



secretly a reef rat

by templemarker

Notes: This story came from lovely's prompt on [inception kink](#) for an Inception/Hawaii 5-0 crossover, "[Arthur is Steve's brother.](#)" I genuinely thought, when I answered this prompt, that it was going to be an amusing one-off crossover that would take me an afternoon to write. 27,000 words later, I was clearly, flatly wrong.

Having been written on the kink meme, there were many--many!--tense shifts. I have tried to correct most of them, but I may not have gotten them all. Apologies for such errors. Thank you so much to all the folks that followed along and expressed their joy on the kink meme; and to pandarus for helping me to clean it up a bit for posting outside the meme. To all the people I pimped into Hawaii 5-0 through this story: you're welcome.

Additional notes included [here](#); I suggest reading them after this story.

They were working a simple bait-and-extract, pulling corporate espionage on one company and feeding it to a competitor, when Arthur got a phone call.

This was notable only in that it was directed to Arthur's personal line, which, in Eames' vast experience monitoring the intricacies of Arthur's working habits, had never once rung whilst during business hours. Whenever those happened to be.

In fact, Eames had long suspected that Arthur's "personal phone" was secretly an excuse for him to fuck off for a smoke break and destroy some smug porcine smiles with some equally vicious birds. And so he watched with bright-eyed interest as Arthur slipped the device from his pocket and stared at the screen in what appeared to be surprised consternation.

"Excuse me," he said to the room, "I need to take this."

Neither Maude (the chemist) nor Paolo (the architect) looked up from their workspaces. Eames waited a beat, and then quietly followed Arthur out into the back garden of the empty, newly built home they were working out of for job prep.

"--what do you mean, you're in the hospital?" Arthur hissed, his voice sounding unusually high-pitched. "Steve, I swear to god, I thought you said when you were taking this task force job that you'd be less prone to calling me with stories of your near-death experiences!"

Eames couldn't hear the reply from this distance, but Arthur's face grew more pinched and he rested his head against the decorative arbor covered delightfully with ornamental ivy. To date, Eames thought only he put such displeasure on Arthur's lovely visage, but apparently he was incorrect. He had *competition*.

"What did Danny say?" Arthur asked abruptly, clearly cutting off this Steve person in the middle of a sentence. "No, I don't care that--Steve! Steve! *What did Danny say?*" Arthur nearly shouted into the receiver of his mobile, ears going slightly pink at the tips.

Dear god, Eames thought, how strange to watch this when it's not directed towards him.

"If Danny says the doctor thinks you should stay in the hospital for the week, you better fucking keep your ass in that bed or I'm buying Mary a first class ticket from the mainland *tonight*," Arthur positively growled, and that seemed to quiet the man on the other side of the line.

Arthur blew out a breath. One rogue strand of hair had fallen from its otherwise perfect swell, and it danced slightly in the air as Arthur expressed his frustration.

"I'm coming out," he said, and his face had turned from irritation to determination. Not even Cobb could turn Arthur's mind when he set a decision like so; Eames had never even bothered to try, knowing it futile from the first moment he saw the tilt of Arthur's chin. "No. Don't even. You're an asshole, a dangerous, risk-taking asshole, but you're my brother, and Danny will need some help keeping you in bed."

There's some further back-and-forth, but Eames had heard all he needed to and more besides. He wandered into the kitchen, black-on-black marble and tile shining a bit with the late afternoon sun, and put the kettle on. He went through the motions of preparing a cuppa, and after a moment's hesitation pulled a second mug from the dish drainer. He watched the light of the kettle and listened for Arthur's re-entry.

Arthur stepped into the kitchen, put together with no hair out of place, looking as though he hadn't just gotten into a familial screaming match outside where their non-existent neighbors couldn't hear.

"I need to take a couple of days off," he said. "We may have to put the job back by a week, to meet that secondary opening in the mark's schedule, but it shouldn't affect the schedule too dramatically. Maude wanted more time with the quick-release Somnacin compound anyway."

Eames didn't say anything, just poured water at the boil over the tea, stirring in a bit of sugar for Arthur and a bit of cream for himself. Wordlessly he handed Arthur his mug; to his credit, Arthur took it without criticism.

In fact, Arthur was watching him with an odd look on his face, which is when Eames realized it was probably strange that he hadn't replied to Arthur's dispassionate accounting of things.

"It's a family matter," Arthur said finally, taking a sip of his tea. "Usually it's a non-issue, but I'm afraid I can't set this one aside."

That's the crux of it, isn't it? Eames had always assumed that Arthur simply didn't have family, that he had lost it or walked away from it or somehow sprung fully formed into the driven, focused man Eames had worked with and occasionally fucked about with for so many years now. But now it was as though some curtain had been opened, revealed a new and interesting bit of Arthur that Eames had never *seen* before and thus was so bloody fascinating.

"I'd like to come with you," Eames said, and he was as surprised to have said it as Arthur was to have heard it.

"I--what?" Arthur asked, and his confusion was entirely justified; because while they've been more or less on and off and then on again for more time than Eames was perhaps comfortable with, they'd never been particularly keen on things such as emotions or personal histories or even a birthday e-card.

But Eames didn't doubt for a moment that Arthur could rattle off Eames' birthday as though it was his own, and there had always been the hint that there might be something more at play here than some truly stellar sex.

They had ignored it, until now, until Eames' curiosity and his rather too-quick mouth.

"I'd like to go with you," he said, meeting Arthur's eyes. "I'd like to meet your brother."

Arthur swallowed, looking as though he was going to deny, deny, deny that he was anything other than a demigod borne from some deity's thigh, but instead says, "Okay."

Eames raised an eyebrow. "Really, darling? I somehow expected more of a protest."

Arthur took another sip of his tea, licking at his lip to catch a stray drop. "Well, we'll see how you feel about pineapple on your pizza," he says, walking back towards the main room. "I'll book two seats for Honolulu tonight."

"Hawaii?" Eames said dumbly, still stirring the teaspoon in his mug. "You mean to say you're from *Hawaii*?"

Maude and Paolo barely noticed as they left the uniformly homogenous residence they were working out of in upstate New York, both too engrossed in their work to care much for what the extractors were doing. Arthur favored bringing them in because they required so little management; Eames because he couldn't think of anyone else who could carve out four weeks for the gig. They had worked together more than once and Arthur, of course, was right--they didn't require much beyond parameters and materials to get the job done.

They drove in Arthur's rented Accord to Albany, where Arthur had booked them on a thirteen-hour flight from Albany to Honolulu. Eames hadn't even known you could *get* direct flights from this corner of the world to the other, and hadn't quite prepared himself for so many hours in the air. After they'd gone through security, Eames abandoned Arthur in the terminal to hit Capital News and Gifts, buying an eye mask and earplugs and a neck pillow and several other things that would assist the alcohol in making this a pleasant trip.

Arthur eyed Eames' overlarge shopping bag from his seat at the gate. His legs were crossed nonchalantly, and he had a cup of coffee in one hand and the New York Times crossword half-filled out in the other. He looked appallingly calm for someone about to spend an entire waking day in a flying tin can.

"I felt underprepared," Eames said lamely, flopping next to Arthur and beginning to undo all the packaging of his many and varied items. Arthur pretended to ignore him, filling in "C-U-P-A-C-A-B-R-A" into tiny little boxes with a fancy ballpoint pen, the bastard, but Eames caught him looking more than once as Eames unveiled his [ultra-plush eye mask](#) and squished at the gel inside.

They boarded the plane, thankfully in First Class. Eames spared a grateful thanks to Arthur on behalf of his legs, knees, and other extended parts, and settled in. It wasn't as if he hadn't taken long flights before--

he of course had, and with some frequency. But he usually had more warning for it, to collect things to help him settle into the unpleasant feeling of enclosure for extended periods of time. He drummed his fingers on his chair's console and watched the airline attendant go through his safety routine, idly assessing the other passengers in the cabin. As the plane began to ascend from the tarmac, he looked over, and Arthur was [already asleep](#), the bastard, somehow bonelessly unconscious without even trying.

Eames took two flutes of champagne, one for him and one for Arthur--and now Eames--and settled in to watch some undoubtedly awful film about silly, pretty things refusing to be adults. He tried not to shift in his chair.

Eventually he did fall asleep, eye mask askew on on his face and rubbish airline blanket tangled in his legs. When he awoke again, they were apparently crossing over the brown expanse of California. Eames slowly removed his head from its uncomfortable angle resting against the swell of Arthur's right clavicle and looked out the window. It was the middle of the night; they were due to land some time in the evening in Honolulu. Going backwards in time was the most awful thing in the world.

Arthur absently brushed a hand over Eames' head, and Eames fixated on the slightly loosened half-windsor Arthur was sporting. Then his eyes swept upwards to meet Arthur's own, the tired, slight smile on his face and the hint that he'd been drinking evident on his breath.

Oh, Eames thought. *Oh, dear*.

He shifted upwards, pulling out of the ungainly sprawl he'd found himself in, stretching towards the ceiling and attempting to pop his back. The flight attendant, one of the three he'd flirted with shamelessly in the handful of hours he'd been awake, was there promptly asking if he'd like something to drink, or perhaps a snack? Eames ordered a scotch and soda and some crackers. When he turned to look again at Arthur, as if he was magnetised and Arthur was due north, Arthur had rested his chin on his lovely, pointy fingers and was watching him with something approaching amusement.

"You're too relaxed," Eames blurted out, desperately wishing he could slap a hand over his own mouth and keep from sounding more like a tosser.

Arthur only raised an eyebrow, and with his other hand, undid his top button.

Eames made a strangled noise and reached blindly for the drink that had, *thank the christ himself*, appeared at his fingertips.

"My father was in the Navy, and when I was growing up he was a Detective for the Honolulu Police Department," Arthur said, and Eames tried not to choke on his drink. "I have an older brother, Steve, and an older sister, Mary. Our surname is McGarrett--I guess I should get that out of the way now." He took a nonchalant sip from his gin and tonic.

In those handful of words Eames learned more about Arthur's family than he had in five years of semi-intentioned investigatory effort. Whatever they might say about Eames, Arthur had buckled down any hint of personal history from even the most thorough of checks.

"Ah," Eames said intelligently.

Arthur smiled again, a slight upward crook of his lovely mouth. "Steve, my brother who's in the hospital, went into Naval Intelligence. Mary--well, Mary does whatever the fuck she wants and it works for her most of the time." He swept his hands out as if to encompass all of himself. "And I became someone's forgotten dream."

"If your siblings are as terrifyingly competent as you, I despair of meeting them," Eames said with that disturbing streak of honesty that had plagued him in the last twenty-four hours. However, his lack of filter did make Arthur laugh, and Eames had learned long ago that he would debase himself in dismaying ways for the merest hint of Arthur's amusement.

Arthur's hand stole out to graze Eames' knee, and Eames started; but Arthur merely rearranged the several blankets Eames had somehow acquired so that they better covered the pair of them, knees tucked closely together. Arthur carefully threaded his arm around Eames' and clasped their hands together, and this time when he smiled Eames could feel his heart plummet to his heels and then rise once more, a crescendo of emotion and recognition that Eames had sworn off *for good* when Elizabeth Marten and then Benedict Caffyn had both broken his heart in rapid succession in primary school.

But there it was again, that feeling of helpless adoration for the slightest of things, overlaid upon Arthur as though Eames had not spent the better portion of his life ruthlessly tamping down any hint of such awful feelings.

Oh dear,, Eames thought wretchedly.

The last number of hours on the plane were spent somewhere between getting blindingly inebriated and sneaking sadly unsubtle glances at the line of Arthur's jaw. By the time they deplaned, Eames had only sobered up to the point where he could effectively pretend to be sober, and had clenched an unresponsive hand around Arthur's wrist as they made their way to the car rental desk.

Arthur, bless his argyle socks, did not appear to notice Eames' compromised state.

When they finally departed the Honolulu airport in the Accord identical to the one they left behind in New York, Eames had regained some sense of himself. At least, enough to keep him from latching on to Arthur like a desperate child. He rolled down the window as they drove. The air smelled like seawater and lemons, an altogether different smell from anywhere else he had ever been; and in this he was including the Indian subcontinent, which had a similar climate but an altogether different scent about it.

Arthur's hair had wilted in the weather, and he hadn't bothered to fix it; instead it was curling delightfully around his ears and his forehead. At some point in the last half-hour he had discarded his waistcoat, removed his tie, and unbuttoned a further three buttons of his well-tailored shirt, revealing the sloping hint of a collarbone and a blindingly white undershirt. Eames thought he might faint from the sight. Unbuttoning Arthur was often his favorite of pastimes; for Arthur to do it himself was welcome surprise. Welcome, and fucking gorgeous.

"You might look to your right," Arthur said, amusement evident in his voice. "It's kind of a pretty view."

Eames wrenched his eyes away from the sight of Arthur in a state of semi-relaxation and his breath caught at the sight of blue, blue waters. "How could you have ever left?" he asked rhetorically, himself a frequent resident of a coastline but knowing sheer natural paradise when he saw it.

Arthur snorted softly. "Given enough reasons, a person might move to Antarctica," he said, explaining everything and nothing at all.

Eames found himself staring again at Arthur's profile; when they rounded a corner, his eyes flickered down to Arthur's right arm, where he was still wearing his watch. Reaching tentative fingers outward, he landed them light on Arthur's forearm. When Arthur didn't flinch, only watched the road with the same focus to which he applied everything, Eames carefully undid the clasp of his watch and slid it off Arthur's hand. There was a tan line still visible, inexplicable from recent days spent in Munich and Jinan and Smethwick, but there nonetheless.

"Welcome home, Arthur," Eames said softly, and Arthur's hand reached for Eames' own.

They pulled up into the driveway of a large, comfortable house. No one else was there when they went inside, but there were signs of life--dishes in the sink, empty beer bottles on the counter, a stray pizza box. Arthur dropped his duffel on the floor and crossed the room to exit out a back door; Eames just took in the place.

It was difficult to imagine Arthur here, neat, lovely Arthur who seemed to be composed of right angles and pressed pants. The worn blankets covering the sofa, a haphazard pile of sandals by the door--it forced Eames to reassess his understanding of Arthur, changing from *preference* to, perhaps, *reaction*. Was it the older brother? Or mayhap the father that Arthur set himself against, creating an alternate persona unlike his origins. But even now Arthur didn't seem uncomfortable here. If he had made peace with it, whatever it was, it was some time ago.

Arthur returned minutes later from the porch with a displeased look upon his face. Eames kicked his own bag to the side and walked up to him, where he was looking at his phone in displeasure.

"What is it then, dear?" Eames asked, wanting to smudge his thumb across the space between Arthur's eyebrows.

"Steve just tried to AMA himself out of the hospital," Arthur said, with that slipshod balance between anger and worry that Eames had rarely ever heard directed towards anyone other than Cobb, and on one memorable occasion, himself. "Danny's sitting on him, but we should probably head over there now so I can deck him into submission."

"I see," said Eames, though he did nothing of the sort. "Who's this Danny, then?"

Arthur looked up, and his face cleared a bit. "He's the guy that made my idiot brother settle down," he said a little wryly, tucking his phone into his pocket and removing his cuff links to roll the sleeves of his shirt up his arms. Eames watched avidly, tamping down hunger. "Steve's never been the most...stable, let's say, of people. But--" and his face shuttered a bit, and Eames gave in to the impulse to place careful fingers on Arthur's forearm. To his gratification, Arthur covered Eames' hand with his own.

Arthur took a careful breath and said, "Our dad was murdered a couple of years ago. It was a guy Steve had been tracking in his work for Naval Intelligence--Hesse."

