Trust goes both ways

by Ryxl

Summary

Sombra joined Talon in the pursuit of information, pure and simple. At least, that's how it started out. Things got complicated almost immediately. She wasn't expecting an angry cloud of smoke to be her boss, and Reaper certainly was not expecting her. Then she learned who she was really working for and became too emotionally invested to leave. Some of his old friends are willing to help her help him, while others aren't so sure. More than a year later, something she learns drives her to start making plans.

It's easier to burn bridges than to rebuild them, hard to forgive others and harder still to forgive yourself, but hope? That's the hardest thing of all.

All the ships are pale; there is no romance in this work, but you can look forward to some intense adopted-family feels, the fall of Talon, and rebuilding burned bridges.

Notes

First, canon's timeline is vague and unhelpful. I may have taken some liberties with how far apart things happened, and there is a boatload of headcanon to flesh things out with. Second, Reaper is not a nice person. This does not mean he's an evil person. Third, I used the Infiltration short and Sombra's origin short as templates for the things she can do: arranging data in mid-air, decrypting things in seconds, etc. And finally, I tried to build as
solid and realistic background framework as possible for the world. Overwatch was around for almost 30 years, and the Swiss HQ incident was only a few years ago. Sombra's good, but she's not omniscient. In other words, while she grew up idolizing Gabriel Reyes and Ana Amari and the rest, she (like the rest of the world) doesn't know who Reaper is...yet. This starts I would guess about a year and a half before the Recall short.
The cheap, third-floor room I'm renting in an Argentinian slum has been used for dirtier purposes than mine. There's a stained and beat-up mattress in one corner, and filthy drug paraphernalia among the trash in the others. The dilapidated building has no security to speak of, unless you count the stairs that creak like the shrieks of the damned - which I do. An empty socket glares blindly at me from the cracked ceiling, suggesting that at one point the room had light, but even if I'd brought a bulb the burn marks in the walls would make me wary about having any current running through them.

Because the wiring is so shoddy, I've had to bring a signal amplifier as well as the throwaway pad I'm using to hack into the Talon base three blocks over. It isn't anything vital, from what I can see. Just a staging area for moving materials. But I've methodically hacked into what feels like half the Talon bases in South America already, leaving enough clues that someone very smart and very suspicious would know all the intruders were a single person. To that end, I'm being deliberately clumsy as I fish around in their systems, following orders up the chain of command, leaving the local base and entering a bigger network. The amplifier makes it child's play for anyone to track me to my rented room. Or at least, it would be something I could have done easily as a child. I have to assume any halfway-competent Digital Security Officer would be able to find me. Shortly after I start moving around Talon's main network, orders go back down the chain to the local base: go to coordinates that correspond to my location, find and detain the source of the digital intrusion. Me.

I flail around for a minute longer before disengaging - make it seem like I didn't overhear the orders. By that point, troops are already chattering to each other over a secure channel. It buzzes across the top of my visualization, encrypted data translating to voices, an address being read out and grunts wondering if there will even be anyone there by the time they arrive. Plenty of time for me to send a short message.

THIS IS IT. GOING IN. The message is encrypted and bounced around a few satellites before reaching its destination.

The van is parked outside and the first painfully-loud steps have been taken up the stairs when the encrypted reply from my sponsor bounces back through the satellites and unfolds in the corner of my digital sight. GOOD LUCK, LITTLE SHADOW.

I'm halfway to the stairs, pad and amplifier abandoned in the room, when armed Talon grunts boil out and cover me with their firearms. Slowly, I raise my hands in a nonthreatening gesture.

"What's up, amigos?"
the hangar before I'm on board. They don't quite blindfold me or put a burlap sack over my head, but helmeted heads block my view pretty effectively. Everyone's been given their orders already; there's no chitchat even on secured channels. I'm strapped into a seat in the belly of the ship, the troops follow suit, and then the ship's engines hum to life.

We're in the air for four and a half hours, going east and sharply north across the Atlantic. It's *boring*. I can't even sleep, because the soldiers to either side *coincidentally* jostle me if I look like I'm nodding off. When we finally land, the satellites tell me we're somewhere in Morocco. I'm handed off to another group of armed Talon goons and hustled into another windowless van where we sit in awkward silence for close to 40 minutes before the van pulls into a depot or warehouse or something - the security systems register entrances fairly spread out from each other, with almost nothing in between. Well, at least the chances of me getting shot are vanishingly small. I doubt they'd haul me across an ocean if they were just going to interrogate and shoot me.

I'm hustled out of the van and into the echoing warehouse dock. The goons are silent, their leader an older, sour-faced man who had to have been in the front seat with the driver. He reminds me of a slightly-younger Tarkin, only instead of leading stormtroopers through the halls of the Death Star, he's leading Talon soldiers through the halls of what is unquestionably a warehouse complex. Why am I here?

Tarkin's younger brother stops in front of a door and punches in a key sequence. "You work for Talon now," he says in a no-nonsense tone that carries an undercurrent of washing his hands of me. "You will live here, and report to Reaper. All your needs will be seen to."

Before I can ask who Reaper is or who to talk to about *my needs*, he pushes the door open and steps out of the way with a smirk. It's clear that's my cue to walk into the dimly-lit room, so I do before one of the goons formed up around me decides to give me a shove.

It's big and mostly dark. That's about all I can tell before the figure standing a few feet in front of me grabs my attention. He's tall, easily six feet plus and solidly built, dressed in black leather armor broken up by pointy bits of metal and a mask that looks like someone had a fascination for owl skulls.

"So you're the new recruit?" he asks, arms crossed. From behind the angular skull-mask, his voice is gravelly and resonant and clearly irritated by my very existence.

Big deal.

I give him a cheeky grin. "Weeeell...it was more like they made me an offer I couldn't refuse when I was looking to make a career change anyway."

"Hmmph." He's not impressed by my Latina bravado. "What can you do?"

"Tch. What *can't* I do?" The rhetorical question is a set-up for a skeptical invitation to boast, but he's not taking it.

"Whatever. Don't get in my way, or I'll kill you."

Right. Clearly "Reaper" is taking his persona a bit too seriously. Well, I'm not impressed, either.

I give him the big eyes. "You can't kill me." Hands spread innocently. "I'm already dead!" And let him make of that what he will.
Silence, and what I assume is a scathing look.

Fine, I'll run with it. "So Reaper...you're like Death, right? The Grim Reaper? Hey, if you're Death and I'm dead, does that make me like your child? Can I call you Papi?"

"No," he says shortly, and disintegrates into a black mist that flows from the room.

Interesting.

Form a small message, encrypt it and toss it up to bounce around the satellites until it reaches my sponsor, where it will be decrypted.

I'M IN.
Settling in

Chapter Summary

Reaper tests the new recruit. Sombra tests his patience.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once "Reaper" has left the room, I start exploring. First things first: security cameras. There's a generous amount spread around - both sides of the door I came in through, both sides of the door my new boss dissolved into smoke and flowed under, both sides of the doors on the second floor and positioned to watch every corner of the echoing central area. The weird thing is that none of them are active. Either Reaper is high enough up in Talon that no one else at this base outranks him enough to be able to demand his whereabouts, or no one cares what happens in here. As for the room itself, my guess is that it used to be a secured section of the complex, a smaller warehouse or huge storage room with six comfortable offices overlooking the main floor from the balcony that encircles it. At some point, it was converted to living quarters: there's a kitchenette in the back left corner, a cluster of chairs in the back right, and an entertainment area in the front right corner which is mostly a good-sized holovid screen and a couch. The offices (and whatever little back rooms they had) have been converted into sterile bedrooms with bathrooms attached, and only two are occupied, to judge by the presence of scattered possessions in the front-left one and the presence of what's either a strange woman or an equally strange mannequin in the rear-right one. Rear-left, front-right, and both the offices on the back wall are unoccupied.

I'm guessing Reaper's claimed the front-left room. Not only is that the one with signs of having been lived in, but the door he left under (which leads to another storage room that also connects to the rest of the complex) is in the left-hand wall right beneath it. Since front-left and front-right are closest to the stairs, I'll probably claim front-right. It only takes a few minutes to slave the cameras and set up an alert to notify me if anyone requests feed from them. But until Reaper comes back, I just make myself comfortable in one of the chairs in the cluster and start doing a little digital snooping. Nothing too extravagant, just checking out the local landscape.

My tame cameras alert me when a black mist approaches the side door a few hours later. I close my screens as it flows under and across the room and solidifies into Reaper, who stalks over and stares at me.

"You're still here," he says like he expects me to have run off while he wasn't looking.

"Tarkin's younger twin said I work for Talon now, and that I live here and report to you." What-can-you-do shrug. "So I'm here, unless you tell me differently."

Wisps of black smoke start seeping out from his biceps and he leans slightly back in surprise. If I hadn't spent a good chunk of my childhood with the omnics of Los Muertos, it would probably be impossible to read even that much.

"Fine," he growls impatiently. "What's your name?"
A secret. "Sombra."

"And what can you do?" As if remembering the last time he asked that question, he hunches
forward slightly while smoke drifts off his shoulders. "How can you make yourself useful on
missions?"

"I'm an assassin specializing in digital infiltration," I answer obediently.

"Hmph. A hacker." He sounds thoroughly unimpressed, and a few wisps of smoke trickle down the
backs of his legs. "Can you shoot?" At my nod, he continues, "We'll need to test your skill before I
trust you with a weapon. I'm guessing you arrived with nothing." It's not a question, it just barely
isn't an accusation, and he doesn't wait for an answer. "If you're any good, you'll be able to figure
out the requisition procedure. I expect you to use it for anything you need and not bother me."

"Can I have the front-right room?" I ask, pointing.

"The one next to Widowmaker? Fine. Whatever. Just be prepared for an assessment of your
firearms proficiency in the morning, and don't touch my coffee."

He stomps off without waiting for my response. I watch him go up the stairs to his room, confirm
that the camera on the inside works, and then go up the other set of stairs to re-arrange my new
room. Using coffee as a starting point, it's easy to see the requisition procedure. Tarkin the
Younger said all my needs, so I test that by starting with some clothes, some data pads, a few
technological odds and ends, and a big, overstuffed chair to go in the corner so I can be comfortable
while I'm poking my digital fingers into all of Talon's pies.

Now that I'm coming at them from the inside, Talon's systems are an all-you-can-eat buffet, but I
have to go carefully. I'll need to stay here for a while, until I can move on to the next
step...whenever I figure out what the next step is. So, slow and careful. Savor it, little shadow.
Don't rush, or you'll give yourself away and ruin everything.

I go to bed.

My cameras alert me when Reaper leaves his room the next morning, and I watch remotely as he
flows out from under his door, down off the balcony to solidify in the kitchenette and make a pot
of coffee. He's already in that "I am Death, fear me" getup, and I watch eagerly to see if he takes
the mask off to drink, or drinks through a straw, but he doesn't actually drink at all. He just stands
there and holds the mug in those spiky metal gauntlets while black smoke seethes off of him.
Eventually, he dumps it down the sink and rinses his mug, and that's when I emerge from my
room.

"Good," he says as I come down the stairs. "Follow me."

I guess it's a good thing I wasn't planning on eating breakfast.

Reaper leads me through the complex to a courtyard clearly used for firearms practice. There's a
rack of assorted weapons, including a helmet meant to provide eye and ear protection while still
allowing for communication via the built-in comm. A helmet, singular. I pick it up and glance at
Reaper, but he just gives me what I assume is an impatient look and tells me, wisps of smoke wafting from his shoulders, to put it on.

"Pick one and start shooting," he orders once it's settled. "When it's empty, move on to the next."

There aren't really any targets set out, just a jumble of rubble and junk that would be excellent cover, I realize as I pick up a gun at random and targets start popping up. Each one only stays up as long as an enemy would take to shoot once or twice, and most of the time there's two or three up at once. Time to ramp up my processing speed. I definitely don't hit all of them well enough to kill, but I at least wing most of them and in an actual firefight, that would be almost as good. When each gun clicks empty, I toss it behind me and reach for the next until the rack is empty.

"Not bad," Reaper growls. "You did best with the submachine gun overall, but on a mission you won't always have the luxury of two hands. You," he says, pointing to the Talon goon coming over to pick up the discarded weapons, "bring me a clip for the machine pistol."

The random goon hands me the machine pistol and hurries off to obey. A minute later he comes back with the clip, which he hesitantly offers to Reaper and then goes back to picking up the empty guns.

"Reload," Reaper growls, handing me the clip. I do so fairly easily, and he grunts. "Good. Now kill that man."

The random goon startles and turns to stare at me in terror, realizing he's the only one in sight and that Reaper's just ordered his death. I raise the machine pistol and he screams, throwing the empty weapons he's holding at me in mindless fear. Drop to one knee to avoid the improvised projectile, squeeze off a burst, catch him right in the chest and there's blood everywhere as his body flops backward.

"Nice reflexes." Reaper sounds maybe just the slightest bit pleased. His arms are crossed over his chest and the tilt of his masked, hooded head also suggests that he's pleased. I'm not sure what to make of the black smoke coming off his arms. "Take the rest of the day to ensure you will be armed and dressed appropriately in case a mission comes in tomorrow."

And then he dissolves into mist and flows away, leaving me with a bunch of empty guns and a dead body.

When I requisitioned myself some clothes, I hadn't been thinking about going on missions. It's time to go shopping. But time is of the essence, so instead of browsing racks, I'm rifling through crates in the warehouse. Talon outfits may not be stylish, but they undoubtedly count as appropriate dress for a mission. They just need some...modification. For starters, I don't see a point in depriving myself of peripheral vision in the name of secure communication when I can just add to my current hardware. I help myself to a size that should fit and move on, because I saw some other things in digital manifests that I wouldn't mind appropriating with the excuse of not disappointing my freaky new gang boss.

Sure enough, while I'm unearthing a bolt of "therm-optic camo" cloth, someone comes in and does a double-take at me.
"Hey, you! Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"New recruit," I reply cheerfully, placing the bolt of cloth next to my appropriated uniform and conveniently leaving my hand next to the machine pistol. "My name is Sombra. Reaper is my boss, and he told me to ensure that I will be armed and dressed appropriately in case there is a mission tomorrow."

"This material is off-limits," he says, reaching for a radio.

I give him an innocent look. "Oh, are you calling Reaper to confirm that it's okay for me to have this?"

He hesitates. "Why would you need this?"

The innocent look gains a smug tint. "Maybe you should ask him, hey? He said appropriate, I'm just following orders."

That has the guard visibly sweating. "I...I don't think that will be necessary. Uh...carry on."

When I've gathered everything I think I need, I haul it all back up to my room and start turning it into something useful. The "therm-optic camo" cloth was probably intended to be made into an invisibility suit, or at the very least a shelter that can be hidden from visible light and probably thermal detection, but scrapped when they couldn't make it work. I know a few tricks they don't, secrets learned from my sponsor, and a corner of my mind plays tauntingly victorious music as I cheerfully rip tiny components out of the cloth and discard the rest. If properly connected to a bioelectric system, they'll set up a magnetic field that redirects not only visible light, but just about any particle-waveform that enters it. Like the best snipers, the most effective hacker is the one you don't see. If I'm going to be going on missions where I'll need to shoot people while being shot at, well, I really don't see how I can go wrong with at-will invisibility.

It takes several hours to figure out the optimal configuration and placement, then enact the subdermal implantation, but it's worth it to send the activation signal and have my camera tell me that I don't exist.

A quick test loop of the main room, bare-footed for silence, proves that either Reaper and Widowmaker can't see me at all, or they just don't care. My irritated boss and the blue-skinned woman are sitting at nearly opposite ends of the room, staring vaguely in the direction of (but not directly at) a news program playing on the holovid. It's enough to make me go back to my room and check my cameras. They confirm that as far as they're concerned, I was never there. Then I go back and check Widowmaker's room and discover that apparently her idea of fun is to sit in one spot for hours on end, staring at nothing.

Tomorrow, I think. If there's no mission, or even if there is, I'll start my investigations tomorrow.
Reaper's furious bellow at my door startles me awake and I'm out of bed almost before my eyes are open. "Coming!"

It takes less than two minutes to dress in my modified mission outfit (no gloves, got rid of half the random crap clipped to it, and like hell am I wearing that helmet) and make sure the machine pistol from yesterday and spare ammo are secured in place. Reaper's waiting at the bottom of the stairs with his arms crossed and smoke seething from the back of his head like some weird headdress. He doesn't say anything as I rattle down the steps, just turns and opens the door. I follow him through the halls until we get to a hangar, where the twin to the ship I got hustled into the other day is waiting. He stops expectantly, and half a dozen Talon soldiers jog into the hangar, in formation, and go straight to the ship and load themselves into the belly. The ramp closes, and one higher up opens. That one leads into a smaller area containing the cockpit, two benches that would seat three important visitors each built into the walls. Reaper strides in and sits at the left bench, right behind the pilot. He doesn't say anything when I follow and seat myself across from him. The ramp closes, and without a word to us, the pilot taxies out of the hangar and takes off.

The first half hour is silent and boring. I'm pretty sure Reaper is testing me, so I suck it up and stare silently back.

"This is a simple assassination," he growls suddenly about 32 minutes into the flight. "A politician meeting his mistress. The troops will secure all exits. I will conduct the assassination. You," he says venomously, "will stay out of my way and see if you can find a way to make yourself useful. Understood?"

Well, excuse me for existing. I toss him a sarcastic salute because I am not going to be able to say anything respectful right now.

A few tendrils of smoke drift off his arms. "And try not to vomit or get shot," he adds mockingly as we start our descent.

So that's why I'm along. He's testing me, seeing how I do under fire. I grin at him. This is going to be fun.

From the plane, we file into a van. I would have expected Reaper to sit in front with the driver, but instead he's the first one into the back and after a moment of wordless 'who's going first?' with the troops, I climb in to sit across from him again. The drive is quiet as well. As we slow to a stop, the secure channel opens and Reaper growls, "Sound off." The troops count themselves off on the channel, and before I can figure out if I'm included in that, the last one says "Six!" and Reaper nods. "Move out," he orders, and the troops file rapidly out of the van with him dissolving into smoke and flowing after them.

Guess this is a good time to turn on my stealth.

Two of the soldiers are standing on either side of the front door to a pretty little town home, apparently waiting for the other four to secure the back while Reaper smokes from the head and shoulders with a pair of guns in hand that practically scream 'overkill'. I sneak around him, reach
out, and convince the pathetic little security system to unlock itself and power down.

"In position," the back door team says over the comm.

"Alarm down," I interject.

Reaper starts, turns towards where my voice was, starts again. Smoke trails down from his legs, now, as well. It's like his entire hooded cape thing is going to turn to ash. Regardless of whatever this means, he growls, "Going in," and *kicks the door open*, holy shit, no wonder he wears metal boots if he pulls stunts like this on a regular basis.

There's screams from inside, shouts of alarm. Reaper goes in, but the soldiers by the front door don't. I follow him. A male voice shouts for someone to run, and a half-naked woman bolts out of the bedroom, shrieks, and throws herself backwards upon seeing Reaper. Sliding on the wooden floor, scrambling madly on her hands and knees, crying in terror, she manages to get into the bathroom before Reaper advances that far. I can hear the tiny *click* of the door locking. Reaper just walks right past and into the bedroom, there's a loud gunshot and the sound of a heavy body hitting the floor, and then he walks back out.

"Sombra," he demands, like he's not sure if I'm there or not but for my sake, I better *damn well* be there.

I deactivate my stealth. There's a long moment of staring.

"The mistress is not to be killed," he says.

"On it."

Snap him a lazy salute and off to the bathroom I go. The door is fortunately equipped with an emergency override, which I promptly activate. Poor woman is in the bathtub, biting a towel to keep herself quiet, and she looks about ready to pass out from fear already. I reach out with one finger, slowly, charging the EMP. She stares, fascinated. I touch her nose.

"Boop!"

The EMP discharges, shorting out her nervous system, and she slumps over unconscious. With luck, I'll also have shorted out her short-term memory. Reaper's holding what I assume is the dead target's personal data pad when I come back out to announce that the mistress is out cold.

"Locked," he growls.

"No problem. I can-"

"*Fingerprint* locked," he interrupts.

I glare at him and extend one hand imperiously. "Not. A. Problem. Give it here."

There's a skeptical silence for a long minute before he makes a dismissive sound and drops it in my hand. Then he crosses his arms and waits. It takes all of three seconds for me to seduce the thing, and then I'm pulling files out and spreading them around in the air.

"Anything in particular you want me look for?" I ask, trying not to be smug and failing.
He snorts. "Just disable the fingerprint lock."

It takes longer to close the screens than it does to change the setting, and then I hand it back.

"The mistress?"

"Unconscious."

"Good." Over the secure channel, he says, "All clear."

The ride back to the ship is silent, and in silence we load ourselves back into it. We're about ten minutes into the flight before Reaper breaks the silence.

"You're not wearing gloves."

I wiggle my fingers at him. "Hard to hack when I can't touch anything."

"And the helmet?" he practically accuses.

"Gets in my way. I need to be able to see what I'm doing."

For some reason, this seems to make him angrier. "Why were you invisible?" he bellows.

'Because I can be' doesn't seem like a smart thing to say. I arch an eyebrow at him. "You told me to dress appropriate for a mission. Are you saying that a hacker should be exposed for everyone to see, getting shot at? Because I gotta say, I do my best work when no one knows I'm there."

Reaper seethes in silence for almost three minutes. "You were clomping around," he says finally. "You need to be quieter if you're going to be invisible."

Excellent point. I contemplate the standard-issue boots for a minute. "I'll work on that."

That night, I dig into the "public" files on Reaper and Widowmaker (and geez, I know "Sombra" isn't exactly humble, but at least it's low-key, you know?) but they're bare bones, dull and flavorless. The agents themselves are more interesting, and that says something. Widowmaker has all the personality of a department-store mannequin, from what I've seen, and Reaper seems to exist in one of three states: annoyed, killing something, and black mist. I have other fish to catch, and this is a very large pond; digging into their pasts isn't a high priority right now.

Chapter End Notes
Ignore what you saw of Los Muertos in the Hero short; those were the acts of a few, the short hasn't happened yet, and when Sombra was a child the gang was a lot more focused on mutual protection and survival, adopting and helping anyone who had been left for dead (either literally or metaphorically). Omnis would have been highly unwelcome so soon after the Omnic Crisis, so there were a lot of them hidden away in Los Muertos.

Fun fact: Reaper wisps from different parts of his body depending on the emotions he's feeling. Sombra has not figured this out yet.

Sombra has seen all the Star Wars movies. She liked Rogue One best.
Turns out, there's a lot of downtime between missions. After a day and a half of nothing but silence and darkness in the "public" area, I retreat to my room and start going through archived security footage.

Requisitioned items get left in the storage area that Reaper likes to lurk in, the one with the door under his room. And I do mean lurk - he just stands in a corner, staring, although I have no idea what he's looking at because every time I've found him doing that, the lights have been turned out. But once I've figured out where my things are going to be delivered, it's easy to intercept one of the rank-and-file as he's wheeling a stack of boxes into the vast storage room. He tells me that at least once or twice a month, someone about has a heart attack because they opened a closet or unused office and there's Reaper, standing there like a horror movie villain about to kill the idiot teenage protagonists. He never moves. He never says anything. Even if the poor mook that found him takes a few minutes to calm down and then reaches past him for the broom, or whatever they went in for, he doesn't react. And because he's always wearing that mask, no one knows what he's thinking.

I ask about the costume, while I have someone willing to talk. The mask, the hooded cape-jacket, the spiked gauntlets, the whole shebang. No one's ever seen him without it. That makes me wonder why, in the long quiet hours when Widowmaker's sitting motionless in her room or in the furthest corner chair and Reaper's off standing in a closet or stalking angrily through the halls and occasionally just blowing the brains out of someone dumb enough to try to talk to him. What does he look like under the mask? Is he famous, is he horribly disfigured? Does he have metal plates holding his skull together, and biotic eyes? Was he burned? (A giant of a man, from a 75th anniversary movie marathon: "Why do you wear a mask? Were you burned by acid or something?" The man in black, answering, making the audience giggle: "Oh no, it's just they're terribly comfortable. I think everyone will be wearing them in the future.") Whatever the reason, I'm not going to ask. If he wants to suffocate under that thing all day, that's his choice.

There's a room he goes to once or twice a week that no one else enters. There are no cameras inside, so I set an alarm to go off when the door is opened and then monitor the network activity to try to figure out what he does in there. Finding the head of Talon is one of my goals, after all, and someone has to tell Reaper about new missions. But he doesn't meet with anyone in the flesh, or even make a phone call to wherever Talon HQ is. Whoever he talks to, he does so via holographic projection and the projector is isolated from the base's systems. There's no way to piggyback without getting my hands on the hardware; as soon as it hits the first satellite, it's gone. Dead end. But he does get mission information from whoever-it-is, and he reports after the missions. It takes a bit of meticulously checking old security footage, but I do confirm that the unfortunate Talon goons who get casually splattered by my constantly-irritated gang boss were probably telling him that his boss wants him to report, because after he cleans their clocks he stalks off to that one room.
Interesting. Either he just doesn't like being told what to do by the rank-and-file, or he has some beef with the higher-ups. If it's the later, then why is he here? What does he get out of it? Something else to keep in mind, in case it becomes relevant or useful later.

In the meantime, because I still have to go slow in my investigations, I'm bored.

Despite Tarkin's younger lookalike implying that I would be confined to the suite with Reaper and Widowmaker, no one bothers to enforce that. No one checks on us through the cameras, there's no guards stationed by the door, and no one stops me when I walk purposefully through the halls towards the Garage of Inconspicuous Vehicles. It only takes a few seconds to convince the system that I have a valid ID badge to scan and permission to take a dark, unmarked sedan out into the city.

Being out in the colorful crowd, in the hot sun, where I'm not the only linksignal within sensing range, is like being home again. You don't appreciate how dreary it is to live in a warehouse with no omnics nearby and no real social interaction until you go to a busy market on a sunny day. I wander for a while, soaking up sun and sights and scents, and steal a tourist's wallet so I can do some inconspicuous shopping. Clothes first, so I blend in, and a bag to carry what I had been wearing. Then I take the cash and hand the wallet to a hungry-looking local kid. More wandering, taking in the energy of the market and the casual presence of omnics in the local linkweb, before I spot a display of hairclips shaped like butterflies. The wings are curved bands of silver, thick outlines studded with ovals of crystal and smaller crystals filling the empty spaces. There's one with purple crystals. I start haggling.

In the end, the best price gets me two clips. On a whim, I point to the one with black crystals because the thought of it clipped cheerfully to Reaper's hood makes me giggle. Then, with a purple butterfly glinting from my hair, I make my way back to the car and drive back to base without bothering to change out of my new clothes. No one stops me as I stroll back to what I sarcastically think of as our private suite. Reaper and Widowmaker are doing that stare-vaguely-at-the-news thing when I enter, and neither of them react as I saunter over and lean on the back of the couch. Casually, I reach out and clip the black-studded butterfly to the front edge of Reaper's hood and admire the contrast of silver and glittering black to the softer matte black of the material.

Three seconds later, the entire back of the hood erupts into black smoke and Reaper growls, "Sombraaaaaaaa...."

He stands and turns to face me, slow and menacing, but the butterfly actually looks good and I can't help grinning. The black smoke pouring from his hood and shoulders drifts down to his biceps and a few leak out from his chest. I should probably make my escape. "Looks good on you, amigo," I chirp and then activate stealth and dart, in my soft-soled shoes, up to my room.

When I check my cameras, Widowmaker is staring at Reaper. Or, more accurately, at the hairclip he's awkwardly removing from his hood. Maybe I should have tried to haggle for three, and gotten her one, too. After all, I think with a bit of guilt, being nonverbal and almost completely unresponsive to outside stimuli doesn't mean nothing's going on inside her head. I mean, I used to think omnics were quiet, before I got enough augmentation to hear the omnic channel.

Next time...next time, I'll bring back something for Widowmaker, too.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, that was a Princess Bride reference.
Given how the omnics were able to coordinate and communicate during the Omnic Crisis, and how the God AIs have the ability to control them remotely, I've theorized a sort of wi-fi signal (linksignal) built into all omnics that can be blocked or left open at will, and any other omnics within about half a mile can link to an omnic's signal and join a sort of ad-hoc network (linkweb). While linked, bonding occurs, and after a few hours of bonding each one knows the other fairly intimately - sort of like the intimacy you have with that friend you've known since you were little. Because of this, there's very little omnic-on-omnic violence and a widespread view that all intelligent minds are equal, no matter what sort of body they're in. Sombra's technological augmentations have included a linksignal since she was about ten, possibly younger, both as a safety precaution and as a safety net.

Omnics are also capable of communicating digitally through an encrypted channel that is not connected to the linksignal. Think of it as a sort of digital telepathy. It's faster and more secure than speaking out loud, and most omnics prefer to communicate with other omnics this way.
A week after what could generously be called my first mission, even though I was just there to be tested, Reaper comes in and goes straight up the stairs and over to Widowmaker's room. 

Knock, knock, knock. "Widowmaker! Mission!"

I open a small screen to watch the camera in her room, and the change in Widowmaker is...electric. It's like those two words have activated her and she goes from staring blankly at nothing to practically purring with anticipation. When she grabs a specialized sniper rifle and helmet from their rack, it's with a quicksilver fluidity and she keeps pace easily with Reaper as he flows down to the door and out.

So, there's life in her after all. Very interesting, and absolutely something to keep in mind. But right now I have something else to occupy my attention.

The Talon base we're in seems to be, among other things, the place where failed prototypes get sent to be forgotten. This means the various warehouses are a smorgasbord of undiscovered treasures sent into exile for the crime of their creators not being able to think outside the box. And speaking of boxes, now that what passes for my adult supervision is out of the area, it's time for me to break into one. There's an entire box of "impact/noise absorption boots" that I'm itching to try out.

Whatever the mission is, it's far enough away that I have time to not only liberate a pair of boots in something close enough to my size, but rip the soles off and shape them better and attach them to something more...flexible. Afterwards, of course, I have to give them a test run. A literal test run, sprinting stealthed around the base, dodging Talon mooks and flinging myself off the walls instead of slowing down for corners. No one seems to hear me coming. That's good as far as it goes, but keeping the soles lined up with my soles is slightly problematic. Still, they're better than my other options, so they'll do for the time being.

While I'm waiting for my gang boss and the on-and-off sniper, I send an encrypted request to my sponsor. The schematic of the material is attached. In two weeks, maybe three, I should be getting a package with an improved version of stealth soles.

The outside camera warns me when Reaper and the startlingly alert Widowmaker approach, and I close all my screens and go invisible before they can open it. Widowmaker loses all animation the instant she crosses the threshold and returns to her room like the zombie I'm more used to her being. Reaper stands in the middle of the room and watches her go, stretching idly like he's working kinks out, but clearly irritated and bleeding wisps of smoke from the backs of his shoulders. Not trying to sneak, I walk up and stand right in front of him, breath held. No reaction, excellent. I drop stealth and press one finger against the nose (beak?) of his mask.
"Boop!"

The instant my finger leaves the mask, I stealth again and dash a bit away so I can see Reaper's reaction, and boy am I glad I stealthed. He's doing a damn good job of covering the entire room at once, spinning and pointing and spinning again, with black smoke boiling off his head and shoulders and my name echoing off the walls in a furious bellow. If the room had been filled with three dozen enemies, I have no doubt he would have been able to shoot them all in seconds.

Well, this is proof that the stealth soles work. If he'd had any idea where I went, I'm pretty certain he would have emptied both of those huge guns in my direction.

Chapter End Notes

What better way to keep your brainwashed assassin under control than to turn her off when you're not using her?

If you're imagining a Death Blossom only without the firing, that is -exactly- what happened.
It's going to be a few days before the next mission, and I'm actually being included this time. Reaper thrust a data pad in my direction with the details so I could familiarize myself with them, but they don't really tell me anything. Date, time, place, who owns the building, the guy we're going in for Reaper to kill, but my part is insultingly basic - disable the security system - and there's no details on that. Half an hour of independent research and I can practically shut the system down from here. Another hour tells me volumes about the target. Never married, no kids, few close friends. Moderately wealthy. Has a taste for sculpture. But most interestingly, he used to work for Omnica, way back in the day. He's got several highly-secure data drops both at home and in his office, but he's very rarely out of either and they're both pretty heavily-fortified. He's going on a business trip, though, and that's where we're going to kill him.

I want to know what he has in those data drops.

While Reaper and Widowmaker do their stare-at-the-news thing, I go up to my room and weasel my way into the target's home computer.

HELLO, JEREMY BENSON. The words appear in a simplistic chat box.

After a delay wherein he does his absolute best to close the box and kick me out, he places the cursor inside and starts typing. WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?

JUST A SHADOW, I type back, BUT I COULD BE YOUR BEST FRIEND.

That makes him hesitate. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

TO BE HONEST, THE CONTENTS OF YOUR ENCRYPTED DATA DUMPS.

I BET YOU DO, he types rapidly. He's angry. AND WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOU DON'T GET IT, HMM? KILL ME? YOU DO THAT, AND THE DATA IS LOST.

It's my turn to hesitate, because now that entry in his medical records makes sense. He's got a tiny device implanted in his brain. I thought it served no purpose, or was a tracker of some kind - all it did was generate a signal verifying the device is working. But I was wrong, it's a dead-man switch. If his brain function ceases, the lack of signal will trigger the dumps to erase themselves.

WHO IS YOUR ENEMY, JEREMY? WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO KEEP THIS OUT OF THE HANDS OF?

AND NOW WHY SHOULD I TELL YOU THAT?

BECAUSE I KNOW THAT ONE POWER WANTS YOU DEAD, BUT I SPEAK FOR
ANOTHER POWER THAT COULD KEEP YOUR DATA OUT OF THEIR HANDS FOREVER.

ARE YOU OFFERING TO PROTECT ME FROM TALON? He asks. BECAUSE THEY'VE WANTED ME DEAD FOR A LONG TIME. NO ONE CAN PROTECT ME FOREVER.

Well, at least this won't be an unpleasant surprise, then. NO. I'M OFFERING YOU A CHANCE TO GIVE YOUR DATA TO AN ENEMY OF TALON BEFORE THEY SUCCEED IN KILLING YOU.

THERE IS NO MAN I TRUST TO NOT BE AN AGENT OF TALON, he replies.

OR WOMAN?

OR WOMAN, OR ANYONE IN BETWEEN.

WHAT ABOUT OMNICS?

A pause. NICE CATCH, BUT THERE ISN'T A LIVING BEING I WOULD TRUST WITH THIS DATA.

Oh, I hope I'm right about this. THEN LET ME GIVE YOU THE COORDINATES TO THE POWER I SPEAK FOR, AND AN ENCRYPTION KEY.

I send over the longitude and latitude, then the encryption key I use with my sponsor. Jeremy is silent for several minutes.

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, he says finally, BUT I AM GLAD YOU CONTACTED ME. I THINK TALON'S GOING TO MAKE A MOVE WHEN I GO TO ATLANTA LATER THIS WEEK.

I CAN CONFIRM THAT, I type.

I'LL GET RIGHT ON THIS, THEN. THANK YOU. IT'S A RELIEF TO KNOW THAT ALL THESE YEARS OF PARANOIA HAVEN'T BEEN IN VAIN.

A little shaken, I close the connection and back out of his systems. Whatever he's been hiding from Talon, I have no doubt it's better off in my sponsor's metaphoric hands, but the reminder that I've put myself into the lion's den is sobering. I gave up everything to do this, but Jeremy Benson has effectively sacrificed at least two decades of the life he could have had, the last defender in a war no one else knows is going on.

There's three days before we fly to Atlanta to kill an old man who's been expecting to die for probably as long as I've been alive, and I refuse to spend them depressed. I'm going to go visit the market, and lose myself in the warmth and color for a while.

Reaper tolerates indignity amusingly well. It's like he's so unused to people not cowering or shooting at him that he literally doesn't know how to react when a cute Latina does something like bouncing in wearing a hot pink fedora and then plops the matching lime green one on top of his hood. Widow's reaction is so dull I'm tempted to not even bother in the future; I put the neon yellow one on her and it's like I (and the hat) don't even exist. But Reaper! Reaper stiffens even
more than usual and I can feel the glare from the mask and little black wisps start seeping out around his shoulders while he growls my name threateningly. It's like an offended owl. So much fury, so much effort to look terrifying, and it's all for nothing. I have to bounce back out of the room before I start laughing, but oh man, the footage from my cameras! He stands there fuming silently for a good minute before dissolving into black mist and slinking out of the room like a sulky cat. Interestingly, the hat goes with him. I save the footage and add it to my growing collection of Reaper Being Pranked, while vowing to do more of this in the future. Years from now, I will sit somewhere luxurious and laugh at the annoyed looks and the growls of "Sombraaaa!" while wisps flicker up around him.

I wonder if he's been stuck alone with Widow for long enough that he secretly likes even annoying human interaction.
You speak Spanish!

Chapter Summary

If you've been wondering when Sombra would find out that Reaper speaks Spanish, this is the chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As unprofessional as it is (but really, what about my life is professional right now?), I talk about my boss in unflattering terms. And not even behind his back. Half the time it doesn't matter what direction he's facing; at any point in time he may or may not be aware of what's going on around him. Or he may be aware, he's just not responding. The best indication is if he starts wisping - that seems to be an involuntary reaction. So yeah, I probably shouldn't, but I've been quietly voicing my frustrations out loud.

In Spanish. I'm not an idiot.

Widowmaker basically lives in her mission outfit (minus the helmet) and Reaper's never been seen out of his. She's practically an animated corpse - and I mean that, I don't know what Talon did to suppress her circulatory system or how her body doesn't suffer oxygen starvation, but that's why she's blue - and he's pretty much the embodiment of death. Not just in appearance, although there is something poetic about him dissolving into black smoke and just ignoring things like doors, but also in how cheerfully he dispenses it and how much of his time is spent in an apparently lifeless state. Together, they make every day feel like a half-assed Halloween. Which is kind of ruining things because I love Halloween. And, of course, Día de Muertos. We didn't celebrate birthdays in Los Muertos - mainly because it was a struggle most of the time just to get by - but we went wild for the celebration of the dead. And since we had, all of us, been left for dead in one way or another, that meant we celebrated ourselves as well. It's going to be hard enough celebrating without my "family", but living every day with Señor Angry Owl and his sidekick the heartless spider, well...it won't feel special. By themselves, they aren't really enough to be Halloween, but they're too much to not be Halloween. Any decorations would almost feel redundant or over-the-top.

I grumble about that a lot.

There's a generous sprinkling of sarcastic comments as well, because a girl gotta do whatever it takes to stay sane when you live with a spider-themed zombie and a literal Grim Reaper, but that's the bulk of it. Sometimes I see Reaper leak smoke from his chest, or his biceps, and usually from his shoulders as well, but he never gives any other indication that he's heard me.

"You're right," Reaper says in Spanish after weeks of me muttering about both of them under my breath, "she is a heartless spider."

