“I don’t get what the big deal is,” Barracuda is saying, splashing some of his drink down his wrist when he gestures at Mako in a big dramatic sweep. His fur is sticky and wet with previous splashes. “It’s not like I *actually* bit him!”

“You made a kid cry,” Mako explains matter-of-factly, because he had. Only a few minutes earlier Barracuda had taken to haunting the water with a fake fin strapped to his head and his big red grin poised like a scythe of impending destruction. This scythe had unfortunately met the wrong end of the face of a few kids and sent them all off bawling and screaming, and the parents had understandably been less than pleased. After a few minutes, Mako adds on, just for good measure; “Several kids, actually.”

“Yeah, but they didn’t have to ban me from the water for an hour!” The beach chair Barracuda is lounging on creaks dangerously under his weight when he throws his head back like a kid having a tantrum. He splashes some of his drink into his mouth, but it mostly ends up splashing across his cheeks. Barracuda hiccups sadly.

Mako, who doesn’t feel bad for Barracuda even for a second, rolls his eyes fondly. “You traumatized them.”

“It builds character!” Barracuda cuts back immediately, jumping to his own defense so fast it was a miracle he didn’t physically deflate with the weight of his own ego. “I got scared a ton when I was a kid, *a ton!* My brothers used to drag me around and terrorize me, and then they taught me to do the same! And look at me, I turned out great!”

Mako does look at him. He’s got four empty glasses buried in the sand by his chair that used to be filled with some fruity abomination that was mostly pulp and chunks that Mako had wanted nothing to do with. He’s got his shorts lazily pulled up with the drawstrings undone and splayed out everywhere, and Mako doesn’t even remember when he took his shirt off, but it’s nowhere to be seen now. That trademark red grin flashes in the hot sunlight of the summer sun, a blight against the cool blues and swirls of darkness of the sea. His teeth are sharp and menacing, and when Barracuda squints against the light to look at him, his eyes are vicious pinpricks that seem even more unnerving against the backdrop of the summer sun. Mako doesn’t say anything for a long time.

He takes a long sip of his own drink (just lemon and water, thank the stars) and stays quiet for a long time.

Then; “Oh look over there,” Mako pretends to be very interested in something happening a ways off, smartly avoiding the question.

This gets Barracuda distracted just long enough for him to forget what they were talking about. Further down the beach there's some guys playing volleyball, big burly Grems whose arms were thicker than Mako's entire body. Earlier in the day they'd bumped into each other briefly, and Mako could barely even think to apologize before one of the Grems was patting him on the back so hard he almost toppled over. He'd always been lean, his body built more for running and navigating tight spaces than anything that might put up a fight back. Mako pulls the edges of his cloak and tightens them across his chest, pulling the fabric across his body a little self consciously.

If Barracuda notices this he doesn't say anything, not that he was really in the business of noticing or mentioning to begin with. The guy was as oblivious as a hyperactive grade schooler on the best of days, unless it suited him to be otherwise of course. Barracuda's entire being seemed to be fueled by chaos, and he was only conniving and intelligent when it served to cause the most chaos possible.

Cause in point: he's currently trying to heave himself out of his beach chair and stumble in the direction of the actual brick walls of men playing volleyball. To do what Mako isn't sure, and he vaguely realizes Barracuda probably isn't sure either, but he doesn't want to find out.

Mako barely registers what he's doing with enough time to stop him. Mako snatches his arms out to yank Barracuda back so fast he can hear the tendons in his arm pop with the effort. He grabs the back of Barracuda's board shorts and hauls him back by his drawstrings, doing it so fast Barracuda plops right back into his beach chair like he'd never been up at all.

Barracuda stares at him owlishly for a second and Mako, who'd never so much as touched Barracuda in his life, snaps his head down and stares into his face on the surface of his drink. His reflection is garbled and out of proportion, with gigantic eyes and a wavy face. He can still see the unmistakable flush dust across his cheeks up to the tips of his ears.

Barracuda's still staring at him when he barks out a laugh and says; "What did you think I was gonna go do?!"

Get yourself killed trying to prove a point or make yourself laugh, Mako wants to say and barely restrains himself.

Mako does not look at him. He shrugs, a little helplessly, and takes a big gulp of his drink. It goes down in one big lump, and for a second Mako's afraid he'll choke on it.

There's a flash of red at his side and Mako pointedly does not look at what is probably Barracuda's very interested grin. He hates that grin, it's the sort of smile Barracuda only gets

when he discovers new buttons to push.

“Did you think I was gonna go fight them?” Barracuda asks point blank. Mako can just imagine him on the edge of his seat by now, spine all curled at a weird angle so he can lounge across the chair sideways with his elbows knocked up onto the armrest and his chin resting between his hands, kicking his legs out like a schoolgirl on the phone with her boyfriend. Mako hates that pose, and Barracuda does it enough that Mako can imagine it so vividly it almost hurts.

He almost says yes, then thinks better of it. He curls away from him, knees drawn up to his chest and his cloak draping over his body. He looks like a very comfy caterpillar about to become a cocoon and he manfully doesn’t spill his drink when Barracuda lets out his banshee shriek of a laugh.

“You did!” Barracuda bellows out, dropping his drink completely this time when he roars over laughing.