Eames sucked in a breath. He didn't wander into those circles, *ever*, not since he was a young, stupid boy with rocknrolla dreams. He didn't wander, but he did listen.

"Yeah. So he killed the old man out of sport, or for money, I'm not really sure. I never asked. Steve, the improbable jerk, was offered special dispensation from the Governor to hunt him down, and picked up Danny along the way. Danny was a detective for Honolulu PD--now he's Steve's partner on the state's special task force."

The way Arthur said the world made Eames think there was more to it than that, but it was hardly question time. "His keeper, then?"

Arthur's smile was a prize. "Something like that." His face dipped again and he unconsciously reached for his phone. "C'mon, we better go. Danny was already sounding a little crazy when I called."

Eames followed him back out to the car, taking one last glance at the house where Arthur had been a child. From there, to here. Eames had only rarely been caught so flat-footed; he couldn't wait to learn about what he'd been wrong on next.

The hospital was much the same as any of the dozen in which Eames had the unfortunate experience of residing.

They made their way up to the Critical Care Unit, and Eames waited patiently while Arthur had a quick word at the nurses' station. They were pointed to a room just down the hall, and as Arthur approached the tension returned to his stance. Eames hesitated a moment, and then swept his hand in a concerted gesture from Arthur's shoulder to the small of his back. Arthur turned his head and shot him a look--somewhat unreadable, between wary and fond. Eames pressed his hand more firmly, and Arthur stepped half an inch closer.

"I'm sure he's fine," Eames all but whispered, and Arthur snorted. "I know he's fine," he said, sounding frustrated. "I just--he's thirty-five years old. He can't keep fucking himself up like this and expecting to get out scot free."

Eames nodded, like he thought he ought to, but somewhere inside his mind was a traitorous little voice that said, *But darling, you get shot in the head for a living, are you truly one to talk after that awful job last year?*

And then, because this trip was hardly complete without Arthur once more cutting through whatever screens Eames thought he had put between his mind and his face, Arthur snapped, "What I do is *different*. I only get shot at in dreams. Steve runs into bullets in real fucking life, okay?"

Following that pronouncement, he stomped into one of the private rooms, leaving Eames to windmill in the corridor wondering if every bloody thing must be written on his face for damnable Arthur to see now.

He followed, of course. As if he wouldn't.

The tableau, when he entered the hotel room, was lifted from some classical triptych--the veritable Steve McGarrett in the center, with two pinch-faced angels on either side of his hotel bed. Eames hovered in the door frame, trying to decide what sort of tactic he should take with the brother of the man he had been sort-of besotted with for the past number of years.

As it turned out, he needn't have bothered trying to figure such things out. The sheer force of the elder McGarrett brother was enough to eradicate any plans for controlling the situation.

"You must be Eames," Steve said from the bed, eyes visibly narrowing even from several feet of distance. "Lemme ask you a question--Arthur says he's in 'information distribution.' On a scale of one to bullshit, how thoroughly should I investigate your background to figure out just what the fuck you're doing with my baby brother?"

"Steve!" Arthur hissed, dropping Steve's hand on the bed.

"Right--well--" Eames started, not entirely sure whether to head in the entirely opposite direction or commend Arthur for discovering such a elegantly neutral phrase for their particular brand of espionage.

"Okay," said a thundering voice from the gentleman on the left side of the bed, "let's just get this one straight right the fuck-all now. There will be no interrogating of boyfriends while in the hospital bed. There will be no threats of violence from the hospital bed. There will be no, and I repeat, *no*, stressful proclamations of *any fucking kind* from the hospital bed. So take a knee right now, McGarrett, before I tell Dr. Kealoha how that vein in your forehead is trying to form its own zip code."

"Danny," Steve protested, but a hand landed squarely in the center of his chest and pinned him gently to the bed.

"Nada," Danny said threateningly, and Arthur crossed his arms and *stuck out his fucking tongue* at his older brother. "Let's try this again," Danny continued. "How about a 'Hi, I'm Steve, Arthur's nosy overprotective brother, you must be the mysterious long-term boyfriend he uses to avoid coming home for Thanksgiving!'"

Steve and Arthur raised the same eyebrow, at the same time, at Danny.

"Now that's just eerie," Danny said.

"You have no idea," Eames said fervently. "Also, Arthur, how is you've never deigned to inform *me* that I'm your stock familial excuse?"

Arthur faltered for a moment, but rallied as he ran a hand through his hair. "You've stuck around the longest," he hedged. "And you're the only one I've mentioned more than once. Some people," he said, glaring at Steve, "infer too much."

"Oh, I think I've inferred *exactly the right amount*," Steve said, eyes squinting in some oddly McGarrett way in Arthur's general direction.

"I agree with your brother," Eames said before checking his own mouth, earning Arthur's full-on glare swinging in his direction.

"Ooo-kay," Danny said, waving his hands around in such a fashion as everyone was forced to turn towards him--if only to avoid being smacked in the face. "Not that this isn't a touching family reunion, but Arthur, how about we give you a minute to catch up with your brother. Eames, No-First-Name-I-Bet-You-Have-An-Interpol-Record, let's go get some coffee."

Torn a moment between staying near Arthur and rather wanting to escape the situation, Eames agreed only after Arthur had waved a hand at him in a dismissive manner and turned back towards his brother. Danny clapped a hand on his shoulder and led him from the room. "Now, as a courtesy I'm not going to try and fingerprint you in the cafeteria, but I gotta say, Steve will probably hunt you down if you hurt

Arthur, and he's already got a couple of manhunts on his plate. So let's make nice for ten minutes, and then you and the prodigal brother can get on your merry, possibly criminal way, sound good?"

Eames nodded. It seemed the thing to do.

In all truth, coffee with Danny wasn't so bad. They carefully avoided talking about anything having to do with work, and instead discussed ideal pizza toppings on a New York slice and the sad lack of proper schmear anywhere other than the Eastern seaboard. When they returned to the hotel room, Arthur was sitting in a chair by the bed, his hands steepled, and Steve was resting with his eyes closed and the lights lowered.

Arthur looked up when they returned and rose to meet them outside the door. "I don't think he's slept in the last twelve hours," he said, worry evident in his voice. "Danny, did you nail the shithead that did this? He's not going to rest until the guy's behind bars."

Danny made a face. "Chin and Kono are out pounding the pavement," he said like he wanted to apologize. "We won't be able to put anything concrete on him until we have a matching sketch for the BOLO, and the witness has been unconscious since she was attacked. We're up shit creek."

Arthur blew out a frustrated sigh. "Okay. I--we--can stay with him if you need to get back to Grace, or the department."

Danny shook his head. "Grace is with her mom this week, I get her next week. But--look, I need to be here as much as you do, but I'll make you a deal. If you can stay here until maybe the morning, I'll go home, get a shower, a couple of z's and then be back bright and early."

Arthur was already nodding. "You look like shit, Danny. Go home, we've got this."

Danny barked out a laugh. "Thanks, Arthur, you're real fucking kind." His eyes were smiling as he said it, though, something like relief showing in them. Eames stepped closer to Arthur, trying to provide a unified front. It said something, that Danny trusted Arthur even suspecting his more...questionable legal choices.

Eames knew how to turn a delicate phrase himself.

They sat there all night, betting M&M's over hands of poker in the half-light of the table lamp. Around midnight, Arthur slipped out of his shoes and slid his feet into Eames' lap, and Eames played one-handed. The other kneaded Arthur's feet until he was a boneless pile of well-tailored clothes on the other side of the cheap table that separated them. Finally, an hour or so later, Arthur's eyes started to slip closed. Eames gently took his poker hand from his lax fingers, checking momentarily to ascertain whether his count of Arthur's cards was correct or not (it of course was), and flicked off the light, settling back into his own chair.

The shadow from the car park's fluorescents cast a sallow glow over Arthur's sharp features, and Eames considered the man sitting across from him. Twenty-four hours ago, they stood in a nameless suburb in a sleepy town working in a field that perhaps fifty people in the world knew existed. Today, nearly everything he'd thought he'd known about this man had been turned out and replaced with new, far more interesting truths.

Eames had always thought of their "relationship," if one might even be inclined to so use the term, as something of a particularly vigorous and satisfying game of pigtail-pulling. He delighted in getting a rise out of Arthur; Arthur seemed to enjoy thwarting his attempts at familiarity and making Eames work harder than he otherwise tended to. Most of the time it ended in athletic, mutually enjoyable sex and the occasional amusing text message every few weeks.

But if Eames wasn't lying to himself--and no matter what he did to other people, he generally made a habit of truth-telling within the confines of his own consciousness--he would have to admit that he had put something of his heart in the bargain for a fair amount of time now.

Years, if he were being honest.

He had simply never thought, even in his most idle fantasies, that Arthur might *feel something in return*.

Eames shifted, ghosting a hand over Arthur's socked feet where they remained in his lap. Clearly there were emotions now. Something in him had prompted him to attend to Arthur on this journey; something in Arthur had allowed him to come. However they had gotten here, things had changed between them, and Eames had made the decision to see it through regardless of how it concluded.

Of course, he dearly hoped it concluded with them continuing on together in all things. These brief glimpses of this other Arthur, this younger brother and Navy brat and unbuttoned, un-waistcoated version of Arthur were far too personally destructive to ever return to their previous arrangement with any measure of satisfaction.

Eames let his eyes close on the sight of Arthur, mouth partly open, lovely swathe of skin barely visible from the opening in his finely striped shirt, and fell asleep with no dream to follow.

They didn't wake until Danny returned in the morning, shaking them awake warily as if he were somehow experienced with Arthur's little quirk of attempting to disarm people whilst half-asleep. Eames ran a hand blarily over his face, scraping stubble, and regretfully pushed Arthur's feet from his lap.

Danny looked better for his rest, freshly showered with a laptop bag strung over his shoulder. He picked up the coffee tray he had sensibly placed on the bed where Steve remained asleep and offered it to the pair of them. Arthur and Eames both took a cup gratefully.

"So now I get to tell you that you both look like shit, go home," Danny said without preamble, perching on the hospital bed and resting a hand on Steve's blanketed ankle.

Arthur snorted. "And you wonder why I don't come home for Thanksgiving."

Danny raised his eyebrows. "Arthur, I can safely say that I've never wondered *why* you didn't come home. I just got to see the results of your occasional visits, and let me tell you, Steve winding himself up chasing rumours from the other side of the world isn't exactly conducive to a restful night."

Eames watched Arthur groan softly and bury his head in his hands, soft strands of hair spilling over his fingers. He mumbled something that Eames strained to hear.

"I'm sorry, what was that, I don't speak the reprobate brother dialect," Danny said, cupping a hand around his ear comically.

Arthur raised his head, but spoke through his fingers. "I will come home this winter."

Danny smiled. It was a very satisfied smile. "Excellent. Now go home, get some sleep, get each other off, whatever. You're not allowed back in the hospital until evening visiting hours."

Arthur didn't protest; Eames was surprised, but shuffled them out of there, shaking Danny's hand and heading back to the car.

They got back to the house swiftly enough, and Eames trailed after Arthur's breadcrumbs of expensive menswear. A button-up, a sock, a belt, an a-shirt. He slipped out of his own things easily enough, and without a second's thought followed Arthur beneath the duvet, feeling Arthur's arms slide over him to be the larger spoon, and shut his eyes to the sound of waves crashing outside the window.

When Eames woke up again, a ruddy spear of late afternoon light cut through the window, lighting the room off the pale colour of the walls. Arthur wasn't there, and Eames slipped from the bed through the quiet house. The clothes had been removed from the corridor, and Eames spared a wistful thought for the entirely platonic show he received last night.

Well. Perhaps not *entirely* platonic.

In the kitchen, which seemed a natural place to gravitate towards, there was a pot of coffee made, some type of sugared doughnut next to the coffeemaker in a paper carton, and a single empty mug with a packet of English Breakfast resting atop it like a question. Eames smiled, finger reaching out to trace "E-N-G" but opting, ultimately, for the coffee.

He filled the mug and spooned sugar inside, wandering over to the kitchen table. It looked as though someone had been to visit while he was sleeping; as he recalled, the table had only featured an empty fruit bowl and a handful of nearly done candles. Now there were several stacks of files gracing its surface, a closed laptop and a rather expensive looking electronic reader resting on what seemed to be witness reports from the Honolulu Police Department.

Lacking anything else to do, and being a rather nosy man--for a living and a hobby--Eames sat down to read.

An hour, or easily more, passed by before there was a clattering from the back porch. Eames looked up from the file he was reviewing, peering through the not-quite-right reading glasses he had filched from aside table in the front room to witness a sight he would not easily forget.

Arthur entered, wearing a *wetsuit*, of all deeply thrilling things, peeled down over his lovely chest just shy of his belly button. Water lightly coursed from the loose tangle of hair he pushed from his eyes, running down the plane of his torso and forcing Eames to stare, pole-axed, at the sight of Arthur's hardened nipples, the dark trail of hair leading towards his very tight wetsuit, and the defined lines of his strong thighs.

The ankle closure of the wetsuit fell about two inches too short. Eames wanted to lick there. He thought he might hyperventilate instead.

Arthur, seemingly unaware of the devastating image he made, set his surfboard--his *surfboard*, my god, Eames would never be able to watch Point Break again without thinking of this moment--against the side of the house and shook out his hair on the other side of the door frame before stepping in.

"What's wrong?" he said, tilting his head to the side. "Also, you have powdered sugar all over your mouth. How many of those malasadas did you eat?"

Dumbly, Eames looked down at the carton of doughnuts to find that, in his absent exploration into the circumstances surrounding the elder McGarrett brother's traumatic accident, he had indeed eaten more than half of the things.

Damn. He usually had more self-control.

He looked up again, watching Arthur peel down his wetsuit to reveal equally tight swim trunks, and revised his opinion of his restraint.

"Darling, come here, I think I might ravish you against this table," Eames said thoughtfully, setting his papers aside.

Arthur snorted. "You're cute in those glasses, but you're not that cute," which was the most ungracious lie, as Eames could see *everything* in the swim trunks Arthur was all but poured into. Eames would clearly have to retain that newfound knowledge of Arthur's affection for eyewear for another time.

He rose, setting the glasses atop his papers, and caught Arthur's arm, turning him around and pushing him against the wall. "I suppose this wall will do," he said, fitting his mouth to Arthur's. Arthur's arms came around his shoulders, and Eames swept his hands up and down Arthur's wet back, coming to rest upon the swell of Arthur's ass. He smelled of the ocean and clean sweat, and that particular smell Eames had come to associate with his pillows in the morning after Arthur had left for another job. Arthur made a gratifyingly desperate sound against Eames, and Eames let out a hungry sigh as he attempted to lift Arthur upwards.

The scene was momentarily arrested by a small, pointed cough that sounded quite a bit like a laugh. Arthur froze and turned; Eames had little choice but to follow, as that's where Arthur's lips were, after all.

A very beautiful woman, largely nude but for a bikini that barely lived up to its name, was at the door where Arthur had been moments ago, haloed in the evening sunlight and smirking irrepressibly.

"If I had realized that wearing your high school wetsuit would get you molested, I would have made you wear one of Steve's," she said, placing her surfboard against the door atop Arthur's and resting her hands on her hips.

Arthur groaned. "He's a giant," which was true, Eames suspected anything of Steve's would look ridiculous on Arthur knowing him only from a bed. Arthur pushed Eames away, but in a manner that involved a quick grope. Eames didn't allow his hand to stray from Arthur's swimsuit until Arthur physically returned his hand to him with a warning glare. How ineffective.

"Kono, this is Eames," Arthur said, moving out of reach of Eames' hands. "Eames, this is Kono. She works with my brother."

"And he used to date my sister," she said with mischievous helpfulness.