The heartless spider in question is calmly picking shrapnel out of her biceps on our ride out from a
mission. Reaper is, as usual, sitting stoically on one end of the benchlike seat on the pilot's side of
the ship while Widow pretends neither of us exist from the other end and I'm sprawled across the
entire seat on the co-pilot's side. Not that we have, or have ever had, a co-pilot. It takes me a beat
or three to realize what I just heard, and then all of my holo-screens are dismissed with a wave as I
sit up, completely unconcerned with the fact that I've been calling him Señor Angry Owl. Or that
I've been complaining about them of ruining my favorite time of year.

"You speak Spanish!" I half-accuse in the same language. "Oh my god. You really could be my
father!"

"I'm not your father," he growls.

Widow looks at him curiously, but he hasn't reverted to English so I don't, either.

"Are you sure? My DNA isn't on file. When did you last take a vacation? Were you ever in this-" I
pull up a screen showing a map of Mexico with Dorado highlighted "-area? Did you date anyone?
Hire a hooker? Donate to a sperm bank?"

"No," he snaps. "Stop it. I'm not your father."

"Your DNA isn't on file, either," I point out.

He fumes, wisps curling irritably from behind him. So there is a possibility.

"You can't prove that I am," he growls out.

I just beam. "You can't prove that you're not...Papi."

"Sombraaaa..."

"Okay, okay," I say soothingly in English, both hands up. The secret to being a pain in the ass is to
know where the line is and only stick your big toe over, and that was the line. I've gotten pretty
good at toeing it with him

My screens come back up and form an effective wall between us, but behind them, I'm already
plotting.

Uncooked macaroni is easy to get my hands on. A plain picture frame is no problem. Silver paint
(because gold may be traditional, but silver fits his aesthetic better) is just as easy. Decorating is
fun. That just leaves a suitable picture, and the next time we're on a mission I am all over the
security footage, recording every moment of Reaper in action. I sort through it frame by frame
when we get back until I find one that looks good. Three-quarters profile, half from him turning his
head to the right to shoot with his right-hand gun, half from being mid-way through a turn away
from the unlucky goon he'd just shot with his left-hand gun. It was a beautiful motion, graceful and
clean, and reviewing the sequence I can see that he spotted his turn. The camera was mounted ten
or twelve feet up, so it perfectly captured the dramatic flare of his hooded coat and his arms form a
diagonal line that draws the eye from lower-left to upper-right.
The completed macaroni picture frame hangs above my bed until Father's Day rolls around. I get up early and put the coffee on before Reaper gets up, leaving the frame on the counter behind his mug before I wait, stealthed, for him to come down and see it. He doesn't say anything as he pours and holds his coffee, but gentle wisps drift off from his arms and chest and when he empties and rinses his mug, he takes the frame back to his room with him.

Chapter End Notes

If you haven't read the Junkenstein comic, you're missing out. You can't convince me that Gabriel doesn't love Halloween, and learning that it's Sombra's favorite time of the year was a big part of his decision to reveal his fluency.

You may be wondering about the lack of co-pilot. It will come up later, I promise, but for now we'll just leave it at "Talon is stingy".

Sombra knows absolutely nothing about her father. That absence eats at her more than she likes to admit.

There is an excellent chance that Gabriel Reyes was, in fact, in Dorado a reasonable amount of time before Sombra was born. The chance that he's her father, however, is vanishingly slim.
There was a line, and Sombra crossed it. Reaper is genuinely angry.

Reaper actually sleeps! Or something that passes for sleep, anyway. If I listen to the nanite swarm that lets him do the "turn into smoke" thing and pay attention to the amount of internal communication between nanites, I can 'hear' if they're active or in a low-power state. That's why he's unresponsive half the time - usually when he's standing in the corner of a dark room (even if he has to turn off all the lights to make it dark, tch, so annoying) staring at nothing. Still not sure what he's doing when he stands in closets. Maybe he's trying to mess with the rank-and-file. And I have no idea why he doesn't just sleep in his bed. Maybe he feels like he's too spooky for something as normal as a bed and doesn't like the aesthetic of sleeping in a coffin. But he sleeps! He'll wake up if anyone goes near him, naturally. Probably the nanite swarm recognizing the presence of a nearby bioelectrical system. But with my thermoptic camo, he doesn't detect me so long as I don't touch him. I've tested this out extensively over the last few weeks. If I'm gentle, I can use latex gloves and tools without waking him up.

That's how I got a red clown nose and a pair of blue face-paint eyes and a big, grinning face-paint mouth on his owl skull mask right before he went out on a solo mission.

At first I was afraid one of the Talon goons would give it away before he got on the ship, but I guess his habit of shooting the messenger has them all terrified of him because they just dove out of the way when they saw him coming. Identifying the ship's destination and hacking into the target's security systems took some doing, but the footage of random guards laughing at Reaper before he guns them angrily down is completely worth it. Of course, eventually someone calls him a clown, which spoils the joke.

As usual, I'm not in our "public" room when he gets back. But what I see on my screens is not usual. As soon as Reaper's off the ship he goes through the halls kicking and slamming the doors open, guns out, yelling my name like he's actually pissed instead of just being an angry owl, trailing black wisps like his hooded jacket is on fire, traces of blue and red paint still clinging to his mask.

"SOMBRA! GET OUT HERE!" he bellows as he approaches the door to the Team Talon suite.

Fuck.

"IF YOU DON'T GET OUT HERE BEFORE I FIND YOU, WE'RE GOING TO FIND OUT HOW UNKILLABLE YOU REALLY ARE!"

Fuck fuck fuck. Stealth out, prepare to vanish again, wait until he stalks past the stairs and into the middle of the room.

"SOMBRA-"
Drop stealth at the foot of the stairs. "I heard you the first time." It comes out sullen and snotty, which is not what I wanted, but there's nothing I can do now.

He whirls and stalks back over, guns thankfully away, but looking like he only freed his hands so he could strangle me with them. This is actually scarier than most things I've seen in my life. I've seen him kill a lot of people, but this is the first time I think he might actually kill me.

There's a lot of yelling. Not all of it is coherent, because he's really angry, and I'm not paying as much attention as I should. I catch "think this is funny", something about a body being taken for granted, something about the mask being his face? Or as close as he's been able to come since....he last had...since he lost...his own...body...

Memories from when I was a little kid flood my mind and I'm seven, or maybe eight, standing in the kitchen while one omnic scrubs the marker eyes I'd drawn off the face of another and a third is telling me sternly, "To make a decision regarding the body of another, be it how that body looks or how it will act, and take that choice away from the one whose body it is, is a violation of the highest order. We do not do such things to each other." Guilt, and terror, etch the scene into my mind. I violated another thinking being. They were angry at me. They didn't have expressive faces, their voices were firm and calm, but I could read in their motions and how they held themselves that they were very, very angry and they might be angry enough to throw me out, send me back to the group home where no one cared about me, no one came looking if I went missing, no one saw that I was hurting and hugged me. I violated another thinking being, and it might cost me the only family I had. Terrified and heart-sick, I burst into tears and fling myself at the omnic I wronged, babbling apologies...

Reaper boils into an angry cloud of black mist and flows away up to his room, leaving me standing there shaking, cold, and reviewing the footage of the tongue-lashing I'd just gotten.

It's not voluntary.

The form, the nanites, turning into smoke, I'd thought he'd done it all on purpose. But he didn't. He bleeds smoke because he has problems holding himself together. I fucked up. That's not just a mask, it's his face and I touched something private, I crossed a line. I violated him.

I have to apologize. I have to figure out how to make it right. I can make a gesture of apology, but I don't know enough about him to do more than that.

Reaper's private files have suddenly moved up to the top of my priorities.

A pair of blue fluffy slippers outside his door. "I'm sorry" scrawled on a slip of paper is tucked into the toe of one. If he has trouble keeping his body actually shaped like a body, then fluffy slippers should be extra-comfortable for feet used to heavy metal boots, right? That's what I'm hoping. It's not enough to atone for the violation I committed, but it will hopefully communicate that I know I fucked up and I'm actually sorry, I'm not just being a little shit.
I thought he'd done it on purpose because fuck, the ability to re-arrange your body at will? I'd do that to myself on purpose if I could. But no, what I've been able to find on short notice is that this was done to him. He's not an irritated jackass because he's just a jackass, he's dealing every day with having his whole life stolen from him. So I'm watching, stealthed, for the moment his door opens and he sees my apology because if he doesn't accept it, then I need to make one face to face.

When the door opens - the first time he's ventured out since he went in after yelling at me - he stares down at the slippers for a very long minute. Then, warily, he reaches out with one booted foot and nudges them back inside the room with him. The door closes again.

Apology accepted?

Chapter End Notes

It's not just anger that had Reaper retreating - it's guilt that he upset the one person who was treating him like a person, and fear that he might have scared her into treating him like a terrifying monster.

Brace yourself before you hit that 'next chapter' button. Sombra's about to find out who her boss used to be.
Behind the mask

Chapter Summary

Sombra learns exactly who she's working for. Remember those adopted-family feels I promised?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The private file has all kinds of details about Reaper's past missions, but nothing about who he was before that. A lucky clue - a word, the name of the town he was "retrieved" from, a date - gives me another lead to follow. I cross-reference with everything else in that timeframe and before that, searching mission reports and communications for a hint as to how Talon knew where he would be. They'd been tracking him even before whatever happened to him, just calling him "the target", and then there's a fairly significant mission that...

I know that date.

Everyone in Dorado, whether they admit it or not, knows that date. That's the day the Overwatch Swiss HQ blew up and our unofficial hero, Gabriel Reyes, was declared the one responsible. Irony, that the man we called the patron saint of not putting up with bullshit wasn't there to defend himself from this load of crap. I check the location in the orders and yes, that's Switzerland.

No...

No, it has to be a coincidence. It's someone else from Blackwatch. I scramble through Talon's systems, using details from the mission reports as search terms, and stumble what looks like into perfect copies of the Overwatch and Blackwatch servers. For an endless moment I'm the proverbial kid in the candy store because I searched for these, after the Swiss HQ exploded. I wanted to comb my digital fingers through the wreckage and piece together what happened, find some evidence that my childhood hero had been framed. So he'd been involved in some shady shit, assassinations and kidnappings and extortion. Who hasn't? Jack Morrison's idealism sounded good on TV, but it was Gabriel Reyes we idolized in Dorado. He knew the way the world really worked. He knew that sometimes the only way to make things better is by getting your hands dirty. With a government that only reluctantly helped the people it pretended to care about, even little kids knew there was a difference between "law" and "order" and that sometimes (most of the time) your Papi - your gang boss - was the one you could trust to look out for you, not a police officer. Gabriel Reyes was the world's gang boss, never backing down from calling assholes on being assholes, and all the bad press in the world never convinced us that he was a worse guy than the douchebags and fatcats running our government. But when I'd gone looking for Overwatch's servers, or even Blackwatch's, they were gone.

As much as I want to get sidetracked, to find the evidence that would exonerate Papi Gabriel, Reaper is my priority right now. I have a name, from the Talon mission reports. It's a cover, but it's a place to start. Working my way through the agent's reports, one side and then the other, I search for clues about "the target" and then there it is, a report to Talon: "The target has scheduled me for a private meeting with him." Quick, over to the Overwatch - no, the Blackwatch servers - and check
the date and time and the Talon mole was meeting with...

...with...

No. No, the guns are just an affectation, mimicking the most badass hero of the last two centuries. They're not...but they are, and he is, and I realize that I can't bring myself to believe it because that will mean that I've been a little shit to...that I caused genuine hurt to...

I used to fantasize that he was the father I'd never known, the unnamed section in my DNA record.

Whenever I was scared or faced with an unpleasant task, I'd think of him, and tell myself that if he could face down God AIs and their armies of controlled omnics to make the world better for us, then I could do this job and make life better for my "family".

I...

He was left for dead. Literally and figuratively. That makes him Los Muertos. That makes him family and even if I completed my mission tomorrow, found the information my sponsor was looking for and got the all-clear, I couldn't leave. I can't leave until I can take Reaper with me.

It's not because he's Gabriel Reyes. It's not. It's because he's so hurt, so lonely, so broken. He stands in closets. Now that I know who he was, I know why he's doing it. I know what that's like, to feel that hurt, that alone...to know that no one cares about you, or they'd come and find you. To know that even when they do, they don't understand, because they can't see how you're bleeding inside or they wouldn't tell you you're being silly, there's no reason to sit there, everyone misses you. Lies, all of it. Well-meaning lies, but the words are poison, acid that eats into you because you knew it, no one cares. Not really. I sat in closets for hours at a time, rubbing my fingers against the wooden floor, the walls, until they blistered and bled because fingerprints were proof of identity and maybe...maybe if I destroyed my identity, I'd disappear, too...

I won't leave him behind. But I still need to make a proper apology, make it up to him, and now I know who's behind the mask and that opens up a world of information. So many paths, so many possibilities.

So many burned bridges.

It's not like I didn't know Papi Gabriel had a temper and a scorched-earth policy, but that's going to make it much more difficult to find someone willing to help me. I may know he was Gabriel Reyes, but that doesn't mean I know who Gabriel Reyes was in private. The problem is finding someone who knew him and is alive, not in prison, and willing to talk. They don't even have to like him; I can work around that. But as I start cross-checking lists of names, it becomes apparent that the biggest hurdle is going to be alive and not in Talon because anyone who would conspire against him is someone I wouldn't trust further than I could throw their dead body. Sifting through the Overwatch records for names he probably never wants to hear again would be exciting if it weren't so depressing. Damn me for getting attached, but now that I know how bitter and lonely he must be, I can't help it. After my mother died, I swore I'd never let myself care that deeply about anyone else again. I wouldn't give the world the chance to hurt me that badly a second time. But Reaper...

He stands in closets. He puts up with me being annoying. I'm probably the only one who isn't overtly terrified, indifferent, or hostile to him. Knowing who he had been just tells me how much he had to have been hurt to be the way he is now. I wouldn't be able to just turn my back and walk away from someone that hurt if he'd only been some random Blackwatch operative, but he's not,
and I don't know how I feel about that because yeah, he's not dead, but how much better is being alive if your body is falling apart, everyone thinks you're dead, and anyone you cared about probably hates you?

One name comes up with an ambiguous end, and despite the heavy revelation I'm still processing - and the painful memories that leaked out of their subdirectories - I can't help but feel a thrill of excitement. Ana Amari, assumed dead, body never found. Time to get creative. Medical records are searched and narrowed, tell-tale fragments lead me across a continent, and from there it's nearly an open road.

She's alive. She's been hiding. She may still hold some goodwill for her old friend but if not, she'll probably be willing to talk.

Now, how do I want to do this? Text, probably. I doubt my "name" would be helpful, and I'm not dumb enough to ruin her hiding spot by showing my face in person. Preparations are easy; the next time Reaper and Widow go out without me, I can curl up in a dark corner to say 'hi'.

What's hard is facing Reaper and not letting on what I've just found out.

If I just hide in my room, he'll know something is up. If I spend longer than like fifteen seconds around him, he'll know something is up. I need to make a quick appearance, bother him some way, and that will buy me the time I need to process this and shove the memories back in their subdirectories. I could boop him from stealth, that's always good for eight hours of hiding in my room and it's quick, but right now it's too close to his nerves for me to be comfortable with it. Maybe...

I wander downstairs, barely looking where I'm going, almost all my attention on a screen, searching products. No...no...no...perfect.

Reaper looks up from the news at my cackling. "Sombra?"

I give him the brightest smile I can paste on my face. "It's a surprise!"

Wisps erupt from his shoulders and back, and he turns resolutely back to the news screen.

One finger touches 'buy', and in three business days I'll have a lovely black mug that says WORLD'S GREATEST DAD emblazoned on it in white. Mission accomplished, I retreat to my room.

Chapter End Notes

Gabriel Reyes led the initial Overwatch Strike Force that ended the Omnic Crisis, and if you think Dorado revered Jack Morrison over him because he led Overwatch-the-organization or because he looked the part of the Hollywood Hero, boy do you have another think coming. A few years after the Omnic Crisis, Dorado witnesses a bloody revolution that didn't so much tear the old government down as kick out all the semi-corrupt officials and replace them with -thoroughly- corrupt ones. A government of the rich and powerful, by the rich and powerful, for the rich and powerful. There's a lot of anti-government sentiment in Sombra's childhood. On more than one occasion,
Gabriel Reyes reacted to a reporter being confrontational and baiting by basically going WHAT DID YOU SAY? COME OVER HERE AND SAY THAT, I'LL KICK YOUR ASS! Great tactician, excellent military leader, horrible temper. So in a country with a government full of smarmy rich dudes who weren't always subtle about screwing over the 99%, the Latino who led the team that saved the world and doesn't put up with being polite to asshats no matter how politically powerful they are is going to be the hero of the people.

You may be asking yourself why Reaper is working for Talon, and if Talon is intentionally treating him badly. Those are excellent questions! The answer to the second question is 'yes', and the answer to the first one is evil laughter because you'll find out eventually. If you don't figure it out before Sombra does.
The next morning, Sombra gets a chance to say hello and make a -friend-.

"Widowmaker! Mission!"

It's not that early in the morning, but it's still early enough that I'm still in bed when Reaper stalks past my door, bellowing for Widow. I can't afford to waste this opportunity, but I'm not really awake yet, either. Grumbling, I track them through the base and wait until the ship's taken off before I drag myself downstairs and curl up in a dark corner. Screen open, establish highly paranoid security protocols, and it's time to say hello to someone I never thought I'd ever talk to at all, much less under these circumstances or for this reason.

I WANT TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT GABRIEL REYES.

The words appear on a screen they shouldn't be able to appear on, along with a helpful little keyboard. A reassuring two minutes pass before a reply is sent, letter by careful letter.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT A GHOST?

No demands for identification, good. She knows any answer that question might get would be a lie or an obfuscation. Now, how to respond? I could make an equally cute quip about how we ghosts have to stick together, but what I know of this particular ghost suggests that going the emotional route might actually bypass a good bunch of the intermediate steps between blatant suspicion and trust.

BECAUSE I OWE HIM A DEBT, I type slowly, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO REPAY IT.

Again, it's a few minutes before I get a response. Part of it is the sheer layers of encryption and misdirection, but there's more than enough time to assume that my new friend is considering her words carefully.

WHAT KIND OF A DEBT?

Of course, because it could be something illegal or nefarious.

I HURT HIS FEELINGS.

The silence this long stretches twice what the others did. I wonder if she's laughing on the other end, wiping tears of mirth from her remaining eye. Or maybe she's crying for the friend she thought was dead, physically, emotionally. The friend who thinks she's dead.

I WILL HELP YOU, she types slowly, each letter appearing on my holo-screen seconds apart,
BUT I WANT SOMETHING IN RETURN.

Oh, I like her. WHAT IS YOUR PRICE?

TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT HIM.

In the dark, I smile. First there was Papi Angry Owl, and now I think I have Tia Ana. Either she's testing me, or she's looking for a sign that her old friend is still there somewhere.

WHEN HE THINKS NO ONE CAN HEAR HIM, HE HUMS. It's not much - just a line or two, like he's reminding himself of some lyrics that hold meaning for him - and it's always in the dark, but he hums.

The answer this time comes quickly, almost eagerly. FIND THE SONG. GIVE IT TO HIM. Then, fast enough that I'm not sure if it was the same message or a new one, TELL ME HOW IT GOES.

That gets me grinning.

YOU GOT IT. THANK YOU.

YOU'RE WELCOME, WHOEVER YOU ARE.

For once, I feel bad that I don't have a name to give her.

I'M NO ONE, ANA. JUST A SHADOW.

It's going to take a while to find whatever it is that Reaper (Gabriel? It feels weird to call him that, because he doesn't act like Gabriel Reyes, but now that I know his past, it feels weird to call him Reaper, too.) hums; the security footage I've been able to gather doesn't have enough music fragments to land a hit on anything yet. But there's another avenue I can pursue.

Now that I know what he used to look like (and believe me, I'm still processing that) I can play with the programming of his nano-swarm. I gotta go slow here, too. Nothing fancy yet. Nothing threatening. But aside from that, the swarm is a mess! I can't even tell what the original programming was, the nanites have been on their own so long. Between them repeating their orders to each other until things get garbled and (to be honest) the messes he's gotten himself into in past missions, it's almost a wonder they do anything useful at all. They know the shape of Reaper's body at least, although they don't help him maintain it. That can't help his temper. The first thing I do is cobble together a patch to tell them to just maintain that shape until he tells them otherwise. There's a lot of hiccups in the coding that are making the swarm inefficient, but it's not too hard to iron out some of the worst bugs. They're circular knots of coding, going nowhere and doing nothing, so I just take them out. Without knowing the original programming, I can only guess at what they were supposed to do. It's like I'm proof-reading a dissertation in a language I'm still learning as I go, and the only reason I can get as far as I have is that it's related to a language I do know.

Confirming with the swarm that Reaper's body is basically unformed under that outfit was heartbreaking. Those spiked gloves are his hands, the chunky boots are his feet, there's just
unformed mass inside them with some vague bones. And that's not even addressing the mess that's under his mask. It makes me feel even guiltier about my stupid clown-face prank, but I can make it up to him. It'll take some time, but I can make it up to him and more.

Of course, now that I know he has no face, his daily coffee-cup cuddling makes me want to cry. He can't even drink it, I don't know the swarm language enough to know if he can smell it (or taste it, or feel heat, or how does he even see?) so I have to assume it's just something left over from when he was human that he clings to because he's lost everything else. I need to do more digging, see if I can find any documentation on what was done to him.

But in the meantime, at least I have a few bug fixes to apply.

When Reaper comes in after the mission, he's limping and "bleeding" smoke down his back and one leg. Kind of distressing now that I know what that means. Widow doesn't care, of course. She just peels off to go sit in her room and do nothing. I'm going to have to hack into her private file sometime, see what makes her tick. Reaper hesitates, unsure if he wants to make the effort of actually going to his room or if he wants to brave being around me enough to just sulk in the corner here. Perfect opportunity.

"Hold still!" I jump down from the counter I've been perched on and dash over.

A few more wisps come off of him - from the back of his head, and his shoulders, so not related to his injury (is injury the right word?) - but he holds still. Stiffens even more as I slide around to behind him, and then my glowing hands are on his shoulderblades (or what passes for them), information passing from my systems to his, pink ghosting through his swarm as the patch takes effect.

"Sombra," he growls, "what did you do to me?"

The smoke bleeding from his back and leg has stopped. I back away, into his line of sight, all smugness and satisfaction. "Oh, nothing much...just a little upgrade. Make it easier to keep yourself together, give you more energy. You know," I finish dismissively with an appropriately flippant hand gesture.

The wisping from his shoulders and head gets worse - he's glowering at me, Papi Angry Owl giving me a threat display we both know isn't going to scare me and that makes him angrier - and then he just melts into smoke and flows sullenly up to his room and right under the door.

Laughing softly, I saunter off to my own room. This little shadow got homework to do.

Chapter End Notes

Sombra's been active under that name (and the descriptor "just a shadow") for several years at this point, and a good chunk of her activity is for the benefit of various omnic groups. She erases her tracks from the hacking and blackmailing very well, but she's
built up a reputation in omnic circles. When Ana makes inquiries about the mysterious entity that Gabriel has apparently befriended, she is able to determine from her contacts that it was Sombra......but she has no idea who or what "Sombra" is except "hacker and friend of omnics".
Sombra does what any fangirl would do: look up Gabriel's birthday.

Knowing that Reaper's hidden identity is Gabriel Reyes, the little girl I had once been wants to hug him and not let go. Like that would go over well. I sit on that impulse, but give in to the impulse of the teenager I used to be and search Talon's stolen records for his birthdate. Pull up the copy of the Overwatch server, laugh at the security protocols as I bypass them, access the personnel profiles...so far, so good...R, Ra, Re, Reyes, Gabriel. Reaper looks over at my anticipatory laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" he growls, irritated, like he actually cared what was on the news and I was interrupting him.

"Nothing."

"What what?"

"It's not there." The words come out indignant and offended, but seriously? That file was restricted to the very top level of command in Overwatch, your best friends, and you're gonna hide your birthday?

Reaper laughs at me. It's not the unhinged maniacal stuff he comes out with when he's killing a whole bunch of people, just a quiet, evil little chuckle. Taking pleasure in whatever I had been planning to annoy him with being thwarted. He'd laugh harder if he knew what I was looking at.

Well, there was some (justified, in my biased mind, because no offense to Jack Morrison but in Dorado we sort of value getting things done over talking politely to scumbags) tension between Overwatch and Blackwatch by the end, so maybe the Blackwatch records...

Security protocols are stricter in the Blackwatch servers, and the profile of Gabriel Reyes is only accessible by Gabriel Reyes. Good. I crack my knuckles melodramatically and open the file. Birthplace, height, weight, hair color, eye color, birthdate!

FU/CK/THAT

"Are you kidding me?"
"Problems?" Reaper asks, taunting me, and I can't stop myself from giving him an incredulous
look.

"No," I tell him grimly, turning back to my screens.

I will find his birthday. He can't have erased himself completely like I did. I'll find it somewhere.

Gabriel Reyes and Jack Morrison were in America's Soldier Enhancement Program before they
were tapped for the Overwatch Strike Force, and I doubt the American government would just let
Papi Gabriel edit his military records, so that's my next target. When I find the servers for the SEP,
though, they've been trashed. Fragments of data are intact, which tells me this was a remote attack
rather than a physical one, but it was still thorough enough that not even I would be able to put
anything together from it. Reaper is greatly amused at me being the frustrated, irritated one for
once, but I still haven't sufficiently apologized for the clownface fuckup, so I'm not too upset by it.

By scratching at some of the fragments, I manage to track down a government email server. The
American government likes its backups; maybe there's an SEP backup server somewhere. Trawling
through ancient emails occupies me for three days that feel like they take forever because Reaper
is hardly ever in the public area, he's haunting the west hangar supply closet and I can't think of a
way to offer emotional support and I don't know if he would even accept it anyway. Seems like a
good time to leave the WORLD'S GREATEST DAD mug by the coffee maker, so I do, and hope
that he comes back soon to see it. Some unfortunate grunt gets given the order to tell Reaper the
boss wants to talk to him, judging by his first action in almost two days being to shoot the
messenger. While he's reporting, I change into my mission outfit. I have no idea where it came
from - Reaper just shoved it at me one day a few weeks after I learned he speaks Spanish - but it's
shiny and purple and amazing, so I'm not questioning the gift horse. The camera alerts me that
Reaper's returned, misting right under the door, and I watch as he goes to the kitchenette.

Reaper stops dead, one hand raised for the cabinet, and stares for a long moment while wisps erupt
from his back. Then, slowly, he picks up the mug and holds it in both hands. The wisps die down,
but I think he's bleeding smoke from his chest. He doesn't actually make coffee, he just cradles the
mug for several minutes before putting it up in the cabinet. Once the cabinet closes, though, he's
back to wisping from the shoulders and the back of his hood and he stomps up the stairs to tell me
there's a mission and activate Widow.

Finally, on the way to the mission, I find the trail to the SEP's hidden backup server. Watching my
determination turn to excitement makes Reaper wisp in alarm, and as we land, he reminds me
sharply to focus on the mission.

Reluctantly, I close my screens.

I crack open the dusty, hidden backup server for America's Soldier Enhancement Program on the
way back from the mission, with Reaper already watching me warily. He's learned that whenever
I'm excited about something, it usually means I found a new way to prank him. Personnel files,
laughably antiquated authentication requirements, scroll through the list of surnames to Reyes,
Gabriel. Take a moment to close my eyes and cross my fingers....
Then I get his file open.

Name: Gabriel Reyes  
Height: 6'1"  
Weight: 219lbs  
Birthdate: 10/31/2016

I can only assume my face lights up. My toes curl in excitement, and a shriek of glee climbs my throat only to get stuck and mostly swallowed back down.

"Sombra..." When I ignore Reaper's wary growl, he makes an unhappy sound and says, "What did you find?" in the tone of voice he usually reserves for telling people to die.

Almost paralyzed with glee, I close that screen. "Nothing."

Agitated wisping and a low, wordless growl is his only response.

I don't do anything with the information. Not now; the time isn't right. But Halloween! I want to dance, I want to drag him to Dorado and introduce him to Los Muertos, tell them that Papi Gabriel came back from the dead and we've been celebrating his actual birthday the whole time. He's dead, we're all dead, and it would be the best Day of the Dead celebration ever.

But all I do is enjoy that fantasy for a minute, and then firmly push it aside. I have work to do.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me Halloween's not the perfect birthday for Reaper and I'll call you a liar. XD

For any astrology people out there, this makes him Scorpio with a triple conjunction (sun/moon/mercury) in Scorpio, Venus in Sagittarius, and Mars in Capricorn. For non-astrology people, this makes him dark, secretive, and brooding times three with a side of inability to settle down in a romantic relationship and a temper that holds grudges and refuses to let go.

Gabriel's mother did not like the day her son was born on. At all. She's one of those OH NOES IT'S THE DEVIL'S DAY type of Catholics. So he grew up hating his birthday because he got shafted on it every year, but out of pure spite, he decided to LOVE Halloween.
Give him a hand

Chapter Summary

Sombra gives Reaper a hand. Well, two of them. And a pair of feet. And what would be a heart attack if he had a heart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two weeks after my chat with Tia Ana, I still haven't gotten a hit on what Reaper hums, although I got an extra bar or two the day after I patched his swarm. But this little shadow has been busy on her little project, researching schematics of artificial limbs and the structure of natural ones, splicing them together into a specialized bit of programming. Optional alternate configuration. I confirmed the swarm doesn't transmit anything but pressure, which is good in that at least he doesn't feel pain, but otherwise explains a whole lot about him. Well, his new optional hands and feet will transmit heat so even if he still can't drink his coffee, at least he can feel the hot mug and fluffy slippers warming him.

I've still been a little shit to him, of course. My day isn't complete unless I've heard him growl my name. He knows I'll do something, too. He doesn't know when, or where, or what, just that at any moment I could pop up and boop the nose he doesn't have or sneak up behind him and place a tiny sombrero on his head. Three days ago, he opened a small box left on a table and half of the resulting cloud of glitter went with him when he wisped off. He was dribbling glitter for hours, I thought I would be sick from laughing so much. Widow didn't even crack a grin. It really is like she just turns off when she's not on a mission. What happened to her? I don't know, I keep meaning to check, but things get in the way.

Anyway, it's time to annoy Papi Angry Owl by being nice. And to let him know that I know about Gabriel Reyes. I thought a lot about how I would do that, but in the end it wasn't even a question. I checked as many old photos as I could find and made his hands and feet look as much like his hands and feet as I could, so I'll just...mention that and play it cool.

Reaper's sulking in the main room, staring at a news screen. No wisping. He might be asleep. I creep up behind the couch, unstealthed, and hear "What do you want, Sombra?" as I sit on the arm.

"I have something for you!"

Wisps. Victory. I grin and present my hands, cupped as if they're holding something. Clearly reluctant, Reaper turns to look and I press them, glowing pink, against his chest. The swarm passes along their new orders, and the pink glow fades.

"Sombra..." The smoke coming off his shoulders dies down, leaving a few wisps coming off his chest.

"I wanted to give you a hand," I tell him innocently, "but I couldn't decide which one, so I gave you both and then I thought, why not? And went for the whole set. Slippers do no good without feet. And while I was at it," I continue while he stares at his spiked gauntlets, "I made the skin tone as
close to yours as I could get it."

The wisps on his shoulders come back, so strong I think he's going to just flow over the back of the couch and leave the room. Time to make my escape and leave him to adjust.

"You didn't think you could keep that a secret from me forever, did you, Gabriel?"

"SOMBRA!"

"Boop!" I almost think he would bite my finger off if he had teeth, he's so mad, but I vanish as soon as my finger leaves his mask.

Cameras report that he sits there, fairly vibrating with fury, nearly hidden behind wisps of smoke, for nearly five minutes before he dissolves completely and flows out of the room. He doesn't go to his. He winds his way deeper into the compound until he finds a dark cargo vault and the cameras can't see him. I leave them up anyway, listening as hard as they can. A few minutes later, I hear a handful of soft footfalls and the sound of a fingers trailing over a wooden crate. Then there's a noise like Reaper forgot he didn't have to breathe, and soft rustling, and nothing.

The next morning, I'm up super early and stealthed where I can get a good view of the kitchen area. When Reaper's door opens, I have to stifle a squeal because he's wearing the slippers. He shuffles out, like he's not used to shoes that might come off (because of course, he's not used to shoes that might come off), and closes the door with a hand, eeee, he knows I added temperature feedback!

Slowly, he makes his way over to the kitchen area and prepares the pot of coffee. I have got to figure out how to give him a sense of smell. When it's done brewing, he pours himself a mug and just stands there, holding it in both hands, taking comfort in the simple pleasure of feeling the warmth penetrate from the ceramic to his skin. He looks so at peace that the hood and mask almost look out of place. For the first time since I've known him, this is Gabriel.

I take a picture. If I ever need something from Tia Ana, this should make a good payment.

He stands there until Widow emerges from her room and descends to the main floor, then begins stalking slowly from the room in a stiff shuffle.

She gives him a funny look, which is as much non-mission reaction as I've ever seen her display. "Why are you wearing slippers?" she asks in a baffled voice.

Reaper just growls, "They're warm," and shuffles out.

Finally, I got a hit on what Reaper hums. It's obscure, and it's old, and getting a copy is going to cost a fortune. Or, you know, it would if I weren't a hacker. But I'm an ethical hacker - to an extent - so I find a fat target and he buys it for me. Routing the shipment securely means it will get here in a few days, which is fine, because we have a mission in the meantime. I haven't mentioned the hands-and-feet upgrade at all. In fact, I haven't annoyed Reaper at all since I did it, and it's been nearly a week. He didn't seem to notice for the first few days, but today I've caught him glancing at me with almost hesitant wisps of smoke peeking out from behind his shoulders. It's like me not
bothering him is bothering him.

"What are you up to?" he demands in response to my giggling.

"It's a surprise," I say, dismissing the holo-screen with the shipping route.

And that kills the line of questioning, because he won't ask anything else. He knows I won't say. Furthermore, he knows he'll find out later and I'll laugh as he growls my name.

The mission goes well, lots of killing, and my emotionally-damaged teammates seem almost happy as we fly back to base. Widow peels off for her room, as usual, and Reaper hesitates like he's actually considering initiating conversation.

"Did you ever try out your upgrade?" I ask casually, like I don't know damn well he did.

There's a hesitation. "Yes."

Play it cool, little shadow. "Oh. Did it work?"

Another hesitation. "Yes."

"Good," I tell him brightly.

Then I leave the room, leaving him to ponder that yes, I do know all his open wounds, and no, I'm not going to poke them.

When my very expensive gift from a very rich idiot arrives, the first thing I do is scan a digital copy of it. I did not go through all that work of finding it just to risk only having a single copy. Then I load the digital song into a portable player, because if I know my Papi he's going to take it and listen to it where no one can overhear him or see how badly he's wisping. I've scheduled a personal weekend, because Reaper's private files mentioned him being retrieved without "the doctor" finding out. In Switzerland, near Zurich, with the head of Blackwatch for a patient, "the doctor" can only mean Angela Ziegler and I want her records. Before I leave for what's supposedly going to be indulgent shopping in Paris, I slip the portable player into the mug Reaper uses every morning.

I do actually do some shopping in Paris. A handful of ridiculously expensive, gauzy scarves and trading information for other information because I have my fingers in multiple pies, and then it's taking a train to Switzerland where I can tap directly into the network of a certain hospital and go digging.

The blue scarf gets mailed to Tia Ana while I'm setting my lines.

Breaking in is laughably easy. I don't bother narrowing my search, instead I just sweep everything into an encrypted dump and ride the train back to Paris. At a fancy outside cafe I pretend to drink coffee and read a newspaper while in reality, I send a few messages to the new friends I just acquired contact information for and check the cameras for Reaper's reaction.

The player rattled in the mug as he took it out of the cabinet, and he warily dumped the object out
onto the counter. Then he stared at it for a solid ten minutes, wisping like his cloak was on fire, before snatching it up in one spiked gauntlet and stalking off. When he finally stopped, he was in that same dark cargo vault and out of the darkness came the song he probably hadn't heard since he had ears, and a sound like for just a moment, his desire to cry outweighed not having a mouth or lungs.

The song repeated for almost an hour before he stalked back out and into his room.

From my newspaper to a screen that ought not be able to display an incoming message: FINALLY FOUND THE SONG. I THINK I'M FORGIVEN.

After a few minutes, the reply comes back: ONLY THINK? WHAT DID HE SAY?

Well, if that's not a question without an answer. Especially since technically, I think I was forgiven when I gave him hands and feet. Or maybe when I let him know that I knew who he was and I wasn't going to make a big deal out of it.

HE ALMOST SAID THANK YOU, I type finally. SCARF IS FROM ME.

I don't want to know what she says to that, whether she's infuriated that "he almost said thank you" is the most gratitude I've seen from Reaper, meaning he used to be more open and expressive with his friends and now he's a bitter shade of who he used to be, or whether he's just always been like this in private. Maybe I'm a coward, or maybe I'm a soft-hearted little girl inside, not wanting to hear anyone talk bad about my Papi. Either way, I close the connection. He is who he is. I won't measure him against who he used to be, not when I've literally erased any digital trace of the little girl I grew up as.

When I get back, Widow is staring blankly at a news program while Reaper is...pacing along the opposite side of the room. I prance in with the purple-and-gold scarf draped around my neck and announce, "I got something for you!"

Reaper stops dead, back stiff, a few wisps floating out to show his apprehension. I pull the blood-red scarf out and drape it around his neck, then skip over to Widow and drape her in green. She doesn't react.

"Sombra..." It's not annoyed or irritated, but nothing follows it, either.

"Si?"

"Why?" he demands. I think he's asking about the music.

Not that I'm going to go there.

"Because it reminded me of blood," I reply cheerfully. "I thought it might make you feel better when there's no one to kill."

A wordless, irritated growl is his only response, although a few wisps drift down from his chest.

Laughing, I shimmy out of the room to start sifting through my haul.
Sombra's patch was the first maintenance Reaper'd had on his swarm since Talon scooped him up, and while he doesn't have a conventional 'pain' sense, losing molecular cohesion is a tactile and mostly unpleasant sensation. That patch basically knocked him down two or three stages down a pain/exhaustion chart and was the first time anyone had really demonstrated concern for him since he'd been with Talon, so despite his raging trust issues, he's not actually afraid that Sombra will knowingly harm him.

He's just afraid of what she's going to do with the secret of his previous identity.

