ashe continued.

"I can still get hard thinking about her."

"It was a lifetime ago."

"No, Ashe, it was a lifetime. And I wouldn't trade it. I'm happy. I had her. I have the team. I have all of you."

Ashe sat back looking at Flash. They ate quietly.

"I have to go back now, don't I." Ashe didn't really question.

"You make it sound like you don't want to. That's not the point. I'm not here to force you back. But Red will come. You are his, like Lacey was mine."

As they headed out of the restaurant, Flash caught the white scars across Ashe's hand as she opened the door to leave the restaurant. "Do you not want to be with Sean or

are you scared to be with him?”

“Yeah, I am. That’s fair, right? What the hell happened? He said what happened to me hasn’t happened before.”

“He got his hood pulled off during the op. Best I can figure it’s how he was id’d and you singled out. Red is pretty identifiable by size and then add his hair he wouldn’t be too hard to pick out. It was all totally shitty, Ashe.”

“One more day, ok?”

47

KAILANI

“ A ll the ladies are getting ready at Bethany’s,” Stitch said over the phone.

“Great,” Kailani said looking down at herself standing at the bulk plant. She was dressed in the company’s coveralls and had spent the day in the yard prepping containers and scavenging containers.

Bethany opened the door when Kailani rang the bell. “Kailani, you made it,” she smiled.

Kailani froze, Bethany was blind, assuming it was a propane smell that gave her away. “Sorry, I thought I scrubbed well enough.”

“It’s not propane, Kailani. You smell like plumeria.”

“Oh,” Kailani was honestly surprised.

“Everybody else is in the main room,” Bethany motioned as Kailani shut the door.