Barracuda’s just about average height on the best of days, but that didn’t stop him from attacking everything in a mile radius like it had all personally betrayed him. But he was much stronger than he looked, his entire body seemed to have been bred specifically to cause as much trouble as possible, and that meant somehow being strong enough to piss off all the wrong people and fast enough to escape them before they could tear his head off. And the last thing Mako wanted right now was for Barracuda to get a few lucky shots in on some guys more than twice his size only to spend the rest of the afternoon in the sea escaping them. Which was something Barracuda always did when he was bored; if there was nothing going on, he was going to create the something to entertain himself.

And Mako wanted no part of it. He was very happy in his beach chair. His toes were in the sand and although he was all wrapped up in his cloak, he was surprisingly comfortable and warm without overheating. Probably had something to do with the temperature norms between planets, but he didn’t dwell on that long. Point was, he was *comfortable*, and that was something he didn’t have the luxury of being very often. The last thing he wanted to do was spend the rest of the afternoon chasing the guys who were chasing Barracuda just because the thought of them bashing in his head was slightly less desirable than sitting alone in the sun.

“Because you would!” Mako says after a long while, finally uncurling himself long enough to pin Barracuda with an absolutely withering glare. He either doesn’t care or– yeah, he doesn’t care, but Mako does it anyway. Barracuda grins at him, menacingly. “You would, and then you’d run and they’d chase after you, and then *I’d* be stuck trying to get you out of this mess of your own creation! And I’m comfortable, Barracuda! We never get days like this and I want to enjoy the peace and quiet before whatever’s going on here stops and we’re back to foraging the

place for scraps! So please, just– just go grab another drink and relax, okay?"

Even Mako sits there shocked for a moment at all of the words that had just come spilling out of his mouth. That was– wow, that was certainly something. In all of the meager months they'd known each other Mako had careened between being completely mute and only partially so, only mustering up a few words at a time when the situation suited him. But lately he'd been braver, speaking up more often with Barracuda who always seemed to demand more and more from him, sometimes annoying him just to get him to yell and bicker. Sometimes Mako dared to think that maybe Barracuda just liked the sound of his voice, but that was a thought he dashed out of his brain as quickly as it came.

They both sit there in silence for a long while. Neither of them moves, and Mako pretends to be very interested in his drink again. He coughs once, for good measure.

"Hey, Mako," Barracuda says suddenly, and Mako hates it, because he can hear that damned tone in his voice that only ever means trouble.

Mako ignores him.

Barracuda presses on. "Mako, Mako. Wait, Mako, let me tell you something, let me tell you something," he says to Mako, who is now sitting there patiently, waiting for Barracuda to tell him.

"What?" Mako finally caves. It comes out as a challenge, and Mako hates that. He chances a look up at Barracuda's face and there's that mischievous glint in his eyes that's only ever meant trouble, and he realizes a second too late that this time he's curled away and too far to snatch Mako back.

"I'm gonna go bite them," Barracuda informs him cheerily and matter of factly. He grins once, a big, red, evil thing, and then he's taking off across the sand so fast he's kicking up clouds of it everywhere.

Mako scrambles out of his chair so fast he accidentally rocks it back into the sand. He sits there for a second, trying to get his feet under him and then he takes off after Barracuda. Their drinks lay sad and forgotten in the sand, soaking down into the depths.

How can Barracuda be so damn fast?! Mako's taller and his legs are longer, but Barracuda is like a little ball of energy that can outrun God themselves when he wants to, and by the time Mako finally catches up to him he's almost within pouncing distance of the volleyball players. He isn't going to catch him in time, and it's that realization that makes the change.

Suddenly adrenaline fires through his body like he just got shot with a vial of novocaine. It's cold and thrilling, pumping blood like air through his veins until he feels so light he could take flight. Unbeknownst to him, his eyes change - that recessive rush making his eyes dark and hungry. Mako lunges for him like a predator jumping out of the grass at their prey, and he catches Barracuda in the waist.

They both go tumbling over each other in the sand, hands and feet flying everywhere. Somewhere in the mix Mako gets a fistful of Barracuda's board shorts and almost rips them clean off, but luckily he gets a mouthful of sand before he can do anything. It takes forever for their momentum to stop, and when they do Barracuda is clean on his back in the sand with Mako on top of him.

Mako heaves up, spluttering and holding his chest. Beneath him Barracuda absolutely roars with laughter, and Mako would smack him if he had the energy. Every single muscle in his body screams at him, sore in a way he knows he'll be feeling in a few hours. His lungs burn with the energy he spent absolutely hauling tail across the beach to catch Barracuda in time. A few other beachgoers stare at them incredulously, but these things are as unimportant as how many stars are in the sky right now.

"Oh– Oh my stars!" Barracuda is laughing. He's got sand in his tentacle hair and all across his body, with big clumps stuck in his fur. His arms are crossed over his chest, fingers gripping at his ribs as he rolls over and shrieks with laughter. "I didn't– I didn't think you had that in you!"

"Neither did I," Mako says plainly, because he really didn't. Their eyes meet for a split second and then they're both rolling over with laughter. Their laughs get louder and louder, and Mako can feel his eyes watering. His chest hurts, and not just because his lungs are probably full of a metric ton of sand.

"Wanna go get a drink?" Barracuda asks eventually. His lungs are still spasming with laughter, his shoulders are shaking.

Mako nods once, feeling weak and shaky, but happy. "Yeah. Yeah, I like that idea. Now help me up before I hit you."