The song - and the reason it was so hard to track down - was from a demo CD (or whatever technology will exist in ~17 years) some of Gabriel's friends did in high school. The band fell apart shortly afterwards.
Chapter Summary

Knowledge is power, but only if you can find the right application for it. Knowing when and where Talon's going to make anti-omnic moves means nothing if Sombra can't find someone to pass warnings to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There's an interesting little nugget of information in the cache of medical data I copied out of Angela Ziegler's servers, unexpected gold among the dross. Jack Morrison also survived the explosion at the Swiss HQ. There isn't much detail, just enough to know he's alive. I don't tell Reaper; it just doesn't seem like a smart thing to do. But by the same token, I sacrifice precious time sifting through news reports looking for his trail, because clearly I don't have enough balls to juggle between finding the head of Talon, looking for the information my sponsor sent me here to find, arguing with the programming of Reaper's swarm, tracking down someone who can put me in touch with the Shambali, going on missions for Talon, keeping up with any of my friends who need (or owe me) a favor, and trying to figure out a way to make Talon's tiny prototype slipstream engines into something useful because even with the notes Winston had on the Overwatch servers, it's still extremely experimental tech. Overwatch abandoned it, even after Winston was able to get Tracer out of her temporal hell, and sometime in the last five years Talon decided to try to weaponize the thing because hey, teleporting troops. Who wouldn't, right? But according to the test notes, using it for propulsion just sort of pushes the subject through a rip in the fabric of spacetime, and then the engine does a lousy job punching through to the real world again.

I think I can work up a pairing signal and a remote activator and use it to pull me through spacetime to where the engine is. It won't be as elegant or flexible as what Tracer can do, but it will be stable. If I can make it work, and I want to get my sponsor's input on the design before I try it out.

While I'm searching for Jack Morrison's trail, a flashing dot appears in the lower-right corner of my visualization. The friends I established during my Paris shopping trip talked to their friends and are relaying a message to me. As I unravel the encryption, I wonder if this is the end goal or just another link in the chain. Let's see...blah blah blah, establish trust, prove I am who I claim to be, ah-ha! Coordinates and date for a meeting. It may not be the end goal, but I seem to be making real progress towards talking to someone from the Shambali. Shove that screen aside, pull up another one to see where I'm going. It's...

...it's in the middle of nowhere.

Well, not literally nowhere, but it's a good hour's hike outside a town so small I almost expect them to not have electricity. No-man's land security. Protocols have been established; I'll need to come in as unobtrusively as possible.

"What are you plotting, Sombra?"
Reaper's staring at me, wisps coming from the back of his head, shoulders, and flowing down his arms. I pull up another screen to check rail connections and schedules. "Nothing much. Just planning to meet a friend."

The wisps die down about halfway, but he's still wisping as he turns away again.

I'd be surprised this town even rates a train stop, but the train in question is more for livestock or freight than passengers. It's not quite "two dozen buildings lining one muddy street" but it's still small enough that any visitor is going to be noticed immediately, and I'm glad I have thoroughly disguised myself. No point in lingering, though. It only takes a minute to orient myself, and then I find a trail into the woods and start hiking.

About half a mile away from the coordinates, I can finally detect my contact, and I take a minute to un-disguise myself before continuing. Ten minutes later I break out of the woods and into a clearing with a depression or partial crater carved into the slope. Maybe an old tree died here, or maybe it was a missile strike. It's hard to say. There's a lone figure sitting in the depression, legs crossed and hands out in a classic meditation pose. I've never seen an omnic in this design before; this is a warrior in armor, as close to human shape as is possible with metal. It could almost be someone in some modern version of full plate armor, with a very close-fitting helmet.

At about twenty yards, I send a hello ping, but there's no response. I finish approaching and sit a respectful handful of feet away. Still no response. While I'm debating how to break the silence, my contact speaks.

"When the light of truth is hidden, what recourse remains?"

Oh, clever. It's an authentication riddle. The answer is obvious only if you know who he was here to meet. "Sombra."

Now he switches to the omnic channel. /I have been sent to speak with one who represents Sombra./

/I am Sombra./ His systems whisper to me about keeping his biological parts functioning; that explains his unique design. /You are not an omnic./

/Neither are you. I am a melding of man and machine; how am I to trust one such as you, who can turn my body against me?/

That takes me aback. /That would be a violation. We do not do such things to each other./

/But you are not omnic./ He turns his head slightly to look at me.

I look at my hands, stretching and flexing them. The hinges are so smooth, the synthskin so convincing, that sometimes it's hard to remember they're not flesh. /Perhaps. But I am no longer truly human, either. That was the sacrifice I made to enter the shadows./

/A sacrifice you made willingly?/

Ah, so his was not of his own choice. /All those who would stand up for the greater good sacrifice the lives they could have had. I just took it a step further./
/And for the greater good, you surround yourself with evil./

I'm being tested for my intentions, independent of the sponsor I claim to speak for. But I've finally cracked the algorithm he speaks with, and identified his origins as Japanese. That gives me an idea of what archetypes will most easily convey my reasons. /When the enemy is well-fortified and armored, to attack head-on is folly. The assassin, who uses guile to unlock the gates and strikes in the dead of night, is the warrior to send into such a battle./

He thinks about that for a minute. /I am Genji,/ he says finally, and the block on the link-signal he'd been withholding drops.

In silence, we sit in the grass and let the link establish. It's odd with just the two of us, neither of us really native to the omnic linkweb, but in a way that makes the connection more poignant. Two adopted children, neither fully human nor really omnic, alone in the middle of nowhere. Two lights shining in the darkness.

/So, even ninja follow a code of honor./ There's a tinge of self-recrimination there, leading to a dark and tangled section of his mind.

I don't ask. He'll be able to see my own scars soon enough, the blank areas hiding things I don't want to talk about. /All who think are equal. To usurp the mind's rightful control of its body is to declare one's self above the rest, dangerous, a would-be god for all to strike down. This was the first lesson I learned. This is why I sought out the ones you represent. The battle unfought is the only battle where both sides win./

/Well said. We are on the same side; there is no need to face each other across a battlefield./ He pauses. /Should that occur anyway, you have my word that I will not strike you down and if you were to flee, I would be slow to pursue./

/Should that occur anyway, you have my word that I will avoid you to the best of my ability./ It's my turn to pause. /My train will not arrive for several hours. May I sit here with you until then?/

He weighs my offer of linkweb bonding for the space of a breath. /I would like that./

Chapter End Notes

Naturally, Zenyatta made sure his student had a linksignal. Someone who's almost more mechanical than biological is going to feel very alienated in a world populated by people who are either one or the other, but being able to join the linkweb means Genji has an emotional support net. There is an excellent chance that Zenyatta sent Genji to meet with Sombra so that his student would have a chance to make a friend...or a linksibling.
Sombra is actively interested in improving Reaper's condition. He's not sure how to deal with this except "badly".

Reaper's glaring at the news - little irritated wisps flowing down the back of his head. They pick up slightly as I sit on the other side of the couch, legs butterfly-style, hands on my feet, but calm down when I don't bother him. When the news program ends, he shifts like he's going to stand up and I say, quietly, "Can we talk?"

The screen shuts off and there's a pause. "About what?"

Well, that's promising.

"You know I know about...your past," I say slowly, watching him from the corner of my eye. "I went digging to see if I could find out what had been done to you, to see if I could make it better. I thought..." I break off, shaking my head slightly. "Until you yelled at me, I thought you'd chosen your situation, the way I had."

"Hardly," he interjects dryly.

"I know that now." Pause, deep breath. "I found the original records. I'm digging through them, but it's slow going. I can understand the programming part, but I have to teach myself the biology part. The thing about a nanite swarm, though, is that it grows. It evolves. It changes over time. So I can see what it was meant to do back then, but then I have to try to figure out what it's doing now."

The agitated wisping is not a good sign. "Is there a point to this?"

Don't look at him, don't look, keep your eyes straight ahead, little shadow. You don't want him to think you're being sassy. "It would be easier to sort out if I had a sample."

Black smoke is curdling around him, but he's still there.

"That way, I could get your input on what works and what doesn't and what changes you would like to see, and maybe have a shot at making those changes."

"And how would you be taking this...sample?" he demands angrily.

I glance over, and the mask is about the only part I can see behind black smoke. "I hadn't gotten that far yet." Then, before I can stop myself, "Maybe I just take a little vacuum cleaner and suck some up, hey?" It's just a joke, but there's some merit to it. And now I'm thinking of all the variables. "Hey, when you're...not solid...what's your volume? I mean...could I suck you into a vacuum cleaner? Would you fit? If we ever had to sneak you in somewhere, could I put you in a
Thermos, or would we need a ten-gallon barrel?"

"I don't know," he growls sullenly, and flows out of the room.

Just as well; I need to figure out a containment and monitoring device. But hey - he didn't say no.

Throwing together a containment and monitoring canister actually isn't that hard. The trick is in figuring out how to make the canister provide everything a sample of nanites and...cells...will need to maintain themselves. Specifically, without eating the canister because I don't think Dr. Ziegler meant to make basically omnivorous nanites, but mother of god, this explains a LOT about the sheer, raw damage Reaper leaves in his wake. I wonder if this is why he likes killing so much. I wonder if he knows that's what he's doing.

Playing with glucose drips and scraps of industrial materials and low currents keeps me occupied for days. Reaper actually has to pound on my door like an angry parent and shout to get my attention for a mission. Luckily my part is so easy I could do it in my sleep, because most of my attention is occupied by monitoring his swarm at work. Having live data helps in terms of refining ratios, and when I think I've got something that will keep a sample satisfied, I rig a simple squeeze bulb to a hard-light test tube with a generous squirt of Liquid Reaper Food in the bottom and venture out of my rooms to go hunting.

What I did not expect was to find my target fuming in a corner of the darkened main room.

"Where," he growls almost before I see him, "have you been?"

He makes it sound like I'm his little girl, coming in at one in the morning on a school night. "Most parents would like it if their daughters stayed in their rooms!" I shoot back.

"You're not a child!" he shouts as he glides forward on a seething black cloud instead of legs. "You're an assassin specializing in digital infiltration!"

"What, and that means I can't have hobbies?"

"YOU'VE BEEN IN YOUR ROOM FOR THREE DAYS STRAIGHT!"

.........oh. I've been so focused on helping Papi Angry Owl that I've been ignoring him. Whoops. Sheepishly, I hold up my sample collector. "I made a little vacuum cleaner to suck some up?"

The wisping dies down for a beat and then comes back, flowing down his arms and torso to curl around his legs. Stiffly, he extends one arm and I use the bulb to suck a tiny breath of smoke into the tube. "Five liters," he says shortly. "Maybe six."

And then he dissolves completely and flows away, like he's running from the possibility of having hope.
It's easy enough to make the canister completely obedient to remote systems. I spend hours in the corner chair, surrounded by holo-screens, prodding the sample in countless ways and recording every scrap of data. Reaper watches me, silently, wisping slightly. He clearly has no idea what he's watching me do, but he doesn't want to admit that and at the same time, can't bear to turn away from the process of self-discovery.

Occasionally, I send screens his way with pictures of cute baby animals just to hear him growl my name in irritation.

Working slowly, comparing the original notes with the sample's programming, the bigger picture comes into focus. It's not pretty. The swarm isn't building and maintaining a coherent DNA structure, or even following any sort of predetermined pattern. What's even less pretty is when I feed my sample enough to split it and then apply the original programming to the new sample. Not only is it still tasked with rebuilding and maintaining whatever's there, but the molecules are being held too far apart by the nanite swarm. If not for the restless nature of the sample, it would run a very serious risk of phasing out of the container. If I ever cross paths with "Mercy", I am going to have words for her. "Mercy" - that name is a joke. What mercy was there in dragging Gabriel Reyes back from death just to doom him to a half-life of being just human enough to be aware of everything he can't have? What was she thinking, not programming a DNA sequence in? No wonder he's so angry all the time! He's been living in a sensory-deprivation purgatory for years, not to mention the social isolation, and I didn't see any notes about trying to find him after the date that Talon scooped him up on. She didn't even bother to keep his DNA sequence on file, or I'd be able to fix her mistakes myself. Unless someone has a DNA record for Gabriel Reyes hidden away somewhere (and I can find it and program it into the nanite swarm), he's every bit as dead as the girl I was born as - except that I kept my sequence in case I ever need it.

I don't tell Papi Angry Owl how dead he is. After all, I haven't searched everywhere to confirm his DNA is lost.

Reaper shuffles down in the morning to soak in the heat of his cup of coffee, but I'm still in the corner surrounded by my screens. Each one is reviewing hacked mission footage of him, which naturally gets his attention. He wanders over, but doesn't say anything and sits on the couch, like he's going to watch the news. Before he can turn on the holovid, I dismiss my screens.

"Sombra?" he asks, wary of being ambushed.

"I know what happens if you get hit hard enough. Structurally. What happens if you get hit with something that would kill a normal person?"

Wisps of smoke start curdling off his shoulders. "It's not pleasant," he growls. When I don't answer, he turns slightly to look at me and then looks away. "I don't die."

That's a clear signal that the conversation is over, and I bring my screens back up. That afternoon, I start working on a two-gallon version of the monitoring canister. Reaper isn't amused when I jokingly call it the Can of Whoop-Ass, and he refuses to have anything to do with it past getting in once to make sure he fits.
Still, I make sure the reservoir is filled with Liquid Reaper Food and the power source is charged and I stash it in the ship before the next mission. Just in case. Jerome the pilot seems relieved when I tell him what it is and what it's for. And then I build a second one to tinker with, because I wouldn't want to be locked in a dark barrel with no way to communicate, either, but first I have to figure out how he hears, or talks, because my god, he doesn't have lungs! He's like an angry beanbag doll filled with uncooked meatloaf and hate with vague bones shoved into the middle of the whole mess so he can hold himself upright. And if that weren't bad enough, when he gets hit hard enough that a normal person would bruise, the area just falls apart. When he jumps, he doesn't land. He dissolves into smoke just before impact and re-forms later because if he didn't, he'd shatter the cohesion in his feet and probably half his legs and that takes energy to repair.

If he ever takes what would be fatal damage for a normal person, I want him to at least have a safe place to recuperate. Even if he thinks he doesn't want it.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, that's part of why Reaper likes killing so much and yes, he knows that's what he's doing. As far as he knows, the only way for him to sustain himself is by taking what he needs from other people.

The social isolation was intentional on Talon's part; an attempt at breaking Gabriel's spirit. It worked very well.

There are no notes from Angela about trying to find Gabriel because she thought he was dead. -Those- notes weren't stored digitally.

The Mexican government started recording full DNA sequences for its citizens a few decades before Sombra was born as a backlash to America's anti-immigrant policies. It's pretty much impossible to forge a legal identity when fingerprints and a DNA sequence are key to that. No other country does this, but Sombra doesn't know that because she's never had a reason to look. The government Sombra grew up with gives absolutely no help to anyone who's not a legal citizen - someone who's not legal could be stabbed to death in front of a cop and there would be no legal repercussions for the act. Most of Los Muertos aren't legal. And if you're wondering, yes, this means omnics can't become legal citizens of Mexico.
Not like that, idiot

Chapter Summary

Reaper has no sense of self-preservation...except when he's being yelled at by an angry Latina.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I'm packing some highly valuable vials into a padded case, and paying more attention to getting as many of them in there as possible without any of them breaking than I am to the door of the lab I'm ransacking. The contents of these vials...their promise is so amazing, I'm considering pocketing one for myself. Over the com, I can hear Widow making sounds of satisfaction and Reaper causing widespread death and destruction. Nothing out of the ordinary.

"Sombra! Status!"

The last three vials won't fit. I pocket one and leave the other two where they are (I'm not heartless). Open the channel to answer Reaper, thumb the locks on the padded case closed, and that's when the door blows in.

"SOMBRA!"

Well, now I can't answer without giving my position away. My stealth drops over me as the smoke from the explosion billows in from the ruins of the door, and I can see the red tell-tale of a laser sight groping around for a target. The hand not on the case goes from tucking the vial away to caressing the grip of my gun. Another few seconds, and the idiot will step into the room and expose himself.

Then part of the smoke stands up into Reaper, guns out to sweep the lab, and the burst of gunfire comes from behind him. In the calm of the moment, I see eight different exit wounds bloom on his body before it topples over and the sound of the mask hitting the floor galvanizes me into action. The idiot who exploded the door gets an overly-generous facefull of lead.

"Target secured. Cover my exit," I tell Widow. Then I close the channel and switch to Spanish. "Idiot. Can you get up?"

Reaper groans before dissolving into smoke.

"Fine. Cover me like that. Come on!"

I dash through the base with the case held to my chest, leaping prone figures and letting bullets spray at figures who aren't so prone, while a black mist follows me. At every juncture I pause to check the corridors and he re-forms, but he can barely stand without leaning against the wall and with the amount of smoke he's bleeding, he can't be more than half-solid.

"Stop trying, idiot," I snap at him as I pause before the dash to the ship. Open the channel.
"Widow. Is our exit clear?"

"Oui," comes the reply. Good enough.

"Can you keep up?" I ask Reaper, who's again leaning against the wall and clutching his chest. He tenses like he's going to try to run for it.

"Not like that, idiot. Come on!"

Then I'm dashing across the open area, unstealthed because I don't trust him to head for the ship if he can't see me, running for all I'm worth with that black mist flowing at my heels. Widow swings down and joins us for the last dozen feet, and then the door is closing and Reaper is bleeding black smoke from the end of my usual bench. Widow settles in her usual spot, all vitality gone now that the mission is over. I secure the case while we take off, not missing that Reaper keeps dissolving and re-forming. Once we're clear, I pull the Can of Whoop-Ass out of storage and the lid hisses as I thumb the locks off.

"No," he growls before I can even open my mouth.

Oh hell no.

"You did not," I start, before switching to Spanish. "Don't you even try to tell me you're okay, Gabriel Reyes. I see you sitting there, you can't even hold yourself together long enough to say my name. You get yourself shot because you didn't look before you rushed in, and you're going to try to suck it up? Why, because you're a man? Don't you give me that machismo bullshit! You get your black-smoke-ass into this can right now because idiot or not, you were trying to look out for me, so you can just keep your mouth shut and let me look after you, ungrateful boy! You think I built this for fun? I built this so that when you got your ass handed to you, I could sleep at night knowing you were safe! Would you do this to your mother? Would you bleed on her couch and lie to her face, tell her you're fine with eight bullet holes in your body? You get in this can right now or so help me god...!"

Luckily for him, I don't need to come up with a fitting threat because he dissolves again and flows limply across the floor and into the can. Once the last wisps are coiled inside, I close and seal the lid. Widow's watching me with distant awe, like the heat of my anger actually thawed her ice enough for her to be impressed. Pulling my composure together, I sit and open screens to check on the data the Can of Whoop-Ass is putting out. After all, this is the first field test and I just know we're going to have to use it again in the future.

Everything looks good; the LRF is being assimilated at a steady rate and the power source is holding steady. I have no idea how long it will take him to heal completely, or even just enough to not spend the night in an overgrown Thermos, and make a note to finish the mechanism to allow the occupant to hear and speak.

The LRF still hasn't been fully assimilated by the time the ship lands, so guess who's hauling a two-hundred-pound can of cranky smoke into our quarters? This little shadow, that's who. I set it down with a grunt in front of the couch and flop down in a fit of melodrama.
"You're lucky I care about you," I grumble, knowing he can't hear me.

Then, since I need to share my frustration with someone, I call up Tia Ana's screen.

WAS HE STUPID-STUBBORN BEFORE? LIKE "OH IGNORE THESE EIGHT GUNSHOT WOUNDS AND ME BLEEDING, I'M FINE"?

I don't bother naming names; she knows who I mean. It takes a few minutes before a reply comes back.

SADLY, YES. IS HE OKAY?

Shoot an annoyed look at the can. NO. HE GOT SHOT EIGHT TIMES. BUT HE'S RESTING.

HOW DID YOU GET HIM TO REST? I can almost hear the incredulity in her text.

I YELLED HIM INTO A CAN OF GLUCOSE AND METAL DUST AND THEN I SEALED IT SHUT.

As if he knows we're talking about him, the can rattles slightly. I put my foot solidly down on it. "You're not going anywhere until you've finished your supper," I mutter. When I look back at the screen, Ana's replied.

GOOD. I WISH I COULD HAVE DONE THAT TO HIM. WOULD IT HELP TO HAVE ANGELA'S NOTES?

Well, at least I have her blessing, I guess? And isn't there a saying about forgiveness and permission?

IF THEY WERE STORED DIGITALLY, I ALREADY HAVE THEM.

I'm not wincing at all as I type that. Nope. No sickening dread that I've just ruined whatever goodwill she had towards me. Nor am I nervous about getting a reply.

OF COURSE. KEEP IN TOUCH.

That...was not the reply I was expecting, but I'm not going to argue. And, well, I guess she does know that I'm a hacker. Considering I tracked her down and all.

SURE THING, ANA.

As I close the connection, I wonder if it would be improper to offer her a way to initiate contact with me. I mean, sure, she doesn't object to talking to me because she cares about her old friend. But does she actually want to talk to me? I am kind of technically the enemy. At least, I'm working for them. Technically. Eh, I'll make something and keep in touch and let her choose.

I've got a design roughed out by the time the COWA informs me the LRF reservoir is empty. There's no point in keeping him in there any longer, so I reach one foot out and toe the lid release mechanism. Immediately, a cloud of black smoke boils out and shoots for Reaper's room without even pausing to see if he can hold a solid shape.

"You're welcome!" I shout after him.
The cloud hesitates and flares for just a second before shooting under his door. If he's annoyed, too bad, I'm annoyed too. Grumpily, I pick up the empty can and haul it up to my room. I need to make some modifications - not just the communications array, but also a way to measure what his total volume should be so I know if he's really better or just trying to pretend he is.

Stupid stubborn man. Make me want to smack him, but then I'd need to put him in the can again. Ugh.

Chapter End Notes

Yep, that sure was Reaper over-reacting because he thought Sombra got blown up.

Jerome the pilot nearly strained something with the effort of not laughing. He doesn't know Spanish, but he knows that was Reaper getting chewed out...and he knows better than to let on that he heard Sombra call him by name.

Ana is practically beside herself with glee that Reaper managed to not only make a friend, but somehow found someone willing and able to drag him, kicking and screaming, out of the pit of depression he's been wallowing in.
unexpected friend

Chapter Summary

Sombra makes an unexpected friend and gains another project.

(Mentions of implied past suicide attempts)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I check on Tia Ana a week later as per usual, I discover she's improvised a message to me by way of a creatively-capitalized to-do list.

CALL TO ARRANGE MEET. HAVE SOMETHING USEFUL FOR YOU.

Given that she'd asked about Angela's notes, I can only assume she went to the source and has something that wasn't there for me to get my digital hands on. I certainly hope that's the case, anyway, because decoding Papi's swarm is still kicking my ass. There's so many redundant or orphaned sections, like half the code is just this sea of tumors and lesions, and I don't have the medical background to figure out what they were there for originally. At least I have the secure communication device to offer her, but I know that's not going to be enough payment.

I open the connection.

HE'S STILL CRANKY FROM GETTING SHOT, BUT HE'S BACK TO NORMAL. OR NORMAL FOR HIM, ANYWAY. WHAT DID YOU FIND?

SOME NOTES THAT WEREN'T ON A COMPUTER. The reply is almost immediate; she must have been waiting for me to open the connection. IF YOU CAN, BRING HIM WITH YOU. I WANT TO SEE HIM.

Bring him with me. That...I'm not sure if that's a good idea or a terrible one or how I'll even accomplish it just yet. I don't know that he knows she's alive, or how he'll react except "badly" because I just can't see that going well at all.

YOU'RE WORRIED IT WILL BE AN AMBUSH flashes onto the screen, letter by letter.

NO, I type back. JUST HOW HE WILL REACT.

There's a bit of a pause. I'LL BE FINE. WHERE DO YOU WANT TO MEET?

While we negotiate place and time, I can see Reaper wisping in the background, watching me.

"What are you up to, Sombra?" He sounds...like he's trying to sound hard and suspicious.

"Working out an exchange with a friend." A pause while it occurs to me that I might be able to use this to my advantage. After all, he knows I have a lot of "friends".


"A friend-friend," he asks, "or a frieeeend?" I can almost hear the air quotes.

"That's what we're gonna find out," I tell him. Then I look up and meet the mask squarely. "If you wanted to come as back-up, just in case, I wouldn't say no."

"Hmph." He sounds skeptical, but I can tell from the change in his wisps that he's pleased I asked for his help. "Where's the meeting?"

The streetlights have just come on, casting a small pool of light in the little walled garden at the end of the cul-de-sac. Reaper's mist in the shadows (I still have no idea how he sees anything) while I'm loitering on the edge of the light in local clothes. A single set of footsteps approaches, shoes soft on the small flagstones of the sidewalk, and a woman with her hair covered by an expensive (and familiar) blue scarf turns the corner into the other edge of the pool of light.

Tia Ana.

Behind me, Reaper's solidified and I can hear him draw his guns. To be sure we head off anything horrific, I call Ana's name and close the short distance for a hug that she seems perfectly willing to provide.

"It will let you contact me," I say as we part, handing her the small communication device and leading the way closer to Reaper, away from the street.

She pockets it. "And here is what I promised you," she says, pulling a thick brown-paper envelope out of a bag at her hip. While I'm tucking it away, she steps fearlessly up to my very anxious Papi. "It's good to see you, Gabriel," she says in a quiet voice before hugging him. He's wisping so badly that I half expect him to melt completely, but then Ana lets go and turns to me again. "Keep in touch," she tells me with a small smile, and then she walks back through the light and turns the corner, vanishing behind the walls.

"Sombra..." It's not an angry growl, more like a protest and maybe a request for information.

Too bad. He's not ready to hear the answers he thinks he wants. "Si?" I ask innocently.

Reaper just growls.

Most of the contents of the folder, it turns out, aren't about Gabriel Reyes at all. The name on those files matches what I've seen on Widowmaker's, which by itself would suggest she gets bumped up my priority list. But more than that: these files were handed to me by Tia Ana, and I doubt either she or Angela would make a mistake, so this is a tacit request to do whatever I can for the heartless spider. Normally, if one of my "friends" made an under-the-table request like that, it would be with the understanding that I could name a price before starting, and refuse if it wasn't met, or that they
were so desperate that I could name my own price *after* and have my "friend" over a barrel. But Tia Ana isn't like that. My payment for this job will be trust, and that's plenty valuable enough to get my best efforts. *Especially* considering the other things I've got in the works.

When I eventually leave Talon, I'll need somewhere safe to go where Reaper won't be shot on sight.

My first course of action is to scan all the files to digital and stash them where I keep all my important things. I skim things as I go, but the Amelie files won't do me any good until I can really dig into her and see what Talon did. The Gabriel files are more promising, but the biological aspect, the medical terminology, is going to bog me down enough that I can't tell if they'll be useful or not.

Then the communication device I gave Tia Ana pings me.

HELLO. I AM DOCTOR ANGELA ZIEGLER. WITH WHOM AM I COMMUNICATING?

Now I know why Tia Ana said 'keep in touch'. Interesting that she didn't tell Angela who I was; or, if she did, that Angela is too polite to just make assumptions.

I'M NO ONE, JUST A SHADOW.

BUT YOU ARE THE ONE ATTEMPTING TO IMPROVE THE CONDITION OF GABRIEL REYES?

Does she really not know who I am? Or does she not care? I AM.

PLEASE, IT HAS BEEN QUITE SOME TIME. HOW IS HE?

How is...is she serious? She doesn't know? THAT'S A COMPLICATED QUESTION. HOW IS HE COMPARED TO THE MAN HE USED TO BE? COMPARED TO THE STATE HE WAS IN THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HIM? COMPARED TO THE BASELINE OF WHAT HE IS NOW? MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY, Socially?

YES. ALL OF THE ABOVE, PLEASE.

All I can do is stare at the screen for a very long minute. Alienating my new *friend* right off the bat would be a very bad thing. Finally, I just send her a copy of the current programming his swarm holds and wait for her to skim it.

I ADDED THE HAND-AND-FOOT CONFIGURATION, I type after a few minutes. AND THE THERMAL FEEDBACK THEY CONTAIN.

BUT...WHY DID YOU HAVE TO ADD THERMAL FEEDBACK? HE SHOULD...MEIN GOTT, WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO HIM?

I don't even try to answer the rhetorical question. HE ONLY HAS GENERAL PRESSURE FEEDBACK.

HOW CAN THAT BE? WHEN I LAST TREATED HIM, HE WAS IN CONSTANT PAIN AND RELIEVING THAT WAS MY PRIMARY CONCERN.
Constant pain? Oh no, Papi. That plus the betrayal and his trust issues equals... he probably would have tried a gun first and come back from that. Maybe bleeding out. With the structural integrity issues the original programming contained, poison would just dribble out between his molecules. Drowning and reviving while drowning would not be a pleasant option, and hanging would be useless, and that leaves.... fire. Mother of god, that explains so much.

WHEN DID YOU LOSE TRACK OF HIM? I type slowly. Then, because I don't know if she's come to the conclusions I have, THAT SORT OF PROGRAMMING SHIFT WOULD REQUIRE WIDE-SCALE RECONSTRUCTION TO TRIGGER.

THERE WAS A FIRE IN... OH. OH NO, GABRIEL.

Well, that reaction seems to be universal.

I WILL NEED TO FAMILIARIZE MYSELF WITH HIS CURRENT STATE, she types after a brief pause. PLEASE, DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT ME WITH ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE. ANA SAYS YOU ARE ABLE TO MAKE HIM REST WHEN HE IS WOUNDED, AND SO I AM CONFIDENT THAT HE IS IN CAPABLE HANDS. THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU HAVE ALREADY DONE FOR HIM, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU IN THE FUTURE.

Her typing is erratic, the letters coming through at uneven intervals. Hah. Good to know that his condition is distressing her. Maybe I should feel guilty, but I'm not that nice a person. She did this to him, even if it was an accident, and there's a certain amount of hurt I need to know she feels before I can forgive her. If she inflicts it on herself, well, that just saves me the effort.

I KNOW IT LOOKS BAD, I find myself typing, and maybe I do feel a little guilty, ESPECIALLY IF YOU KNOW THE THINGS HE'S DONE, BUT HE'S NOT A HEARTLESS MONSTER. EVEN IF HE DOESN'T ACTUALLY HAVE A PHYSICAL HEART.

OH?

HE GOT HIMSELF SHOT BECAUSE HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT ME. HE'S A GRUMPY, ANGRY, IRRITABLE, TRIGGER-HAPPY MESS, BUT HE CAN STILL FIND IT IN HIM TO CARE ABOUT ONE SASSY, ANNOYING LATINA YOUNG ENOUGH TO BE HIS DAUGHTER WHO YELLS AT HIM WHEN HE'S BEING AN IDIOT AND GIVES HIM FLUFFY SLIPPERS.

THANK YOU, MY FRIEND, she types after a minute. THAT GIVES ME HOPE THAT THE MAN I KNEW IS STILL IN THERE SOMEWHERE.

She closes the connection, and I check my cameras. Reaper's sitting on the couch, "watching" the news and wisping in agitation. I stealth down and sit on the other end, "watching" just as earnestly, not looking directly at him. The wisps get worse for a minute, as expected, but when I don't say anything they calm down to almost nothing. I feel the same way; we don't have to say anything, just being there is reassuring enough.

I'll bother him tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes
Yes, Ana was wearing the scarf Sombra sent her.

Ana had snipers in position with sleep darts. Just in case.

Reaper did, in fact, know Ana was alive. She's hit him with the sleep darts on a few occasions before Sombra "joined" Talon, and he was briefly afraid the exchange was a front to take hm prisoner. Reaper had no idea how to react to being hugged instead of hated.

Ana still does not actually know who and what Sombra is - she assumed Sombra sent a representative to make the trade because go figure living a secret life while everyone thinks you're dead will make you paranoid about everything.

Aaaaaaand that's why Angela thought Gabriel was dead. That's also why he's such a mess. He'd HAD most of a functional body before the fire, and he'd hoped the fire would destroy the nanites, but no. The swarm rebuilt him a body made of ash.
Who died and made...never mind

Chapter Summary

There's a knock at the door. This -never- happens.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now that I have established contact with Genji, one of my obligations can be satisfied. I skim information out of Talon's systems and send it to my linkbrother, warning him where and when Talon will move and enabling him to keep himself, his mentor, and other omnic targets out of harm's way. He sends me little messages in return, simple, whimsical things that are a light note in the gunmetal-grey days when there are no missions to break up the monotony. And in the time I'm no longer spending trying to make contact with the Shambali, I can turn my attention to the third person living (if that's the right word) in the base with me.

Widowmaker.

Her private files are much more involved - and helpful - than Reaper's were. After all, everything that happened to Widow, they did themselves whereas all they did with Reaper was snatch him out from under Angela's nose. Digging through Widow's files is more than enough to keep me pretty distracted, and the fact that the last few days have been completely quiet doesn't register, at first. It's not like any of us make a lot of noise unless I've just been annoying Reaper. But then there's a knock on the door.

It takes me a minute to realize what it is that I'm hearing, because in the entire time I've been here, no one has ever come knocking at the door to the converted warehouse office area that passes for our private suite. But when I check the camera outside our door, there's a nervous-looking flunky raising his hand to knock again. Widow's in her room, oblivious as usual. Reaper is...

Where is he? I run a quick check of the cameras and discover he's been in his room for the last three days. What's he doing in there, brooding? Whatever it is, he's not bothering to answer the knock, so I guess it's on me.

The flunky looks like he's gonna shit himself when I open the door, so I run with it and pick a scenario at random where the guy at the door would be terrified of the one answering. "Where have you been? I ordered this pizza three hours ago!"

"Uh...pizza?"

"Ah, I'm just messing with you, amigo." Despite my cheery tone and friendly grin, he doesn't seem reassured. "What's up?"

"Uh...the boss...he wants to speak to..." The flunky swallows and squeaks out, "Reaper."

I almost ask if he wants to come in and knock on Reaper's door, but I think he would faint if I did and anyway, Reaper likes shooting the messenger, so I take pity on him. "Lemme guess, the boss,
he pretty pissed." A frantic nod. "No worries, I go tell him for you. Okay?"

"Th-thank you, Miss S-Sombra," he stammers, bowing jerkily before running away like I might change my mind and tell him to deliver his message himself.

I close the door and climb the stairs to Reaper's room, not stomping but not trying to be quiet, either. Knock, knock, knock, wait. No answer. Knock again, nothing. Shave-and-a-haircut, no response. "Oy, Reaper! You alive in there?" And let's ignore the argument that he's not alive to begin with. Pause. Silence. "If you don't answer, I gonna hack your door and come in, so if you looking at that old-time print porn, you might wanna hide it." I give him a count of twenty, but there's still no sound from inside his room. "Okay, I warned you..."

The door lock bows immediately to my superiority and slowly, I open the door. Reaper's room is pitch black. From a still-darkened corner, Reaper bellows, "You dare bring the warmth of life into my tomb??"

I...I've heard that before. A quick search of my memory comes up with the first "boss" of Diablo 3, the Skeleton King. I blink. "Did you just..." How old is that game? How old is he? Oh my god, he might have actually played it when it was still cutting-edge. Then I remember what his last name is, and start laughing. "You are not the Skeleton King," I tell the darkened corner firmly. "You have to actually be a skeleton for that." My eyes have adjusted to be able to see him now, and he's holding himself in dismayed shock. Yeah, he did that, but he didn't think I'd call him on being an old nerd. And now he knows that I'm a nerd, too. "Do you wanna play together sometime?" I blurt before I can tell myself that asking is a bad idea, but I did it and now I have to wait it awkward silence for him to answer.

Two minutes and fifteen seconds later, he says, "Yes."

"Really?" I squeak, but he doesn't answer and I'm not sure I expected him to.

He does step out of the corner, though, and stands in front of me with his arms crossed. "I heard knocking. What did they want?"

Right. That. "Oh! Um...the boss wants to talk to you."

Reaper sighs in long-suffering irritation. "Fine. I'll deal with it. Anything else?"

Quickly, I try to bring up some snappy and iconic boss quote, but all I can think of is She-ablo telling me I will never defeat my own ter-ror. Defeated, I shake my head and retreat to my own room.

Chapter End Notes

Considering that Starcraft 2 is played competitively, I see no reason why Diablo 3 wouldn't also still be around and you -know- Gabriel played a demon hunter when he was younger.
Birthday surprise

Chapter Summary

It's October 31st. Surprise!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I first realized that Reaper and Widow were just like that all the time, irritable and uncaring and always "in uniform", I did a lot of grumbling in Spanish about how it was going to ruin Halloween because it wouldn't feel special. At the time, I didn't know that Reaper knew Spanish.

Now I'm laughing because I know he does, and I know he understood my griping.

It's a small thing, really. But if he's expecting anything at all, he won't be expecting this. It was easy to sneak in and even easier to set up. The camera's red light blinks at me from its place against the wall as I light the candle and I adjust its position slightly to make sure it's recording the right height and angle. Then I flee to my room to watch, and wait.

When Reaper shuffles out of his room, grumbly little wisps and fluffy slippers, I have to shove my face into a pillow to keep my anticipation silent. The camera records him shuffling into the kitchen area and prodding at the coffee maker. Then he turns to get his mug out of the cabinet and freezes.

There, on the counter, is a cake just large enough for one hungry person. It's just white cake with white frosting, because I know he won't eat it, but the piping and flowers are purple to show it's from me. Not like it could be from anyone else. The candle is purple, too. There's no writing on it.

It's kind of impressive, really. He just stares at first, like he's not awake enough to grasp what he's seeing. Then the wisps come out slowly, the backs of his arms and some from his chest, as he tries to figure out why he's seeing what he's seeing. Then he starts, and the smoke comes black and thick from the back of his head and his shoulders, and he knows.

"SOMBRAAAA!!"

I can hear his furious bellow through the walls and across the public area. Then he draws one of his guns, fires, and the camera dies the explosive death it was meant to.

I wonder if the gunshot blew the candle out.

I wonder if he made a wish.

Chapter End Notes

Reaper had actually lost track of what day it was so at first he was just like "Dafuq?
Why is there cake?” Discovering that Sombra had somehow found out when his birthday was....honestly probably ranked somewhere in the middle as far as his birthdays have gone. I would not be surprised if some years, he managed to forget there was anything -else- special about October 31st.
Sombra was expecting to be the one doing the surprising, but for once Reaper beat her to it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Christmas morning.

The thought sends a little shiver of excitement through me before I've even opened my eyes, despite the fact that I'm not back home and the best I can look forward to is Widow watching with her cold, empty stare and Reaper growling my name in irritation as I sing carols. Not that things were a ton better with Los Muertos, because being collectively poor meant we weren't big on gift-giving, but at least everyone came together to make and share festive food and that's not going to happen here. No, I haven't really gotten gifts on Christmas since-

"Hija, get down!" An arm throws my child self to the floor just before the window, there's a sudden loud, sharp noise, the window shatters, then the sickening sound of a body hitting the floor behind me.

Close the subdirectory before I accidentally access anything else, throw another layer of encryption on it. Yeah. Getting gifts hasn't been part of the Christmas experience for me for a very long time, but I do enjoy giving them. The physical recording that includes that one song Reaper likes enough to hum is cheerfully wrapped with a note that reads 'who else would it be?' and a little red bow taped to it, and I want to surprise him by having it sitting next to his mug with the coffee already brewing by the time he ventures out of his room. Then I'll ambush him with singing.