"In *high school*," Arthur protested. "[Lena](#) and I dated in *high school*"

"Shall I make you my new best friend?" Eames said hopefully.

Kono laughed with her whole body. "Oh, I like him," she said to Arthur. "Maybe I'll dig up that prom picture of you and Lena."

Eames said "Yes!" just as Arthur shouted "No!"

Arthur rolled his eyes and wiped his feet on the mat before crossing the room to collect his phone. He had a message--Eames had heard it beep while he had been reading--and brought it up to his ear to listen.

"You know, you're not as mysterious as I thought you'd be," Kono said as she toweled out her hair and sprayed off her feet using the hose on the porch.

Eames leaned against the wall where he had just pressed Arthur and lifted a shoulder. "I suppose it's hard to be mysterious whilst wearing house clothes," he said.

She grinned. She really was quite lovely. "Yeah, that's true," she said. "But I mean--I've known Arthur since we were kids. He's been back, like, a few times since I started working with his brother, and any time someone asked him about what he was doing he'd say something like, 'Oh, I'm meeting someone for a job, gotta go,' or 'I need to get back to someone, catch you later Steve.'" She eyed him critically. "And yours was the only name he mentioned more than once. So yeah, mysterious, but not as mysterious as I thought."

Kono pulled on a long pair of shorts and threaded a shirt over her head. Eames ran a hand through his hair and let his eyes fall on Arthur, who was furiously thumbing something into his phone.

"He was just as opaque about his life here," Eames offered finally. "I didn't even know he had siblings until his brother was in hospital."

Kono's smile was lopsided. "Yeah, well. It's understandable. The McGarrett family is pretty fucked up. Arthur was the only point of contact between Steve and their sister Mary for, like, years. And Arthur wasn't exactly phoning home every week."

Eames followed her to the kitchen; Arthur disappeared into the room they had slept in the night before, and Eames let his eyes stray to his lovely backside before turning back to Kono, who held out a Kona Longboard lager with a knowing grin. Eames most definitely did not blush, and tried for a leer instead; from her look, it didn't work terribly well.

They sat in the living room, Kono curling into the sofa and Eames sitting on the lounge. He took a long pull--it wasn't bad. In fact it was rather similar to the light lagers from India he'd had when he lived more regularly in Mombasa.

"Mrs. McGarrett died in a car accident when they were all kids," Kono continued, and Eames blinked away his surprise.

"Both parents?" he said. "That's..."

Kono rested her head on her hand. "Yeah. They haven't exactly had it easy, you know? Mr. McGarrett shipped them all off to the mainland like a month after. Steve was sent to some uncle on the East coast, and Mary and Arthur were with their grandmother in California. And then Arthur came back here after Mary turned eighteen and ran off. He was just a kid when it all happened, and came back to live with Mr. McGarrett for like four years before he took off for the mainland too." She shook her head a little, drinking her beer.

"What--well. I don't suppose you know what he did next," Eames asked, hurting a bit that he'd never know these essential parts of Arthur, eager to know as much as this woman might tell him.

"Nope. No one does, not even Steve. And Steve was a dick for a really long time, too. I mean, I didn't really know him then, but he joined the Navy like their dad and didn't come back to Hawaii until their dad was murdered. Mary didn't come back for the funeral, and Arthur did, but he didn't talk to anyone, just stayed for the funeral and the burial and then took off again. And then Mary came back. I think--and I'm just guessing, because I don't really know--but I think Arthur told her everything that happened, and convinced her to come back." Kono's eyes scanned around the room, like she was remembering the last couple of years in a handful of moments. "So Mary and Steve finally talked again, and Steve started reaching out to Arthur. Arthur started coming back once or twice, and they all figured some shit out, but..."

"Some things are still broken," Eames finished.

She smiled sadly. "And how, man."

They sat quietly for a moment before Arthur returned from the guest room. He was wearing board shorts and a loose fitting t-shirt, and if Eames had thought the wetsuit was the most wonderful thing he might see today he was clearly mistaken. He opened his mouth to comment on it, and the clear lack of styling product in Arthur's lovely hair, but stopped when he saw the displeased turn of Arthur's mouth. "What is it?" he said instead.

"Danny called earlier, said Steve was cleared from immediate head trauma," he said. "But I just called back and Steve is trying to AMA himself *again*, even though Dr. Kealoha wants to keep him another forty-eight hours for observation for internal bleeding."

Kono started cursing. "That fucker, he fell off a construction rig from sixty feet and hit a steel shipping crate! He broke three ribs!"

Arthur threw up his hands. "I know! We have to get back over there, Eames, I don't think Danny can keep him there by himself."

Eames nodded. "Of course. Shall I go start the car?"

"Yeah," Arthur said. "Let me just put on some shoes." He slid a pair of flip flops onto his feet, just slightly too large for him, and Eames was distracted for a moment by the visible presence of Arthur's toes in footwear.

"Eames!" Arthur said sharply. "Car! Go now!"

"Yes dear," Eames said automatically. "And I know it's not the time, but I just thought I should inform you that this is the longest we've ever been in the same place without having sex. In case you should like to rectify that later."

"Car!" Arthur bellowed, but Eames could see that some of the tension in his shoulders had minutely relaxed. Which was of course his purpose; that, and prompting the idea of another sort of stress relief. He was only human, after all, and Arthur's *toes*.

He grabbed a pair of trousers from his bag, still by the door, and fumbled the key into the ignition, turning it over. As the car hummed, he shucked off his pyjama bottoms and drew on the trousers, running a hand over his plain shirt and another hand through his fickle hair. It wasn't at all neat, but it would do, he supposed.

The sun was setting before him as Kono and Arthur left the house, Arthur locking the door behind him. Kono's arms were full of papers, and Eames opened the door of her car for her. "Oh, by the way," Eames said, "I just thought you should know that one of the witness statements reported seeing a gentleman dumping a wrench in a barrel near the construction site where Steve fell. She wasn't very detailed, but it was a white man in his mid-thirties that sounded an awful lot like the George Harris fellow described in the file about the Portomento smuggling ring, including the bit about him missing a pinkie finger."

Kono stared at him, mouth slightly ajar. "You--you read the witness reports? And my files?"

Eames shrugged. "Well, you were gone for over an hour," he said apologetically.

"I--but--wait, *George Harris*?" she blurted, looking as though her mind were turning furiously.

"Yes, as I said, according to your file he's the primary shipping--"

"--contact for the Pacific Rim, yeah, I know, but we thought he'd been deported back to--listen, I have to go," she said hurriedly, slamming the door of her car and running around to the driver's side.

"Eames! Stop bothering Kono, let's go!" Arthur said sharply from the car.

"Right, coming, darling," Eames said, waving at Kono as she peeled out of the driveway and down the private road. He got into the car and smiled at Arthur, who was raising his "not amused" eyebrow at Eames. "I think I just helped in police work, Arthur. I feel a bit dirty to be on this side of the law."

Arthur rolled his eyes and backed out of the drive.

At the hospital for the second day in a row, not much had changed. Danny looked once more tired and pinched, his tie loose around his neck, slumped in a chair by Steve's bed. Steve was watching the television with a mutinous look on his face.

"You tried to AMA *again*?" Arthur said severely, without preamble.

Danny snorted, one hand thrown over his eyes. "Yeah. While I was out in the hall talking to Chin, the fucker unhooked himself from the machines and tried to hobble out the door in his patient gown."

Steve's face tightened further, and he shifted in what looked to be a painful fashion in his bed. "I'm fine," he insisted.

"You are not fine!" Arthur shouted. "You are the antithesis of fine! Just because they said that you probably don't have brain damage does not mean you are fine!"

"And I for one am not convinced that they're right," Danny said, coming to rest his elbows on his knees, "because you're pretty goddamned brain damaged to me."

"Steve," Arthur said, and something in his voice sounded like the edge of a broken mirror, sharp and just this side of shattering. "Please, please, I am asking you as one of my two remaining family members on this planet, please stay in this fucking hospital bed until the doctor clears you to go. Please."

Eames caught his breath. He was witnessing something he wasn't sure he had a right to see. But Arthur had been so open about everything else, as if all the shutters he'd put to his life in their line of work had fallen away, that Eames thought perhaps Arthur was letting Eames see him like this so he'd understand what he was getting into. So he'd know if he wanted to stick around.

Eames stepped closer, put his hand in the small of Arthur's back. Arthur was shaking with tension, a painful scowl on his face, gaze not wavering from his brother. Steve, for his part, ran through a dozen different minute variations of the same scowl as Arthur's but finally he fell back, looking defeated.

"All right," he said hollowly.

Arthur sagged a little, but immediately rallied himself. He reached a hand back, taking Eames' into his own. "Thank you," he said. "I really don't want to get another phone call saying you're trying to stage an escape. My life is stressful enough as it is."

Steve made a small, protesting noise, eyes firmly affixed to the television above their heads.

Arthur sighed. "Fine. Be a bitch about it, don't talk to me, I don't care. Just don't fucking move." He turned and went out into the hall, tugging Eames along with him.

They walked in silence down the hall, hand in hand like children, until they reached the end of the hall where the vending machines were placed. Arthur stopped, turning to maneuver Eames against the wall, bringing their linked hands up between them. He fitted himself against Eames, listing slightly so that he fell beneath Eames' chin, and Eames let his other hand curve around Arthur's shoulders. He made some soothing noises, just a soft rumble of nonsense as Arthur breathed harshly against him for several minutes.

"I heard Kono tell you about my dad," Arthur said finally, and Eames fought not to tense up, sweeping a calming hand up and down Arthur's spine. "It's okay, it's easier that she told you instead of me. It all pretty much sucked, for a long time. I was the youngest, and when our grandmother died there was nowhere for me to go except back home."

"To your dad," Eames said. He felt Arthur nod against his chest.

"He was never the same after Mom died," Arthur said. "I don't remember it that well, I was only a kid when the car accident happened, but I know how it felt. And then he sent us all away, and became something...broken. More broken, by himself for all those years. He didn't know what to do with me when I came back, so he worked all the time, and I just tried to get through high school and get out of there. When you're a teenager, and you're stuck in a situation like that--the only thing I ever wanted was to be nothing like him."

"And did you succeed?" Eames asked into the fine hair of Arthur's temple.

Arthur snorted. "More than I could have ever dreamed."

Eames waited a moment, and then asked, "Do you regret it?"

Arthur's fingers tightened on Eames' own, but said, "No. Or, not really. I don't regret the life I made. What we do--there's nothing like it in the world. Nothing. It's better than anything else I could have done. But...I wish I'd been there for Mary. And I wish I hadn't resented Steve for so long, for not being there, for going to the Naval Academy and never coming back. I get it now, but I didn't for a long time. It felt like our dad

had pushed us away, and that Steve pretended we didn't exist. When Mary went to Chicago, I was by myself at fourteen with a parent who couldn't look at me in the eyes. It was impossible not to be angry."

Eames made a noise of assent.

Arthur pushed back, looking Eames in the eye. Arthur's own eyes were red, but not wet, and Eames felt something in him give way at this Arthur, Arthur who was telling him every truth he'd ever had and trusting Eames with them all. He rubbed his thumb across Arthur's palm, watching each inhalation and exhalation Arthur made and trying not to shake with the gravity of it all.

"But you know," Arthur said, his voice steady, "if all of that hadn't happened, if I hadn't left for the mainland at eighteen and gone to Brown, if I hadn't taken a semester in Paris and became Miles Bonnefort's student, if I hadn't met Mal and her fiance and if I hadn't learned how to build worlds in the space of a thought, I never would have met you. So I don't think I can regret it, you see."

"I don't know, darling," Eames said roughly, their hands gripped between them. "I think we might've found a way."

Arthur's smile was small, but with a fiercely defiant edge to it. "Mr. Eames," he said softly, looking nothing like the man Eames had fallen in love with, but everything like the man Eames knew him to be, "I think you should know that I'm in love with you. I have been, for some time."

"Arthur," he said, and reeled Arthur in close, snogging him within an inch of his life and not caring if they were visible from the nurse's station.

Arthur went pliant against him, and Eames--who thought he had been very good at not fucking Arthur against whatever available surface was present over the last two days--mentally cursed everything about this situation that was not a bed, or at the very least a private toilet. He wanted to unpeel Arthur from his clothes, from his words, from everything that was not Arthur panting messily at his skin.

"Please do not make me arrest you for public indecency," Danny said pleadingly. Arthur and Eames broke apart. Danny was standing in the hallway, a dollar bill in one waving hand and the other clamped firmly over his eyes.

"I would really like this whole business of interruptions to stop," Eames said seriously to Arthur, fingers unable to leave the flushed column of his throat where it made Arthur shiver pleasantly to his touch.

"Give us a minute, Danny," Arthur said, swiping the note from Danny's hand. "I'll get you a soda, okay?"

"Dr. Pepper, please," Danny said, hand not leaving his eyes until he had about-faced, double-timing it down the corridor, tie flapping over his shoulder.

Arthur grinning, and then laughed, pressing Eames back into the wall and resting his forehead against Eames shoulder.

When they returned, a bit more put together and with Danny's soda in hand, not much had changed. Steve had angled himself awkwardly on the bed, body directed away from Danny, and Danny was staring blankly at the television, looking lost inside his own head. Eames handed him the can, which he took absently, cracking it open but not drinking from it.

"Danny, do you want to go home? Eames and I can stay tonight," Arthur said gently, hands resting in the pockets of his shorts.

Danny's eyes flickered over automatically to Steve's mulish form on the bed and his eyes tightened.

"Yeah. I'll go back to the house, come back in the morning. Call me if he does anything stupid."

Arthur raised an eyebrow, and Danny shook his head ruefully. "You're right, that was a dumb thing to say. Look, I'm going to go meet Gracie and Rachel for dinner, but after that I'll be back at the house. The doctor is supposed to come in for rounds or whatever at like nine a.m. I don't know if you want to stick around for that or not but he's supposed to get another CT really early before that. He's gonna be grumpy, and they're not letting him have caffeine, so just be prepared."

"Stop talking about me like I'm not in the room," Steve said angrily, punching the pillow and letting out an awful chesty cough.

"I'll stop talking about you when you start acting like the adult I know you are, somewhere deep down inside," Danny retorted. "God, you're worse than Grace when she's sick."

Steve didn't say anything, and Arthur clapped Danny on the shoulder as he left.

"Do you need anything?" Arthur asked Steve, but Steve wouldn't answer him. Arthur shook his head, and he and Eames took up the same places they'd occupied the night before. Eames started to shuffle the cards, and they went back into playing poker like no time had passed at all. Well. This time Arthur was playing footsie with him under the table, his agile, newly-revealed feet doing their best to wind Eames up.

Not that it took much, really.

"You were in Seville last year," Steve said suddenly from the bed. Eames looked over, but Steve wasn't watching them, just staring at the ceiling.

"Good to know your confidential informants are living up to their paychecks," Arthur replied mildly, dropping a card and taking another.

"You were working out of a office building in la Negrilla," Steve continued in a monotone, as if he were reciting facts from a report. "There were two others on your team, and you did prep for ten days before making a move, but then you disappeared and there were no corroborating reports to indicate anything happened."

"Perhaps that means I completed my job successfully," Arthur said.

"Arthur," Steve said, and his voice sounded strained, "what do you *do*, on these jobs? I've never figured it out. You don't steal art, or things; you don't work for any of the crime syndicates, you don't sell anything on the open market. I've been tracking you for years, I know you're doing something shady, but I can't figure it the fuck out!"

"Someone might take that as a hint to stop looking, then," and Arthur sounded less mild, more agitated with a side of constipation. Eames reached one hand down and clasped Arthur's ankle, pulling it up to rest on his own knee, rubbing the skin there soothingly.