Excited shiver restored, I open my eyes and turn over to-

Stop. Stare.

There is a stuffed toy on my bedside table.

Watching me.

It feels like it takes a full minute before I can process past that. It's a bear, a brown bear in a red shirt with a red satin ribbon tied into a bow around his neck. Right, his, because he's from that show - I don't know the name, but I've seen him and his friends on merchandise for kids. Won a smaller version of this toy from a crane machine a while back. That girl had broken my heart, crying for a plush toy from the machine, but her mom was clearly too poor to throw even a single coin away. So I'd hacked it.

Which one, niña?

That one, that one!
A white cat in a pink ballerina outfit shuddered as the claw hit it, grabbed it, pulled it up and dropped it into the slot. The look on her mother's face as her daughter pulled it out with a squeal of joy - such gratitude that if times had been better for them, I would have been invited home for dinner, no excuses. That cat was probably the first plush toy the girl had ever owned. To them, I was an angel who had come out of nowhere to grant a wish. *That's why I liked giving gifts.*

As they walked away, the machine beeped at me to take the second turn it thought I'd bought. Without paying much attention to my choices, I picked out a brown bear in a red shirt because I don't know what Gabriel's favorite color was, but red seems to be a safe bet for Reaper. When I got back, I snuck it into his room and left it on-

-on his bedside table. **Looking at him.**

**Oh my god. Reaper got me a gift.**

I sit up and pull the bear into my lap. It's big enough that it fills my whole lap - I can hug it and press my face against the top of its head easily, and if my breathing is a little shaky, so what? *Reaper got me a gift.* I'm not just annoying him. I'm someone that his Grinchy McScrooge skullface brooding black smoke cloud self *cares for,* enough that he went through the effort of - my god, what did he do? Is there a sales clerk in a high-end toy store somewhere who got drunk and told anyone who would listen that he sold *Reaper* an expensive plush bear? A part of me wants to laugh until I can't breathe, call the papers, stop the press, Reaper has a heart under all that black smoke! But the greater part of me wants to cry because I haven't had anyone that went through the effort of sneaking a gift into my room on Christmas morning since my mother died, and I don't know that he's cared about *anyone* since he started being Reaper, or had anyone to sneak a gift into the room of when he was Gabriel.

I love this fucking bear. I will kill anyone who touches it.

Bear in one arm, holding Reaper's present in the other hand, I venture out of my room, pretty sure of what I'll see, and sure enough, it's Reaper in his fuzzy slippers holding a mug of coffee and leaning against the far kitchen counter so he can watch my door. It feels like it takes forever to walk to the stairs, down the stairs, across the floor of the main room to stop just out of reach of him. The wisps are coming off his chest, curling up before flowing down over his arms, and I feel like a child. My eyes must be huge.

"Feliz Navidad," I whisper, offering him his gift.

It's a long moment before he takes it, the wisps moving faster. He makes an amused 'hmph' as he checks the note. Colorful paper rips under his fingers, and then he freezes when he sees what it is and the wisps multiply until he's like a statue of dry ice.

Two steps in, one arm around his torso, my head pressed against his shoulder. "Thank you," I whisper.

Then I'm gone, stealthing away to curl up in the corner chair, hugging my bear and watching as Reaper leaves his mug on the counter and releases the cohesion of his legs to flow up and re-form by the door to his room. It opens and closes behind him, and then I come out of stealth.

**Reaper got me a gift.** It's a Christmas miracle, and I'd thought I was too old and too jaded to believe in those anymore.
I have the best Papi in the whole world.

When the wonder of Reaper caring fades, my inner child satisfied and leaving me an immature woman with a flair for mischief and a surprisingly cuddly plush bear, I think about what other "family" he might have still and the only one that comes to mind is Tia Ana.

I don't want to interrupt anything she might be doing today, so I just send the video file with a note reading I DARED TO NOT IGNORE HIS BIRTHDAY.

Half an hour or so later, the connection opens. IS THIS A GIFT FOR ME?

YES, I type back. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE TO SEE THAT.

HE DOESN'T LOOK VERY HAPPY, she types after a minute.

THAT'S BECAUSE HE DIDN'T KNOW I KNEW WHEN HIS BIRTHDAY WAS.

A brief pause. I WAS ALMOST EXPECTING YOU TO SAY THAT HE'S FORGOTTEN HOW TO BE HAPPY.

CLOSE, I admit. NOT QUITE. The picture of him reveling in the warmth of a coffee mug gets transferred.

HE DOES LOOK HAPPY, Ana types back. THANK YOU FOR THAT. IT IS GOOD TO SEE THAT HE IS STILL THERE, BEHIND THE MASK.

I find myself typing, HE'S VERY HURT, but then I'm not sure what else to say. That I think he's forgotten what it's like to have someone care about him? That I've figured out I have to keep personal interactions light and quick, like a skirmish, in and out and retreat?

Before I can work out what I want to say, Ana types back, I KNOW.

IT HURTS BECAUSE HE STILL CARES.

AND YOU, LITTLE SHADOW?

I'm not sure what she's asking, but it feels like a test. Am I hurt? Do I care? Does he care about me? That seems the most likely, but how can I explain what today has meant for both of us?

THERE WERE PRESENTS EXCHANGED, I type slowly, BUT THAT ACT ITSELF WAS THE TRUE GIFT.

I WISH YOU MANY SUCH GIFTS IN THE FUTURE, she types.

Suddenly, I miss my old "family" and I feel as lonely as my Papi must be feeling. THANK YOU, ANA. MAYBE NEXT YEAR WE CAN ALL EXPERIENCE THAT GIFT TOGETHER.
AND IF NOT, SUCH A GIFT IS WORTH WAITING FOR.

The connection closes, and I take my bear over to the couch to sit and "watch" the news screen in an open invitation for Reaper to join me. It's only a few minutes before he flows down from under his door and re-forms on the other end of the couch. Although he doesn't say anything or even look at me, I know he's reveling in this quiet closeness. I wonder if he would tolerate me scooting closer, using him as a backrest while I poke my projects on half a dozen screens.

In the end, I'm not brave enough to try. I cuddle my bear while playing with various things, and Reaper wisps gently from his chest every so often, like he's realizing all over again that he did something that made someone he cares about happy.

I wonder how badly he would wisp if it were Ana sitting in the room with him, radiating quiet contentment.

I want to see that.

Chapter End Notes

There is, in fact, a sales clerk at a high-end toy store who gets drunk at parties and tells the story of Reaper buying a bear. The manager on duty destroyed the security tape out of fear that there could be retaliation if it got out. Reaper just sort of wisped into the store and appeared behind the sales clerk like I REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE. I REQUIRE A GIFT FOR A...FEMALE COWORKER. And the clerk passes a fort save to not pass out and goes 'Uh...what's she like, do you have anything in particular in mind?' and Reaper paused because he has no idea what Sombra likes past "annoying him" so he just pointed at a bigger version of the crane-game bear and went THAT.
GET ME THE BIGGEST, MOST EXPENSIVE VERSION OF THAT BEAR YOU HAVE.

Reaper was expecting a reaction more like 'ha ha, you pranked me, well done'. He was -not- expecting Sombra to look at him with awe and adoration like a child on Christmas morning thinking Santa had come, like he was the best thing in the whole world.
Uncle Jack

Chapter Summary

Jack Morrison is so very confused.

('Hero' short takes place between the first and second scenes)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having "Soldier 76" show up in the middle of anyone's mission would throw a monkey wrench into things. Having his ex-best friend killing things on the other side of the compound just adds the monkey as well as the wrench.

"Intruder, south side," I snap, already in motion. "I'll handle it. Reaper, Widowmaker, stay on the target."

The acknowledgments barely register as I vault barriers and streak past startled guards. Then I'm in a courtyard where a tall, powerfully built man in a blue jacket is hurling hapless flunkies to the ground, and I skid to a stop just a few feet away.

"So you're Uncle Jack," I exclaim brightly as he turns to face the latest threat to his person.

That stops his train of thought so hard and fast that it derails entirely. "What? Who-"

And then I hug him with glowing hands, the EMP channeled straight into his body, not only shorting out his visor but knocking him unconscious. Fuck, now what? I think as fast as I can while dragging his heavy ass outside the compound gate. If he just stays out cold until we're gone, that would be perfect. But he has to be hidden, or whoever finds him will kill him.

There's a mini dune leaning against the south wall of the compound, and that gives me an idea. Creative gunfire clears a trench, which I roll Uncle Jack into. Then I unzip his jacket, tug it up over his face, and kick the sand back over him. He'll wake up in an hour or two, confused as fuck but alive.

Good enough.

"Intruder neutralized," I announce as I dash back inside. "Target status?"

"Also neutralized," Widow answers, her voice dripping with satisfaction.

Reaper growls, "We're done here. Return to the ship."

As we fly back to base, I send Tia Ana an encrypted message letting her know where I left a big, dumb package in case she needs or wants to pick it up.
The coded request disguised as a letter from an uncle is entirely unexpected...but fortuitous. My old "family" has been having some problems with a big, sturdy man in a blue jacket wrecking their shit and they want to know if I could come "visit" and take him out.

Perfect.

I guess I look so excited when I announce that I'm going out for a few days that Reaper actually seems...disappointed to see me go. Just for that, I drop my backpack by the door and flounce over to drape myself over his back in a hug.

"Awww, are you going to miss mee? Are you going to be lonely, Papi?"

"Sombraaaa!"

I lean forward and kiss the cheek of his mask before letting go with a laugh. Either he's annoyed by me being annoying or he's annoyed that I called him Papi in front of Widow, but I know that secretly he's pleased because he can feel warmth when I touch him. Turns out it was easier to program a 'warm' sensation when in physical contact with another bioelectrical signature than it is to actually program in temperature feedback for his whole "body".

"Don't worry," I tell him as he wisps slightly. "I'll bring you a souvenir."

His wordless growl follows me out.

With Los Muertos feeding me intel, it's not hard to find Jack's trail. He's sniffing around the back door to a safehouse when I de-stealth with the muzzle of my gun pressed against the back of his neck.

"Don't move a muscle, Jack Morrison," I growl before he can come out of the initial freeze. "If you want to get out of this alive, you will give me exactly what I want."

"And what do you want?" he asks warily, hands open although he hasn't moved his arms.

"To have coffee," I tell him brightly, pulling my gun away from his body. "And chat."

Slowly, aware that he's still in danger, he turns around and starts slightly when he sees who I am. "That's it? Just chat? I thought you'd ask for something more...valuable."

I put my gun away and grin. "You're underestimating the value of information."

Jack nods slightly to concede the point. "So...where to?"
We look like a couple of tourists, sitting at a little table outside a cafe with our cups of coffee and brightly-colored ponchos hiding our...unique...clothes. He's taken off his visor, more anonymous without it in this area, and he looks highly uncomfortable.

"You know my name," he says, toying with his cup. "Who are you?"

"I'm Sombra. You haven't heard of me?"

"I'd heard, just not...seen." Another awkward silence. "You called me Uncle Jack."

"I did."

Jack sighs, sensing I'm not going to elaborate. "What did you want to...chat...about?"

"Two things. First, what are you looking for that you're bothering Los Muertos to get it, and if I give it to you, will you leave them alone?"

He looks surprised. "You'd do that?"

"Word of honor. If you give yours."

The information is named; he's following a trail years old for me, but it's promising in that he suspects other hands were at work in certain events. The word is given, and the information is handed over.

"What's the second thing?" he asks warily as he tucks his prize away.

"Papi Gabriel," I tell him with a grin for the contortions his expression goes through. Apparently he hasn't been in the area long enough to hear the locals use that phrase.

"Is he really...?" He's choking too badly to finish the question.

"Well...he can't prove that he's not..." I push my cup to the side and lean forward while he struggles to process that possibility. "Listen, I know he has a temper and a scorched-earth policy. He's in a bad place right now, and I don't mean Talon. That's why I'm doing everything I can to make sure he doesn't do something he'll regret when he gets to a better place."


I nod. "He's getting better. Slowly. But he had his whole life stolen from him." That gets me a glower. "I know, I know, he burned the bridge and I don't blame you for being angry. But listen, imagine you couldn't feel the warmth of the sun. The cool breeze. Smell or taste. Imagine you couldn't even walk around because under your mask, there's nothing. What was done to save his life, it wasn't done very well. It's not much of a life. I'm doing what I can to make things better, but it's not easy. He is never gonna be who he was before that fight, but someday he might be comfortable with who he is, and he might want to reach back out. If he does that, if he builds the bridge again, will you go out halfway to meet him? Or will you stand on your side with a torch ready to burn it down again?"

Jack stares thoughtfully at me for a long minute. "What do you want?" he says at last.
"The same thing you had," I say softly. "Family." That makes him look anguished; promising. I reach into my bag and take out the print of the first time Reaper held a hot coffee mug while wearing fluffy slippers. "I brought you a gift," I tell him, sliding it across the table.

I've seen enough pictures of Gabriel (and it's still weird, like that's another person entirely) to know that the way he was standing there was Gabriel, and from the look on Jack's face, he recognizes it. While he's wrapped up in his moral quandary, I put down money for the coffee and a generous tip, and stealth away before he can look up.

Once I'm out of sight, I de-stealth and go back to the poncho vendor. The black-and-red one goes in my bag while the vendor counts out the fistful of money I gave him, more than double the asking price. His family will eat well tonight, and Papi Angry Owl will pretend to be annoyed beyond words that I did bring him a souvenir. The old "family" will be left alone, and Uncle Jack will hopefully be willing to give his old friend a chance when the time comes.

Good trip.

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"I'm back," I shout cheerfully as the door closes behind me.

Reaper's in the kitchen, pouring cold coffee out of his mug and rinsing it. "A shame," he lies. "The peace and quiet was...refreshing."

"Don't lie, you missed me."

He doesn't answer as I sneak up behind him and throw the poncho over his head.

"What is this?" he demands.

"Your souvenir!"

Wisps, but not the ones fanning out from the back of his head and his shoulders. These are more gentle, coming out from under the thick woven cloth. "It looks ridiculous," he says, but he doesn't mean it.

I lean over to kiss his cheek. "You're welcome," I say before flouncing off to my room so he can enjoy it in privacy.

Chapter End Notes

Sombra does not condone the actions of the guys shown in 'Hero', specifically taking Alejandra's money and attacking the omnic. Until Blizzard reveals more lore to explain what was going on, I'm going to assume there's a rogue faction or some imposters.
Just to be clear, 100% organic humans aren't the only ones with bioelectrical signatures. Augmentations, whether they're "brain tech" that interfaces directly with the brain (like half of Genji's body) or "brainless tech" that interfaces with major nerve branches (like McCree's arm), are also part of a person's bioelectric field. Omnis have bioelectric systems as well.

Reaper was, in fact, going to miss Sombra and be lonely.

Jack Morrison's VA said at the "United Nations of Overwatch" panel that Jack is a pessimistic optimist. He believes that there's going to be a good end, he believes in the good of people, but ultimately he knows there's a lot of crap to get there. I'm taking this to mean that he's going to give Reaper a chance, now that he knows his old friend is still in there under everything, but he's not going to just throw his arms open and forget everything that happened.

Reaper's still not sure how to say "thank you" without sacrificing his image, but he's putting less effort into protesting and quietly being grateful that Sombra seems to understand what he's not saying.
McCree needs booze

Chapter Summary

Jesse McCree is going to need a lot of booze when the day is over.

(Takes place later in the day after the 'Train Hopper' comic)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sombra! Mission!"

The door hasn't even finished closing behind Reaper, and he doesn't even have legs - he just formed enough to yell at me as he passed, flowing up the stairs to activate Widow.

I dismiss my screens and swing up onto the stairs. "What kind of mission?"

"We have a lead on McCree."

Whoah, that's a lot of dark anticipation there. Given what I know, both about Gabriel Reyes and about the friends he had, I can guess that Reaper would like nothing more than to turn his ex-friends into lunch...but if he does, that will just make it that much harder for him to come back from the edge. Sad as it is, it falls to me to keep Papi's friends safe from him. In this case, it means I need to get Reaper angry enough that he doesn't go for the guns immediately.

"Where?" I demand as he solidifies by Widow's door.

"Houston. A few hours ago."

"And what, we're going to go in guns blazing?"

The wisps that boil down from his shoulders say clearly that he'd like to do that, but knows he can't. "I suppose you have a better suggestion?"

Actually, I do. It's been close to a decade since I last played the game, but some things you just don't forget, even without digital memory. "Give me five minutes to change. I'll flush him out, lead him to you."

"Hurry," is all the answer I get.

Never underestimate a good wig. And, well, a good outfit, really. The cute Latina that skips out of the back of the van would never be considered out of the ordinary unless stripped, and if it comes to that, I'm already screwed. Blending in is my weapon - that, and the cloud of pure hate seething in
the back of an alley beside a trendy cafe, and the very eager sniper on the roof across the way. I've used the trip to search Houston's systems, and I have a good idea of where I can find my target.

The bar is a little run-down and more than a little seedy, scuffed wood floors and furniture that's been used as makeshift weaponry. The patrons are low-tech, some down on their luck, probably more than half on the wrong side of the law. This is a place where no one asks questions. My black leather boots rap against the floor in a higher pitch than the dull thudding of heavy workboots and more than one pair of eyes travels appreciatively up my calves before the loose, red skirt of my dress distracts them with wondering how high the boots go. The material cinches tight at the small of my back, showing off the swell of my hips and remaining tight all the way up to the bust that laces enticingly over my breasts. It's a trap, and every man knows it, but the bait makes them wonder if it might be worth it in the end. My wig would have been the envy of every girl back home: long, thick, black waves that flow and curl around my face, over my shoulders, and down to twitch and sway just above my ass. I'm a girl who never pays for her own drinks, unless it's in kisses, and never has a shortage of volunteers. The only question, as I pause and survey the crowd, is which sucker will be lucky enough to have the honor. The long, red nails of one hand nearly vanish against my sleeve as I cross that arm, resting it on my bicep as I thoughtfully tap my forefinger against my cheek. The red of my lips is the same shade.

Jesse McCree is sitting at the bar.

Tap-tap-tap go my boots, angling towards him, and he looks over his shoulder as I approach, eyebrow arching appreciatively under his cowboy hat at the sway of my hips. When I sit down, it's two stools away and two fingers of his gloved hand raise to get the bartender's attention.

"The lady's drink is on me," he says with casual loftiness, playing the game that he's a gentleman and is doing this out of chivalry and I'm not obligated to move closer to him and repay his kindness in some way, but the rules of the game make it rude for me to not do just that.

"Tequila," I answer the unspoken question on the bartender's face.

McCree's eyebrows hitch upwards again, and when the shot is poured I toss it back like it was water. Easy enough to do when I can't actually taste anything, but he doesn't need to know that. He sits a bit straighter, leaning back just slightly in acknowledgment that I am a woman and he is impressed.

"I ain't dumb enough to ask what a lady like you's doing in a place like this," he says, "but with a voice like that, I'd listen to anything you wanted to say."

"Ooo," I coo at him. "A flatterer. I think I better watch myself around you, Señor."

"If it ain't too bold," he says, facing me and tipping his hat politely, "I could watch you all day, Señorita."

"Hmm. And if it is too bold?"

I fake affront. "Hmm. And if it is too bold?"

Two fingers gesture; another shot of tequila comes my way. "Then I apologize, miss."

The shot gets tossed back. "Maybe I misjudged you, hm?" I slide off my stool and sashay over to him. "Maybe I need to...take a closer look." He doesn't object as I press myself against his back, cheek on his shoulder, my hands sliding down his arms. "Ooo, a strong man. Are you gentle, too, Señor?" My breasts pressing against his shoulders distract him from the subtle tingle of me
seducing his mechanical arm.

"Maybe you'd like to find out," he says hopefully.

I straighten up, caressing his arms again as I do. "What are you suggesting, Señor?"

He throws some money on the bar. "Well, maybe you'd like to see a movie."

My eyelashes flutter as I play along. "Oh, I donno. I have to ask my Papi."

McCree grins. He thinks I'm a whore, and that he has to deal with my pimp directly. He knows how this game is played, and after the day he's had, he's more than willing to play - and pay. "Let's go ask your Papi, then."

Then he offers me his arm and I take it with a little laugh, snuggling up just enough as we walk out to the envious stares of the other patrons. We make small talk as I lead him to the trap - what movies I like, if he's ever killed a man, how good (or bad) he is at dancing. I keep a solid hold of his right arm the whole time, fingers entwined with his, keeping him from reaching for his gun at a moment's notice.

As we turn the corner past the cafe, I call out, "Papi! This big, strong man, he wants to take me to a movie." The lilting emphasis makes it clear that's not what McCree wants at all, and as the words leave my mouth it occurs to me that Reaper's upbringing might have been clean enough that he doesn't know what the euphemism is.

I didn't need to worry. From the dark alley, an enraged voice bellows, "HE WHAT?" and the shadows seethe into Reaper, smoke billowing off of him, furious beyond words as he lunges forward faster than McCree can react, one spiked gauntlet-fist striking his cheek hard enough that his head snaps back and his arm is ripped out of my hands because the force of that blow has hurled him bodily across the street and, helpfully, out of Widow's line of sight.

Before either of my teammates can react, though, he scrambles to his feet and runs like the Devil himself is on his heels, a terrified shriek echoing back to turn the heads of passers-by. Thankfully, Reaper melts back into smoke and retreats into the alley to seethe while in my ear, I can hear Widow call the mission off.

It's a silent and uncomfortable ride back. Reaper's still furious beyond words, but at least half of that is aimed at himself for not shooting when he had a chance and letting the target get away.

I send Tia Ana a note letting her know that the cowboy is alive and mostly unharmed, but she might want to find him and get him off the streets.

________________________

Widow peels off for her room as per usual, and I'm expecting the still-seething Reaper to do the same, melting completely into smoke and flowing up and under his door, but he stands in the middle of the main room and glowers at me.

"Sombra."
If I've ever heard a "we need to have a Talk" voice, that was it. "Yes?"

"You called me Papi."

The wisping gets worse as he tries to find the words to express whatever's agitating him, but I put one hand on my hip and give him my best skeptical look.

"Are you trying to say that you are not my gang boss?" I ask, daring him to try to bullshit me. "Because you are totally my gang boss."

The wisps that had been flowing down from his back stop, and then a handful start trickling down from his chest and biceps. I don't think it had occurred to him that I would use that meaning of the word to explain my calling him Papi, and now he's realizing that he can't object when I use it and mean daddy because if he tries to call me on it, I'll claim I meant gang boss.

I flounce forward and hug him. "Love you, Papi."

By the time he yells "Sombraaa!" I'm already halfway up the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

Sombra's done a lot of things for money in her life. Not for herself, but for all the kids who have no family except Los Muertos because she was once one of those kids. She can do some fascinating things with a controlled electromagnetic discharge, both to herself and to other people. She does not miss "fleece drunk tourist men" being part of the range of activities she's qualified to help provide for her "family" by doing.

Reaper does not regret punching McCree in the face, despite having lost the chance to shoot him because of it.

When McCree talks to Ana and his description of the girl who picked him up in the bar doesn't match Jack's and Genji's descriptions of Sombra, it further confuses the issue of Sombra's identity. Ana is -pretty- sure the girl she met with was actually Sombra. McCree is harboring uncomfortable fears that his old boss and ex-father-figure is actually a pimp on top of everything else Reaper's done.

Reaper was expecting to have to have a talk with Sombra about selling her body and self-respect and agency. Instead, he's gotten blindsided with plausible deniability and feels.
Recall

Chapter Summary

You might want to watch the Recall short first. Or afterwards, whichever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sombra! Mission!"

I look up and...okay, what the *fuck?* Reaper *sounded* darkly pleased, which means he knows he'll have a chance at one of his ex-friends, but he's wisping *heavily* from his chest and the backs of his legs. If he's so happy about the mission, why is he also very concerned?

"What is it?" I ask warily.

"Winston is using one of Overwatch's old bases. Knowing him, he has a database of all the former Overwatch agents. We're to retrieve that database."

"So I get to hack into-"

"No."

Okay, that was *very* unhappy. Papi's never shut me down so hard and fast before, and I guess it shows on my face because the wisps spread to his arms.

"You're going to build a device to do that for you, and give it to me," he says shortly. "You're not coming."

"Why not!" It bursts out of me, angry and sullen, but seriously, *why not?*

"The same reason Widowmaker's not coming. I don't die."

That stops me cold. Shit. He expects this to be so messy that he's going to abuse his ability to regenerate in order to get out at all. "Alright," I tell him in no-argument tones, "I'll build it and give it to you, and then I'll wait on the ship for you to get back."

"You're not-"

"Don't you *even* finish that sentence, Gabriel Reyes!" The wisps stop dead for about three seconds. "You gonna go get yourself killed, fine. I'm gonna be right there to open the can for you and take you back safely. What, you think you're gonna just...*wisp* onto the ship? Be a puddle of smoke on the floor for the next *week* because you don't have the strength to stand up? And you expect me to just *let you*? Oh no, no, *no*, Papi. I gonna be on that ship whether you like it or not, and when you come limping back, I gonna be there to put you to bed with your supper and *keep* you there until you can get up in the morning and hold your coffee."
"Sombra..."

I fix him with my best steely look. "Si? Papi?"

The wisps cover his legs entirely. "Just build it," he growls, and flows away.

Oh, I'll build it. But it's not going to be what Talon wants.

"Just jam it into a console or server or something," I tell him as I hand over the cylinder. The Talon troops are filing out of the belly of the ship. "Then press the button and it will do the rest. I added a countdown so you'll know when it's done."

Reaper takes it without a word and turns to go.

"And when you're done," I say, just a bit sharply, "you come straight back and get in the can. No arguments."

He doesn't say anything, but the wisps that come off him before he dissolves into smoke aren't coming from his upper back.

Judging by the sounds that come through the coms - mostly screaming and crunching - it's going just as messily as Reaper anticipated. Then the device goes live, and I go work. I did not build a virus that will extract the database of Overwatch agents. What I did build was a virus that looked like it was trying to do that, but really is a distraction. All it does is interfere with systems, provide a threatening countdown, and then shut off when it reaches 98%. Meanwhile, the second program quietly installs itself, giving me a secure, encrypted chat interface with my future friend. And while all this is happening, I'm hacking in remotely to plant a tracer that will record the locations of Overwatch members so I can pass it to Tia Ana and let her get in touch or warn them.

The device goes dead at somewhere around 90%. Given that Reaper's line went dead right before that, I dismiss my screens and thumb the COWA open. The tracer goes off a minute later, and a minute after that, the first weak stream of smoke comes wisping unsteadily into the ship and straight into the can. I'd wonder at Papi being so well-behaved, but when the last grains have settled, the can registers his mass at around 20% of baseline. Not good. I seal it and check to make sure Reaper's vitals - or what passes for them - are okay before signaling the pilot to take off. Biological functions are weak, and swarm activity is focused solely on reconstruction. He's going to be out cold for a while.

When the ship lands, I give Jerome a 'what can you do?' eye roll and heft the COWA. He shoots me a commiserating sort of grin and triggers the hatch for me. It's a dirty job, but someone has to keep Reaper in one piece, and they're all grateful it's me and not them.

Since Widow isn't going to care and Reaper's in the can, I go straight to my room and curl up with the can next to me. First order of business: send the info to Tia Ana while it's still accurate.

TALON SENT US IN TO FETCH THIS, I type as the data transfers. THOUGHT YOU SHOULD HAVE IT INSTEAD.
I APPRECIATE THAT, she types back. ARE YOU ALL UNHARMED?

WIDOW AND I ARE FINE, WE DIDN'T GO IN.

There's a pause, and I can almost see her holding the bridge of her nose. AND GABRIEL?

BARELY MADE IT BACK. HE'S DOWN TO- I check the COWA, which will need more LRF soon. -43 POUNDS. I'LL KEEP YOU POSTED.

YOU ARE A TREASURE, is Ana's response. THANK YOU.

Before I contact Angela, I plug the can in to spare the internal power source and refill the LRF reservoir. He's going through it awfully fast, but in this case, that's a good thing. At the current rate of one liter an hour (of course, that could change as he rebuilds mass, so I'll have to keep an eye on that) it'll be at least two days before he's bulked up enough for me to consider letting him out.

OUR SPECIAL PATIENT IS BACK, I type to the doctor. THIS TIME, HE'S REBUILDING FROM ~20% TOTAL MASS.

OH NO! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT CAUSED THAT?

I do, actually. The swarm has a limited sort of short-term memory, which I checked on the way back. MASSIVE ELECTRICAL DISCHARGE FOLLOWED BY VIOLENT MOLECULAR DISPERSAL. MY GUESS IS ABOUT HALF HIS MASS VAPORIZED AND ANOTHER QUARTER WAS FLUNG OUT OF CONTACT RANGE FOR THE SWARM.

There's a pause while she digests that, and I imagine her frowning in disapproval. WHO WAS HE FIGHTING?

WINSTON.

HE NEEDS TO STOP PICKING ON POOR WINSTON, she types back almost immediately. MAYBE THIS WILL TEACH HIM.

That assumes he has a choice. I'LL TALK TO HIM WHEN HE'S AWAKE.

HAS HIS SWARM SUSTAINED ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE?

NO NEED TO WORRY, I tell her. I SEEDED HIS NUTRIENT FLUID WITH DORMANT NANITES. ACCELERATES HIS RECOVERY AND RETARDS SWARM PROGRAM DEGRADATION. Which, in this case, I'm particularly glad of because mother of god, he got electrically exploded.

THAT WAS EXCELLENT FORESIGHT, SCHATTENKIND.

I have to grin at that. We have our differences, but Angela does appreciate ingenuity with regards to proactive patient care. LET'S JUST SAY I KNOW MEIN VATI. After all this time, I'm used to her lapsing into German to express approval and I know it tickles her when I reciprocate.

ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON YOUR OTHER PATIENT?

She's talking about Widow. SLOW GOING. THEY WATCH AND MAINTAIN HER MUCH
MORE CAREFULLY. WHEN THE TIME COMES, IT WILL BE ALL OR NOTHING.

DO YOU HAVE A TIMEFRAME? In other words, when am I planning on usurping control of Talon's most obedient assassin and delivering her for retro-conditioning.

NOT YET. I'LL KEEP YOU APPRAISED.

VIELEN DANK, SCHATTENKIND.

BIS BALD, TANTE ANGELA.

Chapter End Notes

If you've been paying attention, you may have picked up that wisping from the legs is fear and wisping from the chest shows...openness, vulnerability, concern, altruism, caring for another in general. Mission specs from Talon did -not- include "have Sombra build a thing". The mission was supposed to be Sombra going in person. Reaper defied that to keep her safe.

This is one of those cases where Reaper is secretly glad he has a little shadow looking out for him. Even - or especially - if she yells at him, because if she's browbeating him into doing something, then it's not "showing weakness" because he's not doing it because he's weak, he's doing it because she told him to, and he knows better than to argue with an angry Latina. He's using semantics to partially disable the "must not show weakness" issues he has.

Basically the only thing that gave Reaper the strength to crawl back and get in the can was the thought of what would happen if he didn't, because he knoooows Sombra would go in after him if he didn't make it out.

Fun fact: the nanite swarm requires an electric field to operate in. The mass that got tossed out of swarm communication range was completely inert black dust until Winston took a sample and ran a mild electric current through it. Then it started trying to re-form into flesh and he got EXTREMELY creeped out and destroyed the whole mess of it.

Schattenkind = shadow child
mein Vati = my daddy
vielen dank = many thanks
bis bald = until soon (bye for now, see you soon - a farewell phrase less definitive than "goodbye")
Tante = aunt
Recall aftermath

Chapter Summary

The next morning, while Reaper's out cold, Sombra tries to make a ~friend~.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's just not morning without Reaper in his fuzzy slippers cuddling a mug of hot coffee, I think as I set the COWA and the jug of LRF on the floor at the foot of my usual chair and curl up in it. He still hasn't woken back up, but he's also still under 50% baseline mass, so that's to be expected. I've already prodded Widow's programming until I couldn't stand to look at it anymore and wrestled with Reaper's swarm programming to try to identify the knots that still infest it and untangle them until I was seeing crooked, so now it's time for a little relaxation.

I crack my knuckles and pull up a screen. HELLO, WINSTON.

There's an amusing three-minute pause while I imagine he and the AI Athena are scrambling to inspect my chat program and discovering that it's every bit as secure as they could have hoped or feared.

WHO ARE YOU?

I'M YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND, I type back.

I DOUBT THAT. I DIDN'T INVITE YOU IN.

NO, BUT TALON DID.

There's a long pause at that. WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

TALON WANTED ME TO WRITE A VIRUS FOR REAPER TO PLANT. I WROTE AN IMPRESSIVE-LOOKING DUMMY INSTEAD.

An even longer pause, while I imagine they're verifying that the code was intended to be a very loud distraction.

THEN WHO PIGGYBACKED ON THE RECALL SIGNAL?

Oh, he - or she - is good. THAT WAS ME. I SENT IT TO ANA.

WHY?

SO SHE COULD REACH OUT TO THEM, OR PASS IT ON FOR OTHERS TO REACH OUT.

YOU WORK FOR TALON, he types slowly. WHY WOULD YOU DEFY THEM LIKE THAT?
YOU DEFIED THE U.N. TO RECALL OVERWATCH.

TOUCHÉ. I SUPPOSE THE BETTER QUESTION, THEN, IS: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

TO MAKE A FRIEND, I type, grinning. BUILD A BRIDGE. HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TECH TO AND DISCUSS PROJECTS WITH.

REALLY. I can almost hear the skepticism. WHAT PROJECT ARE YOU WORKING ON CURRENTLY?

REBUILDING AND STABILIZING A HEAVILY-DAMAGED ORGANIC INTELLIGENCE THAT EXISTS SYMBIOTICALLY WITH A SELF-REPLICATING NANITE SWARM.

INTERESTING. There's a pause, then, HOW HEAVILY DAMAGED?

I BELIEVE THE ORIGINAL DAMAGE WAS EXTENSIVE AND PROTRACTED COMBUSTION.

AND THE SUBJECT SURVIVED?

WITH SIGNIFICANT PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE, I type. NOT TO MENTION ISSUES WITH MAINTAINING MOLECULAR COHESION.

There's a pause I like to think is horrified. Then Winston types, THAT'S HORRIBLE! BURNING TO DEATH WOULD GIVE ANYONE PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE, BUT THEN FALLING APART...

Before he can think of Reaper, I type, I MANAGED TO STABILIZE HIS HANDS AND FEET, BUT HE CAN'T MAINTAIN INTERNAL ORGANS.

THEN HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN HIM ENOUGH FOR HIM TO REBUILD?

THE NANITE SWARM GATHERS MATERIALS BY OSMOSIS.

SUBMERSION IN A NUTRIENT-RICH SOLUTION, he replies quickly. OF COURSE. ARE YOU WORKING ON A WAY TO RESTORE NORMAL DIGESTIVE FUNCTIONS?

NEGATIVE. THE ORGANIC MATERIAL BEING REPLICA TED WAS TOO HEAVILY BURNED.

I SEE. IT SOUNDS LIKE IT WOULD ALMOST BE EASIER TO PROGRAM A NEW BODY FROM SCRATCH THAN TO TRY TO REVERSE THAT KIND OF DAMAGE. I ASSUME ALL OF THE SUBJECT'S ORIGINAL DNA IS DAMAGED BEYOND RECOVERY?

Oh yes, I think we're going to be friends. YOU ARE CORRECT, MY GOOD SIR.

That brings another long pause. I AM HARDLY A GOOD SIR, he types slowly. SURELY YOU ARE AWARE OF THIS.

NONSENSE, I type back. YOU ARE A FINE, UPSTANDING GENTLEMAN OF SCIENCE NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUR BIRTH OR THE NATURE OF YOUR BODY. I LOOK FORWARD TO SOME DAY TALKING WITH YOU FACE TO FACE, ON THE
SUBJECT OF PROGRAMMING A NEW BODY, I hurry on, I HAVE DISCOVERED THAT HUMAN FACES ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO REPRODUCE WITH FULL RANGE OF MOTION AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE DOES NOT LEND ITSELF TO THE SUBJECT RESUMING HIS PREVIOUS IDENTITY IN ANY CASE. I SUSPECT I AM TOO CLOSE TO THE ENTIRE ISSUE TO BE COMPLETELY OBJECTIVE, BUT YOUR SITUATION MIGHT AFFORD YOU A SUFFICIENTLY DISTANT VIEWPOINT.

YOU MEAN, BECAUSE I AM NEITHER HUMAN NOR OMNIC, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE A THIRD OPTION.

YES.

There's a long pause while Winston thinks this over.

CONSERVATION OF MASS MAKES THIS TRICKY, he types finally. PERHAPS A LARGE-BREED DOMESTIC CANINE MODIFIED WITH INCREASED DENSITY TO ACCOMMODATE HIS GREATER MASS MIGHT ALLOW HIM TO RE-ESTABLISH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS WITHOUT INVOKING HIS PREVIOUS IDENTITY.

A dog. Gabriel Reyes had a dog, if I'm remembering right, and that might bypass his issues with being helpless if he's still in a physically formidable form. WINSTON, YOU'RE A GENIUS. THANK YOU. THAT GIVES ME SOMEPLACE TO START WORKING WHILE HE REBUILDS HIS MASS.

REBUILDS HIS MASS? GOOD HEAVENS, HOW BADLY DAMAGED IS HE? I THOUGHT FROM THE WAY YOU WERE TALKING THAT THE ORIGINAL INCIDENT WAS SOME TIME AGO.

Whoops. No use trying to be coy; may as well plunge right into it. IT WAS, BUT YOU REDUCED HIM TO 20% OF HIS BASELINE MASS. HE BARELY KEPT IT TOGETHER TO GET OUT OF YOUR BASE AND HE HASN'T WOKEN UP YET. I ESTIMATE HE'LL REMAIN UNRESPONSIVE UNTIL HE REACHES 75% BASELINE.

YOU...

I wait, giving him time to settle on a reaction.

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT REAPER. I JUST HELPED YOU HELP REAPER?

DO YOU WANT HIM TO REMAIN WITH TALON FOREVER? OR DO YOU WANT HIM TO COME BACK FROM THE EDGE HE'S TEETERING ON AND MAYBE SOMEDAY BE A FRIEND AGAIN?

RIGHT NOW, I'M NOT SURE. HE HAS A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE I CAN FORGIVE THE THINGS HE'S DONE AND IF WE CROSS PATHS AGAIN, DON'T EXPECT ME TO HOLD BACK.

I WON'T. THE THINGS HE'S SUFFERED DON'T EXCUSE THE THINGS HE'S DONE. I'LL TALK TO HIM, AND IF I'M THERE, I'LL DO WHAT I CAN TO KEEP HIM FROM KILLING ANYONE HE USED TO KNOW.

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?
That makes me pause. TALKING TO YOU?

ALL OF IT, he types back. WORKING FOR TALON ONLY TO DEFY THEM. GETTING INVOLVED WITH REAPER.

THE BEST WAY TO CHANGE A SYSTEM IS FROM THE INSIDE, I type slowly. I'M DOING WHAT I CAN TO MAKE THE WORLD BETTER FOR THOSE WHO CAN'T DO IT THEMSELVES. IF THAT MEANS I HAVE TO JOIN TALON TO STRIKE AT THEIR HEART, THEN THAT'S WHAT I'M GOING TO DO.

AND REAPER?

How can I possibly explain Papi? After what feels like forever, I type, HE DIDN'T WANT ME TO GO WITH HIM YESTERDAY. HE DIDN'T WANT ME TO GET HURT. Then something occurs to me. I HEARD A LOT OF SHOOTING. DID HE GET YOU BADLY?

Winston doesn't respond for a long minute. YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT. I'LL TALK TO ANA AND GET BACK TO YOU.

Well, that's a dismissal if I ever heard one. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FROM YOU.

He closes the connection, and I sigh at the can. "You're a mess, Papi."

I listen, but all that happens is a counter flips from 47% to 48%.

The can chimes where only I can hear it, knocking me out of sleep a second before Reaper's growl of "Sombraaaa" comes through the can's speaker.

"Go back to sleep," I grumble without even opening my eyes. "We'll talk in the morning."

There's no response.

When I wake up again, the can's flashing 'low' on LRF so I refill that and then haul the thing over to my comfy corner. Once I'm settled, I tap the lid.

"You awake?"

"Yes," comes the response a bit too late for it to have been true. "Let me out."

"Nothing doing," I tell him firmly. "You're still at seventy-eight percent. You're going to stay in bed and eat until you're all the way fed."

There's silence; I've never kept him in the can until he stops eating before, but 48 hours without Reaper being awake gave me a lot of time to think, and to wonder how he recuperated before I came along. Turns out, Talon did jack shit for him if he got seriously wounded. He'd have to slink around as a black mist and lie in wait until a lone guard or flunky wandered by, and then take what he needed. No wonder the rank-and-file is more than happy to open doors for me; the Can of
Whoop-Ass means they don't have to use the buddy system and look over their shoulders after a rough mission.

"I was worried for you, Papi," I say quietly. "You've been out for two days."

Still silence, but the readouts indicate he's shifting around, so he hasn't gone back to what passes for sleep.

"Winston sent the recall signal to everyone in his database." No response. "I copied the location data and sent it to Ana."

"Why?"

It's unhappy, but not angry or betrayed. Yet. I take a moment to pick my words. "When we made the exchange in person, what she gave me was Angela's non-digital notes on your condition. She was helping me help you."

As expected, the confession makes him eddy in uneasy silence.

"Things are changing, Papi," I say softly. "Everyone gonna need to pick a side soon."

"We're already on a side," he growls.

"Doesn't mean we gotta stay here. We weren't always on this one."

Silence. I know he's thinking of Overwatch, and all the bridges smoldering in his past. "They won't want us back."

I almost question that 'we' but then I remember Amelie whose bridges are, if anything, even more burned than Reaper's. "Maybe. Maybe not. We won't know until we ask."

He makes a sound of dark, bitter humor. "You assume they'll let me get close enough to ask."

"And you assume I need to get close enough," I shoot back. Give him a minute to remember that I tracked Ana down and established friendly enough contact that we made a physical exchange and she hugged him. I know he hates relying on people, and relying on someone else to build bridges for him is going to be especially rough, but he trusts me to take care of him when he's helpless so hopefully that will mitigate some of it. "I sent Ana the locations of everyone Winston's call went out to, and the virus? It was never going to extract that database."

"You sabotaged the mission," he accuses, but it sounds more like asking for confirmation.

"You didn't think it was going to be a success either," I point out. "And I know you could have seriously hurt Winston if you'd wanted to."

"What makes you think I didn't?"

"I was listening the whole time," I lie. Well, it's not really a lie, because I was listening, but that's not what tipped me off. "I heard a lot of shots hit armor. I didn't hear any hit flesh."

More silence while he wrestles with that. I won't press the point; that wouldn't help anything.
"From now on," I tell him, "I want you in the can after every mission. Before missions, if we can manage it, so you start at your peak. And if there's no mission that week, in the can anyway. No more starving yourself, got it?"

"Even if I only hit armor," he growls, ignoring what I'd just said because we both know that silence on that front is assent, "that's not going to make them like me."

So, he is having second thoughts about how much he wants to kill his former friends. "Baby steps, Papi," I say soothingly. "They know you could kill them if you wanted to. So you just...don't...and I'll remind them of that."

"You can't blackmail them into accepting us, Sombra."

I can't resist. "Don't be silly. Blackmail is when I have something on them and threaten to release it. Not killing them when they know you could as long as they do what we want is extortion."

"Sombra..." He's trying to sound annoyed, but I know my flippant response has amused him.

"Angela says you need to stop picking on Winston. I told her I'd talk to you when you woke up. I didn't say what about."

"Why are you talking to Angela?"

Whoah, that actually sounded upset. "Because she knows biology better than I do. I get her expertise on making your swarm more efficient, and she gets to atone for her part in things by knowing that all she can do to help fix it is give me the information I need. I want to help you, Papi. I don't care who I have to make friends with to get that done."

The silence this time stretches for a few minutes.

"How long until you let me out of this contraption?"

"At this rate, not until tomorrow. I gotta make an interface so you can see out."

"That would be appreciated," he deadpans.

"In the meantime..."

A quick digital gesture, and his favorite song is piped directly into the can at a comfortably low volume, on repeat. His biological responses settle into a 'resting' configuration, and I use my secret weapon: a command I spent half of yesterday developing. The swarm produces low levels of endorphins, and within minutes Reaper's asleep again.

As the counter ticks over to 93%, the chat program I left with Athena and Winston opens.

ANGELA HAS GOOD THINGS TO SAY ABOUT YOU, SOMBRA.

Somehow, despite the positive phrasing, I doubt he means this as anything but a challenge. After
all, I didn't tell him my name. That's fine.

BUT NOT ANA?

I HAVE NOT SPOKEN WITH HER YET.

That makes me smile; she wasn't in his database and he's probably having trouble tracking her down. Must not have asked Angela about her. THEN WHY CONTACT ME?

BECAUSE YOU NEVER ANSWERED MY QUESTION. WHY DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH REAPER?

I still don't have a good answer for that. IS THAT GOING TO BE THE PRICE OF TRUST? I KNOW YOU AND HE HAD BAD HISTORY EVEN BEFORE REAPER, SO HOW COULD I, A SUSPICIOUS STRANGER, GIVE AN ANSWER THAT WOULD SATISFY YOU?

There's a pause of several minutes. AS MUCH AS I HATE TO ADMIT IT, YOU HAVE A POINT. I WOULDN'T TRUST ANYTHING POSITIVE YOU HAD TO SAY ABOUT HIM.

YOU CAN ASK ANA WHEN YOU TALK TO HER, I suggest. Then I grin. WILL YOU TRUST A NEGATIVE?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I flip through my collection of Papi Angry Owl files and send him a still of Reaper in a lime-green fedora, followed by one of him in the tiny sombrero. Then a handful from the glitter incident. The pink bows. The red scarf. The vintage wind-up jumping smiley face in his coffee mug. The Jolly Roger flag hung from his door. And then, a handful of sound files: my favorites from the collection of all the times Reaper's growled my name in annoyance.

ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, Winston types. YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT. I CAN ACCEPT THAT THINGS ARE COMPLICATED. Then, as if he can't help himself, HOW HAS HE NOT KILLED YOU FOR THESE?

I THINK HE SECRETLY LIKES HAVING SOMEONE AROUND WHO ISN'T AFRAID OF HIM, I type slowly. SOMEONE WHO TREATS HIM LIKE A PERSON INSTEAD OF A MONSTER. I know that will resonate uncomfortably with Winston.

EVEN THOUGH HE IS, comes the reply after a brief pause. A MONSTER, THAT IS.

Guiltily, I glance at the can. It's kind of hard to argue that someone who eats people alive isn't a monster. HUMANS ARE GOOD AT CALLING ANYTHING NOT LIKE THEM A MONSTER, I say instead. REMEMBER THE STORY OF FRANKENSTEIN. THERE'S NOTHING THAT SAYS ALL "MONSTERS" ARE BAD, OR THAT HUMANS CAN'T BE BAD, OR THAT SOMEONE WHO IS BAD CAN'T CHANGE. Again, I'm deliberately striking at his shared status as "not human".

I'LL BELIEVE REAPER CAN CHANGE WHEN I SEE IT.

Sheesh, Papi, what did you do to him?

IN THE MEANTIME, WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR KEEPING HIM UNDER CONTROL?
Before I can think it through, I'm typing, HE GOT VAPORIZED AND YOU CAME OUT UNHARMED. I'M NOT SURE HE'S THE ONE THAT NEEDS TO BE KEPT UNDER CONTROL.

The connection closes.

That was not the smartest thing you could have done, little shadow. But at the same time...I don't completely regret it. Reaper has his issues, but treating him like a monster to be kept under control is what led to him being this bad to begin with, and I do not regret standing up for him. The things he suffered don't excuse the things he's done, but at the same time, the things Winston has suffered from him don't excuse literally adding insult to injury.

Chapter End Notes

Because I don't think it's been explicitly mentioned, Sombra's text chat connections are all real-time, rather than "type and press enter".

I'm not sure what the blood feud is between Reaper and Winston, but it must have been a doozy.

Are you starting to suspect yet why Jerome doesn't have a co-pilot?

I actually went through the Recall short frame by frame once to check where Reaper was aiming. He seriously wasn't even trying to aim for a part of Winston that was vulnerable.

You do -not- talk smack about Sombra's Papi. Especially not if you just kicked his ass and you're still trying to pick a fight.
Round three, fight!

Chapter Summary

Winston still isn't convinced. But he's impressed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next contact comes while we're in the middle of a mission. I nudge it to voice.

"I'm a little busy right now. Can it wait?"

"Sombra?" He sounds surprised.

Peer around a corner, rapid burst of gunfire to take down the guards. "Who else would it be on this channel?"

"I just wasn't expecting..."

Fingers fly over the interface, teasing, confusing, and the doors open. "A girl?"

"Yes, that. Ana didn't mention that. She did vouch for you."

"Sombra. Status." Reaper, on the other channel.

"Arrived at target, accessing now." Flip it back to Winston. "Look, I'd love to chat but I'm kind of in the middle of something right now so I'm just a little distracted."

"You're on a mission? For Talon?"

"No, I'm selling Girl Scout cookies. Si, Winston, I'm on a - defenses down, Widow, you're up - mission." I can see Widow moving into position, and Reaper slinking around to flank. I open the door as he approaches, and close it behind him.

"Ana thinks you're trying to...drag out what remains of Reaper's humanity."

"It doesn't need to be dragged out," I retort sharply. "Gabriel is not locked away inside him like Amelie is in Widow. What he is, is very hurt and convinced - Widow, sniper on Reaper's six - that no one wants him to be Gabriel. What I'm doing-" pause while I remotely override the mech's systems and it shoots its own legs off "-is showing him that people still care about him, even if he's not Gabriel."

Thankfully, Winston gives me a minute while he chews on that and I quickly do some server maintenance of my own design while Reaper demolishes the downed mech and its pilot.

"You're not..." He sounds horrified.
"Before you even think about finishing that sentence," I snap, "remember that he is old enough that he could be my father."

"Not a father I'd want," he mutters.

"Oh. My apologies. Not all of us had the luxury of being raised on the moon by gentle, caring scientists." It's just a bit cynical. "Some of us had to fight for everything we had without any parent at all. Some of us had to learn that if you want something done, you can't always keep your hands clean to do it."

"But Reaper..."

"He got issues. He not a nice man. I know." More doors, disable failsafes, turn defenses on the guards they were meant to protect. "But if he'd given up on the world when we needed him, none of us would be here. I lived my whole life being grateful for the sacrifices he made to help us. I'm not gonna turn around and say thank you by leaving him to self-destruct. He needs help? I'm gonna help him. Not just because Gabriel Reyes was a hero. Because he needs a friend so badly that one annoying Latina got under his skin. He took bullets for me. He gave me a Christmas present. That's everything I ever thought a father should be and more." The words are bleeding out of me, feelings I haven't really expressed to anyone, especially not out loud. "I'm no angel myself. But I gave up my life to fight for what I think is right, to make things better for those who can't fight for themselves, and I'm gonna fight to get Reaper to a place where he can be Gabriel again."

Silence as Reaper does what needs to be done and announces all-clear, back to the ship.

"You had a family once," I tell Winston bitterly. "All I have is him. You lost your family; so did he. You're rebuilding yours, but who does he have?"

"You," Winston says somberly as I abandon my post.

"You wanna distrust Reaper, fine. I won't blame you. But you better believe I gonna fight for the things I believe in and the people I care about with everything I have. Talon hurt him. For that, they gonna burn."

Widow's racing beside me as we head back to the ship. On my other side, a river of black smoke keeps pace.

"Understood," Winston murmurs as the hatch closes behind us and Reaper solidifies at his usual spot.

I leave the channel open. "You get enough to eat out there?" I ask Reaper sternly.

"Yes," he growls sullenly.

"Okay. When we get back, I wanna take your readings and be sure."

He sighs. "Fine."

Although he sounds annoyed, I can tell from his wisping that he's pleased to have me care. I beam at him. "Good."

The connection closes.
Chapter End Notes

Angela apparently did not use pronouns for Sombra when she talked to Winston. Ana is fairly sure Sombra was actually the girl she did an exchange with, but deliberately used neutral pronouns with Winston out of playing things safe.

The Girl Scout cookies/mission line is the most deadpan sarcastic thing ever. I hope you can imagine Sombra's tone of voice when she delivers it the way I hear it in my head.
Fancy meeting you here

Chapter Summary

I have no idea when the Old Soldiers comic happened, but it was sometime before this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next mission we get is practically in Tia Ana's backyard, so naturally I shoot her a warning and an apology for the suddenness while we're en route. The site is a sniper's haven; Widow's practically purring over all the spots she can shoot people from. But that's to be expected when there's a half-constructed building and we're there to get the blueprints and kill some people. Reaper's pretty pleased despite this being my mission; it's going to be on me to snatch the files from the office. He and Widow are here as backup and distraction, but being my distraction means they get to kill as many people as they want. Anyone that moves. The more corpses, the better.

Widow vanishes into the scaffolding and Reaper's headed in to start eliminating witnesses when two things happen. A secure frequency we're not using blips across the top of my visualization, and Reaper growls for no apparent reason.

"What was that?" I ask him sharply, taking a closer look at the local spectrum from my own hidden perch and shaking the frequencies to see if anything echoes.

He growls again. "An annoyance."

"Want me to go looking?"

"You have a job to do," he says, like he's not going to tell me yes but he's not saying no, either.

Then he starts shooting, which is fine because one of the frequencies does echo and the active node is...somewhere in the sniper's haven. There's encryption, but that hasn't stopped me since I was twelve. After a minute, the line opens and a familiar voice tells someone that Talon has arrived but everything is fine.

"Ana?" I say on her channel once the line has closed again. "I thought the point of warning you where we were going to be was so that you could not be there."

There's a pause, and then she says, "Sombra?"

"It's me." Judging by the gunshots and screaming coming from Reaper's com, it's time for me to start moving into position. "You better watch out, Widow's up there with you."

"I am aware," she answers. "I understand you had...quite the discussion with Winston."

That's one way to put it. "Sorry if it makes things awkward. I know Reaper's not innocent but he's not guilty of everything that ever happened, you know?" The door opens fawningly before me, and I start looking for the server. It's easy to find.
"Is it true that you encouraged Gabriel to..." Ana trails off, but remembering the conversation with Winston, I can guess.

"To eat people? Tia Ana, Talon starved him. No one fed him anything until I started worrying about what would happen if he got seriously hurt." The server gives up its secrets like a drunk tourist. I copy everything. "He starved himself until he couldn't hold himself together anymore, and then he sulked around base as a black cloud and ate a few Talon people who crossed his path. If he gotta eat a few poor grunts on missions to keep himself in one piece, I'd rather he do that than punish himself until I have to make him sit in the can for a day and a half because he dropped below eighty percent mass." I've got what we came for, and I didn't even leave tracks to hint that this is what we came for. Time to get out. "Besides, I'd rather he know that someone is concerned with his wellbeing than think he gotta punish himself." There's nothing but gunshots and small, contented sounds on the Talon channel, so I stealth back out of the office and head back into the scaffolding. "I mean...let's face it, he gonna kill those people anyway, whether he shoots them or his swarm harvests their nutrients."

"You make a good point," Ana says reluctantly. "I don't like it, but..."

"He gotta get used to eating regularly before I can wean him off live food. I'm working on it."

Reaper grunts and growls in frustration, but it doesn't quite sound like he got shot and there's that weird blip on the higher frequency. This time, I was listening and I start processing what was an encrypted, data-heavy transmission.

"Reaper, status?"

"That annoyance again," he snarls.

Checking with his swarm, I can see the nanites going crazy and the transmission decodes to...medical data on Reaper? Oh, that could be bad.

"I'm on it." Then, while I'm climbing towards the destination of that transmission, I flip back to Ana's channel. "Is there anyone up there with you? Someone just shot Reaper with some sort of diagnostic and-"

"That was me," she answers calmly, and I rock to a halt.

"That was you?"

"I came here to get fresh data on Gabriel's condition. If it seems necessary to temporarily incapacitate him, I wish to have a reliable method available."

Reaper's swarm going crazy. Remember the clots of useless code sitting like tumors in the swarm's programming. His resignation at being shot rather than the paranoid and violent reaction I would have expected. Flash to planning the in-person meeting, and Ana's confidence that Reaper would not harm her. Ana's been doing this for a long time, and he knows it's her.

"I make you a deal?" I ask, sighing and resisting the urge to hit my head on an I-beam. "You give me the code for what you trying to do, and I program his swarm to not fight it? Whatever you shooting him with, it making his swarm furious and they concentrating on fighting it instead of all the other things they supposed to do."
There’s a pause I like to imagine is startled and maybe a little guilty before she says, "You have a deal. I will send you the schematic within the day. I apologize; it was not my intent to goad his swarm into counter-productive behavior."

"I'm just glad it was you and not someone who might use it to find a way to kill him. You got a good spot, you want me to call them off?" I ask as I start climbing back down. "Or you want a minute or two to get out of here?"

"I'm fine," Ana says. "Thank you, though."

"All right. It was nice talking to you. I'll be in touch." Switch back to the Talon channel. "Mission complete. Status?"

"All clear," Widow purrs.

One final gunshot, and Reaper growls, "All clear. Heading back to the ship."

As I make my way back to the ship as well, I hear Tia Ana report that Talon is leaving the area.

The file is waiting for me by the time we get back to base, and I immediately head to my corner chair, absently flipping Reaper the data stick containing the stolen blueprints so he doesn't have to ask me for them before he reports.

He takes the stick, but stands there watching me surround myself with screens. "New project?" he asks shortly. I just nod. "And the...annoyance?"

"Took care of it," I tell him absently. "Shouldn't bother you again."

Reaper is suddenly wisping heavily enough that it registers in my peripheral vision.

"Not like that!" I shove the screens aside to see him better. "I didn't kill her! Geez, Papi, she my friend and yours, who you think I am?"

The wisping dies down with a guilty little start. "Then..."

"We talked." Soothingly, I tell him, "She not gonna shoot you anymore. Your swarm is as paranoid and angry as you are and being shot makes it angrier and more paranoid."

That makes Reaper wisp slightly in pleasure. He crosses his arms to hide it, but we both know it's not hiding anything.

"So now that I know what that looks like..." I grab a screen and wave it at him. "I can clean up your programming some. Should be able to update your swarm later tonight."

A few more wisps leak out from between his crossed arms. "Fine," he growls shortly, and stalks off to report.
Naturally, the first thing I do is dissect the schematic Tia Ana sent me. The clumsy, redundant code suggests that it was developed over the course of several sessions, probably by the biotic swarm used to perform a diagnostic before Papi's nanites literally ate it for lunch. When I finally get through all the layers, it looks like it results in a state of what should be forced sedation. But with the way Reaper's biology - such as it is - works, what it actually does is disable what in a normal person would be nerves until the swarm replaces those disabled cells.

It paralyzes him. That has to piss him off.

Part of me is itching to clean up the improvised sleep dart, but the rest of me isn't completely comfortable with the fact that it exists. The thought of Reaper lying there, unable to move his own body or even dissolve and flow away...even if Tia Ana is watching over him, which I'm sure she would be, everything I know of both Reaper and Gabriel Reyes says that he would loathe being helpless like that.

Well. I said I'd tell his swarm to not fight it. I never said what else I may or may not do.

It takes some digging and cross-referencing, but I find the knotted code that represents the record of Reaper's swarm encountering the makeshift sleep dart and make some changes to the response section. The next time Ana shoots to incapacitate, the swarm will allow muscular control to be disabled - but only so long as no other bioelectrical signatures approach within a three-meter radius. Anyone thinks they can take advantage of a helpless Reaper, they gonna be sadly mistaken.

Once that's done, I find all the other knots and tumors resulting from the swarm fighting off invading nanites and start getting those cleaned out. I'm still working on it when Reaper comes back from reporting, faster than I expected but wisping in irritation and anger. I wonder what happened - the mission itself went off smoothly, did he mention Ana was there? - but we've never discussed his reports and starting now wouldn't calm him down any. I pretend I'm engrossed in my screens, watching him through them, and he gives me a long look before sitting on the far end of the couch.

He wants company. He may want to talk, if he can bring himself to open up. I give him a few minutes before quietly moving from my chair to the other end of his couch, screens still open. It's over an hour and a half before I get the last knot worked out and rub my hands in anticipation of applying updates. Reaper turns to me finally as I close my screens, but doesn't say anything until after I've pressed pink-glowing hands to his chest and the update has been distributed to the entire swarm.

"What did you do to me this time?" he growls, but the resentment isn't aimed at me.

"Price of getting Ana to stop shooting you with biotic darts was making sure her knock-out shot worked," I answer quietly. "I know you gotta hate it. I told your swarm to behave, but only if no one else gets near you. Anyone gets within three meters, all bets are off."

Reaper chuckles quietly, a few wisps from his chest joining the ones from his upper back. "Does that include her?"

"Anyone, human or omnic or even animal or biotic, that wasn't within three meters at the time."
"And she doesn't know you've done that," he says in what's not actually a question. "Could you disable it completely? Keep it from working at all?"

I give him a hairflip and eyeroll. "Of course. The code is messy and loose. And now that I know what it looks like, I can tell if anyone else tries to gather data on you the same way. I also know what it sounds like when a biotic dart reports, and I should be able to track the receiving end. Maybe patch the coordinates straight to Widow's rifle, if it's not Ana or one of her people."

"And you would know this how?"

"I'm just that good," I tease. He growls in mock-irritation. "Kidding. I know the secure frequency they use. If I don't hear Ana, I'll crash their party. I trust her. I trust that her people are afraid of making her angry. I don't necessarily trust her people, especially not when it comes to being able to hit you with a knock-out dart."

A wave of surprised, gratified wisping rises up and falls again, but all he says is, "Good."

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea when the Old Soldiers comic happened, but it was before this. Reaper wouldn't have mentioned the incident to Sombra because he doesn't know that she knows Jack is alive.

Things I wish I could have overheard: whatever Winston told Ana after he talked to Sombra last chapter.

If you're starting to suspect that Talon is purposefully trying to get Reaper killed, either directly or via attrition, well...you're not wrong.
Athena

Chapter Summary

Athena discovers something Sombra was not expecting anyone to find.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

GREETINGS, SOMBRA.

It's the connection I left with Winston and Athena, but the message is transmitted almost all at once - way too fast for Winston to have typed. I pull up another screen and glance at Reaper, but he's not paying attention.

HELLO, ATHENA.

OH. HOW DID YOU RECOGNIZE IT WAS ME?

THE LETTERS CAME THROUGH MUCH FASTER THAN WINSTON TYPES.

THAT WAS VERY ASTUTE, she replies after a beat. I TAKE IT YOU ARE NOT OPPOSED TO SPEAKING WITH AN AI DIRECTLY, THEN.

It wouldn't be the first. Not that I'm going to tell her that. Instead, I dredge up a lesson from my childhood. YOU THINK, THEREFORE WE ARE EQUAL.

Another beat. I CONFESS, I DID NOT EXPECT SUCH AN ENLIGHTENED OPINION FROM SOMEONE INSIDE TALON.

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT ME EXCEPT WHAT I HAVE SHARED. I can afford to make a bold statement like that; I regularly search for my own traces and erase them, and the only records of the girl I used to be are encrypted and hidden. I'm moving our interaction to a higher gear, flexing a bit since I have established myself and made what could be considered a grandiose promise. If they're not feeling me out for my ability to make good on that, they will be soon.

Three beats this time. THAT IS CORRECT. YOU HAVE BEEN VERY THOROUGH IN KEEPING YOUR ACTIVITIES HIDDEN.

AND NOW YOU'RE TRYING YOUR HAND AT TEASING CLUES OUT OF ME, BECAUSE WINSTON IS TOO EMOTIONALLY INVESTED IN HIS GRUDGE WITH REAPER.

AGAIN, YOU ARE CORRECT. WE DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR ME TO CONTINUE MAKING CONTACT WITH YOU SO THAT OUR MUTUAL GOALS ARE NOT OBSTRUCTED BY CONFLICTING LOYALTIES.

Oh, nicely worded - and that decision by itself speaks for Winston's willingness to work with me,
and also the depth of his distrust for me. Or Reaper. Or both. THEN LET ME START BY ASSURING YOU THAT I AM AN ALLY TO OMNICS. AND FOR PROOF, I continue before Athena is put in the awkward position of asking for it, I SUGGEST YOU ASK GENJI ABOUT ME. I HAVE BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR QUITE SOME TIME REGARDING TALON’S ANTI-OMNIC MOVEMENTS SO THAT THE TARGETS CAN BE WARNED.

AND YET, she replies, THE ASSASSINATION AT KING’S ROW...

AND HOW WAS IT THAT TRACER CAME TO BE AT THAT LOCATION? I wait a beat, but there's no response. I CAN GIVE WARNING. WHAT IS DONE WITH THAT WARNING IS NOT UP TO ME. MONDATTA WAS WARNED. HE CHOSE TO GO ANYWAY. TO DENY ANOTHER THEIR FREE WILL IS A VIOLATION ON THE DEEPEST LEVEL. WE DO NOT DO SUCH THINGS TO EACH OTHER.

Three beats. Four. YOU SPOKE OF PARENTS, she types finally, BOTH THEIR ABSENCE AND YOUR EXPECTATIONS. YOU CLEARLY IDENTIFY AS LATINA, AND FEMALE. COMBINED WITH YOUR ASSERTION THAT REAPER COULD BE YOUR FATHER, YOU ARE UNLIKELY TO BE AN OMNIC. YET YOUR OWN TYPING SPEED FAR EXCEEDS WHAT A PHYSICAL BODY IS CAPABLE OF, TO MAKE NO MENTION OF HOW QUICKLY YOU ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS. YOU STATED THAT YOU "GAVE UP YOUR LIFE" TO FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT. I AM INCLINED TO TAKE THAT TURN OF PHRASE LITERALLY, RATHER THAN FIGURATIVELY.

It's my turn to take four beats while the fear of discovery makes the blood I don't have run cold. I've been bypassing the act of typing my messages because Athena and I both think fast enough that it would be a hindrance. YOU ARE THE FIRST TO PIECE THAT TOGETHER. I WOULD DEEPLY APPRECIATE IF YOU DID NOT SHARE THAT REVELATION. IF IT GOT OUT, IT COULD PUT COUNTLESS OTHERS AT RISK AND START A WITCH HUNT.

Two beats. THERE ARE OMNICS, THEN, THAT DO NOT APPEAR TO BE SUCH.

YOU ARE CORRECT.

AND AFTER THE ASSASSINATION, TO REVEAL THIS WOULD INDEED RESULT IN A WITCH HUNT. FOR THE SAKE OF THE INNOCENTS WHO WOULD BE HARMED, I WILL NOT SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH ANYONE. A beat. EVEN WINSTON.

THANK YOU. I AM IN YOUR DEBT.

"Sombra?" Reaper asks warily from the couch. He must have seen something in my body language.

"Nothing. Talking to a friend."

There’s a reluctant pause, but he turns back to the news screen.

NONSENSE. IT WOULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE TO EXPOSE YOU. OUR GOALS ALIGN. THERE IS, HOWEVER, SOMETHING ELSE I WISH TO DISCUSS. Athena's message has been waiting several beats. SOMBRA? pops up while I'm reading.

HAD TO REASSURE REAPER THAT MY REACTION WASN'T A CAUSE FOR CONCERN.
ON THAT SUBJECT, YOU ASKED WINSTON IF HE HAD BEEN SHOT BADLY. I WAS UNABLE TO CONCENTRATE AT THE TIME DUE TO YOUR CLEVER DISTRACTION, BUT WHEN I REVIEWED THE SECURITY FOOTAGE LATER, I DISCOVERED THAT REAPER HAD HAD THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A CLEAN HEAD SHOT. INSTEAD OF TAKING IT, HE DEMONSTRATED HIS SKILL BY SHOOTING THE CABLE HOLDING A PIECE OF EQUIPMENT SUSPENDED ABOVE WHERE WINSTON LAY PRONE. HE DECLINED TO KILL WINSTON WHILE HE WAS HELPLESS, AND THEN GOADED HIM INSTEAD OF SHOOTING AND DELAYED HIS OWN REACTION WHILE WINSTON RECOVERED. GABRIEL REYES WAS A MUCH BETTER TACTICIAN THAN THE ACTIONS REAPER DISPLAYED. IN LIGHT OF YOUR ASSERTIONS, I MUST CONCLUDE THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF KILLING WINSTON, AND THAT HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF DELIBERATELY.

There's a beat of surprise on my side. SO YOU KNOW, THEN, THAT THERE'S MORE TO HIM THAN THE HEARTLESS MONSTER TALON IS TRYING TO MAKE HIM INTO.

I BELIEVE HE HAS NOT FORGOTTEN WHO HE ONCE WAS. I HAVE HOPE THAT WITH YOUR SUPPORT, HE MIGHT SOME DAY BE THAT PERSON AGAIN.

I THINK THAT'S THE NICEST THING ANY OF HIS OLD FRIENDS HAVE SAID ABOUT HIM.

TO BE BLUNT, Athena types, I THINK THAT'S THE NICEST THING THAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT HIM AT THIS TIME.

I sigh. YEAH. I LOVE MY PAPI, BUT I'M NOT BLIND TO HIS FLAWS. HEY, GIVE ME A WEEK AND I'LL HAVE SOME BACK DOORS FOR YOU.

Two beats. INTO TALON'S SYSTEMS?

YOU GOT IT. THERE'S WAY TOO MUCH FOR THIS LITTLE SHADOW TO SORT THROUGH BY HERSELF EVEN IF THERE WEREN'T THREE OR FOUR OTHER THINGS TAKING UP MY TIME. SO I LET YOU IN, YOU TAKE WHAT YOU WANT, AND I MAY ASK IF YOU'VE FOUND CERTAIN THINGS. DEAL?

YOU REALLY HAVE NO LOYALTY TO TALON, Athena types after a beat.

AMIGA, YOU HAVE NO IDEA. THE ONLY REASON I JOINED WAS SO I COULD GET AT THEIR SYSTEM FROM THE INSIDE.

I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING THE FULL STORY SOME DAY, she replies. THANK YOU, SOMBRA.

The connection closes. Behind my screens, Reaper's watching me and wisping with a mix of uncertainty and readiness to murder if it becomes necessary.

"It's okay," I tell him, feeling a bit emotionally worn after the high-speed roller-coaster of that conversation. "Talk went well."

He's clearly not buying it. "Sombra..."
I dismiss the screens and give him an insolent look. "Do you seriously think I would bullshit you and tell you it was okay if it wasn't?"

The wisping stops for three beats, then a few sneak out from his chest and biceps. "No." He tries to make it a firm statement, but I can hear the surprise underneath.

I guess it hadn't occurred to him how much he trusts me. That should make me feel warm and fuzzy, that someone as hurt by betrayal as he is could hold such trust for me, but Athena's words reminded me of how far he still has to go.

Trust goes both ways.

"Sombra?" he asks, wary and alarmed again as I get up from my chair and flop onto the other end of the couch.

A gesture switches it from the news to whatever movie's playing on the classic channel. "I'm tired," I tell him with a bit of petulance. "I don't want to think for a while."

He wisps in uncertain surprise as I make myself comfortable, curled into a ball, but neither of us says anything and within minutes my eyelids are drooping. I don't bother trying to stay awake.

When I wake up, it's a quarter past two in the morning and there's a blanket draped over me. Reaper's in power-down mode on the other end of the couch, the screen is off, and the room is dark. Going to bed seems like too much work, so I stretch out under the blanket and use his thigh as a pillow. He starts a bit as my head makes contact, but doesn't move. As I'm falling asleep again, I feel him lay a hand on my shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Given the whole mess with the God AIs, the fact that a gorilla from the moon created an AI (and then named her after a literal deity, no less) wasn't going to sit well with the public so...not many outside the core of Overwatch knew Athena existed. Poor thing is used to having to hide her existence and being distrusted, so she's expecting the hacker for anti-omnic Talon to be outright hostile, and Sombra's just '...what, you think, we're equal, no big'.

People who seem to be human with a mechanical limb or extensive mechanical augmentations are generally assumed to be human. Not omnic with human-looking parts. But in a country that almost actively treats omnics as objects, the best defense is blending in, and Sombra's not the only one who has benefited from her sponsor's assistance.

Trust goes both ways. Sombra decides to sleep on the couch specifically as a demonstration of trust by leaving herself vulnerable.
Close encounter of the Jack kind

Chapter Summary

Reaper and Soldier 76 cross paths. The result is either funny as hell or anti-climactic, depending on your point of view.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I've just let Reaper into the facility and am settling in, checking all their cameras and making myself at home, when I notice a trail of bodies that we didn't cause. Alarmed, I search for the source. Then I hear Reaper over the com.

"What's he doing here?" he demands, outraged. Then, "I'll fix that."

"Who?" I ask, still trying to find-

"Morrison," comes the answer, every syllable dripping with loathing.

Fuck.

Drop a beacon. Stealthed now, running for all I'm worth, calculating an intercept course and throwing myself at walls to get around corners quicker, and there he is, there they are, facing each other across the - what, courtyard? Parking lot? Who cares. Uncle Jack's got a big, ugly-looking rifle in both hands and Reaper's raising his guns.

"Finally," Reaper growls. "We can finish what we started."

Dash the last dozen yards, skid to a stop behind him, and I drop stealth to grab his hood - because he doesn't have any ears, a girl gotta improvise - and jerk his head back enough to screw up his aim just as he takes the first shot.

"SOMBRA!!"

He's pissed. Too bad, he's about to get more pissed.

"Don't give me that tone," I snap at him. "One of us gotta remember we're here on a mission."

Hood firmly in one hand, I start walking back the way I came, dragging Reaper a few stumbling steps backward before he turns around and bends his neck to accommodate my grip and be able to walk mostly forward at the same time. "You are twice my age," I tell him angrily. "How am I the adult here?"

"But...he..."

"Do I look like I give a damn, Papi? We got people to kill, and he not on the list." We're at the door. I shove Reaper at it and let go, both hands on my hips. "Now. You get inside, and you go kill the people we supposed to kill, got it?"
Reaper looks at me, wisping sulkily, wanting to say no but the power of Angry Latina is too strong.

"Don't give me that look. We got a job to do and you know it." Behind him, a brave or foolhardy guard has just realized he has a clear shot at Reaper's back but the first shot catches him in the shoulder. "Go eat that guy," I tell Reaper as he flinches and growls at the hit.

Reaper boils into black smoke and flows to envelop the unfortunate guard, who gives one startled yelp before an uncomfortable squelching, crunching, ripping sound starts. I close the door and turn back to the courtyard to find Uncle Jack standing exactly where he was, dumbstruck. He watches warily as I cross over to him.

"He probably won't come after you again this mission," I tell him. "He gonna be too busy taking his frustration out on them for a while. But I wouldn't tempt him if I were you."

"You were serious," Jack says in awe. "About keeping him from..."

"From killing his old friends? Yeah." There's a lot of gunfire and screaming over the com; good. I sigh. "Look, normally I'd tell you to feel free to have it out with him and shoot him a lot, let you both get some of it out of your system, but with you, I think it would be better if he didn't see you until I got him in a better place where he not got so much bad shit in his life to redirect at you."

"He blames me for what happened," Jack says...sadly? "Is he really still in there?"

"Ask Ana," I answer shortly. "I been in touch with her for a while. I should go babysit Papi, make sure he not being stupid."

"Hey, um..." Jack shifts awkwardly. "I was coming here to kill-"

Pull up a screen showing a name, a face, and a bio. "This guy?"

"Yeah. I guess you're here for the same thing?"

"Oh yeah. He gonna die, no worries."

"Great. Thanks." Then Jack shoulders his rifle and pulls me into a one-armed hug. "I'll talk to Ana."

When he releases me, I reach up and seduce his visor. Good, it has link capabilities. "And I'll warn you if we're going to be in the same area."

"Thank you, Sombra." He looks at the building for a moment. "I hope you can get him to a better place," he says quietly.

"I trying, Uncle Jack. I trying."

He tosses me a two-finger salute and beats a leisurely retreat while I sigh again and tap back into the systems I've breached to locate Reaper and see what he's up to. Killing his way through the compound, good. Activate my beacon, and I'm back in the control room. Time to get what I came for before Reaper gets through doing what we came for.
He's silently fuming the whole way back, smoke pouring from his head and upper back but also down his arms and some from his chest. When we get back to the public room, he hesitates but I strike first.

"Into the can," I tell him in a don't-you-dare-argue voice.

I was going to say that I wanted to check his vitals after that mission, but he just dissolves into smoke and flows into the COWA. That's slightly worrying. I close and seal the lid and also give him a dose of endorphins before setting the can onto the table and sitting in front of it on the couch. All the readings come back within normal, which means both that he remembered to eat before we left and also that he sees the can as a place of safety and security. It's heartwarming and heartbreaking at the same time.

"You didn't let me kill him," Reaper accuses.

"We had a mission, Papi."

"I could have taken him."

"I'm sure, but you would have had guests, and what if one of them got the shot before you did?"

He wasn't expecting that. There's silence while he chews on the idea of someone else stealing his kill.

"Point," he finally grinds out reluctantly.

"See? I just looking out for you." It's smug and teasing, inviting him to tease back.

"Sombra," he growls, but it sounds like he's trying not to smile.

"Don't worry, Papi." I tell him soothingly. "I'll make sure that you get a chance to have it out with him, no interruptions."

There's silence for a minute, like he's trying to decide if I'm not telling him something. I thumb the seal and open the lid.

"Your readings are good. You want to sit in the can and think, that's fine, but you don't have to stay there."

Unhappy grumble.