"Stop feeling up my brother in front of me," Steve complained.

"No," Eames said, setting down his cards to shuffle the deck one-handed. Steve made a disbelieving noise.

That made Arthur smile. "Steve, we've had this conversation or variations on it every time I've seen you in the last two years. Stop asking. I'm not going to tell you what I do. You wouldn't like it if I did."

"Fuck you," Steve said harshly.

"No, big brother, fuck *you*," Arthur said with a little heat. "I don't have to explain shit to you. Just because I didn't go into the Navy to become some perfect military drone doesn't mean my choices weren't right for me."

"You don't explain anything to me!" Steve roared, and immediately started coughing wetly, wracking his body against the bed.

"Fuck, Steve!" Arthur said frantically, rising from his chair to press Steve back into the bed. "Eames, go get the nurse--"

"On it," Eames said grimly, running out into the hallway and grabbing the first uniform-clad person he could find. The room was soon flooded with people, and as they took over, Eames collected Arthur and they huddled in a corner, watching them swarm Steve who had gone pale with exertion.

"I shouldn't have let him get riled up, fuck, I should have just shut the fuck up, why did I do that, god, if something happens--" Arthur babbled, hands latched on Eames' forearm.

"He's going to be fine, he's as stubborn as you, isn't he?" Eames said, keeping him close.

Arthur looked up at him, eyes wild. "He's such a bastard but he's my *brother*,, Eames."

"I know," Eames said. "I know, Arthur. He'll be fine."

An hour later, after they'd been directed to a nearby waiting room, one of the doctors came to fetch them. "He's been sedated," she said, pushing her hair out of her eyes, "and he's ruptured the stitches on his torso, but we've ruled out a punctured lung, so if he can get some rest he should be fine for now."

"Thank you," Eames said for the both of them, and led an unresisting Arthur back to the room. Steve was asleep, and Arthur drifted over to the side of the bed, resting a careful hand on Steve's leg. "You have to get better, you asshole," he whispered. "Stop doing this to me, to other people. You don't have to know everything to care about someone. Sometimes you just have to have faith in them."

Eames leaned against the door and crossed his arms, watching the bowed line of Arthur's back in the half-light.

"I love you too," he said.

"I know you do," Arthur replied, and when he turned his face was wet.

They did finally get some sleep, dragging the loveseat from the waiting room into Steve's room. Eames flirted with the nurse, and he looked the other way, even brought them a couple of pillows. It was comically uncomfortable and it took ages for them both to settle, but finally they did, Eames curling Arthur close by virtue of his broader body.

An attendant woke them around six, preparing Steve to go down to the CT machine, and Steve was groggy but aware of what was going on.

"We'll be here when you get back," Arthur promised him, clutching his hand for a moment.

"Don't make me deport your boyfriend," Steve slurred, with some attempt at a smile, and Arthur smiled back.

"What makes you think you could?" he said as they wheeled Steve out of the room. Arthur returned to Eames, sitting next to him and resting against Eames' side.

"I don't think I could have done this alone," Arthur said into the otherwise empty room.

"You could do anything, Arthur," Eames said, a bit groggily, and he might've said more embarrassingly flattering things were it not for a stern-faced, decidedly fit man brandishing a paper bag at the door.

"Guess I hit the wrong time for breakfast, huh?" the man said. He wore a garish, tropically themed shirt. Eames very much wanted to know where he purchased it from.

"Chin," Arthur said warmly. "Hi, man, how's it going? It's been awhile."

"It has, kanaka," Chin said, holding out his hand for Arthur to shake. "Your bro's been a little hardheaded, I hear?"

Arthur snorted. "You don't know the half of it." He turned to face Eames, and then glanced back at Chin. "This is my, um. My person. Eames."

Eames held out his hand. Chin had a strong grip, one Eames usually associated with law enforcement officers. He knew it well, from the times he had pretended to be one. "Pleasure."

"Likewise," Chin said, looking him up and down. "So the local picked a malihini, huh? Saw that one coming, man."

Arthur sighed, a little dramatically. "C'mon, don't give me a hard time, Chin. What did you get for breakfast?"

Chin shook the bag. "Breakfast burritos, Artie. Steve's favorite. Hospital food is shitty."

"Artie?" Eames asked disbelievingly, as they moved to the small table in the hospital room.

"Something no one is ever allowed to call me, ever," Arthur said, a constipated look on his face. "Chin used to work with my dad. He knew me when I was a kid. So he gets one pass," Arthur said, glaring at Chin when he handed him a burrito.

Chin held up his hands defensively. "Sorry, just trying to keep the memories alive," he said, grinning wide.

"Those memories can rot," Arthur informed him. "It's Arthur. Which you know perfectly well. Also, I know how to disable a man with a paperclip."

Chin just laughed. "I'm sure you do, little brah."

"Stop calling me little."

"No chance."

"This burrito is pretty good," Eames said, trying to switch the track of the conversation. He wasn't quite sure when his default response had switched from using information such as that to tease Arthur within an inch of his life (not that he wasn't inclined to save it for future use) to protecting him in whatever manner he required, but apparently such was the case.

Arthur threaded his foot around Eames' ankle; Eames suspected he was perilously close to developing a fetish. Chin talked about the place he'd acquired the burrito, the people who ran it, their family history and their apparently incestuous relationship with his own family. They carried on with meaningless small talk for the better part of an hour, until finally Steve was rolled back into his room, looking no worse for wear and awake in his bed.

"Chin," he said, holding out his IV'ed arm for Chin to bump his fist.

"Boss," Chin said, dragging a chair to sit by Steve's bed.

"Did you find Harris?" Steve asked trying very much to look alert even as he clearly needed to go back to sleep.

"We found his car," Chin said, "but the bastard is pretty squirrely, it looks like he was down by the port--"

"Arthur," Eames murmured, "shall we go get a coffee? It is rather early."

Arthur tracked away from the two men discussing things that were none of their concern, and set on Eames. "Yeah," he said. "Okay."

The hospital commissary was slightly busy, but they had no trouble acquiring coffees and settling in to one of the booths by a window. The sun was beginning to fill the room, and Eames watched the light play across Arthur's face as he pushed his hair from his eyes for the dozenth time.

"I bet, right now, you're missing your hair gel," Eames said, smiling slightly at Arthur.

Arthur's hand stopped midway through pushing it back. "You have no idea," he confessed, shaking his head a bit. "But the last time I was here the first two days were spent making fun of me for my hair, my clothes, my shoes, and my T. Anthony luggage, so this time I just gave up as soon as we set foot on the island."

Eames laughed. "Darling, you gave up earlier than that."

Arthur quirked an eyebrow.

"Don't you recall the button you undid on the plane?" Eames said, finger tracing the rim of his paper cup. "I was very nearly undone myself by the sight."

Arthur's smirk turned into full-board laughter, which resulted in his hair falling once more into his face. "You're so easy," he teased. "I bet you almost fainted when you saw my ankle."

"Victorian prudery is your fetish, dearest, not mine," Eames said in a blatant lie.

"I can't imagine what you think of me now," Arthur said slyly. "All undone, casual clothes, unsocked feet and all."

"You have no idea," Eames said fervently.

"I do," Arthur said, his tone turning slightly serious. "Eames, god, I do. I--fuck, I want you when you *breathe* at me, you have to believe me, I just. I can't. Right now."

"Hey," Eames said. "Arthur. This," he waved his hands between them, "is something we've managed to make work for years. I can wait until it's appropriate. I've waited longer before."

"I want to suck your cock," Arthur said softly. "I was thinking about it on the plane. I really want, I want you to fuck my face. I never told you that, but I want it, I think about it when I don't see you for months."

"Arthur," Eames said helplessly, "I can wait unless you *talk dirty to me in a hospital refectory*."

Arthur, of course, did not look at all repentant. "I also want to fuck you until you can't walk," he informed Eames in a hushed tone. "Remember that time in Bogotá? I want it like that again, where you come just from me fucking you, and then we make out for an hour and then I fuck you again until you're all loose and messy and can't say anything but my name and 'please' and you fall apart."

Eames made a strangled noise. "*Arthur*," he said urgently, "will you kindly shut the fuck up!"

Arthur's eyes had glazed over a little but he snapped back at Eames' tone. "Um," he said, one hand dipping below the rim of the table where Eames' hand already was, squeezing the life out of his cock, "sorry. I mean. You're right, this the longest we've ever been in the same place without having sex."

"Why don't you ever listen to me," Eames agreed, trying to ignore the flush on Arthur's neck that surely mirrored his own.

"I'm usually thinking about fucking your mouth so you'll shut up," Arthur said apologetically.

Eames dropped his head to the table and concentrated on breathing steadily.

Somehow they made it out of the refectory without causing impromptu pornography. Arthur disappeared for a moment and returned with a leer and a shave ice. "It'll cool you down," he promised, but that was so clearly, farcically untrue.

Eames ate it all anyway.

Back on the ICU floor, where their little crowd of McGarrett supporters were breaking hospital visiting rules right and left (Eames suspected that was something of a theme), Chin stood leaning on the nurses' station, talking with a woman who was clearly a doctor at the hospital, but not Steve's doctor. He looked up when he saw them and put his hand on the woman's forearm, pausing their conversation.

"Hey guys," Chin said, "Steve fell asleep, and I figured he could use it. He's been fighting pretty hard the last few days."

Arthur frowned. "You have no idea," he said, and Chin smiled a little.

"I really do," he said, and came up to throw an arm around Arthur's shoulders. To Eames' surprise--for Arthur was never much for physical affection, and then (barring yesterday's episode in the corridor) rarely in public--Arthur took it with grace, hooking his own arm around Chin's shoulders. "Listen, I know it's hard. But your brother has changed a lot in the last couple of years. He's gotten--well, he cares about things he'd fucked up before. And he sees that, which for Steve is a pretty big deal."

Arthur looked down at the floor, and Eames followed his line of sight: Arthur's toes curled into the soles of his flip-flops, a surprisingly young motion. Eames wondered if Arthur ever did that in his wing-tips, in his oxfords, where no one could see the vulnerability. And what did it say about being here, with this extended, exasperating family he'd tucked away like a well-read note, that he would let others see and take notice?

"He's still a bastard," Arthur said finally, and Chin laughed and clapped him on the back.

"I never said he wasn't, little brah. I'm just saying, give the man a break. He's finally realized he has emotions, and the Navy really didn't prepare him for that." They shook hands, and Eames did as well. Arthur leaned against the wall next to Steve's room, crossing his arms, and Eames moved next to him.

"Family friend, Chin, yeah?" Eames asked, rolling up the sleeves of his shirt he'd grabbed from the car that morning and unbuttoning another button. The floor was a bit stifling, not that Arthur had noticed, the half-dressed thing.

"One of the closest," Arthur said. "He stuck with my dad after my mom died, and when I came back home for high school he was the one that got me to go out for soccer. He kept on me a lot of the time, about my grades and stuff for college. I mean, I was pretty determined to get back to the mainland either way, but Chin's probably the reason I went to Brown instead of UCLA."

"Good man," Eames said.

Arthur's mouth turned down. "Yeah, well. He was a good cop, too, and he got burned by the brass for shit he didn't do. I'll give my dad this--he stuck with Chin, too, when shit went down with him. A lot of the HPD wouldn't get within a hundred feet of Chin after he got pushed out of the department, but my dad had him over for dinner every week, took him fishing, made him apply for jobs. I was gone by then, but Chin emailed me a couple of times and let me know what was going on. My dad was a shitty father, but he was a good friend."

Eames paused. "Could've been worse," he said finally. "You could've been raised by clown people."

Arthur gave him a look that conveyed exactly what he thought of Eames' attempt at levity, and pushed off the wall, ducking back into Steve's room. Eames followed.

Steve was passed out, bed raised and mouth hanging open. His arm was limp against his side, and Eames noted the nicely efficient job that had been done with his IV. Arthur went to the table and rummaged through his bag, pulling out his Kindle and the day's New York Times, which had cost a small fortune to purchase at the gift shop. He handed the Kindle to Eames, murmuring, "I put [*The Shadow of the Wind*](#) on there for you. I noticed you were reading it, but you forgot to bring it."

Eames took the thing from him, looking up at Arthur from the seat he'd taken on their shared uncomfortable loveseat. Arthur smiled, and Eames took his hand when he made to pull back. Instead, he tugged Arthur down to sit next to him, feeling every bit like the sort of teenager he never was.

"Arthur," he said on no more than an exhalation, "why did we never do this before?"

Arthur folded his hand into Eames' own and crossed his feet at his ankles. "I never thought you wanted this before."

"How wrong you were," Eames said.

"How wrong I was," Arthur echoed. "In the kitchen a couple of days ago--that was the first time you'd ever asked. I know you looked, I have traces and my own informants and a few red herrings thrown into my background for good measure. But you never asked me about my life, or my family, so I figured we were just...enjoying each other's company a few times a year." Arthur smiled, showing off the dimples so well hidden on the job.

"You never asked me about mine, darling. There's always a line in this business, and that was it," Eames said, not troubled, exactly, but wondering how he might've missed this simplest of keys to the most recalcitrant of doors.

"As you say," Arthur said, "there's a line."

"So whereas I thought we were pulling pigtails," Eames mused, "we were actually playing chicken. How very droll."

Arthur ducked closer, and in the flushed shell of Eames' ear, he whispered, "And you blinked first."

"You bastard," Eames breathed back.

Arthur smirked. "I guess it's a family trait."

Eames pinched his side and laughed silently as Arthur tried to wrestle out of Eames' very firmly planted arm.

They settled down to read, and around eight-thirty Danny returned, his daughter in tow. She was a young thing--Eames pinned her at around ten--and had a finger threaded through one of the loops on Danny's trousers, as if she felt too old to hold his hand but not quite old enough to let go yet. To his credit, Danny didn't seem to notice, just walked in step with her into the room. She had some kind of fierce defensive look on her face, and it reminded Eames of Philippa, for just a moment, at Mal's funeral standing a few feet away from her coffin.

"Go on," Danny said softly, and she darted from his side to climb up next to Steve on the bed.

"How's Grace doing?" Arthur asked, muted.

"Not great," Danny said. "Hi, good morning, how are ya, did Steve try to muscle his way out of incarceration again? No? Good. Yeah, Gracie's not doing so hot with having her Step-Steve end up in the hospital. Would you know, despite all odds to the contrary, only Kono has ended up doing serious time here? And even then she was in and out in less than forty-eight hours." He looked grim, like a father who'd had to have more than one iteration of the same difficult conversation.

Eames looked over at Grace, who had rested her head very carefully on Steve's chest. Steve was coming awake now, and he rested a hand on top of her head. "Hey monkey," he said hoarsely. Arthur untucked himself from Eames' side and murmured, "Ice chips," before slipping out of the room.

"Are you okay?" Grace asked carefully.

Steve looked down at her. "No," he said, and Eames gave him points for being honest. He'd always hated when adults lied to children, or tried to smooth things over. Better to give the truth than to sustain a lie. "But I will be."

Arthur returned with a plastic cup, and Danny took it from him, crossing to the other side of Steve's bed and holding it out to him. Steve and Grace were in quiet conversation, Grace inching her way up Steve's bed until she had draped herself lightly on top of him. Steve was supporting her with his arm, and Danny was running a hand up and down her back.

"Kid from his first marriage," Arthur murmured to Eames. "It's why he moved here, followed her for custody."

"She seems like a sweet girl," Eames said.

Arthur smiled. "She is. I'm surprised Danny didn't bring her in earlier--she's kryptonite for Steve."