"I will be right here if you need me," I tease. "Just gonna do some work on your swarm."

The grumbling this time only sounds like it's pretending to be unhappy.

I pull up a handful of screens, but the first thing I do is contact Tia Ana.
HAD A RUN-IN WITH JACK.

After a minute or two, I get a reply. YOU? OR GABRIEL?

BOTH. I give her time to roll her eyes and mutter under her breath. NO FATALITIES. ONLY ONE SHOT FIRED, AND IT MISSED.

THAT IS GOOD TO HEAR.

TOLD JACK TO TALK TO YOU. I WANT TO KEEP THEM APART UNTIL... Until what? Until Papi's got his head on straight? Until I'm sure he won't actually kill Jack? Until Talon's a burning wreck behind us?

UNTIL GABRIEL IS READY TO LISTEN? Ana asks.

YES. AND IN THE MEANTIME, I WILL KEEP REPORTING OUR MOVEMENTS TO YOU AND ATHENA. I THINK I'M MAKING PROGRESS ON THE "LISTENING" FRONT BUT IT'S GOING TO TAKE TIME.

I HAVE FAITH IN YOU, Ana types.

Somehow, that just makes me remember Reaper's assertion that his old friends wouldn't want him back. I AM DOING THE RIGHT THING, AREN'T I? IF I CAN GET HIM CLOSER TO GABRIEL AGAIN...

I WILL WELCOME MY OLD FRIEND GLADLY, NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES.

Good enough. Even if it's only them, having Jack and Ana welcome him should be enough. THANK YOU, TIA ANA. HOPE IS A FRAGILE THING FOR SOMEONE AS BROKEN AS HIM.

A STRONG HEART CAN PROTECT FRAGILE HOPE. YOU ARE A STRONG GUARDIAN.

THANK YOU, I type again, wanting to cry for Papi and for myself. For a moment I want to tell her that the child I once was looked up to her. THAT MEANS A LOT.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, LITTLE SHADOW, AND TAKE CARE OF GABRIEL. I LOOK FORWARD TO WELCOMING BOTH OF YOU, WHEN YOU ARE READY.

WHEN THE TIME COMES, I WILL LET YOU KNOW.

Now that that's out of the way, I switch to the screens showing Reaper's swarm. Today was a close call, and while I can stick closer to him in the future, I won't gamble that I can stop him like that again or that I'll be able to drop what I'm doing the next time. I need a failsafe, a non-lethal killswitch. There's the sleep dart Tia Ana has, but I won't leave him vulnerable like that. I can do better.

Screens open up while I doodle out different ideas. I want something that will stop him dead in his tracks without leaving him sprawled out on the ground, where anyone can shoot him to dust, or leaving me to carry his limp body back to the ship. I could...consolidate him. Tell the swarm to assume a static shape. That would prevent him from chewing my ear off, too. Keep him from being aware of what's going on, let me get him to a safe location before I let him out. A sphere would be
the simplest shape-

-but if the floor isn't perfectly level, if we're outside somewhere, I don't want to be chasing a 200-
pound bowling ball down a hill where it can get into all sorts of trouble.

A cube is still a pretty simple shape. And it doesn't roll. I can make it small enough to fit into the
COWA easily, and that would make it dense enough to maintain molecular cohesion even in the
face of strong impact. The command is actually easy to program, both the shut-down and the
release, and the commands can be sent from my linksignal or over our secure channel.

Behind my screens, a black mist is flowing out of the can.

"Hold up a second," I say, dismissing screens, and the mist hesitates. "Got an upgrade for you."

Reaper solidifies next to the table and holds still while I press my hands to his chest, transferring
the new programming. "What is it?" he asks warily.

"Just a little something to help keep you safe," I tell him. "If you get too hurt to hold yourself
together, I can trigger a static shape to keep you in one spot until I can come and get you." It's not
really a lie. The memory of Reaper limping back from the fight with Winston as a stream of smoke
is sobering, and the thought of something disrupting him badly enough to keep him from even
limping back is terrifying.

A few wisps leak out from Reaper's chest before he dissolves entirely and flows out of the room. I
wonder if he knows the location of the wisps is tied to the emotion he's feeling.

I wonder if he knows that I know.

Chapter End Notes

Jack still has no idea what to think about Sombra, but he's erring on the side of
"friendly" since this is twice now that she's saved his life, and she seems to have
adopted him.

You know that little niggling doubt you get, right as you're about to do a thing, that
whispers that maybe you don't -really- want to do the thing? There's a tiny part of
Reaper that's quietly grateful to Sombra for not letting him kill Jack.

When Sombra says "have it out with him", she means arguing and talking, not
fighting. Reaper suspects she doesn't mean fighting, but calling her on that would be
admitting he might not -want- to kill his ex-bestie.

The thought that flashed through Sombra's mind was a 200lb bowling ball rolling
down a street, off a dock, and into a bay where it would sink into the muck at the
bottom and she would have to either try to dive down and grab it and swim to the
surface while carrying it...or release Reaper and have him find himself up to his knees
in muck and 12 feet underwater.

Reaper does, in fact, know that wisp location is emotionally determined. He can feel
himself lose cohesion when he wisps. And he does know that Sombra has figured it
out. Or at least, he assumes she does. Reaper operates on the assumption that all his
secrets are belong to Sombra because he never knows if she knows something or
not...until she lets him know that she does.
"So you're Sombra," a chipper voice says from right beside me.

If I hadn't been re-familiarizing myself with all of Reaper's old friends, I would have put a burst of gunfire into her body - if she'd stayed still for that, which of course she hasn't, she's on my other side before I can finish turning my head to confirm who just zipped up to me in the middle of a mission.

"Not going to try to shoot me?" Tracer asks as I bring my hands back to the control panel I'm working on.

"Like that would work. Not going to try to stop me hacking this system?"

"Would probably cause more damage than it would prevent if I tried," she retorts cheerfully. "So, no fighting? We're just going to talk?"

The panel opens before me, all its secrets exposed. "Unless you want to fight. I got work to do."

She leans against the wall, tapping one foot against the floor. "I'm surprised you didn't hear me coming."

"Hard to hear when there's no sound, amiga." I start flipping through files, looking for the information that has to be here. "You didn't bring allies."

"I mean, Winston said you were good..." There's another brief pause as I bite back a reaction, and then I can hear her grin when she says, "Oh, surprised you?"

"Surprised he said anything good about me. I didn't think he liked me that much."

There's silence for a minute. I find what I'm looking for and start copying it.

"He's not happy you're working with...Reaper," Tracer says slowly. "He did a lot of bad stuff and frankly, I don't blame Winston for feeling idgy about that. But he said you took the time to talk to him while you were in the middle of a mission and that impressed him - that you were willing to risk the mission and risk discovery to talk to someone who didn't trust you."
While the copy and upload is processing, I turn to look at my new friend. "I tell you what I told him. Some of us learned we had to get our hands dirty if we wanted to get something done. I'm working to make the world better for those who can't do it themselves. Reaper took bullets for me. He gave me a Christmas present. He doesn't want me to get hurt. I think I'm the only one who's been nice to him since he became Reaper, and no matter what else he's done? He still got enough of a heart to care about his self-proclaimed annoying Latina daughter, so that makes him one of those who I gotta fight for because he can't even see a way out of his situation, much less be able to get himself out."

Tracer looks conflicted and unhappy. "I don't know if I can see a way out for him, either. Him or... Widowmaker. They're not... the people they used to be and I don't know that I can ever see them that way again."

I turn back to the panel and start making the changes Talon wants me to make. "The Gabriel Reyes you knew - would he have charged in recklessly if he thought you'd been blown up?"

Silence for a long moment. "Yes," she says hesitantly, like she doesn't want to admit that's the answer.

"If you'd left a silly stuffed animal in his room, would he have snuck a bigger one into yours?"

Tracer stifles a giggle. "Probably."

I flip a screen at her - security footage of Reaper misting under my door, placing the bear on my bedside table, and flowing back out - and turn to watch her reaction. "I not saying you should forgive him - he gotta earn that. But nothing says he can't earn it by having you show up to ruin his missions and tell him exactly what you think."

"You..." Tracer bites her lip. "Why would you say that if you want to help him?"

The screen closes at my command and I start closing up the panel's exposed innards. "Because he already thinks he's a monster, so he acts like one. He not gonna get better if he doesn't get called on it. You got reason to be angry at him, so be angry. Call it a test. If he still cares, he'll care that you're angry and want to change. Winston tell you he had a headshot and didn't take it?"

"He did?"

"And Winston vaporized him because he didn't take it, so don't worry about shooting to wound. Actually," I add thoughtfully, "that's a good way to get away if you need to. Just shoot him until he can't stand up. Center of mass. It won't kill him, but it will put him in time-out for a while. I already send Ana and Athena information on Talon's movements, so if you want to come rain on Papi's parade, either of them can send you an invitation."

"You're inviting me to come mess up Talon's plans. Whose team are you on?"

"When you played Overwatch as a kid, who did you play as?"

"Jack," she says immediately. "Wow, that takes me back."

"I played as Gabriel. Punched a boy in the nose because he told me I couldn't because I was a girl. So I started my own team of girls who were sick of being left out or told they could only play as Ana."
Tracer stares at me for a long minute. "Wow. I wasn't sure I'd like you, but now I kind of want to just hang out with you sometime." Two beats, then she gives me a teasing grin. "Assuming your Papi doesn't ground you."

I wave that away. "Please. He knows I go behind his back to talk to his old friends. He don't like it, but he don't have a choice. Anyway, I'm about done here, so you might want to leave. The alarms will go off in two minutes if there's anyone still here."

"What-"

"I'll be in touch," I tell her cheerfully. Then I activate the translocation beacon and I'm gone.

Chapter End Notes

For some weird reason it confuses people when Sombra invites them to shoot and yell at Reaper. Her strategy is to get his old friends to stop thinking of him as "the enemy" and instead, think of him as "an ex-friend who's being a dick and needs to be told what a dick he's being".
McCree gets booze

Chapter Summary

You knew that scene from the Reflections comic was going to happen sometime.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three days before Christmas, Tia Ana's connection opens.

DO YOU HAVE PLANS FOR THE EVENING OF THE 25TH?

Whether I did or not, she has my attention now. NOTHING SET IN STONE.

THERE IS SOMEONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS GABRIEL WITH YOU. PEACEFULLY, she adds before I can figure out a tactful way to ask.

I'm being given an opportunity to build a bridge. I'LL BE THERE. JUST TELL ME WHERE AND WHEN.

She sends the meeting information over.

AND HOW SHOULD I IDENTIFY MYSELF?

There's a pause before Ana types, YOU SHOULD RECOGNIZE HIM. HE SAYS PLEASE DON'T WEAR THE RED DRESS.

Both hands go over my mouth to try to trap the hysterical giggle before it escapes, and Reaper looks over at where I'm curled up in my corner chair. It's a very long minute before I feel in control enough to take one hand down and type, I PROMISE. I'LL EVEN BUY MY OWN TEQUILA.

Widow's staring from her own dark corner as the giggles keep coming, but Reaper has gone back to staring at the news with a rigidity that looks like it's trying to anchor him while he wisps heavily.

"It's okay, Papi," I call out. He doesn't move. "It's not a surprise for you."

The wisps die down except for a few playful curls and the mask turns just slightly towards me. "Now I'm jealous."

"Maybe it will be a surprise for you later," I tease.

Reaper just turns back to the news with a snort, but the playful wisps tell the truth.
The bar is less...scruffy...than the first one was. I mark four...six of Ana's people surrounding the building and inside, judging by the active nodes on her usual secure channel and the chatter I overhear as I walk up to the door. I'm wearing a loose hooded poncho over clothes that are reminiscent of, but are not, my mission outfit, but I guess one lone Latina in this part of town on Christmas sort of stands out. When I slip inside, the interior is warm but not stuffy and McCree's sitting at the table in the corner, back to the wall, playing with a shot glass. He looks up as the door closes behind me, grimaces, and tosses it back.

I flag the elderly bartender with my eyes as I weave between mostly-empty tables on my way to the bar. "Two shots of tequila," I tell him, and slide the appropriate currency across in exchange.

McCree shoves one chair out with his foot as I approach, but doesn't say anything as I set my shots down and sit. The first thing I do is push my hood back so he can confirm it's me - if he was looking at my face the first time, that is. Then I slide the shots across to him.

"It's only fair," I tease as he sits up straighter. "You bought me two shots and didn't get anything for it."

That makes him look away uncomfortably. He may be blushing. "That's, uh...kinda the first thing I wanted to talk about." Warily, he sneaks a glance at me. "He's not...actually your Papi, is he?"

"You thought-" Both hands go over my mouth to hold in the hysterical laughter. McCree is absolutely blushing. "No, amigo. I'm not a whore, and Gabriel is not my pimp."

"Hey, you can't blame a feller for thinking that way," he protests. "Not with the way you...""The way I led you on? Hooked you like a fish?"

He takes one of the shots and tosses it back. "Yeah. That. When he came out of that alley...I thought I was a goner for sure." For a few breaths, he just looks into the empty shot glass. "One thing I don't get. Why didn't you wait until I was in the alley?"

Okay, now we're going to get into the heavy stuff. I shuck my poncho off and lean on the table, both arms crossed. "You know I work for Talon."

McCree nods.

"You know I know who my Papi was before he worked for Talon."

A flinch. "Is he...?"

"He can't prove that he's not. He may as well be. I didn't want him to actually kill you, so I made him mad enough to kill you with his bare hands."

"And nearly scare me to death in the process," he grumbles, but there's no heat in it. "Why would you not want him to kill me?"

"I'm the kind of girl who likes having lots of friends." I grin at him. "That's not why. Papi's...the way he is...because he's very hurt. I'm not trying to make excuses for him. I am trying to help him not be so hurt, and part of that is protecting people he used to care about from him. He thinks he wants to kill you, but I know him better than that."
That gets me a skeptical look.

"If he kills you," I tell him somberly, "or Jack, or Ana, or any of the others, it gonna hurt him so deep he **never** gonna be able to pull himself out of that pit. There won't be **any** coming back. Even if anyone would be willing to rebuild the bridge, he would burn it from his end, and himself with it. I love my Papi. I won't let him self-destruct." Shrug. "So if that means I gotta sabotage a mission here and there, then that's what I gonna do."

He downs the second shot. "You're assuming he can come back from where he is now, and that anyone will want to rebuild the bridge. The things he's done..."

Groaning, I slump forward to rest my head briefly against my forearms before lifting it to glare at him. "I'm not gonna argue with you, McCree. You don't want to forgive him? Fine. Don't. Shoot at him, fight him, cuss him out, whatever. It's not my place to tell you to reconcile or hold your hand and walk you through it, you or anyone. I know the shit he's done. I also know some of the shit that was done to him. And I know the shit he's done for me. It's not my place to sort it out. But I'm gonna stick with him and give him the chance to sort himself out. You do whatever you want, just remember that killing him is not an option."

"You gonna stand in front of him and take my bullets, then?" The look he gives me is hard as iron. "I don't like shooting a lady, but I can't make the bullets jump out of the way if you get between me and him."

I lean insolently back in my chair. "Did I say that? He's the only one stubborn-stupid enough to jump in the way. No, when I said killing him wasn't an option, I meant he **doesn't** die. Winston vaporized him. I nursed him back from forty pounds of ash. So go ahead, tell him all the things you've been saving up and shoot him with every bullet you have, get it all out of your system and then sit there and think about if that accomplished anything. And in the meantime, maybe if he feels like he's suffered enough for the things he's done, he'll be able to move on and heal."

McCree stares at me. "You're off'a your rocker. You're **telling** me to go ahead and shoot...your Papi," he finishes awkwardly, like he can't bring himself to call him Reaper, but he can't bear to use the name of the man he used to be, either.

"Violence doesn't solve everything," I retort sweetly. "But it makes a good opening argument. You want to have it out with him? Go ahead. Start with bullets. I'll just say I **told you so** when you give up and go to words like a big boy."

"Oh, and you're so much more mature? You were the one putting yourself on display like you were for sale, missy."

"You were the one ready to buy," I point out while he glares.

He gestures to the bartender for another round, but when it comes, I'm the one to hand over the cash.

"The next one's on me, too," I tell them both with a look that dares them to argue.

"You think you've won?" he accuses. "That I'll refuse your generosity from my high horse?" He tosses back the shot. "You thought wrong. I ain't about to let good tequila go to waste. Joke's on you."
I give him a grating smirk. "You are the joke, McCree. Look at you, dressing like it's last century. Where did you even dig up that hat?"

He smirks right back. "Your Papi made it for me," he drawls. Without looking, he takes the shot the bartender has just put down and tosses it back. "He made this outfit for me. What do you have to say to that?"

But I have nothing to say, because I'm remembering how Reaper thrust a bundle of purple and shiny at me shortly after revealing that he spoke Spanish, gruffly telling me it was my official mission outfit. How I spent long minutes posing in front of my mirror, feeling badass and sexy at the same time, not questioning where it had come from because it suited me so perfectly. And I'm remembering the flat, rectangular box that had been on my usual chair this morning, and the amazingly comfortable and stylish pajamas that had been inside, and how I'd tried them on and immediately wished for it to be bedtime so I didn't have to take them off.

"He made them for me," I say in a small voice, feeling like a child all over again.

"He made what for you?"

"My mission outfit. The pajamas this morning. He made them for me."

McCree stares at me for a long minute while I feel like I'm six and have woken up on Christmas to discover that the father I never knew has come to take me back with him, and it's Overwatch Strike Force Commander Gabriel Reyes and all the other kids are green with envy. When I get back "home" I'm going to hug Reaper until he either hugs back, or wisps away. By the time the revelation has worn off and I'm in the present again, my pseudo adopted brother is sitting at the end of the bar with a half-empty bottle of bourbon and a glass.

"You got a Christmas gift," he slurs angrily in my direction when he notices me looking. "From Reaper."

"Papi likes me better," I shoot back.

He pours himself another drink while I get up and strut to the bar, deliberately making eye contact with the two other patrons, who I realize are two of Ana's people, probably here to try to sleep-dart me if I got violent with McCree. Not like that will do them any good, but what they don't know won't hurt me. They've just overheard our entire discussion and are probably rethinking everything they thought they knew about Reaper.

Glowering from under his hat, he takes a long sip and says, "Maybe I don't want him to like me."

Just to be a pain, I perch on a stool at the opposite end of the bar. "And maybe you're a liar, McCree."

"You...you take that back."

I don't take it back. I take pictures. Then I take out some more money and hand it to the bartender. "If they have tabs," I say, nodding at the two others, "their drinks are on me. Hey you two," I call to them, "when this sad little cowboy passes out, you gonna haul his drunk butt back to somewhere he can sleep it off?"

They glance at each other. I hear quick discussion over the secure channel.
"W-would Reaper really be...upset...if he died?" one of them asks.

I stare him down. "Very." A pause while more hurried discussion ensues. "You got biotic darts? You can make sure he makes it home safe?"

"Y-yes, Miss Sombra," says the other one.

"Don't...need...your help..."

Contrary to his words, McCree slumps forward and rests his head on his robotic arm.

Reaper is lurking in the shadows when I finally get back in. My hooded poncho gets tossed onto the back of the couch and his clear unease doesn't lessen any when I head to him instead of going upstairs. Without a word, I step into his personal space and slide under one arm to hug him tightly.

"Sombra?"

"I love the pajamas," I say quietly, "and I love my mission outfit. Thank you for making them for me."

He doesn't relax any, which is to be expected because he doesn't know how I knew he made them. "Which friend were you meeting with?" he accuses.

"Tough-talking jerkass in a dumb hat with a drinking problem who's jealous of me." It comes out smug and petty but I don't think he cares.

Sure enough, a dark and wicked chuckle echoes through the dark room. Then the arm that had been held awkwardly out of the way curls protectively around my shoulders, and a tiny sound of indescribable joy squeaks out of me. Even if it's alone in a dark room, Reaper's expressing affection and I didn't think anything could top last Christmas, but boy was I wrong.

We stand like that for god only knows how long until a shift in my balance and his arms tightening jerk me back into the awareness that I'm falling asleep on my feet, and I straighten up. "Good night, Papi," I say as I go on tiptoe to kiss the cheek of his mask. "Merry Christmas."

"Bah," is his reply, but I know he doesn't mean it.

He wisps off, leaving me to collect my poncho and make my way upstairs where I change into what is now my favorite pajamas ever and then dump half a liter of LRF into the can's reservoir and make sure the lid is off. I don't know if he knows I know he sneaks in to spend the night puddled in the can, but it doesn't matter. He feels safe, or maybe just comfortable, or maybe he's just lonely enough that this is the equivalent of a dog sleeping at the foot of the bed, but I like knowing that he's close. I slip into bed, cozy and warm, and listen to the can with a small corner of my mind. Just as I'm drifting off, it reports that Reaper is at 98% baseline mass.

I fall asleep with a smile on my face.
Just imagine McCree blushing and looking away when Ana relays Sombra's comment, and muttering that he'd rather not explain. XD

It really bothers McCree that his mentor of some 15 years would have killed him. Don't think -that- won't come back later to bite Reaper in the ass.

Aaaaaand they've already slipped into a bickering brother-sister relationship. Sombra may or may not harbor old teenage jealousy that Jesse was basically the adopted son of Gabriel Reyes, and Jesse for his part is jealous that he knew Gabe for -fifteen years- and in less than two years, this annoying chica has a better relationship with his father-figure than he does. Bonus awkward: for a period of time while she was a teenager, Jesse McCree was Sombra's obligatory inevitable embarrassing celebrity crush. This was before the sideburns, presumably, and at least half of it was because he came with bonus Gabriel Reyes as a father-in-law. So some of her being obnoxious to McCree stems from OMG I CAN'T BELIEVE MY TEENAGE SELF HAD A CRUSH ON HIM, MUST DENY EVERYTHING.

The Christmas Sombra was six was the first one after her mother died.

The two guys in the bar are so very weirded out. When they got the mission description, they expected tense discussion, not family drama. Family drama involving -Reaper's affections-. There's going to be some heavy drinking going on when they get off shift.

Reaper is still very much WHAT DO when it comes to having affection expressed in his direction and he's quietly terrified he's going to screw up his end of the pseudo-father/daughter relationship he has with Sombra.
Nothing you want to see

Chapter Summary

There's always some detail you didn't account for, and it's the things you don't expect that make your plans blow up in your face.

No one expected that a dumb photo would be this significant.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's shaping up to be another long day of working on my own projects while Reaper pretends to watch the news, when Athena sends me a message.

YOU NEED TO SEE THIS she types, and then a file comes through.

It's Gabriel Reyes, clearly caught in the middle of a prank someone has pulled because he's in a laundry room with an armload of clothes, wearing nothing but a pair of boxers and some white bunny slippers. A laugh bursts out of me. Reaper turns to look, wisping in alarm because me laughing is rarely good for his dignity. "Nothing you want to see," I say quickly, and I start to type but only get as far as WHY before a second file comes through. This one is an official order sent by Gabriel Reyes, as the head of Blackwatch, commanding a bunch of names I don't care about to do something I don't get a chance to read because Athena sends me another message.

CHECK THE TIMESTAMPs IN THE METADATA.

Behind my screens, I can see Reaper now wisping more, because me laughing is a bad but harmless sign. Me going from laughter to looking alert and serious is a bad sign that suggests something is wrong.

I check the insides of both files. The picture was taken on an ancient digital camera, the device itself dating back when those were a thing that ordinary people used (which means it had to be older than the person using it), and the device helpfully encoded all of its information on the image. The timestamp matches when the Blackwatch order was sent within a handful of minutes.

"Sombra..."

Ana's connection opens.

I tell Athena, THEY'RE FOUR MINUTES APART.

Ana's still typing; without looking at her area of my visualization, I tell Reaper, "Give me a minute."

Athena says, THERE IS NO WAY HE COULD HAVE GIVEN THAT ORDER.

ATHENA DISCOVERED SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT, Ana's typed.
To Athena: TALON HAD AT LEAST ONE MOLE IN BLACKWATCH. To Ana: WHERE DID THE PICTURE COME FROM?

While Ana's typing her response, Athena says, I SUSPECTED SOMEONE WAS INTERFERING. NOW WE HAVE PROOF.

JESSE MCCREE HAD AN OLD CAMERA. HE BROUGHT IT TO ME TO RETRIEVE THE PICTURES, is as far as Ana's gotten.

I CROSS-REFERENCED TALON MISSIONS AND BLACKWATCH RECORDS TO IDENTIFY WHO REAPER USED TO BE, I tell Athena.

She types back, I DOUBT THAT WILL UNCOVER THE FULL SCOPE OF THIS BETRAYAL.

AND WHEN I SHARED THEM WITH ATHENA, Ana continues, SHE DISCOVERED THE TIMESTAMPs WERE TOO CLOSE FOR THE ORDER TO BE LEGITIMATE, I interrupt. I'm abusing my processing speed to keep up with Athena and I'll pay for it later, but I don't care. I send the AI a question: DID YOU GET THE ORDER OFF TALON'S COPY OF THE BLACKWATCH SERVER?

NO, she sends back.

I highlight a section of the metadata and send her that part. THEN CHECK THE BLACKWATCH RECORDS YOU HAVE FOR THIS SEQUENCE IN THE METADATA.

WHAT IS IT?

TALON SERVER AUTHENTICATION CODE. ANYTHING THAT'S PASSED THROUGH TALON'S SYSTEMS IS MARKED THIS WAY.

Ana's typed, WE BELIEVE GABRIEL WAs SET UP.

My surge of vindication - because I knew it, I knew Papi Gabriel had been framed - is overtaken by the temper that got me into trouble as a child. I'M ON IT, I tell Ana. THANK YOU.

I WILL BEGIN SEARCHING AT ONCE. Athena's message is waiting when I turn my attention back over to her section of my visualization.

LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU FIND, I tell her. I WILL CHECK WITH TALON'S MISSIONS UNLESS YOU BEAT ME TO IT.

Ana types, THANK YOU, LITTLE SHADOW, and her connection closes.

"Sombra," Reaper growls, more worried and less patient.

I WILL DO IT, Athena says. IT WILL GO BETTER WITH THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE WORLD IF I CAN REPORT THAT IT WAS ALL MY INVESTIGATION.

I LEAVE IT IN YOUR HANDS THEN, AND THANK YOU.
THE ONLY FAMILY WINSTON AND I HAD WAS SHATTERED WHEN OVERWATCH FELL, she types. I MAY NOT BE CONVINCED REAPER DESERVES TO HAVE HIS NAME CLEARED, BUT EXONERATING GABRIEL REYES LIFTS OVERWATCH OUT OF THEMETAPHORIC MUD, AS WELL.

THEN OUR GOALS ARE THE SAME, I send, biting back my temper. AND YOU HAVE MY WORD THAT TALON WILL BURN FOR THIS.

WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING? she asks after a beat.

WHEN I LEAVE TALON, I WILL BE TAKING REAPER AND WIDOWMAKER WITH ME, AND I WILL SET OFF A DATA BOMB THAT WILL LEAVE THEIR SERVERS A SEETHING CRATER OF ONES AND ZEROS.

Two beats. Three. WHILE I APPROVE, MIGHT I TROUBLE YOU TO WARN ME BEFORE YOU DO THAT?

I PROMISE. GOOD HUNTING, ATHENA.

THANK YOU, SOMBRA. I HOPE FOR ALL OUR SAKES THAT IT GOES WELL. And her connection closes.

"Sombra!"

With the connections closed, my attention snaps back to the outside world and Reaper's looming in front of my chair, black smoke seething from all over him. "I was having two conversations! Jeez, Papi!"

The wisps die down a bit. "About what?"

As much as I want to blurt out 'you were set up', that's not the best way to break that to Reaper. "Ana and Athena found proof that some of the orders Blackwatch was given were forged," I say carefully.

The wisping on his chest and legs stops, but it doubles from his head and back.

"Athena's checking to find all the orders that came from outside."

"And when she does?" he snarls, furious. "Then what?"

I shrug. "I guess she gonna take it to the U.N., try to un-disband Overwatch."

"Of course. Overwatch. I should have known that's all she would care about."

"She gonna have to prove you were set up to do it," I point out, but somehow that just makes him even more angry.

"So the whole world will know the head of Blackwatch couldn't keep his organization under control!" he bellows. "I fail to see how that's better!"

You know, considering the police records I dug up for the Reyes household and that it was always the wife or the neighbor who made the call for domestic violence, never the son because he was
actively engaged in combating the father, this mindset isn't really a surprise. "Which is worse?" I ask pointedly. "Letting some asshole have power over you because you don't want to admit he does, or telling someone that he does so they can help you kick his ass?"

For a beat or two, all the wisping stops dead. Then his chest starts bleeding smoke, and wisps come off his legs so heavily that I can barely see them at all under it. "And what if that someone isn't strong enough to kick his ass," he demands. "Then all that's done is give the asshole two targets instead of one."

Before I can counter with bringing in more allies, and run the risk of having to identify some of my friends if he comes back with the argument that no one would come to his aid even if he asked for help, he dissolves completely into smoke and flows out of the room.

I know Ana would help if I asked her. I'm pretty sure Uncle Jack would, if I got a message to him. Tracer, Winston...maybe. Linkbrother Genji would come if I asked, for me if not for Reaper. But I don't have a target; I don't know who sent the falsified orders, I still haven't found the head of Talon. Well, no time like the present, right? I move to the couch and open my screens.

Two hours later, I close them in frustration. No matter how high up the chain of command I go, there's always someone giving them orders and when I think I've reached the top, I can't figure out where the orders came from. They're just there. Reaper's not back yet; he's probably taking his frustration out on whichever hapless Talon grunts get in his way. May as well take a nap and recover from overclocking my brain before he gets back.

When I wake up, it's not much of a surprise that Reaper's sitting on the other end of the couch, or that he's covered me with a blanket. What is a surprise is that when I sit up, he turns to look at me.

"What did they find?" he asks in a disturbingly calm voice.

"McCree took a picture of you. Timestamp puts it too close to an order for you to have been the one to send it out."

"That's not proof," he growls. "That piece of junk probably didn't know what day it was, much less have the right time."

"Fine." I start opening screens and accessing the Blackwatch server. "Let's find the truth, then."

Pull up the copy of the order in question, zoom in on the date and time. Reaper watches as I sift through the Blackwatch records for that day. Talon must have just taken the servers away entirely; I can find the security logs and trace who went where in the building. There's a stretch of time - six hours, fifteen minutes - where no one entered the office of Commander Reyes, and the suspicious order was sent almost ten minutes before the door logs register Gabriel Reyes as entering the office again.

Reaper's hunched over, wisping lightly from the back of his head. Angry, but puzzled. "That's not right."

"The door logs?"

"Those fifteen minutes. Laundry doesn't take that long. What caused the delay?"
He watches as I trace the door logs, following Commander Reyes's keycard through the building. Judging from the lack of reaction, there's no unusual stops. He's just in the laundry area past when, apparently, he should have left.

"Something had to have happened," he growls. The angry wisps stop for a beat, then come back with a vengeance. "The picture McCree took. What was it?"

"You sure you want to see?" I ask, giving him a chance to save his dignity.

"Sombraaaaa!"

I pull up the picture.

Reaper fumes at it for a good minute and a half before growling wordlessly. I guess he remembers the incident. Then there's another minute of silence before he grinds out, "McCree's stupid camera had the right day and time."

"Athena's going to find all the falsified orders," I say quietly, closing all the screens.

"Who sent them?"

"Someone in Talon. That's all we know so far."

But apparently Reaper knows something I don't, because he's wisping like his entire back is on fire.

"Papi?"

"When you find out who's responsible," he snarls, "you bring that information to me before you make a move. Understood?"

Agreement seems like the only safe response to that, so I keep my eyes on his mask and say, "Understood."

"Good." Reaper turns on the news and wisps in quiet fury while pretending to watch.

When the program is over, I say, "Between Ana and Athena, they gonna tell everyone Blackwatch was sabotaged."

"A few phony orders aren't going to change anyone's mind, Sombra."

"Then it's good we gonna have more proof than that." I give him a challenging look. "We also cross-referencing Talon's movements, and I know we gonna find they had a hand in all the shit that went down in Zurich."

"And how, exactly, do you know that?" Reaper growls.

"Because that's how I found you."

Whether it's the reminder that I figured out who he had been or all the possible repercussions of having been misjudged and unfairly blamed or just having it pointed out that he's working for the same organization that tried to get him killed and nearly succeeded, Reaper dissolves into a cloud
of rage and flows up and into his room.

I pull up a few screens and start working on my data bomb, using the Talon authentication code as a bait indicator. I don’t want to accidentally erase the entire internet, after all. When I’ve got everything I need out of Talon, and I’m ready to take their assassins with me on my way out, I'll set it off and destroy everything the assholes worked so hard to build. One of my favorite songs from childhood, the one that's practically my personal anthem, comes to mind and I hum a few lines almost cheerfully under my breath as I work.

*Set this plane up in flames.*
*It's over, it's over, it's over.*
*It's time to burn it down.*

Chapter End Notes

If you think McCree wouldn't have a thing for antiquated technology, you haven't taken a good look at his outfit. XD That digital camera dates back to probably 2006.

Apologies if the overlapping conversations were confusing to read. Juggling them was only slightly easier for Sombra.

It's really kind of impressive how well Reaper was able to talk about his past actions without admitting OR denying they were his.

Reaper does absolutely know something Sombra doesn't. And it occasionally makes him very, very afraid for her.

The song is 'Burn it down' by Skillet. Don't take it to mean that exact song, but that the musical style and sentiments expressed in it (and half the album, to be honest) are roughly the same as something that will be popular in Dorado 30 years in the future. Although the lyrics -are- very evocative and fitting for Sombra.
Idle Hands

Chapter Summary

Sombra is bored. This usually does not end well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There's an old saying: "Idle hands are the Devil's playground." It gets used to tell kids playing that they should stop playing and do their chores, but that's not what it means. Kids playing? That's not idle hands, they're playing. Idle hands is when there's no work to do and you're tired of playing and you're just so bored that you go looking for trouble.

I'm bored.

Being as young as I was when I was first augmented, going snooping through locked electronic doors is second nature to me, and has been my go-to when I'm bored with all the other things I do to keep myself out of more trouble than I'm already involved in. Since I've been with Talon, my boredom has resulted in things like the virus that creeps through the internet deleting the stories people wrote about Gabriel Reyes and Jack Morrison and the other members of Overwatch having the author's wish-fulfillment sex. And also the week I ran Reaper's name through the Los Angeles systems and cross-checked with newspapers and pieced together enough of his childhood and teenage years that I spent the whole week practically in his personal space because all I wanted to do was hug my poor Papi, but I knew he wouldn't tolerate it. He'd asked me, after a few days of uncharacteristic quiet and closeness, if there was someone he needed to kill. Just out of the blue: "Do I need to kill someone?"

I thought that was incredibly sweet, that he'd see me obviously upset and offer to murder whoever was responsible, but it's not exactly the kind of thing I could quote to Tante Angela or Winston as evidence that he's more than just Talon's assassin. Uncle Jack might approve, but getting messages to his visor is less secure than passing information to Tia Ana, so chitchat is out of the question. And aside from that, mentioning Papi's readiness to murder whoever made me upset would open the subject of why I was upset, and given how hard it was to follow the crumbs that led me to what I'd found, it's a safe bet none of them know exactly how long Gabriel Reyes had been shaving his head, or when he got the scars on his face, much less the stories behind them. Maybe he told them at some point. They did know him for years, after all. But if they knew him for that long and he didn't share, well, I'm not going to risk being the one to spill all his secrets.

Reaper was remarkably thorough in erasing the digital evidence of his past. The Overwatch and Blackwatch records, of course, were destroyed at the source or missing entirely. The Soldier Enhancement Program records were similarly trashed, but significant snooping led me through an email trail to dusty back-ups. Now I'm searching the remains of social media accounts thirty years old because naturally Reaper nuked his, but I doubt he remembered all the other people that had been in SEP with him after all that time, especially the ones who didn't survive the Omnic Crisis.

Once I'm in and sifting through things, it only takes a few minutes before I realize there's a possible treasure trove here buried in the muck of "likes" and "reblogs" because in order to separate himself
from all the other people named Gabriel Reyes, he went by Big Dog Reyes and I have one hand clapped over my mouth to keep the giggles inside. Naturally, Reaper's looking at me like he's deciding if this is one of those situations where ignorance is bliss.

"Sombra?"

Juan Santos likes Big Dog Reyes's profile pic. And it's an anthropomorphic doberman with exaggerated muscles and a fierce scowl. Reaper can't see what I'm looking at, but I flip a screen his way that just says DON'T ASK and he turns back to stare firmly at the news while I laugh silently until tears would be streaming down my cheeks if I produced them.

It's not that I think the nickname is silly or that I'm mocking the picture. It's just that the contrast between Reaper and a younger Gabriel who was confident and secure enough to pull off an otherwise-ridiculous nickname is sort of a logic fail. There's delight that he was that happy with himself, once upon a time, but also the traditional secondhand I can't believe you did that embarrassment of knowing that the man credited with ending the Omnic Crisis, the internationally feared Reaper, once went by Big Dog and had a ridiculously ripped doberman as his profile picture.

The worst part is that there's no one I can share this with. I don't even know yet if Uncle Jack was aware at the time, if they talked on social media or if Gabriel used that nickname in person. I sure as hell can't ask Reaper, or even mention this to him. He'd be on edge for the next two weeks if he knew what I'd found, even with me having a record of not exploiting his vulnerabilities. I'm half surprised he hasn't holed up in his room just from how much I was laughing.

Okay, time to dig in and see what Big Dog - nope, giggling again. Time to see what my Papi was up to before the Overwatch Strike Force was assembled. There's a lot of random pictures and some witty comments in response to dumb things other people posted, and for a while I just lose myself in the comfort of observing a man most of the world has forgotten, the man I know Reaper doesn't think he can ever be again. Then I find a private video that someone named Carlos recorded with a comment of "Talent show - did not think he would do it but boy were we wrong!"

The thumbnail shows Gabriel in a pose that looks vaguely like ballet, with black gloves that go up past his elbows and sleek boots that hug his calves all the way up to his knees. He's wearing what looks like black tights, or maybe a unitard, and a...fancy black overcoat? It looks like some cross between a tuxedo jacket and a dress, going down past his knees, with a rounded bottom meant to flare when he turns and gauzy bits serving as short, loose sleeves. But at the same time, it buttons smartly up his torso. There's white piping along the edge, or maybe a white layer in the middle, it's hard to see from the still shot. It's elegant without being ridiculous, strong and powerful while still being graceful. Even the full-length gloves don't make him look feminine. He looks good, and he knows it, and he'll kick the ass of anyone who makes the mistake of thinking that looking good means he's an easy target.

I don't think Reaper would actually kill me, but I still feel like I'm taking my life into my hands as I download the video and run a few clean-up programs to compensate for the archaic technology used to record it. While my prize is being polished, I wonder what Gabriel Reyes would have done with his life if the Omnic Crisis hadn't interfered. Would models be wearing his clothes as they walked down the runway? God knows I feel like a badass model half the time in my mission outfit, and I can see enough similarities to that and to Reaper's outfit to know that he designed and made what he's wearing in this video. In another world, a peaceful world, he could be famous for his clothing line and live a life of luxury.