Eames snorted. Danny returned and said, "Listen, you guys can head home if you want, I'm just gonna drop Grace off at school and then I'm going to be back in here for most of the day getting through paperwork. But listen, Arthur, I know we haven't seen much of each other doing shifts here, but I wanted to let you know I'm bringing Grace home tonight. Rachel said she hasn't been sleeping well since Steve's been here, and we figured it might get her through the night to be at the house."

"Of course," Arthur said. "No problem. We'll probably be back here tonight anyway."

Danny looked relieved. "Great, excellent, glad to hear it."

Arthur stood again and went to the foot of Steve's bed. "Listen, we're going to take off," he said, placing a hand on Steve's blanketed foot. Steve nodded, arm still keeping Grace tucked into his side.

"Can you water the hydrangeas?" he asked. "Mrs. Kim usually does it, but they're on vacation right now."

Arthur grinned, transforming his face in a moment. "Gardening, huh?" he said. "Never would've pegged you for it."

Steve rolled his eyes, but he smiled back. "They were mom's," he said. "She always liked them on the front of they house."

Arthur nodded. "I'll water them for you."

"Thanks," Steve said.

"Bye, Arthur," Grace said, muffled a bit.

"Bye Grace. Say good bye, Eames."

"Goodbye, Eames," Eames said automatically, and was rewarded with a little giggle. He waggled his fingers at her for good measure, and she waggled hers back.

They went back to the house, and every mile seemed to convey more exhaustion on the pair of them. This time, Arthur took care to point out Grace's room, and Steve and Danny's room, before they both collapsed into bed. Arthur tugged Eames to his chest, fitting his leg between Eames' own, and the last thing Eames thought before he fell asleep was, "I wonder what Arthur wants," but the thought was too big to answer.

Eames awoke alone again, knowing this time a bit of what to expect. He took his coffee, filched the glasses from the living room, and took Arthur's kindle out into the back garden, sitting in a wicker chair and setting his feet on the matching table. He read *Zafón* in the waning light, occasionally glancing up to see if Arthur had made it back to shore, but it was easy enough to get engrossed in his book. The story reminded him of a dream he'd been in once, for a client who had been a wealthy older gentleman wanting to relive his memory of youth. It had been a sepia-toned world they'd built for him, inviting his sleeping self to wander through a maze of half-real experiences that a man of twenty-five would be eager for. When he woke--Eames recalled his name was Bertinelli, now that he thought about it--the man couldn't remember all of it, but he could remember enough to put a light back into his eyes.

Near seven, Arthur returned, wearing the same gear from the day previous, board clutched beneath his arm.

"Hullo, Arthur," Eames said, setting aside his book as Arthur set aside his board and leaned down to kiss Eames a hello back. The water from his hair fell in fat droplets onto Eames' shirt, and Arthur's body beneath the fabric felt taut and wonderful.

"I do like those glasses," Arthur said when he pulled back, a rueful smile on his face. He picked up his board and moved towards the porch--no, the lanai, Arthur had corrected him on the word earlier. "Did you sleep well?"

"Well enough," Eames said, collecting his things and following.

"I spoke with Paolo after I got up," Arthur said, stripping out of his wetsuit with terrible efficiency while Eames watched the show. "He said Maude's run into a stumbling block with the medication the mark is taking, and he thinks we're going to have to push it back a couple of weeks more."

"And does Maude agree with that opinion?" Eames asked wryly, ducking back into the house to refill his mug, leaving Arthur on the other side of the open door to hose off.

Arthur sighed. "She thinks she's going to have a breakthrough," he said. "But you've worked with her before, you know how she is. I told her that we can't schedule a breakthrough, and she gave the phone back to Paolo and refused to talk to me any more."

Eames laughed. "I do know how she is. You might as well buy your chocolates now, love, or she's going to push the deadline back further just to spite you."

Arthur made a face. "I already sent some things over," he admitted. "She's so fucking temperamental, but I know she's going to get the compound right. That's why I brought her in. Those damn anti-psychotics are a bitch to work around, and she's going to get it right."

"Good man," Eames said approvingly.

Arthur ran off to take a shower, and Eames poked at the refrigerator, trying to see what he could throw together for dinner. He ended up with stir-fry, rice boiling on the rear of the stove, and was just reading a bit more of his book, leaning against the counter, when Arthur came up next to him smelling clean and damp.

"We should probably go relieve Danny after this," Arthur said, poking at the skillet with a wooden spoon. "He texted me to let me know he and Gracie are there, they got some dinner and ate it with Steve and are watching some movie about fish."

"Finding Nemo," Eames said immediately, and Arthur blinked at him.

"Yeah," he said. "How did you know?"

Eames shrugged one shoulder and dished out the food, setting the reading glasses (still a bit too small) atop his head. "Educated guess."

"I--" Arthur said and then shook his head, smiling a bit. "I don't want to know."

They ate in companionable silence, sometimes talking about the food or Arthur's wave set or bit about Grace, but mostly not talking at all. There was a faint echo of the ocean from the open door, and the low hum of the refrigerator rounded out the peace of the house. Eames wondered what it was like when it was full of people, what it looked like with a happy family.

The phone rang as Arthur was rinsing the plates and Eames was tidying the sitting room, and Eames swiped Arthur's mobile from its place on the kitchen counter. The phone read "Mary" and featured a picture of a woman holding a very large cheese wedge hat with something of a maniacal grin. "It's your sister," Eames said, still a bit shocked that he can say those words and know them for what they mean.

"Shit," Arthur said, grasping for a towel. "I left her a message yesterday but I didn't think she'd actually get back to me."

Eames hit the "answer" button and held the phone up to Arthur's ear. Arthur flashed him a grateful look, the first time Eames had ever seen such a thing on Arthur's face not directly attributable to the exchange of ammunition.

"Mary," Arthur said, and Eames pulled a kitchen towel from the refrigerator door and offered it to Arthur. He climbed onto the stool at the kitchen island and was gratified when Arthur didn't leave the room--when Arthur let him listen.

"Yeah, he--yeah. Well, you know how he is, mostly it's just amazing that he hasn't been in the hospital more times. The doctor said--okay. Well, if you talked to Danny you're probably more updated than I am, but we saw him this morning and they kept him today and maybe tomorrow, just to be sure. Yeah. No, I don't think--okay--well, it's up to you, but--yeah. Yeah, I can do that. Are you sure you can take the time--? Okay, Jesus, give me a break, it's not like you've made any special effort to come to the islands in the last decade." Arthur made a face and then snorted. "Okay, pot, but I think I had slightly more of a reason to head to the mainland than you did. Fine. Fine! Look, I'm not going to--no, you shut up. No, you--that's what she said, Mary, and you are now officially my least favorite sibling right now. That's pretty harsh considering one of them put himself in the hospital by way of a hero complex." Arthur was grinning, belying the tenor of his words, and Eames rested his chin on a hand and contemplated how different Arthur was with his sister compared to his brother.

"Look, I'll send you the itinerary tonight, okay? You're going to have to rent a car, though, or get someone to pick you up because I don't think we can spare the manpower between trying to keep Steve in his hospital bed and actually eating and sleeping. Okay. Okay. Oh my god, Mary, just shut up and pack, okay? Okay. Okay, bye."

Arthur was still smiling when he hung up the phone, and he said to Eames, "My sister's coming out here too, to yell at Steve. Looks like you get to punch all your family cards in one go."

Eames snorted. "My god, what luck."

Arthur set his phone on the counter and comes over to Eames, nudging him until he scooted back a bit. Arthur set himself in Eames' lap, one leg on either side, hooking his wrists behind Eames' neck. "Thanks for going through all this with me."

"Arthur," Eames said seriously, "I can't think of anywhere I would rather be."

They made out in the kitchen until a key turned in the front door and Danny and Grace spilled in; Eames and Arthur pulled apart, flushed and smiling, and Danny rolled his eyes at them as he ran them down of

the non-events of the day. After sorting out the next day's plans and wishing Grace a good night's sleep, Arthur and Eames headed out to the hospital for another night of babysitting.

When they arrived Steve was already half-asleep. Arthur had a murmured conversation with him that Eames didn't try to overhear. As Steve drifted off, they watched an old episode of Jeopardy and ate green jell-o and read until they finally give in to a nap in the wee hours. Steve had stayed put another day, and their duty was well done.

In the morning, marked mostly by the stab of sunlight through the east-facing window next to Steve's hospital bed and the agonizing tangle of twisted muscles and shared pain between two adults who really should've known better than to sleep a second night on the damnable institutional love seat, the doctor making the rounds told Steve he would be released later that day.

"Are you sure?" Arthur asked, the severity of his face undermined by the loose curl of his hair around his eyes.

Dr. Kealoha arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow; Eames noted the action and immediately started breaking down its component parts in his head. A handy bit of power play, that. He was still listening with one ear even as catalogued the attendant muscle groups in his face.

"Mr. McGarrett, I think any attempt to keep your brother under medical care at this point would do more harm than good," she said, swinging the metal lid of the patient chart closed and sliding her pen into her pocket. "You know him better than I do--do you honestly think he'll stay now that he's set for release?"

Arthur deflated slightly, disappointment a strange look on him. "I suppose," he said, the lovely culture of his vowels matching the doctor's own educated accent. Eames wondered if Arthur even realized the ease with which he switched verbal modes, and decided not to tell him, for then Eames' amusement would be gone.

"Arthur, shut up, I'm getting out of here," Steve said, already twitching in his bed though he wouldn't be leaving for several hours yet.

Arthur threw him a glare. "Excuse the shit out of me for being concerned that you're not well enough to be released," Arthur said snippily, and that right there, the slide between Ivy Leaguer and younger brother was far too delicious to acknowledge.

The doctor was clearly hiding her laughter under a well-balanced facade, and Eames quirked a smile at her in acknowledgement. She took a breath and her mask fell back into place; Eames was already mirroring her stance. What a useful forge--power and control wrapped into a beautiful package. Very useful.

"Gentlemen, I'll leave you to work out the details," she said, pulling a card from her breast pocket and handing it to Arthur. "If he's still breathing poorly in twenty-four hours, page me and bring him back in. The ribs should heal on their own, and we're out of the woods on the lung, but he'll need to be monitored for the next four or five days to really be clear." She took her leave, and Eames marked her walk--no sway at all, just a purposeful stride in functional clogs, her green scrubs slightly too long for her height.

Arthur smacked him on the shoulder, and Eames jolted back to awareness.

"Stop checking out the doctor," Arthur ground out.

"I was just trying to imit--" Eames protested, and Arthur smacked him again.

"Seriously, I don't care, she's too hot for you anyway," Arthur says as dismissively as he could manage, and when Eames turned his incredulous gaze upon Steve, he found the man hiding his grin behind a hand, IV cannula disrupting the tan flesh.

"Your brother is a menace to all perfectly respectable Englishmen," he informed Steve, and Steve couldn't contain his laughter this time.

Arthur was rather irritated.

It turned out that it was Saturday, and Danny and Grace and Kono all arrived at once with coffee and food and loud, bustling conversation. At first Arthur refused to sit next to him on the loveseat again, but Eames kept entering his personal space to "get a doughnut" or "hand Grace a sugar packet" or "poke holes in Arthur's general demeanor." He finally gave up and sat huffily next to Eames, an image rather ruined by his somewhat collegiate appearance. Arthur placed a possessive hand on Eames' thigh, and Eames found himself stuck with a rather foolish smile on his face.

Kono and Danny agreed to bring Steve home, and genial goodwill was exchanged as Arthur and Eames took their leave. Arthur placed his hand on Eames' thigh again as they drove back to the house, and Eames pretended not to notice even as he inched his own hand atop Arthur's.

They really were a insufferably well-matched set, Eames thought ruefully. Arthur had ruined him for truly satisfying sex with other people some time ago; perhaps it was due time that Arthur had ruined him for other things as well.

It was only nine in the morning, but several days of unrelenting stress and their newfound familiarity had made them inclined to head immediately towards the guest rooms after attending to a handful of menial things. Eames took a shower, using Arthur's shampoo and finally relegating himself to a thorough shave. When he returned to the bedroom, Arthur was tucked beneath the sheet, chest bare and Kindle in hand. At the sight of Eames in his towel--which Eames had thoughtfully not removed from his person to better

exploit Arthur's clear lust--he placed the Kindle on the nightstand and said in a demanding tone, "Come here."

It wasn't as though Eames was going to do anything else.

The towel dropped to the floor, and he was gratified by the sharp breath Arthur took. Eames walked to him, not his own gait but a borrowed one, and his cock rose as Arthur's eyes locked on his waist.

He stopped just before the bed, to see what Arthur would do.

Predictably, it was not what Eames expected--Arthur rolled his eyes and withdrew one leg from the confines of the bedclothes, wrapping it around Eames' waist and managing some kind of ninja-judo flip that resulted in Eames landing on his back, squarely in the middle of the bed.

"Now I declare," Eames said in as gaudy a voice as he could imagine, considering he sprang to full attention at that bit of trickery, "what kind of girl do you think I am?"

"The kind about to get a blowjob," Arthur said dryly, ducking his head down to swallow Eames down.

Eames barely managed to control his voice, and then didn't bother when he remembered in a flash that there was no one else in this big, airy house other than the two of them. Arthur was very talented at this particular skill, laving the slit in repeated motions until Eames was a shuddery wreck beneath him. Eames writhed and panted as Arthur worked his mouth tortuously slowly down Eames' cock, only stopping when his nose pressed against the thin skin of Eames' groin.

Arthur kept himself there, pressing down on Eames' hips with strong, unmoving hands, so that Eames could only jerk a millimeter or two away from the obscene stretch of Arthur's lips and back in again. Eames knew his eyes were wide, his mouth open, sounds escaping from him that were shocky and filthy. Arthur met his eyes and hummed deep in his throat, until Eames bowed and jerked from the vision and feel of it all. He was insensate for a long, bliss-ridden moment, and only came back to himself when he felt Arthur pulling off as slowly as he first went down. The air on his cock felt like another bit of Arthur, another bit of Arthur's direction, and his legs fell weakly open in a pornographic sprawl.

Arthur finally released Eames' cock from the wet confines of his dirty, wonderful mouth, and were Eames not so utterly spent from delayed desire and a thoroughly satisfying orgasm from the man he was now considering fitting with a GPS tracker, he would very much have liked to do something about Arthur's own particular concern.

He raised a hand weakly, and Arthur batted it away. His mouth was wet and red, spit slicking the corner and sweat sticking the line of his forehead. He was naked, which Eames did not recall, and his eyes were fixed on Eames' limp form with something akin to avarice and self-satisfaction. Eames adjusted only

minutely, to better fuel whatever reel was spinning in Arthur's head. He arched a bit, gratified by the rising flush in Arthur's skin. It was turning quickly from its natural pale colour to an island tan, and Eames was fascinated by the change.

Arthur straddled Eames' legs, knees bracketing his hips, and stroked himself off. The tip of his cock escaped with every downward motion, red and leaking from the vise Arthur held himself in. Eames arched again, and Arthur's eyes travelled from Eames' soft cock, up his chest to land on Eames' mouth, before meeting his eyes and making the journey down again.

"Arthur," Eames said, hearing his voice shake a bit from exertion and the thing swelling in his chest. "Arthur, dearest, do it, I want it, I want you on me. Won't you come for me?" and Arthur did, a sound wrenching from him like it was dragged up from somewhere deep. Even as he was still shuddering it out, he reached a wavering hand down to rub himself into the skin of Eames' stomach, some kind of ancient ritual he couldn't help but enact. Eames rumbled his pleasure in response, arching into the touch, and Arthur gasped once, twice, falling atop Eames with his mess between them.

To Eames' chagrin, he fell asleep like that, Arthur's dead weight crushing him to the bedclothes, bedroom door ajar and light left on in the bathroom. His feet dangled off the bed and the sun was far too bright, but it hardly mattered.

Eames started awake to Grace's high shriek of laughter, finding himself unable to move, Arthur pinning him down to the bed. Arthur seemed to gain twice as much density when he slept as when he was awake. Eames had to brace a foot on the floor to flip him over, slipping off the bed to shut the door and grabbing his towel from the floor.

He looked down and rubbed a thumb ruefully over his stomach; he really ought to take another shower altogether. But there was something wonderfully dirty about leaving it there too, for Arthur to find later on. He mentally shrugged and tossed the towel over Arthur, obscuring his bum from inappropriate eyes.

Eames dressed and debated the likelihood of waking Arthur. He had two settings: on-the-job, where he barely managed to get into REM sleep at all; and off-the-job, where wailing sirens had been known to go off and still Arthur wouldn't stir. He grasped Arthur's ankle where it was hanging off the bed and moved it over a bit. Arthur didn't wake at that, so Eames left him. He probably needed the rest, with all that had happened in the last several days.

He closed the door behind him and went to the kitchen, where Kono and Chin were doing something on the cooker while a smiling, somewhat intimidating gentleman Eames has not yet met leaned over the kitchen island. Steve and Danny weren't there, but Grace was sitting on the stool next to the new bloke, grinning like she'd just won the lottery or been told unicorn ponies actually did exist.

"No, you gotta add the soy sauce in before the water, brah," the man argued, not seeming to mind Grace poking his shoulder incessantly, trying to get his attention.

"That's not how my mom does it, Kame," Chin argued back, stirring something around in a wok.

"Kame," Grace whined, "Kame Kame Kame *Kame*."

"Look, little wahine, didn't your papa ever tell you it's rude to interrupt a conversation?" Kame said, his smile softening the rebuke.

Grace rolled her eyes. Eames liked that about her, the spirit of being a well-off only child with none of the spoilt unpleasantness. "Danno told me I need to speak my mind because girls are just as important as boys and boys don't always believe that."

Kono laughed, sweet and loud. "I'm with the kid here, Kame," she said.

Kame rubbed Grace's head affectionately. "You speak your mind, hey, but stop poking me, you get me, girl?"

Chin looked up from what he was doing and spotted Eames. "Hey there."

Eames waved a bit. "Hullo there. Sorry to interrupt, just woke up and wanted to see what all the fuss was."

"We're making dinner!" Grace said cheerfully, holding up a squash and waving it around.

"I can see that," Eames said, smiling at her. "Where's your father, then, and the wayward McGarrett?"

"Out on the lanai," Kono said, whisking something in a bowl as she inclined her head.

"Right, I'll just--do you need any help?" Eames asked, cutting himself off as he headed in that direction.

"Nah," Chin said. "Too many cooks already, with Kamekona and Gracie here."

"I resent the implication I am too much of anything," Kamekona said, pretending to be affronted.

"What if I said you were too much of a pain in my ass?" Kona said, brandishing her whisk. The other three gasped in mock-shock, and Grace held out her hand.

"Quarter, please," she said primly, and Kono groaned and dug out a quarter from her pocket.

"I see I'll have to mind my words," Eames said, sliding his hands into his pockets.

"She's too well-trained," Kono complained.

"Shave ice doesn't pay for itself, Kono," Chin said, hiding his own grin but revealing it in his eyes.

"I'll just--" Eames said, slipping out of the room to the sound of happy bickering. It was what greeted him on the lanai, too; it did seem to be a running theme here. Perhaps that explained him and Arthur, a bit. Or Arthur's reaction to him, and to Ariadne, and to one or two others Eames had seen Arthur work with.

"What, are you pissed that we could actually catch a criminal without you?" Danny's agitated voice floated out over the evening air, a bit like his daughter's in the rhythm and fall. "Jesus, we don't all have to be Army Rangers to be competent at our jobs," Danny continued, sounding a little bitter.

"Navy--fuck you, Danny, that wasn't funny the first two hundred times and it isn't funny now," Steve retorted, a little weaker, Eames thought, than he probably was normally. He walked up behind them, careful to kick a stone or two to alert them to his presence. Both looked up when he approached, and Danny gave him a little wave.

"Mind if I join?" Eames asked. Danny waved him into one of the other rattan chairs, and Eames slid his ankle over his knee, making himself look relaxed and non-threatening. In this context, he was both of those things, but he had been in Steve's position (benched and drugged and unhappy about both things) and preferred to keep him from tensing up at all, not when Eames' demeanor was so well under his own control.

Danny had a beer, Steve had some iced tea, and there was a paradisaical sunset dropping low over the waters. The rosy light made Steve look less sallow than he had in his hospital room.

"Did you nab George Harris, then?" Eames asked.

Danny raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, I heard about your little trick with Kono's files. Notice me not commenting, right, but yes, we got the asshole. He was holed up in a trailer park with a .22 and a bottle of whiskey. Harris didn't even ditch his phone, which was the second dumb thing he did after trying to drop Steven here from a construction platform. It had all his pick up and drop off records, including a cheat sheet to the code system in the Notes application. Dumb fuck. He's sitting in a holding cell down in District 1-2, nursing a hangover and waiting on a judge."

Eames smiled a bit. "Well played, then. Glad you got him."

"They should've called for backup," Steve said grumpily from his slump in his chair. One arm was wound around his torso, bruising visible on his arm and hand pressed against his side.

Danny glared at him, but moved his glass into his hands. "We would have, if we hadn't needed to defuse the situation right the fuck then. I'm all about letting SWAT do their thing, McGarrett, but if there's a drunk scared asshole with a gun and kids playing down the road, I make that a priority."

Steve made a face but sipped his tea, tilting his head back and staring at the sky.

"Where's your recalcitrant half?" Danny asked, turning to Eames and resting his head on his hand.

"Asleep, I believe. He could sleep through an earthquake at times," Eames said, noting the tired lines around Danny's eyes, the neutral set of his mouth. It was automatic, his dissection of visual expressions. He didn't even pay attention to doing it most of the time, anymore.

"He did that when he was a little kid, too," Steve said, a half-smile on his face. "Sometimes I'd have to carry him back to the car after we were out on the beach, and he'd never even flinch. He'd wake up the next morning in his bed and bug the crap out of me, worried that he missed something."

"He doesn't miss much now," Eames said.

Danny snorted. "That's the god's fucking truth."

They moved to lighter topics, the weather and closing the case and whether the American football playoffs were worth ordering pay-per-view. Eames contributed a bit, but his mind was elsewhere, wondering about the job they've left behind and Maude's penchant for pecan candies and whether Arthur would be able to walk away from all this as cleanly as he thought he could.

Arthur appeared at the lanai, and Eames' eyes were automatically drawn to him. Sometimes it was as though he was the only thing in a room, and Eames had catalogued every expression, every gesture Arthur made and he still found himself fascinated. And clearly more than a little besotted.

"So, Steve," Arthur said, with that determined look he gets when he had to do something he didn't like to do, "I may have neglected to inform you of something important."

Steve turned, very slowly and still protecting his ribs, and a frown crossed his face. "What did you do," he asked, trying for intimidating but mostly coming out petulant.

"WHERE'S BIG BROTHER?" came a voice louder in volume than should be possible from such a compact frame. Mary hopped out from the house and threw an arm around Arthur, who looked simultaneously long-suffering and delighted. "Steven James McGarrett, what the fuck did you do to yourself?"

"You called *Mary*?" Steve asked, eyes wide. If possible, he was shrinking back into his rattan chair, trying to fold up his large frame into a tiny ball. Eames watched, a bit impressed; he couldn't fold himself into that position, broken ribs or no.

"Yes he did!" Mary said, entirely too gleeful for the situation. "And guess who took her two weeks of vacation time to stay here and help you recuperate?"

"Oh god," Steve said.

"That's right!" Mary came over to them and ducked down, fringe falling in her eyes. "And don't think you can ship me off to the mainland again, brother, because you're on medical leave and I took all the batteries out of the remotes already."

"Arthur," Steve said, sounding a bit desperate, "Arthur, can't you stay? I mean, we don't want Mary to lose all her vacation time, right?"

Arthur's smile would have been epic if he were a different sort of man; as it was, the edges of his dimples were just threatening to show. "Steve, I already lost a week to this. And my job doesn't come with a vacation accrual."

"Danny?" Steve turned to him hopefully. "Aren't you worried about having a guest for that long?"

Danny rolled his eyes. "Mary's not a guest, dumbass, she's family," he said, and Mary high-fived him right in front of Steve's face. "Besides, I'm not taking my vacation time to stay home and feed you chicken soup. We're taking Grace to New Jersey for Thanksgiving, if you haven't forgotten--don't forget, Steve, you have to come too, it's mandatory--and I've already purchased those plane tickets. So Mary here is gonna keep you in line and nurse you back to health."

Steve's face warred between horror and resignation and finally settled on resignation. "I can't believe you called Mary," he muttered at Arthur one last time before staring moodily at the ocean. Mary ducked down and kissed him on the temple, and Steve took it without complaining.

Mary hopped back up and settled on Eames. "So," she said, her eyes going sharp in the way that seemed to be a McGarrett family trait, "you're the guy who's been fucking my baby brother and never coming home with him, right? Eames?"

Eames spared a glance at Arthur, who was smiling a bit more freely now, the tips of his ears pink. He liked this, Eames realized. Arthur liked how Mary treated him with no regard for his well-established boundaries. A bit like Eames treated him, or used to treat him, before they fell into this new thing between them.

"I rather prefer to think of it as Arthur fucking me," he demurred with a slight leer, and Mary laughed, delighted.

"That's not unusual," she assured him, and both Danny and Steve were complaining, telling them to shut up.

"Food's up," Kame called out from the house, and the next twenty minutes found them trying to put together a table outdoors big enough for them all. Steve made them get the folded-up work tables from the garage, and Danny produced a couple of mismatched tablecloths from somewhere, and eventually all nine of them were seated outside. The tiki torches and the firepit were all set up, and an old Elvis Presley tune was playing on the hi-fi. Eames, sitting between Arthur and Kono, passed the salad and considered for the first time pulling out his totem, just to check.

It wasn't that he really believed totems to be all that useful, or that this felt anything like a dream. It was just all so very unexpected, and that told him more than anything else that this was real. Real life, in Eames' experience, could hardly be rendered in its full complexity inside a dream. It was a reason not to work from memory--it could never be fully recreated. There was always a flaw, always something missing.

He didn't reach in his pocket for his poker chip, didn't take Arthur's hand and flip it over to see the familiar, known scars on the inside of his palm. He did place his hand on Arthur's thigh for a moment, and he did return Arthur's warm smile, now becoming more familiar. He ate his salad and his chicken and his rice, and teased Grace and laughed with Chin.

And in the back of his mind, he was shifting his idea of Arthur, the forge he'd made of him like he had of all the people he'd loved, and pushing and stretching that idea until it had taken on a new depth. Arthur was like the Dance of Seven Veils, though he wouldn't be amused by the comparison. In the number of years Eames had known him, he'd slowly, carefully, shed his artifice for Eames, revealing each time some delicate breadth of skin. This was the closest Eames had ever been to knowing the whole of him; and yet he suspected there was still more to learn.

Perhaps this would be his greatest forge yet, if he spent a lifetime perfecting it.

Arthur shook him a bit, drawing him out of his reverie, and Eames smiled reflexively. "Sorry," he said. "Just thinking a bit."

Arthur's hand stole beneath the hem of his shirt, hidden by the lip of the table, though of course Kono could have seen if she looked. Arthur's thumb rubbed in much the same place Eames' own did a few hours ago. "So am I," Arthur said, and Eames watched his pupils contract in the half-light.

"So how did you two meet, then?" Mary asked, spearing some broccoli into her mouth and raising a familiar eyebrow.

"On a job," Arthur said, just as Eames replies, "In Prague."

"So what, you did a little International Man of Mystery and little brother just swooned into your arms?" Mark smirked, and Danny barked out a laugh.

Arthur smirked back, a familial double-take, and said, "Well, we did rappel down a five-story building together on the same line, but I wouldn't really call that swooning. It was my gear, after all."

Eames grinned, recalling that particular getaway. "You were a very young and limber thing, though, Arthur," he said, making Arthur roll his eyes. "As I recall, everyone else went out the front but you insisted on a rooftop escape. And the building wasn't beset by fire after all."

"It was a reasonable assumption!" Arthur protested. "After the way the mar--the job went south, I wasn't going to put it past things to spontaneously combust."

"Oh, Arthur. Just because it had once manufactured weapons for the Third Reich didn't mean it would still retain any combustible items," Eames countered.

"And was this job, how do we say it, *legal*?" Steve asked, his mouth turned in a frown.

"Who cares," Mary snorted.

Steve shot her a look. "I care," he stated.

"You don't care, you're just nosy and judgemental," Mary said, taking a pull off her beer and crossing her eyes over the bottle in Steve's general direction.

Steve huffed a little, and Danny patted his shoulder.

"Arthur, are you a criminal?" Grace piped up, waving her fork in the air for emphasis.

Arthur seemed to think about it and, in the presence of three amused law enforcement officers and one clearly riled-up sibling, said, "I am not breaking nor have I recently broken any laws in the country within which I am residing."

A chorus of laughter and protests met his answer, and even Eames had to smile at the careful truth-telling. He had seen Arthur's identification--it was genuine, and that Arthur had let him see that had set him more

off-kilter than he had admitted at the time. Of course, Arthur had carried weapons through airport security, but honestly, if TSA couldn't locate them they didn't deserve to find them.

"What about you, shop manager?" Arthur shot back at Mary, and Mary grinned. "So you did get my email!" she said.

"You got promoted?" Kono asked, holding out her fist for Mary to bump. Mary nodded happily and accepted a high five from Kame too.

"Yeah, they liked how I conducted the inventory so much they had me reorganize the floor, and the next thing I know I'm the manager of Harry's Bike Shop," she said. "Got a little pay bump, a little more vacation time. And they didn't mind me taking off for a family emergency," she said, shooting a look at Steve.

"Congratulations," Steve said grudgingly.

Danny smacked him lightly on the back of the head, and Steve exaggerated his response. "Stop it," Danny said reprovingly. "You're not being overprotective brother. You're being overbearing brother. There's a difference. Both your siblings are gainfully employed, generally happy, and don't live here. Count your blessings."

And there were those identical smirks again, on Mary and Arthur, evident as they both sat back in their chairs, sharing a look. Eames tightened his hand on Arthur's knee; so like Arthur as he knew him, but a bit different, a bit softer. Mary made him a younger version of himself, no less opinionated or defiant, no less *Arthur*. More Arthur, in a way, because perhaps this ganging up on their older brother was where his competitiveness--and his initial rivalry with Eames--had originated.

"Stop looking at me like I'm interesting," Arthur protested, "or I'll set them on you to ask you a bunch of personal questions and see how you like it."

"Ooh, point," Mary said. "So Eames, apart from scaling European buildings, what do you do with your time?"

Eames said, "Cross-country skiing," just as Arthur said, "Gambling," and Eames shot him a look. "Fickle thing, aren't you, Arthur?"

Arthur just gave him a deceptive smile and threaded their fingers together.

They all stayed out late, until the stars that could be seen through Honolulu's light pollution radiated in the sky. Eames offered to handle the dishes, earning him a pleased look from Arthur. Steve was nearly sacked out on the couch in the living room, Grace tucked in beside him, and Arthur collected Grace in a limp pile

to put her to bed. Danny and Chin hefted Steve upwards, and he mumbled but didn't protest the help getting up the stairs to the master bedroom.