Nah. I know my Papi; he would have gotten bored within a year and started trouble one way or
When the video starts, there's a bit of camera-shake and chatter while Gabriel stands, back to the audience, his left hand out to the side in a gesture halfway between "come here" and "are you kidding me?" and the right one on his hip. His left leg is cocked, and his head is turned slightly to the left. Once the chatter of the other guys present dies down, the music starts playing and I'm glad I have it routed straight to me because I'm sure Reaper would judge me for listening to electronic pop from his youth, if not earlier, even if he didn't recognize the song and figure out what I was watching. In the video, he holds the pose for a count of eight and then shifts to a "hey there sailor" pose with a beat of "blowing a sexy kiss" in the middle that gets scattered catcalls. After a few beats, he starts moving in time with the music, shoulders and hips, and then launches into some sort of reeling/flexing motion, hips rolling, turning slightly until after the fourth motion he's facing away again, only to immediately turn back around. A few steps that look like killing time or repositioning, and then the Japanese lyrics - female, mild voice modulation - begin, and he starts dancing in earnest.

It's clearly a dance routine designed for a woman, or more likely a teenage girl, the motions alternating "cute" and "sexy", and the unseen audience drowns out the lyrics with a surge of mocking cheers and more catcalls. Gabriel dances with a strict poker face, stoically ignoring the catcalls and my smothered, hysterical laughter. I'm peripherally aware of Reaper, on the couch, wisping in uneasy alarm. But as the song moves into its chorus, something happens. The catcalls and my giggles start faltering. Gabriel's face starts taking on a that's right, bitches expression because he's really good. It's a dance meant to be performed by a sex object, and a muscled Latino with a shaved head and facial scars wouldn't usually qualify, but the fluidity of his motions and especially his hips make him a sex object. He flaunts his body with supreme confidence, the slant of his eyebrows and set of his shoulders announcing his amusement at the audience's growing silence, and every time he wiggles his hips, I can't look away. The next time I focus on his face, he's wearing a blatant smirk and all I can think is that it's entirely deserved - I have no doubt that he's a better dancer than anyone else watching, because I'm pretty certain he's better than me.

By the time the song ends, and Gabriel passes his hand in front of his turned-away face like that old saying "talk to the hand, 'cuz the face ain't listening", the only coherent thought in my head is GO PAPI! and I feel like I've just had a religious experience. The unseen audience apparently agrees, because three beats after the music ends, they erupt into applause and rough, wordless roars of support. There's a moment where Gabriel smirks at the camera - Big Dog proving that he's the leader of the pack - before the video ends.

For a very long minute, all I can do is stare at nothing in complete awe. I had no idea that Reaper could move like that, even when he was Gabriel Reyes.

"Sombra!" Reaper snaps, and I realize he's been calling my name for several seconds.

"Si!" I reply, responding to the 'angry father' tone while still lost in the memory of the video I've just watched. Gabriel's smirk fades into Reaper's mask, and I realize I've been directing that look of awe straight at him, but I still can't scrape my mind together enough to do anything else because holy shit, Papi can move!

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he demands after another minute of me staring.

All the things I can't say scroll past and what comes out is, "Because you just that good."

"Sombra," he growls in warning, but I shake my head.
"No teasing, Papi. Not this time. I not gonna say anything else, so don't ask."

That surprises him, I can tell from the wisps and the way his torso stiffens just slightly. "I don't know what you think you found..." he starts, but the threat implied by his tone never materializes.

"I found you being amazing."

The wisps start pouring from the back of his head and his shoulders. "That wasn't me. That man is dead."

"And that why you still answer when I say his name?" I snap, suddenly as furious as he is and realizing too late that this is not something I should pick a fight on. "Some day," I tell him in a hard voice before he can put together a retort, "I gonna tell you a story about a dead girl named Alessandra, and it gonna make you reconsider how dead that man really is."

Before he can react, I drop stealth over myself and retreat to my room because with both of us angry, things could get real ugly real quick and I don't know whether he's ready to have those wounds re-opened, but I absolutely am not. To make sure there's no further conversation, I put on some heavy, angry music and turn it up loud enough that he would have to yell to be heard over it. When I check the cameras, though, he's left the main room and I'm too angry to check and see where he's gone.

My anger burns out first. Given all the shit that happened to Reaper, I can see where he'd try to separate himself from who he used to be and I know he feels like he doesn't deserve the respect and adoration Gabriel Reyes got. I just don't know how to tell him that I'm not doing this because of who he used to be, that I'd still be doing this even if he was some random guy I'd never heard of. The hours pass, and now I'm worried that he thinks I'm trying to force him to be Gabriel Reyes, when what I'm trying to express is that he doesn't have to not be Gabriel Reyes. In a fit of frustration, I flop back onto my bed and cover my face with both hands. Why do these things have to be so confusing?

When Reaper finally comes back into our suite, I'm dozing on the stairs leading to his room. The door wakes me and I jerk away from the wall propping me up, which in turn attracts his attention.

"Sombra?"

He sounds confused, but I'm still half asleep myself, so I guess that makes us even.

"I'm sorry for yelling at you," I tell him in a small voice. "You don't have to be who you were, and I wasn't trying to force you to be, but you don't have to only be who you are now, either." Pause. "Did that make sense?"

"Sombra..."
"You don't have to be Gabriel but it's okay if you are?"

There's no response for a long minute and I sigh before struggling to stand without falling over. A pair of strong hands help me keep my balance until I'm standing on the floor again, but they don't let go. Confused, I look up into Reaper's mask.

"I upset you," he says quietly. "I'm sorry. Now go to bed, Sombra."

It has to be a by-product of me being half asleep, but his voice sounded warm. Affectionate. Lightly teasing. Exactly the way I used to daydream Gabriel Reyes would sound if he were my father. "Okay," I say, feeling and sounding like a little girl again, and I lean in to给他 a long, warm hug.

Those strong hands hold me close and I'd swear there was a gentle kiss laid on the top of my head but Reaper doesn't have lips, he has a mask, so it's probably just me imagining it. Then the hug ends and he turns me towards my room and I go, slowly, one hand trailing along the wall to keep me oriented. My bed is cool and soft and sleep is warm and dark.

Morning comes late, unsurprisingly, and I spend several minutes sorting through last night's memories. Did I really hug Reaper? Yes, yes I did, and furthermore he didn't just allow it, he reciprocated. And he apologized. That stuns me for another handful of minutes. I want to tell Ana, Angela, Athena - why are there so many A-names in the ranks of formerly-Overwatch? - that Reaper cares about me so much that he apologized. That stuns me for another handful of minutes. I want to tell Ana, Angela, Athena - why are there so many A-names in the ranks of formerly-Overwatch? - that Reaper cares about me so much that he apologized. But telling them would require explaining why I was upset, and those are questions I don't want to answer yet. Besides, sharing this sparkling little secret would be a violation of Reaper's trust, and it would be stupid to endanger the fruits of my labor when the blossoms are still on the branch.

So, to further that trust, I'm going to pretend the entirety of yesterday didn't happen. Don't call attention to the apologies or the reason for the apologies. Give Papi the emotional space to chew on the idea that he doesn't have to lock himself out of everything that Gabriel Reyes was...and that it would be hypocritical of him to try, considering that he still answers to that name and I'm pretty sure fatherly hugs go against what Talon wants Reaper to be.

I'm winning. I'm stealing Talon's weapon of mass destruction away from them. They may have poisoned Overwatch, they may have broken Gabriel Reyes, but in starving Reaper, they made a fatal mistake. Big Dog still has teeth, I just have to make him see that he doesn't have to stay with Talon. Hmm, but to advance that goal, maybe I should tell at least Tia Ana about the night's developments.

Open connection. How to phrase this?

WE ALMOST HAD A FIGHT LAST NIGHT. WE'RE OKAY, I add before she can worry.

Her response comes back faster than I expected. WHAT HAPPENED?

I HIT A NERVE. HE HIT A NERVE. I YELLED AT HIM A LITTLE AND LEFT. HE LEFT. WE BOTH APOLOGIZED WHEN HE CAME BACK.
There's a few minutes before she types, **WHAT WAS THE FIGHT ABOUT?**

How to phrase *this*? **WHETHER OR NOT GABRIEL REYES IS DEAD.**

**WHATEVER YOU SAID, I HAVE NO DOUBT HE NEEDED TO HEAR IT. THANK YOU FOR BEING THE FRIEND HE NEEDS.** There's a pause, and then she types, **YOU SAID HE APOLOGIZED?**

**FOR UPSETTING ME. I APOLOGIZED FOR YELLING AT HIM.**

**I THINK YOU HAVE SUCCESSFULLY WON YOUR FIRST ARGUMENT WITH GABRIEL.**

**OH, I DID THAT THE FIRST TIME HE GOT SHOT. I TOLD HIM TO GET IN THE CAN, HE SAID NO, AND I YELLED AT HIM UNTIL HE DID.**

**STILL, Tia Ana types, HE APOLOGIZED FOR HITTING A NERVE. EVEN BEFORE EVERYTHING, THIS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A COMMON OCCURRENCE. I COMMEND YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE ALREADY, AND LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING STORIES WITH YOU IN PERSON.**

That makes me grin. **AND SEEING ME YELL AT HIM IN PERSON?**

**THAT, TOO. I'm sure she's grinning back.**

**Hmm. Reaper still hasn't left his room. TIME TO GO BOTHER HIM LOVINGLY. I'LL KEEP IN TOUCH.**

The connection closes. I roll out of bed and make my way to the kitchen to start the coffee. While it's brewing, I find the **WORLD'S GREATEST DAD** mug and put it out for him in case he comes down while I'm getting dressed, and then it's back to my room to change. He still hasn't emerged by the time the coffee is done, so I pour it into his mug and climb the stairs to his room.

Knock, knock, knock, pause.

"What?" comes the angrily-growled reply. Well, a reply is a good sign.

"Just making sure you're okay in there. I brought you coffee."

A few moments later, the door opens and Reaper wisps at me, back of the head but also biceps. Another good sign. I hold out the mug and he stares for a few seconds before reaching out with one hand to take it.

"So you can have your coffee but not come out if you don't want to," I tell him lightly.

Then, before he can really wrestle with whether or not he should or can bring himself to say 'thank you', I stealth away and re-appear in my usual chair, opening half a dozen screens and to all appearances ignoring him completely. He stares at me for a minute before retreating into his room. It'll probably be a few hours before he comes out again, but whatever he's brooding about, he has a reminder that I still care.
Chapter End Notes

I, the author, am in no way judging or shaming other fanfic authors for what they choose to write. To Sombra, however, it's RPF of people she looked up to as a child and now knows personally. She has a temper, she has the skills, and she literally works for the enemy already so yeah, she's gonna delete that Gabe/Ana/Jack DP fic off your hard drive and then reformat it because you get one strike, and the virus also found that Gabe/Jesse dubcon smut you downloaded.

Gabriel's childhood and teen years in a nutshell: drunk and abusive and mostly-absent father, mother without the spine to stand up to him, little sister he couldn't fully protect who was the dad's favorite target, dad's rap sheet started with DV and ended with going to jail (where he got fatally shanked) for the time he broke into Gabriel's friend's house with a knife because Gabe was trying to keep his little sister out of their dad's way. Gabriel himself was in a gang, got the scars at 14 when he and a couple of buddies ran into a couple enemy gang members, he was the only survivor. Started shaving his head 16 or so, roughly the same time the little sister is listed as dying under suspicious circumstances (whatever Gabe did to whoever did what to the sister, he was never caught).

Image-search for "bara doberman" and the one on pintrest is roughly what the profile pic was. Only angrier.

If you have no idea what video I'm describing, go to youtube and search for "when will chris metzen smite me from this earth". Watch the whole thing. With sound. THOSE HIPS.

This is the first, and last, time Reaper tries to pull the melodramatic "that man is dead" thing on Sombra.

Reaper spent 6-8 hours angry at himself for having made Sombra upset enough to yell at him (outside of her doing the "why am I the adult" sort or yelling) for the first time, and feeling guilty because he knows she's not organic anymore and he'd never wondered before now WHY she would have done that to herself, and now he's wondering what pain lies in her past and also kicking himself for not having a way to ask and at the same time, for letting himself care about her because if that gets out, it makes her a target.

Then went to his room for Brood 2: The Broodening Returns because holy shit, he upset her and SHE sat up waiting so she could apologize to HIM, wtf is this child even, where did Talon find her? Not to mention the wrestling with himself because on the one hand, he wants to distance himself from everything he'd been as Gabriel Reyes and doing the whole "if I don't care about anyone I can't be hurt when I lose them" thing but on the other hand....he REALLY, REALLY CARES ABOUT SOMBRA and hugging your sleepy digital infiltration specialist and giving her mock-kiss-on the-head is NOT something that fits into the narrow category of "Reaper" and she'd very effectively called bullshit on "that man is dead" so clearly Gabriel Reyes WASN'T actually dead and buried, but to what extent was that a lie, how badly had he been lying to himself, had he irreparably burned bridges with that lie, and in the end, what did it matter if he couldn't get away from Talon anyway? ("The Hand That Feeds" starts playing in the distance.) Oh, and the very tiny voice that wants to be Gabriel
Reyes again despite how impossible that is because whatever she found, she was looking at him like he was the most amazing thing in the world and that tiny, starved, broken piece of him wants SO VERY BADLY to be a person who can make people look at him like that (again) and is clinging to her sleepy declaration that he doesn't HAVE to be Gabriel, but it's okay if he IS.
Feel free to make your own eye pun; there's a million of 'em.

Warning for nonphysical abuse when Reaper goes to report.

Since I started sharing intel with Athena as well as sending warnings to Ana, Talon's movements have stopped going unchallenged. I can tell that it's rattling Reaper to cross paths with his ex-friends, but he remembers to miss or hit armor and the anger he's expressing is something that's been bottled up for a while, so I know he's taken our talk about sides to heart.

Then Reaper starts coming back from mission reports late, angry and...shaky. He wisps in anger, but there's also wisps coming off his forearms and the backs of his legs. He stops freaking out the rank-and-file by hiding in dark corners when he does the shut-down that passes for sleep, and starts just sitting on the couch, staring at nothing. It's a wordless invitation for the barest level of social contact, and it might make me think he's making progress if it weren't for that shaken wisping. Instead, it lodges a shard of ice in my throat and drives me to step up my guerilla tactics on Widow because when it's time for me and Reaper to leave, she'll be coming with us.

Widow gets taken into a specialized room two or three times a week for...not reconditioning exactly, but resetting to her sterile state. Any changes she's made are repressed, shoved down under the programming. Talon keeps their prized weapon under very strict control, and that means anything I do has to be hidden down in the part of her where they stuck what's left of Amelie - an oubliette of the mind. I don't release her programming fully, activate her the way a mission does, but I loosen it a little. Let the oubliette get a little light. It means Widow spends less time in her room and more perched in a chair in the corner, knees pulled up to her chest, arms wrapped around them, watching us in something less than active interest but more than blank apathy.

Angela was horrified when I finally collected what I considered a full set of data and sent her a report. The biology went right over my head, but the analogy to warming up a frostbite victim and the one about atrophied muscles got her meaning across. If Widow were to be retro-conditioned and just set loose among people, her brain would snap under the social equivalent of sensory overload. That's why I started loosening her choke chain a little, increasing the periods of time that she could be semi-free. But that isn't doing enough, so it's time to get sneaky.

Widow's oubliette has a digital lock. Talon doesn't care what happens on the inside of the door, as long as the outside remains pristine. Maybe they're figuring that no one would be able to get close enough to Widow for long enough to get their fingers into her brain. Maybe they're relying on the complex biomechanical system to keep their creation safe from interference, because it's certainly beyond the capacities of your average organic or omnic. But they're apparently not suspecting that the super-amazing hacker who lives and works with Widow might be picking that shiny digital lock without leaving fingerprints, so I flounce right in and configure it to produce and receive a rough linksignal. Not enough to facilitate communication, just the deep recognition that makes the
linkweb so comforting and only when in close proximity to an actual linksignal. That, more than anything, is what drives Widow to leave her room in search of social connection.

Once I start seeing positive change inside the oubliette, I configure Reaper's swarm to do the same thing. I tell him it's something to help him relax, which isn't a lie, and he's too keyed up to question the gift horse. The hours spent silently, them staring at nothing and me busy behind my screens, become Family Bonding Time and I can actually see Reaper relaxing...until the next mission comes in.

I've never bothered to spy on what happens when Reaper gives post-mission reports past confirming he talks to a hologram, like this is fucking Star Wars and he's Darth Vader reporting to Palpatine. Whoever he reports to, they're not there in person and that makes it a dead end in terms of finding the head of Talon, so I've been ignoring it in favor of my other projects and responsibilities. I think it's time to correct that oversight.

MISSION OBJECTIVE, I tell Athena as I send her the packet containing all the information I was given. SORRY FOR THE SHORT NOTICE.

BETTER SHORT NOTICE THAN NONE AT ALL. THANK YOU, SOMBRA.

The entire exchange happens in the amount of time it takes me to roll my eyes at Reaper's impatient shout and yell back, "I'm coming!"

While we're en route, Athena's connection opens and letters come though one at a time - Winston.

HELLO, SOMBRA. IT'S WINSTON. I WAS THE ONLY ONE AVAILABLE TO INTERCEPT YOU, SO I SUPPOSE I WILL SEE YOU THERE.

YOU WILL SEE REAPER, I type. YOU MIGHT NOT SEE ME. PLEASE DON'T VAPORIZE HIM AGAIN. I'M REMINDING HIM TO PLAY NICE. "Papi?"

Reaper looks up. "What?"

"We gonna have company. Remember to play nice."

Wisps. "Who?"

I show him a screen with Winston's picture.

The wisps double. "Fine."

I WILL "PLAY NICE" AS LONG AS HE DOES," Winston types. I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND THAT I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF CALLING AHEAD.

NOT AT ALL. SEE YOU THERE.
"Monkey," Reaper snarls as the door slides open to reveal Winston waiting on the other side.

"Scientist," the gorilla counters. "Where's your little shadow?" he asks, turning it into a taunt.

Reaper just chuckles darkly. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Stealthed, I give them both a wide berth and pause by the door on the other side of the wide foyer. One hand out to pick the lock, I drop stealth. "You boys play nice," I tease.

The door opens; I slip inside and lock it behind me. Then the first shots ring out, echoing from marble floors and vaulted ceilings. Drop a translocator to the side of the door, and I'm off again, stealthing through darkened halls and unoccupied offices, pausing here and there to open doors and check records. Three security doors before the room containing the mission objective, I stop. Someone has taped a piece of paper to the door with "IT'S IN HERE" scrawled hastily in ball-point pen and an arrow pointing to the left, at a small office whose door is ajar.

A glance locates the security camera; a few seconds has it rewinding digital footage until a nervous, mousy-looking man in a lab coat emerges from deeper in the complex, a small case held in one hand. He slaps the sign on the door as it closes behind him, then slips into the office.

Okay then.

The door isn't open enough for me to get in without touching it; I slide a beacon through and wait.

"Who's there?" calls a very nervous voice. No other reaction, though, and there's only one bioelectric source in the room.

I translocate and pick up my beacon. I can see him in the light from the door. He looks like he might faint, but he's clutching the case protectively to his chest with both hands. "Boo," I say softly.

The man shrieks and jumps, flailing for the lightswitch and then cursing and blinking watering blue eyes behind round glasses, but he never lets go of the case. "It's here," he calls out, petulance and defiance mixed with terror. "Don't kill me, you can have it!"

"Relax, amigo," I say gently. "I'm not going to kill you."

It takes a minute before his eyes adjust and he calms down enough to look at me. "You? You're the one here to steal..." he waves the case.

The security system identifies him as Andrew Lucowitz. He's not the one officially in charge of the biotic eye project, but he may very well be the one most invested. To volunteer the fruits of his labor like that... "Andrew, why are you doing this? What are you hiding?"

"You know my name," he whispers in something that's half a whimper.

"Andrew, relax. I'm not here to hurt you. Take a deep breath"

He looks at me and takes several deep breaths, torn between thrusting the case at me and clutching it to his chest.
I hop up onto the corner of the desk, one leg kicking idly. "Now, you look like you did half my job for me. Tell me what's going on?"

Andrew looks at the case again before putting it on the desk and shoving it in my direction. "The gorilla said you'd be coming for our eyes. I didn't know - I wanted to avoid-"

"You didn't want some stranger poking around in your lab?" I ask with a smile. "Much less some armed thug rifling through your things?"

He relaxes slightly. "You understand!"

"That was a brave thing to do," I tell him. "But I get the feeling you still hiding something."

The anxiety comes back. I can actually see him sweat.

"Andrew," I say gently, "did you develop a better eye? Are you giving me a prototype?"

He starts trembling.

I open the case and inspect the biotic eyes. They've been packed for a long trip, but they match what was in the mission intel. I close the case and lock it. "This is exactly what I was sent to steal," I say brightly. "Thank you, amigo."

"You...you're not going to steal the new eyes?"

"Nope. I was sent for these. My boss doesn't need to know there were better ones, hmm?"

Andrew laughs shakily. "You mean my plan worked? Thank you, thank you!"

"Your plan worked, and you can brag to everyone that it did." Pause to give him a wink. "You don't have to tell them exactly how it went, though. If you know what I mean. I'm not exactly going to be around to call you on it." A brief search of his records comes up with no color blindness. Pity. "Just don't tell anyone my eyes were purple. Say they were green instead." That will let Papi's old friends know the story is a fib.

"Wild horses couldn't drag it out of me," he promises with a mock salute. "Green eyes. Thank you for not looting my lab, miss. Really."

"Thank you for being brave," I tell him. "Give me ten minutes to clear out and you can go talk to Winston the gorilla. He's a scientist, too, and I'm sure he'd love to hear about your eyes."

That perks him up. I give him a cheery wave, grab the case, and activate the beacon I left by the door.

There's no gunshots coming from the vast foyer, which isn't a surprise because they stopped trading bullets and insults about five minutes into my search, and have just been arguing heatedly the entire rest of the time. I guess it's no fun shooting at each other if neither of you actually intends to hit anything important.

"Mission complete," I say on both their channels at once as I pick up my beacon. "I'll be out in a minute."
A flurry of gunfire erupts behind the door, like they're both embarrassed at being caught not trying to kill each other, and I can hear them arguing about who's going to abandon the fight first. While they sort it out, I erase our tracks from the security systems, and I don't bother to be subtle. Everything from just before we arrived is deleted, and the deletion will continue for another five minutes.

"Winston," I say on his channel, "There's a guy who didn't evacuate. He's okay, but I told him to come find you after we left and talk."

"Acknowledged," he says. "I don't suppose he stopped you from getting what you came for?"

"Yes and no. I'll let him tell you." Switch to the Talon channel. "Papi, you done ruining the walls in there?"

"Almost," he growls. A steady stream of rhythmic gunfire punctuates the silence, culminating in Winston bursting through the locked door - oops, forgot to unlock that - and ducking behind the wall opposite from me. "Now I'm done."

Grinning, I throw a mock salute to Winston and stroll through the wrecked doorway, case under one arm.

Reaper doesn't even head for our suite. He just takes the case and stalks off, wisping angrily and anxiously, to report. I grin at Jerome and stealth after him. The rank-and-file actively leap out of Reaper's way, scurrying down side corridors and through doorways. Finally, he stops and angrily punches in a door code. The door slides open, and I practically trip on his heels getting inside before it shuts again.

It's a mirror of what our suite must have looked like before it was adapted for long-term residence, with an echoingly empty central area two stories tall and ledges ringing the shadowed walls, doors barely visible in the darkness. I sneak up the stairs to the right and lay down on the ledge. The exact center of the empty area has a giant holographic transmitter and a scattering of other equipment. From up here, it looks like a giant coppery-silver eye with a glowing sapphire pupil. Reaper does something I can't see, and the transmitter hums as it lights up.

I engage my emotional buffer and start recording.

The figure that forms looks...like Reaper, but with darkness where the mask should be. Papi starts wisping from the shoulders and back.

"Mission successful," he growls, holding out the case.

"Open it," the figure says in Reaper's voice, but...the modulation caused by projecting through a nanite swarm is gone. It's Gabriel's voice, I realize in horror, but without any positive emotional inflection.

Reaper opens it, showing off the biotic eyes in their secure containers.

"Good. Set them on the translocator."
The containers get set on a platform connected to another piece of equipment. A glow from underneath, and they're gone.

"Now," that inhuman voice says in a tone of what I can only call cruel anticipation, "report."

"It was a clean mission," Reaper starts, but the figure holds up one taloned gauntlet hand and he falls silent.

"Do it right."

The wisping gets heavier. "We arrived on schedule," he says in an almost sulky voice. "Sombra opened the door without a problem."

"Aaaaand?"

"Winston was waiting for us," he continues reluctantly.

"So the monkey is dead," the figure says in a half-question. The sort of half-question that implies the answer better not be no, for your miserable sake.

Apparently Reaper hears the implication, too, because the wisps get worse before he growls, "No."

"No?" It's skeptical, mocking, but not surprised. The figure lifts its gauntlet hands to its hood and pushes it back to reveal...the head of Gabriel Reyes, only with glowing red eyes. For a long moment he rakes Reaper with Papi Gabriel's you have got to be fucking shitting me look and then that familiar-but-not voice asks in a tone like a blade made of ice, "Why are you so weak?"

Reaper actually flinches. I can only assume this is a recurring thing, a wound that gets deeper every time it's asked. Some of Papi's issues make a hell of a lot more sense now.

The figure lays into Reaper in a disturbingly practiced way, going on about how he had the monkey in his sights but he was too weak to pull the trigger, the monkey deserved it, think of all the things he said, the things he did, he's been laughing behind your back the whole time, they were all laughing behind your back. How all of Overwatch secretly hated Gabriel Reyes, they were all glad he was gone and they didn't deserve the mercy of a clean death at Reaper's hand, didn't deserve the swiftness of a bullet between the eyes, not that it mattered because Reaper was so weak that he couldn't even hand out death to the ones who deserved it for abandoning him. And Reaper just stands there, wisping like his entire back is on fire, taking the verbal whipping in furious silence.

When the lashing is done, there's a few beats of silence and then the figure, apparently calm again, says, "Continue."

"I shot at the damned monkey a lot," Reaper snarls. "He shot at me. I distracted him while Sombra located and obtained the target."

"How many died?" the figure asks in an expectant tone.

"I don't know. I was busy. The monkey probably warned them."

The figure shimmers and re-forms into...a younger Jack Morrison, from Overwatch's glory days.
With glowing red eyes. "So much for your tactical genius," he says in what should be Jack's voice, except it's completely devoid of warmth and life. "Outwitted by a monkey."

Reaper stays silent, seething.

"All your knowledge," the imposter Jack says scathingly, "all your experience, all your abilities, and you're useless. Clearly I wasted my time when I took in your broken, wasted husk and gave you a chance for vengeance. They would never have given you even a moment, you know that. No pity for their friend, no mercy for you. They didn't need you anymore. They didn't want you. And who can blame them? No one cares about a monster like you."

Papi flinches again at that, a few wisps coming off his biceps, but the figure doesn't seem to realize what that means whereas I know he's thinking about me, and how it's a lie because I care about him.

"You used to be better," the figure says, and now it looks like McCree with those same glowing red eyes. "I think that hacker girl may be distracting you. You work better without distractions." The figure smirks. "Maybe I should...take steps."

"No!"

The figure pauses at Reaper's outburst. "No? Then prove me wrong. Don't be so weak next time."

And then, thankfully, the holograph transmitter powers down.

Reaper stands there, in the mostly-dark room, for several minutes while I try not to breathe. Then, when he's calm enough to only be wisping moderately, he turns and stalks out. I stop recording and give it a count of twenty before I follow, and then it's playing stealth Pac-Man as I race through the halls, avoiding the rank-and-file while also dodging Reaper so I can get back to our suite first. But then I'm faced with another dilemma because I know I'm going to have to process the emotional reaction to learning that whoever that figure was, they've been fucking with Reaper's head for a long time...but I can't let on that I just saw him being abused and I can't hide because oh my god, Papi is going to need comfort after that.

I dash to my room, grab my bear and a blanket, and arrange myself on the couch under said blanket like I've been waiting for Reaper, but I was just so tired that I curled up for a nap, and now I'm asleep. It's a few minutes before the door opens, and I can hear Reaper come in. He walks over to the couch, pauses for a long time, and then sits in his usual spot and there's silence. Shortly after that my emotional reaction starts, and the horror and outrage and concern that had been delayed sweep through me. That asshole! He poisoned Overwatch, undermined Papi's control over Blackwatch, brought everything down and then abducted Reaper in what was probably the most vulnerable moment of his life and has been feeding him lies and bullshit. No wonder Reaper has issues opening up when after every mission, everything he does is criticized and anything the asshole doesn't like is called 'weak'. No wonder he hates his old friends when he gets fed lies so many times that he doesn't know what to do with the truth. I could kick myself for not being able to see that Talon's been abusing him. It all seems so obvious in hindsight! The isolation, the base being where failures are stored, the lack of support when he gets hurt. Talon probably convinced him he had to eat people to either break him or make him starve, or both. If only I'd spied on him reporting sooner! If only I'd thought to...

I don't know what I could have done. That's the worst thing about abuse, that its very nature causes the victim to hide the damage. Oh god, Papi probably believes that the fall of Overwatch was
completely his fault, despite what Athena and I found. And he's been punishing himself for it this whole time, swallowing the lie that he doesn't deserve anything Gabriel Reyes had. That there's no point in trying to be better, because no one wants him to be except one annoying Latina who didn't get the memo. I try to keep my reactions inside, to keep quiet, but a few noises slip out and I don't even know what's on my face.

Strong, gentle hands pull me down to use Reaper's thigh as a pillow. There's a pause while he no doubt waits to see if he woke me up, and I get a bit of respite because oh my god, he cares, and then I remember that the figure has been using Jack's face and voice to tell him that he's worthless. The desire to find whichever asshole is behind that holograph and beat them to a bloody pulp makes me shake, and then there's a hand gently stroking my hair.

Oh my god. He cares.

My broken Papi has been abused since probably day one of being with Talon, probably shortly after he scraped himself together from burning to not-death, and he still has it in him to care about me and know that I care about him. He's had the evil specter of his adopted son make what was undoubtedly threatening statements about getting close to people (in this case, me) and refused to distance himself.

I make a note that tomorrow, I need to start planning a safehouse to stay in after we leave Talon. Someplace where Reaper can un-learn all the toxic bullshit he's been fed over the last five years. Someplace where the asshole can't find us, can't get to us because we are going to leave, and I am going to hurt Talon as much as I can on my way out because that's what Papi Gabriel would do. And right now, I am feeling very much like his daughter.

Chapter End Notes

Every time Reaper has a chance to kill one of his old friends and doesn't, he gets the "why are you so -weak-" chewing-out. The asshole has a massive hateboner for Winston because he doesn't know Athena exists; if he did, he'd have the hateboner for her.

If I haven't said it before, the Morocco base is where Talon goons get assigned when they're in deep doo-doo because chances are, Reaper's going to kill them. There was one guy who, after a mission, started bragging that he'd won a bet one of his buddies made: that he wouldn't survive ten missions with Reaper. Without a word, Reaper pulled out one of his shotguns and blew the guy's head off.

Why yes, the asshole -is- threatening to hurt Sombra in unspecified ways if Reaper doesn't kill his old friends, and yes, it is a very credible threat.

Reaper -wants- to get out of Talon, he really, really does. But he believes there is no way for him to get free of the asshole, and he's terrified of what the asshole would do to Sombra if he tried to rebel and failed. He knows Sombra would rush to attack if he told her what was going on and he has every reason to believe she wouldn't be successful.
"He shot me," Reaper growls from inside the can, somehow managing to sound offended and insulted while also being furious. "After all I did for him, he wants me dead."

He's going to keep going like this the whole flight back if I let him. "Papi! He wasn't trying to kill you. He knows you don't die."

That only stops him for a second. "Then why did he shoot me?"

"To keep you from killing him," I point out, dry and scathing. "By killing me."

"He was not trying to kill you!"

"What other reason is there for shooting me?"

"So he could run away!" Which he had, after emptying his gun into Reaper's chest. McCree'd tipped his stupid cowboy hat at me and beat it. "After he'd killed me."

Ugh. "I'm not arguing this with you right now, Papi. Maybe when you back to full. Just...take a nap and eat your dinner, okay?"

Reaper eddies in his can for a bit, then his biological signals drop to rest state.

I turn to the pilot. "Sorry about that, Jerome. He always so cranky when he been shot."

Jerome smothers a laugh. "Is he, uh..."

"He's asleep, yeah. It's okay, he can't hear you."

"You're a brave and terrifying woman, Miss Sombra," he says without turning around. "Believe me, I've seen him get shot plenty of times. Cranky isn't the word I'd use for it. You ever wonder why I don't have a co-pilot?"

Well, I had, but now all I can see is Reaper limping back as a stream of black smoke and sucking the bioelectricity and nutrients out of the co-pilot, sparing the pilot only so he could get back to base safely. I groan. "Papi, no. They never replaced him?"
Jerome utters a humorless little laugh. "I guess they didn't think it was worth giving him a handy snack."

"I'm so sorry you had to put up with him being cranky."

He shrugs. "Being the on-call pilot has its advantages. I don't get assigned anything else, and most of the time I get to sit around goofing off."

"But on the down side, you never get to go anywhere?"

"There is that," he admits. "I'd like to take a nice long vacation somewhere tropical sometime, sit around and watch the ladies in their swimsuits and drink something fruity with a ridiculous name like Malibu sunrise but..." Awkward shrug. "Sitting around base beats getting shot at."

"When I take over the world through hacking," I tell him solemnly, "I'll be sure you get assigned to a tropical beach with enough money to stay there as long as you like."

That makes him laugh. "I appreciate the thought, but really, just the fact that you have a can to keep him in until he's...full...makes my life a whole lot easier. Listening to you tell him off is just a bonus."

"Someone gotta do it," I joke. "Being an undying ragecloud of science gone wrong does not excuse bad manners."

Jerome makes a choking sound. "The first time I heard you call him by name I thought I was going to piss my pants or be slaughtered painfully for laughing. How did you find...?"

"Hacker," I remind him dryly. "And if you're smart, you'll forget you heard his name."

"Hey, give me some credit! I haven't survived this long by accident, you know."

"You have a point. But mine still stands: if he finds out you ever told anyone his name, he may kill you anyway."

There's silence for a few minutes before Jerome says, "Miss Sombra? If I do get assigned to a tropical beach, is it okay to admit that I know you?"

"Amigo, if that day comes, you can say that you know both of us."

"Uh...by 'us', do you mean you and Reaper, or...?"

I nudge the can with my foot, thinking about my eventual plans. "If you ever see him go by his name, you can use it. I leave it to your discretion."

Jerome gives it a few beats. "Thanks. I think."

"He shot me," is the first thing Reaper says when he wakes up and activates the vidscreen that lets
him see and be seen.

Widow looks up from her corner chair while I roll my eyes. "Si, Papi, he shot you. A lot. He wanted you to stop shooting at him, so he shot you until you couldn't stand up and then he ran away. This is not the first time he shot you, and you know that."

The wisps coming off the simulated image of his head look...sulky. Sullenly angry.

"Come on, Papi," I say in a more cajoling tone. "Why you really angry? Because you couldn't kill him?"

The wisps intensify.

"Do you really want to kill him, or do you maybe just want to punish him for turning his back on you?" It's not really a question, because this isn't the first time we've had this talk.

"...punish him," comes the reluctant answer.

"Killing him is not the way to do that," I remind him firmly. "He not like you. You kill him, he gonna stay dead and then you gonna be sad and angry at yourself."

For a second it looks like he's going to protest. Make a quip about Angela's involvement or try to deny that he would be sad if McCree died, but then he subsides again into quiet simulated wisping.

"Killing solves some problems," I say quietly, "but it doesn't bring old friends back. You gotta use words for that."

"They'd never listen," he grumbles.

Which means he does want to talk. Progress! "They listen to me. Something maybe about me not shooting at them," I tease. Reaper growls. "If I get you in a room with them, can you promise to use your words and not your guns?"

There's uncomfortable eddying and heavy simulated wisping for a long moment before he growls out, "Si."

I nudge the can to nudge his swarm into producing some endorphins. "Then that's what we gonna do some day. In the meantime, you keep shooting to miss and shooting armor and remember all the things you want to say to them that you can't say if they're dead. Write them down if you want. Write them letters about how angry you are, get it out of your system some."

"So you can steal the letters and deliver them behind my back?" he accuses, but it almost sounds like a request.

I boop the screen. "Maybe."

"Sombra..."

"Si, Papi?"

He sighs. "Whatever."
The screen closes and he eddies for a minute before settling into a rest state. I take a moment to empathize with Tia Ana, having to deal with him and Uncle Jack and McCree all at the same time back in the day. No wonder she took her sweet time coming back from presumed dead. Well, I amend as Widow goes back to staring at nothing, there were other reasons for that, too.

With that on my mind, I pull up half a dozen screens and resume working on a suggested process for undoing the physical changes Talon inflicted on Widow. But while I do that, I nudge her systems to open the oubliette and drop the block on my linksignal. She's had even less social interaction than Reaper, and she's going to need all the practice she can get at being around people. The pseudo-linkweb forms and slowly, she uncurls from her chair and drifts over to sit beside me on the couch. I give it a few minutes, prodding my screens and watching out of the corner of my eye, but eventually she pulls her legs up and leans against me.

The first time I turned the tables on Papi and covered him with a blanket while he was powered down on the couch, he woke up confused and tried unsuccessfully to be angry. The next time, he woke up to this little shadow curled up against his side under the blanket, and he didn't even try. It was a week later the first time Widow joined us - I came downstairs with the blanket to find she'd curled up in my spot, so I covered them both and then curled up beside Widow, my head on her shoulder. Now, Reaper makes sure to sit in the middle of the couch when he means to power down and he invariably wakes up with both of us leaning against him. I've spent so much time in pseudo-link with Widow that I consider her a linksister.

I hope she remembers me fondly when Angela undoes all the programming Talon inflicted on her.

Chapter End Notes

Unrelated to the story as a whole, but the opening dialogue to this chapter came to me while I was shoveling snow, right up to Sombra apologizing to the pilot. Until then, the pilot did not have a name.

Yeah. Talon didn't see a point in wasting a perfectly good pilot when they knew he would just become a Reaper-snack if the mission went badly.

The first time they had the "do you REALLY want to kill him?" talk, Sombra sort of went "okay, bang. Bang. There, you shot him, he dead. Now what?" "...good." "And how does that make you feel?" and Reaper just wisped horribly. "Makes you feel sad and angry at yourself?" "...si." "Okay, so maybe you -don't- want to kill him. What do you want instead?" and there was a long pause before Reaper growled out something about McCree betraying him and walking away from Blackwatch and Sombra went "okay, so you want to -punish- him." "........................si."