Kono and Kame took off, Chin shortly after them, and Mary curled into Steve's warm spot on the couch, drawing the old quilt over her shoulders. Eames methodically worked through the dishes, and when Danny came up to help him, putting the dishes in the washer or drying them, they worked in a companionable silence.

Danny said, "Don't mind Steve, alright? He's just--he gets worried about those two, because he feels guilty that he wasn't around when they were growing up. And then, with John--their dad--with him gone, with their mom gone, he feels like he should be more like a parent."

"Seems like Arthur and Mary managed to grow up well without much of that around," Eames said mildly, scrubbing at the rice pot.

Danny carefully wiped down the lids and put them away. "You're not wrong," he said, but his voice is a inflected with caution. "They ended up less fucked up than they could've been, let's say. But Steve found a home in the Navy, and now that--well. Now that we've built a life together, something outside of that, he's regretting not being a better brother, or a better son. And it comes out like he's trying to run their lives, when Arthur's thirty, for crying out loud."

Eames snorted. "I can't imagine anyone succeeding at telling Arthur to do anything," he said. "Even when he does things he doesn't like, it's always his own choice to do them."

"Well, and now you've met Mary, so you can just imagine them both telling Steve off," Danny said. "Which they've done. Loudly."

Eames rinsed the silverware and dropped them into the dishwasher while Danny wiped down the counters. As Eames was wringing out his dishcloth, Danny said, "I don't know about you and Arthur--I don't want to assume, because Arthur McGarrett is a lot of things and secretive makes the top of the list. But with me and Steve...have you ever met someone who just, you know, just fits? Right into your life, into all the empty spaces, even the ones you didn't know you have, and makes all your weak spots stronger? That's--that's me and Steve. That's what he wants for Arthur, is just to know that someone has his back at the end of the day, even if it's not him."

Eames hesitated, and Danny immediately waved his hand in the air, so similar to his daughter, and started walking it back. "I mean, I don't want to presume here--"

"There was a girl once," Eames said, the low rumble of a memory escaping the confines of his well-ordered brain. "She seemed to know all my tricks without ever having to try and understand them."

Danny dipped his hands into his pockets, the picture of an open ear.

"Arthur and I--we don't really fit, I suppose. We're well matched, but not because we make it easier for one another. We work well because we'll always hit the weak spots. I don't pull any punches with him, and he gives me the same courtesy. We made excellent rivals. It's just taken us this long to understand how one's opponent can be the closest, best companion."

Danny stared at him for a moment, head cocked. "So no commitment ceremony for you two then," he said wryly.

"Not unless we wore matching tac vests and exchanged our favorite grenade launchers, no," Eames said ruefully, truthfully.

Danny slapped him on the back, and Eames thought he'd just earned some kind of approval, possibly a more important one than Steve's given the clear influence Danny has on him. Danny went to see about Grace and Steve, and Eames pressed the button on the dishwasher before retreating to the guest bedroom.

Arthur was there, much like he was in the morning, tucked into the bed with his kindle in hand. He looked up when Eames enters, and says, "M203."

"So you heard that, then?" Eames said, unsurprised. He shucked his trousers, pulling off his socks to leave his boxers and undershirt on. He crawled into the bed beside Arthur and tucked into his side. "You did always value versatility over other qualities."

Arthur threaded a hand into Eames' hair, mussing the remains of the gel Eames had put in it, and Eames choose not to protest. "Give me a Vampir any day--reloadable, portable, and significantly wider range."

Arthur flicked his ear, and Eames flinched, digging his fingers into Arthur's side.

"Overcompensating," Arthur said, a smile tugging at his mouth.

"Never," Eames swore, drawing a pillow beneath his head and angling his face against the soft cotton of Arthur's t-shirt. He sighed, hand splaying across the expanse of Arthur's stomach. "I suppose you're going to say no to sex, what with the full house."

Arthur's hand tightend in Eames' hair, and Eames looked up. "I booked our flights back," he said in place of an answer. "We're on the red-eye back to Albany tomorrow evening. I thought we might get a hotel tomorrow for the afternoon, give Mary some space and get out of everyone's hair."

"Is that so," Eames rumbled, letting his fingers duck into the waistband of Arthur's pants, feeling him shudder with promise. "What a lovely idea, Arthur."

Arthur's eyes were blown a bit wide, and he looked down at Eames with that heady combination of lust and shared humour that Eames had become so very eager for. He drew Eames up and licked into his mouth, the carefully leashed strength focused entirely on Eames. "Tomorrow," he said a bit breathlessly when he finally pulled back.

"Good lord, whatever will we do tonight?" Eames said with mock horror, laced a bit with being put out.

Arthur reached over to the bedside and grabs a glossy magazine, dropping it into Eames' lap. He stared down at a man [being consumed by a wave](#). "Why don't you learn something new," Arthur suggested, laughing at his own private joke.

Eames settled into Arthur's side and placed a gentle bite to Arthur's elbow. He opened the page. Never let it be said he wouldn't add new information to his repertoire.

*

Eames woke alone, again, which had never been unusual with Arthur. Arthur was the proverbial early riser and a poor sleeper on the job to boot, an altogether too common side effect for professional dreamers. Fill your veins with Somnacin for too many years and there was a likely chance you'd never sleep well--or naturally--again. Eames himself had always been mindful of the number of jobs he'd taken in a given year, but even so, for every one-month job there was a three month refractory period where he spent too many hours haunting late-night institutions and too few in REM sleep.

Arthur had been a pro for nearly ten years, and had barely ever stopped between one job and the next. Eames couldn't recall him ever taking a vacation (though of course that didn't mean Arthur never had). What it did mean, however, was that the mornings were few and far between when he woke to find Arthur tucked in beside him, asleep or not.

He stretched and looked out the window for a long moment, forcing his eyes to adjust to the perpetual sunshine of the place and taking in the noises of the house. A glance at the clock on the night table told him it was just past nine in the morning; he'd managed about five hours himself. Arthur had still been reading when Eames had dropped off.

He rose, pulling a new shirt on and stepping into yesterday's trousers. After a moment's thought, he put on Arthur's flip flops, just a bit too short for anything but pattering about the house. They were to leave today, at some point; Eames knew Arthur would have their itinerary sorted and rarely bothered to ask any longer where and when to be. Either Arthur would get him there, or he'd expect Eames to snoop his way into knowing. Eames had never yet blown a timetable without fully intending to.

Eames ducked out into the common rooms, and found Mary and Grace watching a television program together on the couch. He waved, said his morning pleasantries, and asked about the rest of the house.

"Steve threatened to go into the office, so Danny's taking him on a walk down the street," Mary said, rolling her eyes. "They've been gone about half an hour and last I checked they were four houses down, so they'll be awhile. Arthur's surfing, he'll be back when he's back."

"Alright then," Eames said, spying Arthur's kindle on the counter next to an empty mug by the coffee machine. "I'll just wait outside for him, then. Come and join me if you like."

"Dora's about to go into the jungle!" Grace protested, and Mary laughed.

"Right, I withdraw the offer," Eames said, smiling at Grace, who was riveted to the screen.

He took his coffee and his previous position, alternating between scanning for Arthur and falling into his book. He had to admit that Arthur's family home was a deeply pleasant place to spend some time, and Eames had made a career out of finding pleasant places to be. He paused mid-sentence and drew his gaze again to the rough dirt path leading to the place where Arthur put out into the ocean, and let himself wonder a moment what this might be like, this thing between them, in the future.

There was a future, he was certain of that, and though Eames was good for a gamble he preferred to know which way the cards would fall. Arthur would be the first to admit that he followed a routine--a routine, because it worked, most of the time--but what had always delighted Eames so much about Arthur, what had transformed professional interest into personal competition and finally into the game of hearts and secrets they played at, was Arthur's ability to devise a solution for any wrench thrown into the works. Any time Eames had thought they were thoroughly bugged, or supposed Arthur would finally be caught flat-footed, Arthur had somehow managed to push through it and emerge the other side with a vicious, leonine grin.

In there somewhere was the moment when Eames had stopped wanting to be the wrench and instead be the thing on which that smile landed.

They had never talked about a partnership before. Certainly they had talked around one, particularly once Cobb fell off the radar and refused to answer anyone's job-related messages. But it had been two years, and Arthur was still running solo. Maude had brought Eames into the job they were on leave from right now--a thanks for a quick save a few years ago and only the barest acknowledgement of whatever she thought might occur between him and Arthur.

And now, from the barest space of time in what amounted to nearly a decade of violence and courtship, Eames hoped a partnership was a foregone conclusion. If he were honest with himself, he wanted to be a partner in all things, but there was still an element of uncertainty. He had been counting the cards, but Arthur always held one tucked against the delicate skin of his wrist.

Eames snorted. If he was reduced to such awful metaphors, he clearly was not caffeinated enough. He made to rise from his seat when his eye caught on a flash of red, and then a flash of dark skin. Arthur, think of the devil, was making his way back to the house, and Eames walked to meet him partway.

Arthur seemed lost in his own thoughts, but he smiled when he caught sight of Eames. "Hi," he said warmly, surfboard tucked under his arms, "I was just--"

Eames grasped Arthur with both his hands and pulled him close, jerking him a bit so that Arthur's hand scrabbled to maintain its grip on the board. Eames drew him upwards and kissed him, tilting his head until Arthur's own was knocked backwards by the force, and Arthur let out a surprised sound and then a moan as Eames licked into his mouth, memorizing the taste of Arthur and seawater and morning sunshine, and Arthur, Arthur, Arthur.

One of Arthur's arms came up to Eames' shoulder, Eames' hair, while the other somehow managed to hold on to the bloody board. Eames was breathing out harshly through his nose, every intake a scent-memory, every exhale strained.

Eames continued to press into Arthur for a few moments more, and then slowly drew back, placing careful, chaste kisses on his lips. When they parted, Arthur's eyes were closed, the colour high in his cheeks, his lips swollen and red. Eames couldn't bear to close his own eyes, just ran his gaze along the well-known line of Arthur's jaw, his eyebrows, the little dent at his left temple. Eames knew, then, something he should have known all along, something he'd been fooling himself into pretending wasn't there: if he spent the rest of his life teasing out every bit and piece of Arthur, everything that made him laugh and weep and rage, it would hardly be enough. He'd spent a decade chasing Arthur down; he'd spend a dozen lives learning this man.

When Arthur's eyes opened, he looked dazed and kiss-flushed, somehow still hanging on to that damnable surfboard, fingers clenching and releasing at Eames' nape. He opened his mouth to say something, and then seemed to get caught on the words, swiping his tongue down over his bottom lip as Eames gentled his hold into something softer.

"Who taught you to surf?" Eames asked softly, the rumble of his voice barely escaping the closed space between them.

"What?" Arthur asked, not tracking completely. He opened his eyes, blinking a few times, and Eames traced the permanent shadows beneath his eyes. "I--uh, Mamo. He was--he was my parents' friend, good friend of my mom's. When I came back here after my grandma died, he came around every week, sometimes a couple of times a week, to take me out and teach me. We had surfed when we were little, my mom surfed and would take us out on the boards, but Mary and I never really did it when we were in

California. Too far inland. But I was pretty young still when I came back here, and Mamo never let up on me, kept coming even when I told him to fuck off."

The words seemed to focus Arthur, bring him back from the place Eames had sent him with his kiss trick, and Eames watched the play of thought behind his eyes. He catalogued the return of the ever-present tension to Arthur's body like he had a thousand times before, but this time he watched with promise.

Arthur ducked down, laying his board gently against the ground, and laughed a bit when Eames' hands tightened on him. He curved his own arms around Eames' waist, tucking his fingers into Eames' shallow rear pockets, and ducked his face into the curve of Eames' shoulder, hunching down slightly. The rub of Arthur's nose against his skin was debilitating, and Eames let out a shocked breath.

"What's this, then?" Arthur asked into the space of privacy they'd build between them. "Did you wake up this morning and realize I was never going to let you go again?"

Eames let out a punchy laugh and drew his fingers into Arthur's hair, memorizing each fine thread. "Arthur," he said, hearing the waver in his own voice and praying Arthur didn't, "I'm not sure I can bear to imagine a world without you in it."

"You'll never have to," Arthur said with the heady confidence of a lover, and in this moment, despite knowing all the things that could terribly, astonishingly wrong, Eames chose to believe him.

There, in the back garden of the home in which Arthur had grown up, in the middle of all the things Eames had been allowed to see over the last week and with all the things still left to discover between them, it felt like a promise. It felt like truth.

Now Eames knew that whatever he asked of Arthur, Arthur would tell him.

*

When they finally returned to the house, Mary was grinning at him in such a manner that informed him of peering sisterly eyes through the unshaded window. He smiled back, a bit rueful. Of course things with Arthur were never easy--the only way to get to that moment had been through the obstacle-laden minigolf course that was his family. Eames didn't mind in the least.

Danny and Steve finally hobbled back to the house, and the six of them together made a late sort of breakfast. Arthur made a frittata, Danny some pancakes, and Eames pulled together the bones of a smoothie. It was quiet, and congenial; some of the fight had gone out of Steve, it seemed. He was quiet and solemn through breakfast, though he put down a full plate. Just as Mary was regaling them about a hundred-mile ride she had done on her fixer-upper Kawasaki, Eames watched carefully as Steve placed a

wary hand on Arthur's shoulder. Arthur looked over, his own gaze cautious, but he gave Steve a small, encouraging smile that was answered in return.

No matter the reason, something had been fixed between them on this trip, something that had been broken for a long time. Eames wondered if they might've gotten there at all, if their father hadn't been killed. He chose not to linger on that thought.

By noon, it was clear that Steve was fading, and Danny and Eames both helped return him to his bed, despite his protests. Steve groaned as he was laid down, instinctively protecting his torso with his arm. Danny forced him to take his pain medication, and Arthur hovered with a frown at the door.

"Listen," Steve said roughly, his voice hoarse and tired. "I, just. You should come home more, Arthur. I'm sorry if I'm a shitty brother, okay, I don't wanna be. I'm trying. But you--you should come home more. You can bring him if you want, I don't care. He seems okay for a guy with a fake name. I just, I just wanna--you should talk to Danny, okay, he figures out what we're doing most of the time, but I don't want it to be all birthdays and holidays, okay?" Steve's eyes were pleading even as they were slipping shut.

Eames looked over at Danny, whose lips were drawn in a thin line, and Arthur, who seemed genuinely caught by surprise at Steve's request.

"I--okay," Arthur said, with a hint of uncertainty. "I will."

Steve blew out a sigh, relief evident in his sagging body, the lines in his face disappearing. "Good. That's good. I'm sorry it took me getting hurt to get you out here. I'm--I'm not easy, I know that, I'm sorry for not doing better. I'm gonna try, though. I promise I'm gonna try."

"Okay," Arthur said, voice flat. Eames watched him try to draw his arms around himself, and then arrest the motion. His mouth was an unhappy tangle, and Eames debated for all of a second before going over and folding him close. Steve sighed once, twice, and fell into sleep. Eames tugged Arthur away, leaving Danny sitting next to Steve, tracing the hollows of his face with something like compassion etched into his own.

Arthur went into their room, and Eames took a moment to take a breath in the corridor. This had never been him before, in the middle of other families' arguments and hurts and memories without knowing what he'd gotten himself into. When he was younger, he'd had a mate, someone he'd loved, and had gone 'round to his mum's flat while he was in prison. But it wasn't the same as this. Then, he'd been as much as family, a brother, even when that word had hurt for what he'd wanted instead. This time--he had to learn *so much*. There wasn't any rubric for figuring all this out.

When he went into their room, Arthur was packing, methodically folding his clothes into one case and Eames' into another. Eames watched him for a long moment before Arthur blew out an annoyed breath and said, "Come in, don't just fucking loom there."

Eames did, sitting down and toppling one of Arthur's careful piles to the tune of Arthur's protests. He took Arthur's wrist in his hand and placed a kiss against the skin there, feeling the stutter of Arthur's heartbeat and glancing upward to see Arthur's face warring between anger and grief.

"It's all right, love," Eames said softly. "You've a right to be mad, you're allowed to be."

"Everything about this *sucks*," Arthur said, a wet cough following his words.

"Indeed it does," Eames said, and tugged down so that Arthur fell against him, holding him close and kept and safe, for that moment if no other.

They stayed like that though Arthur's defiant, struggling breaths, and Eames tried every soothing trick he had to work Arthur through it.

God, if he had only known. He would have sacrificed a thousand biting words for the barest hint of this.

When Arthur subsided, he placed a delicate kiss like a gift against the hinge of Eames' jaw and rose, pushing Eames off the clothing and starting to fold it again.

"We leave in an hour," Arthur said with finality, and Eames tucked a finger into the waistband of his board shorts and said, "Alright," as he left the room.

Mary and Danny were in the kitchen, talking about American football and drinking mugs of something. Mary smiled at him, something sad in it, and made him one as well.

"I think we'll be off soon," Eames said, taking a sip of what turned out to be peppermint tea.

"Aw," Mary said. "I hadn't finished interrogating you yet."

"I'm sure there will be other chances," Danny said, giving Eames a significant look. Eames ducked his head in return.

They talked about nothing for awhile more, Eames trying to keep pace with how well they clearly knew each other, making up outrageous things about Arthur just to make Danny and Mary laugh. Danny clapped him on the shoulder and Mary tugged him close, saying, "You're good for him, he's too serious."

"I'm not," Arthur protested, emerging from their room with their bags in hand.

Danny laughed, high and loud. "Bullshit! You're a workaholic, and I say that being with your brother."

Eames looked at him balefully. "That's true, darling, you are."

Arthur made a face. Mary came around the kitchen island and tugged him close, causing him to drop the bags. "Arthur," she said into the curve of his shoulder, "Arthur, you stupid fuck, you need to answer my emails and make up amazing lies about what you're doing with your life. I can't deal with Steve on my own anymore, even with Danny. You gotta do better about being around, about being in contact."

"I know," Arthur said, genuinely surprising Eames. "I will. Honestly, I promise I will."

"We're gonna hold you to it," Danny said seriously, getting up and hugging Arthur too. "I know you McGarretts are still figuring out this whole family thing, but let me tell you, you have a lot to learn from the Williams Family Experience."

"Never," Arthur said, clapping Danny on the back. "Not a fucking chance, Danny. I'm pretty sure our version of family involves residences a safe continent or ocean apart from one another."

"As long as we don't let that stop us from anything," Mary corrected, hugging Arthur again.

"Hey, I'll tell Gracie you said goodbye," Danny said apologetically. "She's at the Girl Scouts with her mother, I'm sorry she didn't get a chance to tell you herself."

"Please do," Eames said. "She's a lovely girl."

Danny beamed at him. "Thank you," he said, offering his hand. Eames shook it, and then accepted Mary's hug. He picked up their bags, ready to follow Arthur.

"Hey, we're gonna take her," Arthur said to Danny, and Danny nodded.

"That's fine, it's not like he's gonna be driving her around. She's in the garage, just hit the button for the door and let me know where you parked her, we'll get it on Monday."

"Bye guys," Arthur said. "I--yeah. I love you."

"It was nice to meet you all," Eames said, and smiled at Danny's laugh.

"We're not taking the rental?" Eames asked, following Arthur to the house's garage.

"No, the agency came and picked it up this morning," Arthur said absently, following a door through to a dropcloth-covered vehicle.

"What's this then?" Eames asked curiously, setting down the bags.

"This," Arthur said with a flourish, tugging off the dropcloth, "is my dad's baby." Underneath was a classic American muscle car, black and gleaming with a fairly new coat of paint. Eames let out a low whistle, and Arthur smiled at him in appreciation.

"I'm afraid I don't know my cars, love, you'll have to catch up me up," Eames said.

"1968 Mercury Marquis," Arthur said with reverence. "My dad picked her up in the early eighties as a wreck, a real fixer-upper, and he did some work on it for years. Until my mom died, and he just--well."

"Right," Eames said. "And then?"

"Well, he was always talking about how he wanted to fix it up with his sons," Arthur said, opening the car and reaching through to pop the passenger side lock. Eames put their bags in the backseat and climbed in. Arthur's face was alight with pleasure as he fit the key to the ignition. "But, you know, he never actually did anything with it, and then he--" Arthur cut himself off, something dark flashing across his face. He turned the car over and it roared to life. Eames was surprised it didn't rouse the whole island, with the noise it was making.

"Steve decided to fix it up a couple of years ago," Arthur said, pressing the button for the garage. They waited while it slowly opened. "I sent him a few parts I'd been collecting when I heard what he was doing, and paid for the paint job earlier this year. He's done most of it, though. It was the one thing we could talk about without arguing."

"She's beautiful," Eames said sincerely, and was rewarded with Arthur's lovely smile.

"Thanks," he said, and nearly peeled out of the driveway, barely remembering to hit the garage door button again.

They drove back the way they had originally come, Arthur pointing this and that out as they drove. They finally pulled into the Kahala Hotel, the car still purring when Arthur put her into park.

"We're about twenty minutes from the airport if traffic holds," Arthur told him. "I kind of wanted some space, to freshen up."

"Something less family-filled?" Eames said, stepping out of the car and grabbing the bags, which he handed off to a waiting bellhop.

Arthur smiled at him. "Exactly."

The valet took the keys from Arthur raptly, sliding into the Mercury with an expression of bliss. Arthur ran a hand through his hair, clearly trying to tame it back and failing. Eames waited in the lobby with the baggage cart while Arthur sorted out the front desk, and then amiably followed him to the elevator.

The ride up was done in companionable silence, and Eames kept pace as Arthur led them to the room. It was well-appointed, tropical but subtly so, and Eames smiled at the waiting champagne bucket on the table. He popped it, pouring two glasses, and brought one over to Arthur, who was in the bedroom of the two-room suite.

"Eames, it's barely two," Arthur said in a laughing rebuke; but he smiled and took a flute nonetheless, bringing it to his lips.

"You know, I'll be a bit devastated when you begin hiding your smiles again, Arthur," Eames said ruefully, sipping at his glass. It was a nice bottle, bright and springy and suited to the climate, a bit over-chilled for most places but well done here.

"Who said I ever hid them from you?" Arthur asked rhetorically, setting down his glass on a night table and stepping into Eames' space.

"I should pay better attention," Eames murmured.

"You should," Arthur agreed, angling his face for a kiss. Eames was happy to oblige.

Arthur moved them towards the bed, and Eames' champagne fell to the floor, spilling onto the expensive carpet. He could have cared less, pushing a hand to meet the warm skin of Arthur's ass, the other resting against Arthur's neck, pressing a long open kiss into him just to hear Arthur's answering sound.

"Eames," Arthur said softly, "Eames, I need you to--" He cut himself off with another kiss, pushing Eames to his back and bracing over him, hands alongside Eames' head.

"Whatever you want," Eames said, knuckling into the skin of Arthur's spine, and Arthur made a grateful noise and pushed him hard into the mattress.

"Stay," he said, wrenching away. In a moment he'd shucked his t-shirt and shorts, nothing beneath them but skin, and knelt down, sliding off Eames' loafers and pressing a kiss to his right ankle. Hands crept up Eames' thighs, coming to the button his trousers and unhooking it, drawing the zipper and then the fabric down his legs. Careful fingers flipped each shirt button free of its loop and Arthur pushed the shirt down Eames' shoulders. Eames rose slightly to allow it to be slipped off, and then Arthur was there again, hovering over and looking his fill.

Eames let him. Arthur was unabashedly visual, that characteristic vying to be Eames' favorite quirk about him, and he knew Arthur appreciated the shifting colour of Eames' skin, the hard ridges of muscle, the long-worn tattoos.

One hand came to rest on his sternum, pressing down slightly, and then Arthur was sitting back, taking Eames' cock, just hard enough but on its way, and drawing it into his body.

Eames screwed up in surprise and pleasure, eyes falling closed until he wrenched them open again, gripping the bedsheets with both hands and trying desperately to remain still. "Arthur," he ground out, "what did you--"

"In the bathroom," Arthur panted out, the muscles of his stomach jerking again and again even as he slid resolutely down, the rest of him locked in ecstatic tension. "At the house. I couldn't--I kept thinking of this, of you, and I couldn't wait, so I--"

"Arthur, god, every time," Eames said, hiccoughing breath breaking up his words, "every time I think I know what you're about, you just--"

Arthur, having pushed down so that Eames was fully seated inside him, bent over to meet the groan that escaped Eames' lips. "I want to keep you on your toes," he breathed out, setting his teeth to Eames' lower lip, "Mr. Eames."

Eames let out a broken laugh. "Dear god, don't call me that," he puffed out, and then set one arm around Arthur's waist and flipped them over without managing to pull out.

Before Arthur could say something suitably terrible, Eames drew back and then pushed in hard, nailing Arthur's prostate with the tip of his cock. He was rewarded with an ungainly arch of Arthur's body, Arthur's fingers digging into the muscle of his thighs. The slight pain cleared his head, and he fucked into Arthur, feeling the lube he must have used earlier and the drag of Arthur flesh, telling him how long ago Arthur had done this, thinking of him and them and Eames just fucked into him harder. His hands spanned Arthur's waist, holding him in place for several hard, fast thrusts, and then Eames placed his hand around the head of Arthur's cock, forming a fist and *squeezing*, employing that awful grip Arthur loved so well. Arthur bowed upward, mouth falling open in a soundless howl, and Eames kept fucking him through it, through the clench of Arthur around him, through the dig of Arthur's fingernails into his skin.

When Arthur dropped to the bed, as if his strings had been cut, he willingly turned over to his belly, letting Eames fuck into him that way. The flushed sprawl of Arthur's skin, the darkened line of his tan, the pitted scars and knocks and faint bruises all took Eames to his edge; and Arthur, looking over his own

shoulder, a shadowed hunger in his eyes, saying "I want it, give it to me, it's mine," stumbling-slow and proprietary sent him over.

*

Eames was eloquent in almost any situation, but post-orgasm--post-Arthur--was decidedly not one of them. He woke, again alone, hearing the shower running from the other room. A glance at the clock told him half an hour had passed. Their flight was scheduled for just past nine, and Arthur would insist they arrive promptly two hours earlier to the airport. That left him a few in between, so he drew back the covers and slipped inside, pulling a pillow to his chest and closing his eyes again. All hotels were fundamentally the same, and Eames had stayed in so many over the years that they were comforting in their mundanity.

He slept, feeling Arthur briefly come near, swipe a hand over him, and then recede. No dream; he couldn't sleep that deeply in so short of a time, not when he'd been testing out Maude's compounds for the previous few weeks.

This time, when he woke, Arthur was there, brushing the hair from his forehead and quietly calling his name. He opened his eyes, and sucked in a breath.

There was Arthur. His hair was pulled back into its tight hold; he wore a pale green Oxford with a dark blue tie. The tie had small flecks of gold in the thread, visible in the afternoon light. It complimented his skin well. Gold and green cufflinks flickered at his wrists, the angle cut of his cuffs alluding to the delicate knobs of his wrists.

No waistcoat, no jumper--poor weather for that here. But he wore his jacket, and it was one Eames knew well; he'd been there when Arthur had first worn it as a new purchase, and Eames knew every stitch from the peaked lapels to its double-vents. He wore his tie full Windsor; his trousers sported a perfect crease. Eames ran his eyes up and down, finally landing on Arthur's face, which wore an expression of repressed amusement.

Eames lifted his hand and cupped Arthur's face. Arthur leaned slightly into the touch, his face unchanging; Eames rubbed his thumb against the edge of Arthur's mouth.

"You smile at me all the time," he echoed, etching every part of this into his memory for later, so he would never forget.

Arthur nodded slightly, and Eames pulled him down for a kiss.

It felt the same, but quieter, and Arthur barely let his tongue steal out to meet Eames' own. He kept himself a careful distance, clearly wanting to keep his clothes pristine, and Eames let himself shudder at

being naked and near Arthur, lovely, put-together Arthur, this Arthur who had disappeared for several days and then shown up as if the whole interlude had been a dream.

Eames didn't need his totem to tell him it wasn't one.

"We need to get to the airport," Arthur said softly. "I didn't want to wake you, but I want to be sure we're not going to hit traffic on the H1."

"Alright," Eames said, trying to gain his bearings again. "Just a moment, then, love, I need to pull something together."

Arthur laughed a bit, squeezing a hand around Eames' wrist, and said, "I left an outfit for you."

Eames raised his eyebrow and tangled his fingers with Arthur's own. "You cheeky man, I bet you've locked my suitcase so I don't have any other choice, hm?"

"I'll tell you the numeric code when we're back in Albany," Arthur said, and Eames didn't know how he had never seen this expression for what it was before. Arthur had been smiling at him for *years*.

Arthur withdrew, calling downstairs for their car and presumably orchestrating rebel uprisings and seeing to the extermination of world hunger and the like while Eames dressed. It was a nice outfit, Eames thought with some irritation; a bit darker in hue and with more colour co-ordination than Eames was generally keen on, but enough had transpired between them that he'd wear it without complaint.

He was stealing all of Arthur's ties when they returned to New York, however. That was only proper.

Eames emerged from the bedroom to catch sight of Arthur, limned by the light of the floor-to-ceiling window. Arthur never wore black if he could help it, always building outfits from different pieces and colours and patterns, providing something exquisitely complex to look at. Eames had always appreciated that, and of course Arthur's penchant for a closer line in his trousers. He was a riot of texture and pattern, but you had to get close enough to see it.

Eames suspected that was yet another awful metaphor, and shook his head free of it, stepping up behind Arthur and turning him by the shoulder.

"We should get downstairs--" Arthur said, but Eames cut him off with a kiss, using his strength advantage to bend Arthur backwards in something of a silver screen dip. He pressed and licked and bit until Arthur's pulse raced, until he was breathing harshly and gripping at Eames with both hands, until he was rutting just a bit against Eames.

Eames righted him, kissed him once more, and stepped back. He grinned--there he was, the Arthur he loved mixed with the Arthur he'd come to know. Arthur made to slick back his hair from where it had fallen out of place, and Eames grabbed his arm.

"No," he said roughly, "leave it."

Arthur met his eyes and nodded.

The thing between them eased a bit as they checked out, collected the car, and drove to the airport. Arthur couldn't help but show his pleasure at driving the Marquis, running his hands over the steering wheel and sitting back in the driver's seat with a cocky tilt to his head. They were at the airport too quickly--Eames could've enjoyed that view for ages more--and Arthur sighed when they were parked in the Economy lot and he'd turned off the car.

They left the keys with the attendant for Danny to pick up, and got through check-in and security cleanly. And then they were in the waiting lounge of their gate, so very far from where they'd been a handful of days before, Arthur picking away at the crossword and Eames rifling through the unlocked pockets of his bag to make sure his eye mask was tucked inside.

"Eames," Arthur said, drawing his attention. "What about your family? Will I ever get to meet them?"

Dear god. Arthur meeting his mum.

Arthur meeting *One Two*.

"Well," he hedged, "it's a rather long flight..."

Arthur placed his hand on Eames' knee and leaned in closely, his breath hot against Eames' jaw. "It's only fair," he said, biting gently at Eames' earlobe, sending a shudder through him because Arthur was *never* this forward in public, "darling."