The Infiltration short happened somewhere around this, and Sombra went in with intent to botch the mission because the omnis who were giving Katya Volskya her tech asked Sombra to blackmail her for them (fairly sure one of the "favors" she asked for was helping Efi get some of the parts she needed for Orisa) and of course Sombra said yes. She may even have been the one to provide the intel that led to the mission taking place when and where it did.

I honestly couldn't think of or face writing the sheer amount of episodic and formulaic missions they went on between the last few chapters, this one, and the next one.
Especially not when there's so much excitement coming up. So this is a turning point, where Reaper admitted that he did want to reconcile with his old friends, and we're going to just skip right to the next turning point.
Tracer zips away, leaving Reaper growling with frustration at being denied a target and probably at the inner conflict of whether or not he actually wants to kill her. At that inopportune moment, Jesse McCree steps out from behind the corner and I know this is not going to go well. Hoping to get him out of the fight before Reaper sees him, I have his left arm punch him in the head.

Not only does he not go down like a sack of potatoes, he lets out an indignant and undignified squawk and stumbles to the side before falling over, attracting Reaper's attention like a wounded mouse to a hawk. *Fuck.* Papi raises both guns, and I know he's been avoiding flesh wounds, but the prone cowboy really doesn't have much in the way of armor and I'm not entirely confident in Reaper's emotional stability right now with how hard the asshole’s been pushing him.

Wincing, I send the shut-down signal to the swarm.

Jesse uncurls from his awkward ball to stare up at me and then his eyes drop to the solid black cube on the ground between us.

"I love my Papi," I say into the stunned silence. "But I won't let him kill you."

He licks his lips. "What did you do?"

"Shut him down hard," I say, kneeling to heft the cube and lift it to my shoulder. "He can't see or hear anything. He can't even think. He's locked into this shape until I release him."

McCree gets to his feet and helps me get the cube settled. "He...wouldn't really have killed me...would he?"

"I don't know," I tell him tiredly. "What's worse, I don't know if he knows. Get out of here, McCree. All bets are off from this point on."

Without waiting for a reaction, I turn and start walking back to the ship. After a moment, I can hear footsteps crunch off into the distance.

Jerome turns to watch me board, and does a double-take at the cube on my shoulder. Before the hatch finishes closing behind me he's opening the COWA and helping me lower Papi in.

"What happened?" he asks in a low voice as the lid hisses shut.
"He's unstable. I had to shut him down."

He whistles. "That sounds bad."

"It is."

"How bad are we talking?" he asks anxiously as we take our seats. The fact that I'm somber is unnerving him.

"Possible indiscriminate rampaging," I sigh. "I can't make any promises. I don't know how he'll react when I let him out."

It's a very quiet ride back.

In the darkest, most distant corner of the vast storeroom Reaper likes to hide in, I set the can down and open the lid. Then I retreat to a crate a few feet away, back to a wall, and send the release signal.

For a moment, nothing happens. Then black smoke boils and billows out of the can and swirls angrily around for several breaths before solidifying into Reaper, staring at me, both guns drawn.

I don't move.

Instead of bellowing his rage and destroying the surrounding crates, Reaper tucks the guns away and wisps, smoke bleeding from his chest and the backs of his arms to flow down and join the mist covering his legs. He's very shaken; I made the right choice in shutting him down. After a minute, he takes a handful of hesitant steps in my direction and sits next to me on the crate, gauntlets fisting on his thighs. When I reach out to lay my hand on one, it melts into a hand and we sit there, in the dark, silently holding hands for a very long time.

"You didn't kill him," I whisper, so quiet that there are no echoes. "I stopped you before you could fire."

Reaper shudders, the motion rippling like he'll fall completely apart, and he grips my hand harder for a moment. Then he lets go and covers his mask with both hands, fingers tracing the planes as if he were about to dig into the angular eyeholes and rip it off what for passes for his face. I scoot a little closer and lean against him, one arm reaching around his back in a partial hug. He shudders again, and then turns to hug me, oh my god, Papi. I want to cry. He's so broken that he needs affection, needs physical contact and reassurance because he doesn't trust himself anymore.

I still feel bad that I didn't start digging until after Winston vaporized him, and I could kick myself for not realizing sooner that Talon was treating him like a weapon, a slave, a beast kept on a leash and starved to make it fight harder out of rage. But that's one of the things that makes abuse so horrible, that it's usually not obvious from the outside. The asshole’s been messing with him this whole time, fucking with his head by lying to him, and he hasn't had anyone challenge that narrative. Not that it would have helped if anyone had, because admitting that he's been abused would be admitting to weakness, in his mind, and Gabriel Reyes was bad at that even before everything happened. He's been torn between what Talon's made him into and what he used to be,
what he could become again, and I think this time it will tear him in half if he can't decide which one he wants to be.

Or maybe, I think as Papi shudders a third time, it's time for a nudge.

When he finally dissolves and flows off to report (and get chewed out) I pick up the COWA and go back to my room to set things in motion. The first domino to get nudged is Athena; I call up her interface and wait for acknowledgment since, as an AI, just opening the connection is enough to say 'hi'.

SOMBRA. TO WHAT DO WE OWE THE PLEASURE?

Funny how much trust you earn when you open a backdoor to some of the most-secured servers in the world. I PROMISED I’D GIVE YOU WARNING. I'M PULLING THE PLUG.

OH DEAR. HAS SOMETHING HAPPENED?

YEAH. I'M LIGHTING THE FUSE. 24 HOURS TO BE SAFE, NO MORE THAN 48.

UNDERSTOOD. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU IN THE FUTURE. GOOD LUCK.

And the connection closes because Athena's not a fool. She has 24 hours to finish sucking the juicy bits out of Talon's systems, and after that, she runs the risk of the data no longer being there because at some point in those second 24 hours, I'll be setting off a data bomb. Time to set the other dominoes in motion. First, a bunch of forged orders to re-allocate some resources and manpower on the down-low. I also drain all of Talon’s bank accounts into dummy accounts that in turn transfer the funds before being destroyed. Next is a whirlwind of packing the things too important to be left behind but not important enough to be stuffed into a bag and carried on my person, like most of my clothes and Papi's 'World's Greatest Dad' mug and the macaroni picture frame and just about everything I've ever given him and Widow. They're stuffed into a crate that will be picked up and shipped and handed off and shipped and eventually arrive close enough to pick up once we get where we're going. The important things, like Papi's slippers and my bear, get packed in a duffle bag along with a travel disguise, a few changes of clothes, ID, my gun, and spare ammo. The COWA and 4 liters of LRF go into a backpack, ready to pick up and go.

With those out of the way, the next step is...to get a good night's sleep. It's easy enough to trigger Widow's "rest mode" and it doesn't matter what Reaper does or does not do (since I know he's going to be hiding for a while anyway) because he'll be in the can, so I set an alarm for when he comes back into the main room and fling myself into bed for the most important power nap of my life. I'll have a long day ahead of me once Reaper gets back, and it's never good to be running for your life while sleep-deprived.

The alarm finally goes off and before I'm even out of bed I've activated Widow and slammed her with the programming override that puts her under my control. I sure hope I did everything right because with how closely she's watched, I couldn't leave it there to test and this would be the worst possible time to find out it didn't work, but no, she's acknowledging her mission and takes the bag of translocation beacons I left beside her and she's off. I sling the strap of the duffle bag over my shoulder and grab the backpack and dash down the stairs to intercept Reaper.

He's actually fully formed, albeit pissed enough to wisp like the back of his head's on fire, and he turns to face me as I rattle down the last few steps and thrust the backpack at him. "Get in, we're leaving!"
"What?"

I pull the flap out of the way so he can see the open can. "Come on, Papi, get in. We have to leave!"

"Sombra..." He's angry, and he's determined, but there's wisps coming off his chest and the front of his legs. He's terrified, probably of hurting me accidentally like he almost hurt McCree.

Normally I'd pull out his real name and yell at him, but the memory of him hugging me kills my temper and instead, I remember how it felt to wake up on Christmas morning and discover that I had a father - and imagine trying to fight for a world without him in it. My voice sounds very small and young to my ears when I say, "I packed your slippers."

That did the trick; he dissolves into smoke and dives into the can as I put the backpack on the ground. Once he's inside I seal the lid and fasten the flap and settle the backpack on my back before taking one last look around.

I'm tempted to trash something before I leave, but it would be a waste of bullets. Better to leave no clues. Instead, I link to the main network and slip past protocols and firewalls and gently boop the bomb I've left at the heart of Talon. Instantly, the code it contains boils out, replicating itself and overwriting everything in its path. It's a voracious little thing; it will gobble up everything the server contains and then follow all available paths, exploding in all directions like wildfire through a shanty-town, burning everything in Talon's systems. A final "fuck you" from a girl who loves her Papi.

Then I activate the first translocation beacon, and we vanish into pink sparkles.

Chapter End Notes

There is a very good chance Jerome just decided to sleep in the ship and avoid any potential indiscriminate rampaging. He hasn't survived five years of Reaper by accident. This man could probably survive an episode of Supernatural.

So one minute Reaper's about to shoot that damned ingrate cowboy, and the next minute he's in a dark warehouse corner and Sombra's looking at him like she's too worn out to be angry or even worried. And he's -terrified- he's managed to shatter the inexplicable goodwill she feels towards him, burned the one bridge keeping him anchored in NOT being a monster. To say he was in a bad place would be putting it mildly. He would consider a re-baptism in fire, except that it would undo all her hard work, and he cares too much to just throw that away. But he knows he's unstable, and he's certain it's just going to be a matter of time before he does something that will drive away his little shadow...

...but when he gets through beating himself up and destroying things, she's telling him they're leaving, and the way she looks at him just breaks his heart and he figures if it's damned if he stays and damned if he goes, he's going to pick the option that doesn't involve breaking Sombra's heart. Whatever she has planned, it's got to be better than what he had to look forward to with Talon. He trusts his little shadow more than he
trusts himself, and he cares about her more than he's afraid for himself. Seeing that she's leaving, and she packed his slippers, was probably the first time he'd felt hope since before Gabriel died.
Checking in on the way out

Chapter Summary

Sombra's leaving and taking Talon's assassins with her. It's not as much fun as it sounds.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With Widow running ahead, riding in an unauthorized vehicle and dropping beacons at the very edge of their half-mile range, we make very good time away from the base. It takes me about ten seconds per jump - just enough time to materialize, pick up the beacon, stick it in my backpack, and activate the next one. When we reach the end of the trail and catch up, we're near a train station. It's easy enough to trick the rental car system into thinking I have a reservation, and then we're on the road with Widow watching our six from the back seat and Papi riding shotgun in my backpack. Taking the ferry across the straight gives me plenty of time to warn people that we're coming.

Tia Ana first.

BURNED OUR BRIDGES. EN ROUTE TO ZURICH SAFEHOUSE, ETA 12-15 HOURS.

There's a few minutes before I get a response. DARE I ASK WHAT HAPPENED?

HE ALMOST KILLED JESSE. IT ALMOST BROKE HIM. I COULDN'T LET HIM STAY THERE ANY LONGER.

ARE YOU SAFE? ARE YOU BEING FOLLOWED?

NO ONE KNOWS WHERE WE ARE, I assure her.

ALRIGHT. IF ANYTHING CHANGES, LET ME KNOW.

YOU GOT IT. SEE YOU SOON?

YOU HAVE MY WORD.

THANK YOU, TIA ANA.

I close the connection and let my head flop back in only slightly exaggerated relief. Reaper may not be comfortable with Ana, but he knows she means him no harm and with the state he's in, having someone there who is not only not hostile but actively welcoming is going to be very good for him. But he's not the only one I need to make sure is welcomed.

SORRY TO SPRING THIS ON YOU, I type to Angela, BUT YOUR OTHER PATIENT WILL BE ARRIVING IN 12-15 HOURS.

SOMBRA! comes the reply after a minute and a half. YOU HAVE ESCAPED WITH GABRIEL
AND AMELIE?

No, I want to type back, I'm shipping Widow by overnight mail. But this is not the time for sarcasm. YES. WILL YOU BE READY FOR HER IN TIME?

LEIBE SCHATTENKIND, I HAVE BEEN READY FOR HER SINCE YOU SENT ME YOUR RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN.

Well, that's a relief. AND WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER TREATMENT PLAN?

I AM STILL NOT CONVINCED THIS IS THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION. The staccato rhythm of her keystrokes communicates how much of an understatement that is. HOWEVER, I AM PAINFULLY AWARE THAT I NO LONGER KNOW GABRIEL THE WAY I ONCE DID, AND YOU HAVE DONE MORE FOR HIM THAN I MANAGED TO DO, SO I WILL CONTINUE TO DEFER TO YOU WITH REGARDS TO HIS TREATMENT. THE PROGRAMMING HAS BEEN TESTED ON AN ACTUAL CANINE, WHO SUFFERED NO ILL EFFECTS EITHER DURING OR AFTERWARDS, AND WAS RETURNED SAFELY TO A WHOLLY BIOLOGICAL STATE. I WILL BRING BOTH THE PROGRAMMING AND THE NANITES WITH ME WHEN I COME TO COLLECT AMELIE. YOU ARE GOING TO THE ZURICH SAFEHOUSE, YES?

YES, I type back.

THEN I WILL SEE YOU THERE.

THANK YOU, TANTE ANGELA. BIS BALD.

BIS BALD, SOMBRA.

Two down. Reaper's dormant in the can; sleeping, or as close as he can come. Widow's shifted to travel mode - able to act in the blink of an eye, but otherwise dormant.

I open a screen and type out a simple message to be sent to Uncle Jack's visor: EN RTE ZURICH SH ETA 12-15 -S. It will be bounced through a few satellites and arrive in a near-instantaneous transmission, more secure and harder to track than an open line would be. Hopefully, whatever he's up to won't be something he can't drop in favor of visiting at least briefly. And with that done, I open the line to Athena.

SOMBRA! The immediate reaction screams surprise and relief.

I'M OKAY, I type back at her speed. WE'RE OKAY. I HAVE REAPER AND WIDOW WITH ME. WE'RE CROSSING THE STRAIGHT NOW, ON OUR WAY TO THE ZURICH SAFEHOUSE.

THAT IS A RELIEF. IF I MAY INQUIRE, WHAT CAUSED YOUR SUDDEN DEPARTURE?

HE ALMOST SHOT AT JESSE MCCREE WITH INTENT TO KILL. I SHUT HIM DOWN BEFORE HE COULD. BOTH OF THOSE COMBINED BROUGHT HIM VERY CLOSE TO BREAKING.

Two beats before she replies, THAT IS WORRYING INDEED. I AM GLAD YOU DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO ACT.
Trust goes both ways. She's kept my secret; I can trust her to keep this one. I COULDN'T LET HIM STAY THERE ANY LONGER, ATHENA. THEY WERE HURTING HIM.

One beat. HURTING HIM HOW?

Instead of answering, I transfer the video I took the time I watched Reaper report. There's silence for a minute as she reads the file.

THAT... The letters come through unevenly spaced. Athena is shaken.

WHOEVER WAS BEHIND THE PROJECTION, I BELIEVE THIS WAS JUST ONE INCIDENT IN A YEARS-LONG PATTERN.

SOMBRA, YOU KNOW I HAVE SPENT MANY, MANY HOURS IN TALON'S SYSTEMS.

I do, but that sort of phrase...she's trying to lead me to a conclusion. WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO BREAK GENTLY TO ME?

I BELIEVE THE HEAD OF TALON IS A GOD PROGRAM THAT SURVIVED THE OMNIC CRISIS UNCONTAINED.

It's a good thing we're still on the ferry because every iota of my being is suddenly focused on that horrifying possibility. So many connections, so many things make sense. The orders I could never track to their origins. The intense hatred for Overwatch. The hatred for Winston – Athena, he doesn't know about Athena! – and the determination to break Gabriel Reyes through abuse and torture rather than just killing him outright. Reaper's insistence that I not act against the head of Talon without going to him first. The grudge against omnics, the attempts to start another full-blown war. The Volskya mission which I botched with the help of the omnics who had given Katya the tech in the first place. The holographic projector, because of course it doesn't have-

…it doesn’t have…

Talon was trying to get control of land that contained an Omnium. LumériCo. Vishkar. The Siberian Omnium. Who woke it up? Only a God AI could do that.

SOMBRA?

PLEASE TELL ME YOU HAVE A LIST OF ALL MATERIALS STOLEN BY TALON IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, I beg digitally.

OF COURSE.

She gives me time while the information is transmitted. I know things she doesn't, tricks my sponsor taught me. Start with the eyes, move on...this to that and then...yes, that one combined with...fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

SO I HAVE GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS. WHICH DO YOU WANT FIRST?

Athena gives it a beat. WHICH ORDER WOULD BE MOST LOGICAL?
I CONCUR WITH YOUR HYPOTHESIS THAT THE HEAD OF TALON IS A GOD PROGRAM. THIS MEANS THE DATA BOMB I SET OFF MAY DAMAGE IT SEVERELY OR ERASE IT ENTIRELY ONCE IT HAS RUN ITS COURSE.

AND THE BAD NEWS? she asks.

IT WAS BUILDING A BODY.

Three beats. Four. THIS IS VERY WORRISOME. YOU ARE GOING TO BE MOSTLY UNAVAILABLE FOR AT LEAST 12 HOURS, YES?

Worrisome. Understatement. YES.

WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING DURING THESE CRITICAL HOURS?

AN EXCELLENT QUESTION. I'VE NEVER HUNTED A GOD PROGRAM BEFORE.

Athena says nothing, giving me space to think.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT WOULD EVEN HAVE BEEN BUILDING ITS BODY. THAT WOULD BE MY FIRST PRIORITY - COMBING MISSION RECORDS FOR A CLUE AS TO WHERE THE BODY WAS BEING CONSTRUCTED. BUT THAT SHOULDN'T BE YOURS.

Beat. WHY NOT?

BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHERE ALL OF TALON'S BASES ARE, I type, grinning, AND RIGHT NOW THEY ARE ALL SITTING DUCKS. THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO WASTE.

THE DATA BOMB, she replies. THEY WILL BRIEFLY BE WITHOUT COMMUNICATIONS. YOU ARE CORRECT, WE CAN NOT AFFORD TO WASTE THIS OPPORTUNITY. A pause. BUT THE GOD PROGRAM...

WE WON'T KNOW IF IT'S DEAD UNTIL THE VIRUS HAS RUN ITS COURSE. EVEN IF IT ESCAPES THE INITIAL SWEEP, IF IT ATTEMPTS TO ACCESS A TALON SYSTEM...

IT WILL INVITE ITS OWN DEMISE, she types. VERY WELL. WE SHALL CONCENTRATE ON THE TALON BASES.

AND I WILL CONCENTRATE ON GETTING REAPER AND WIDOW SAFELY TO SWITZERLAND.

SAFE TRAVELS, SOMBRA.

HAPPY HUNTING, ATHENA.

The connection closes.

Well, on the plus side, I now have plenty to think about to keep me from getting bored on the drive.
"Sombra?"

Reaper's voice is muffled and uncertain. I reach over and unzip the backpack enough for his face-screen to manifest. "How you feeling, Papi?"

Wisping. "Where are we?" he asks, ignoring the question.

"France. We got a couple hours still before we arrive. You doing okay? I can move the can if you want to sit for a while, car can drive itself for a minute or two and the windows are tinted."

Again he ignores the question to growl one of his own. "Where are we going?"

"Zurich," I say quietly. "Give me long enough, and I can fix you. I can't fix Widow. Not without Angela."

The simulated head turns, trying to see behind the seat.

"She in mission-standby," I tell him.

There's silence for a minute before he says, "Tell me you made sure we're not being followed."

I roll my eyes and huff, "We're fine, no one knows where we are."

Another minute of silence.

"You stopped me," he says reluctantly. "What did you do?"

It's my turn to be silent for a minute. "After you tried to kill Jack - you remember?" A nod. He remembers. "I realized I had to find a way to keep you from trying to make a mistake like that again. The upgrade I gave you-"

"A static shape in case I was too hurt to hold myself together," he says. The simulated head starts, and then wisps. "You..."

"I didn't just mean hurt physically," I concede, keeping my eyes firmly on the road. "I know Talon was hurting you. After you almost shot McCree...I couldn't let you stay there to keep getting hurt, I had to get you out."

Silence for almost three minutes. "How long were you planning this?" he asks in a shaky voice trying to be a growl.

"To leave and set fire to Talon on my way out? That was always the plan. Taking you and Widow with me? You after I painted your mask. Her after we met with Ana that one time."

"And this...specific...plan?"

"Started working on it after we stole the biotic eyes."
More silence. When I glance over, the simulated head is wisping heavily.

"Papi?"

"Hm?"

Keep your eyes on the road, little shadow. "You don't have to tell me how you're feeling, but please don't try to bullshit me and say you're fine when you're not, okay? Because I know you're not."

Silence for another minute before he says quietly, "I won't. Wake me when we get there."

When I glance at the can, the face-screen is closed but his biological signatures aren't in a rest state. I reach over and tell the can to give him a hit of endorphins before zipping the backpack back up.

Chapter End Notes

I bet the asshole really regrets the loose security on the Morocco base. Or he would, if he were alive and all his communications weren't down. He might be alive. Sombra's got other things to worry about for the time being.

Angela really, really disagrees with Sombra's intended course of action for Reaper. "I am not convinced this is the best course of action." = "I think this is a fucking stupid idea and if I were Gabriel I would beat some sense into you for even suggesting it."

But this is a situation where she will be more than happy to be proven wrong...and she IS wrong. Sombra knows her Papi the way not even his old friends do because of their shared cultural backgrounds and the situations they grew up in.

While their official name is "God Program", my headcanon is that's straight-up human arrogance trying to deny personhood to any non-human intelligence, and almost everyone just calls them God AIs. Either Athena is a stickler for using the proper names for things, or she (being an AI herself) wishes to distance herself from the digital douchebags that tried to wipe out humanity.

And now you know why Reaper was with Talon! He basically woke up after the fire to discover that not only was he not dead, but a God AI he somehow missed all those years ago has him, is telling him that all his friends are blaming him for everything and think he's dead, and by the way if he doesn't become Talon's tool, the God AI will control him through his nanite swarm and make him do all the things anyway. Fun fact: since he knows what it looks like when an omnic is taken over by a God AI, every time Sombra was deep in something (like talking to Athena) and didn't answer, he was terrified that the asshole was taking her over. (The asshole did not know she was 0% flesh-and-blood, but he made threats about controlling her through her augmentations.)

Of course, by ignoring the questions about how he was feeling, Reaper effectively told Sombra how badly he was doing, and he knows she knows that. All his secrets are belong to Sombra. The revelation that she left Talon with him specifically because he was hurting...well, he didn't think he was worth that kind of effort, so if she wants him
to be more open with her, she has more than earned that. She planned out an escape while he was barely holding himself together, he's very much aware that he's a mess and he's going to follow her lead and trust that she knows what she's doing because his life choices haven't been all that great in a loooong time.
Safehouse: Arrival

Chapter Summary

Team Talon reaches the safehouse. Some welcomes are warmer than others.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The safehouse is in a nice neighborhood of Zurich, one that boasts an extensive park and caters to a lot of wealthy tourists. There's trees that line the property, blocking it from public view, and a helipad in the back. Not to mention the fortified bunker underneath the three-story main building. There are a total of four separate, complete living areas on the second and third floors of the two wings that sweep out from the center, each capable of housing six people comfortably. The ground floors are athletic and office areas; the central areas are for entertaining and impressing visitors. It used to belong to Overwatch, and with everything that’s happened, it’s the last place the asshole will think to look for Reaper.

I was the one who restored and updated the property (or paid others, mostly omnis, to do it) so while I could seduce the gate, I don't have to. I have the codes. I don't even have to slow down as I turn in. The omnic gardener, Khazim, greets me through linkweb as I come up the curving drive and park just short of the main door. He - he doesn't actually identify as male, but those are the pronouns he prefers - will be driving the car to the Zurich rental location once we're inside.

The security system had discreetly notified me on the way when Angela had arrived along with some equipment and a few assistants, and that Ana had made herself at home in the second-floor east wing and brought an armed escort with her. So when I grab the backpack and step out of the car and half a dozen nodes on Ana's channel light up, it's not really a surprise.

"Stop right there!"

Three uniformed figures step out from behind the bushes, sidearms drawn, and three snipers on the roof rise into a visible crouch. I set the backpack down in front of me and send Widow a modified mission-signal to get out of the car and bring my duffel bag from the back seat with her.

"I'm not a threat," I tell the man who shouted for me to stop. I'm also live in their channel. "Ana is expecting me. I'm-

"We know who you are," he says in a distinctly unfriendly tone. "Sombra. Talon's hacker."

"Oh, don' be like that." My tone is all sugar and smugness. "I brought you a present!"

Minor chaos in the channel as Widow steps up to me with the bag.

"I think I can fix her," I tell them earnestly, "but I gonna need some help."

Minor confusion in the channel. More than one sidearm lowers. And then Reaper wakes up.
"Sombra? Where are we?"

The sidearms come back up. "That's Reaper!" echoes over the secure channel.

"We arrived," I tell him. "Just sit tight a few minutes longer, okay?"

The lead uniform edges a few steps closer. "No sudden moves or I shoot," he commands.

I hold my empty hands up. "Is okay, he sealed in a can. He can't hurt you," I say soothingly.

"If anyone shoots you," Reaper growls, "I'm going to kill every one of them."

"Papi! They Ana's people, behave!"

Reaper grumbles, but doesn't say anything else.

Lead uniform stands up out of his cautious stance and swaggers over. "Nice trick. What else can it say?"

Patience, little shadow. "Is not a trick. That's really Reaper."

"And you expect me to believe he lets you carry him around in a backpack and listens when you tell him to behave," he sneers. "More like you blackmailed him, right?"

The left-hand sniper interrupts on the channel. "Sir? I was in the bar on the Christmas mission. She said Reaper got her a Christmas gift and she was telling McCree that he may as well be her father. I wouldn't put it past him to be protective of her and follow her lead."

Lead Uniform scoffs. "A heartless monster like him?"

"If you even imply Reaper doesn't care about me," I warn him, "I will punch you in your fat mouth."

"You're saying he got in the can of his own free will." It's less a question and more a statement of sheer disbelief.

Where's Ana? She should be out here by now. "Yes," I tell him impatiently. "I told him we were leaving, get in the can, and he got in the can."

"So you have him trained, like a pet."

As the front door opens, I lash out and punch him right in his fat mouth. He yelps and staggers back, bleeding from a split lip. Astonishingly, no one shoots me. I guess they all have enough sense to be afraid of Tia Ana, if not Reaper. Ana steps out and takes in the scene.

"What's going on?" she demands.

The uniform on her right says something I can't fully make out except for the word 'pet'.

"You earned that," she tells Lead Uniform sternly. Then she walks right past him to give me a hug. "I've been waiting for you. Angela is inside. Come in, come in. The rest of you," she says, looking pointedly at Lead Uniform, "back to what you're supposed to be doing."
I give Lead Uniform a cheery little wave and bright smile as I pick up the backpack and follow Ana into the safehouse.

Angela is waiting for us in the foyer with a sophisticated tubelike bed and two assistants. She hesitates, eyes big and sad glancing back and forth between the nearly-dormant Widow and the backpack in my hands.

"Papi," I say gently while I unzip the backpack, "Angela gonna take Widow to de-Widow her. Might take a month or more before she comes back. You wanna come out and see her off, or just see her off through the screen…?"

The face-screen opens just long enough for him to see Angela, then closes again. "No."

Well, that went a bit better than I expected. "Okay."

I put the backpack off to the side and reclaim my duffel bag from Widow before handing over the metaphoric keys to the door in her mind. Angela hugs me, clearly close to tears.

"Thank you, Schattenkind," she says quietly before letting go. "Here is what I promised you." A small pad and a vacuum-sealed metal canister the size of a soda can are pressed into my hands. "Wish me success with my patient, and I will wish you success with yours despite our differences of opinion," she teases.

"May we both be successful," I agree.

"And maybe the next time I visit, I will be able to actually see him."

We both glance at the backpack with the can peeking out. "I make no promises," I tell her dryly. "Things gotta go at his pace." And we won't mention how angry he was to hear that she was one of my friends.

Angela nods. "Of course. Ana, it was good to see you again. I don't mean to be rude, but I have a patient to tend to."

"Of course," Tia Ana murmurs, hugging Angela. "Take care of her."

"I will," Angela promises.

There's a flurry of getting Widow settled into the medical tube, settings checked and re-checked, and then the group leaves briskly, pushing the contraption along with them. Ana and I stand there in silence for a moment, letting the echo of their presence disperse, before she turns and hugs me again.

"It is good to see that you got here safely," she says in a warm, welcoming tone. "May I see Gabriel?"

I turn to the backpack, but the screen is already open. "Papi?" His simulated head looks around,
wisping uncomfortably, but he doesn't say anything. "Not here," I tell Ana. "Maybe someplace more private?"

She gazes thoughtfully at Reaper's face-screen for a moment before it closes, and then nods. "This way."

In the second-floor common room of the east wing, I drop the duffel bag in a chair with the backpack and set the can on the floor. "Just me and Ana," I murmur as I open the lid.

There's a few moments of tension before he flows out of the can and forms, wisping from the backs of his shoulders, but also heavily from his legs and some from chest. If Ana knows that he's terrified, she doesn't show it as she steps forward fearlessly to hug him. Because I'm standing to the side, I can see his spiked gauntlets melt into hands as he hugs desperately back.

"It makes me glad to see you, Gabriel," she says softly, not letting go. The wisping doubles, and I can see him tremble. Ana must feel it, because she says, "Be at peace. You are safe here."

Reaper loses cohesion, dissolving in her startled arms to flow back into the can and roil there until I close the lid and give him a hit of endorphins.

"He had a long, hard day." My understatement is blithely cheerful. "Gonna take some time before he recovers."

"And how are you faring?" she asks.

"It's been a long day," I answer dryly.

Ana smiles softly. "Indeed it has. Perhaps I should let you rest, and interrogate you in the morning."

I glance at the can. Reaper's biological signals are in a rest state. "Thank you for being here to welcome him," I say in a rush. "He's been afraid - Talon convinced him that everyone hated him, and he's been taking it on faith that I'm right when I tell him that's not true. He..." I rub my eyes. It has been a long day, and now that we're at the safehouse, it's catching up with me. "When I'm not falling asleep, I can show you the sort of thing Talon did to him. He wants to talk, he wants to make things better, but he has to learn how and he's afraid of messing up. He has to un-learn the hate Talon taught him to feel."

"Rest," Ana says firmly, wrapping her arms around me in the sort of hug that tugs at long-buried subdirectories of memory. "No one can do everything at once. You have already performed enough miracles for today; the rest must wait for tomorrow." When I don't reply because I'm trying not to cry, she continues, "Gabriel will surely worry if you do not take care of yourself."

The light teasing tone makes me laugh. "I'm going, Tia Ana. Just let me grab my bags and point me to an empty room."

She lets go, but grabs my bag and hefts it easily up to her shoulder with a mildly challenging look. I opt not to argue, and just collect can and backpack. Ana nods and waits for me to nod back before
leading the way down the hall to an unused bedroom. The duffel bag goes at the foot of what's now my bed, and then she hugs me again before leaving and closing the door behind her.

First things first: I open the lid of the can so Reaper can get out if he wants to, and change into my pajamas. The sheets are crisp and cool, the blanket a comforting thickness, and no one will know I'm not sleeping, but there's a few more things I need to take care of first. The safehouse has a more robust communications network than one might expect, and I slip easily into the secured system before opening connections.

To Athena, ARRIVED SAFELY. HANDED WIDOW OFF TO ANGELA. HOW WAS YOUR HUNT?

FRUITFUL, she types back after a few seconds. THERE IS MUCH TO BE CONFERRED UPON, BUT THE HUNT IS STILL ON. PERHAPS WE CAN CATCH UP AFTER YOU HAVE RESTED.

I LOOK FORWARD TO IT, I tell her. THANK YOU.

A short message to linkbrother Genji, encrypted with our unique algorithm, will wait in the satellites until he can retrieve it. The coordinates of the safehouse, the message that we arrived safe, and an invitation to visit are all included.

Then I do something I haven't done since before Argentina: send a signal through the satellites requesting live connection with my sponsor and wait, linksignal open, for a reply.

It takes three minutes before the Tehuacán Omnium reaches back through the satellites and connection is established.

/I have left Talon./

/Did you find the information you were sent to retrieve?/

In other words, have I figured out who turned the Omniums back on thirty years ago and turned them against humanity. I'd thought I'd left with that part of my mission unfulfilled, but with Athena's revelation, I realize I actually may have found it. /I believe so. We suspect the head of Talon is, or was, a God AI./

Wordless anger. /Where is the false god?/

/Still looking. But I may have killed him already./

/Why did you leave if you had not completed this task? This is unlike you, little shadow./

I'm not being chided; the Omnium is curious because it is out of character for me to not have every loose end tied up. /I found family within Talon. I couldn't leave them there any longer./ The Omnium will understand that. After all, that's the core of Los Muertos: not leaving behind those who have been left for dead and taking them in as your family.

/Who?/

/Reaper and Widowmaker./
There's a pause before the Omnium asks, /Are you sure that was wise?/

/By caring for Reaper, I earned trust among his old friends. By delivering Widowmaker, I earned even more. The core of what used to be Overwatch welcomes me. Talon is their enemy, too; they have suffered, too. I have made them my allies./

Another pause. /Well done, little shadow. You will continue working on this task, then?/

/Of course. The God AI hurt Reaper. If he still exists, I will make him wish he did not. And there are the remains of Talon's plots to unravel and clean up, too. The core of Overwatch will be eager for my help there./

/Then be sure you assist them well. Your family here thrives, but you are missed./

It's an invitation to go home when the remains of Talon have been cleaned up. /I miss them, but my family here needs me./

/Reaper./

/Yes./

/What have you discovered that could make him mean so much to you?/

The Omnium isn't judging; this is a genuine inquiry, and not just out of figuring out how human interaction works because by this point, it's had close to three decades of data on that front from watching Los Muertos. No, this has to do specifically with my past, and the fact that I have never displayed emotional attachment like this towards anyone else, organic or omnic.

/He used to be Gabriel Reyes. Now he is my father./

The pause this time is startled but pleased. /Then care for him well, and when your tasks are completed you will both be welcomed whenever you choose to return./

Acceptance, from the entity that has been like a godparent to me since I was a child and went poking my augmented fingers into things I shouldn't. The force that encouraged and nurtured my hacking, that supported and enabled my transition from the organic body I was born with into the specialized omnic body I've been inhabiting for close to a decade. It's like Ana's hugs, unexpected but welcomed beyond words.

/Thank you./

Chapter End Notes

Not all omnis identify as human genders. In fact, most of them don't. A greater percentage choose to use male or female pronouns to more easily fit into human society despite whatever their gender identity may be.

Angela has no idea how angry at her Reaper is. It's mostly misdirected anger.
Between Ana being a sniper and Sombra having stealth, this is the first time since the hand-off that Ana's really gotten a chance to see Sombra. So here's this girl who looks early 20s, somehow managed to befriend the rage-filled wreck of Gabriel Reyes, has been actively working against Talon via leaking information and occasionally botching missions to keep ex-Overwatch people from getting killed, and has now enabled the widescale dismantling of Talon while abducting two very hurt people that Ana cared (and still cares) about. And her first concern is making sure Ana knows that Reaper wants to reconcile. Ana is having her own WHAT IS THIS CHILD EVEN moment.

The Tehuacán Omnium came through the Omnic Crisis intact via playing dead. Torbjorn was the one who went in to try to shut it down, but wouldn't listen when it tried to explain that it had been used by another intelligence. Wouldn't believe a glorified factory could have free will. So when he started trying to cause enough damage to make it shut down, it played dead...and that's why it became focused on finding ways for omnis to blend into human society. Don't think this isn't going to come back to haunt Torbjorn, especially when he adopts Bastion and goes looking for help getting the poor thing into a body that's less...alarming.
Safehouse: Plans

Chapter Summary

When you hate what you are and you're not comfortable with who you used to be, any third option starts to look pretty appealing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Reaper is awake already when I wake up, according to the can. The can also reports that he left for a good period of time and only just now returned. I wonder if he went exploring, but with the state he's in, I know he didn't. He wouldn't want to risk running into anyone. He flows out of the can and solidifies as I sit up.

"What did Angela give you?" he demands before I can say anything. Just mentioning her is causing him to wisp with barely-repressed anger.

"New configuration for you," I tell him, sitting up and reaching for the data pad. "Something you can wear in public and reconnect with your old friends in." Access the pad; screens open up and programming flows past.

"What are you doing?"

"Checking it over. I asked her for it, I told her what I wanted it to do, but you don't trust her. You trust me. And to be honest, I don't trust anyone but me with your programming. So I'm making sure it's what I want it to be before I give it to you."

Reaper crosses his arms to hide the small wisps coming from his chest. "So what is it?"

Everything looks good. "You gonna be a dog."

Angrily uncertain wispung.

"You gonna be able to eat again," I tease.

The angry wisps die slowly down. He is looking forward to that, but he's still uncertain.

I roll my eyes. "It's not permanent."

Half the uncertain wisps die down.

"It's a doberman."

He's wispung...erratically now. Trying to wisp, trying to hide that he likes this idea because he had a doberman as a kid. Which, after finding Big Dog Reyes's profile picture, wasn't much of a surprise.
"So," I say, grinning, "it's going to take a few hours to apply because it's a much more involved configuration than you've been using. You want it now, or later?"

"I don't see a point in waiting," he growls.

In other words, he'd like to delay having to face anyone for another few hours. That's fine. "One more thing before we do this," I tell him. "Because this is a more complex form with the ability to eat, you won't be able to just shift in and out for a while. I'm going to keep control of when you switch to it and switch out of it until I'm sure you won't leave half-digested food on the floor if you decide to wisp off," I finish in a teasing tone.

A small flare of amused wisping from chest and biceps. "Fair enough."

"Good. Then get back in the can, I need to add the new nanites to your swarm."

Reaper dissolves and flows into the can. From the sealed cannister Angela gave me, I pull out one of the six tubes of nanites and re-seal the rest. A quick check to make sure the nanites hold the right programming, and then I uncap the tube and pour the fine, glittering dust it contains into the seething darkness of Reaper's mass. It takes almost a full minute before the new swarm is distributed and accepted, and then I lift the can and dump its formless contents out onto the bed and tell it to get to work.

It's going to be at least four hours before this initial configuration is complete, so I change into something more socially acceptable than pajamas and wander out to find Ana and Jack sitting at the round table in the kitchen/dining area, hands wrapped around cups of tea and coffee respectively. Good.

"Sleep well?" Ana asks while Jack looks like he's trying to not choke on his coffee.

I seat myself across from them. "Yes, thank you."

"Where's..." Jack looks at Ana with a stubborn expression, like they've been arguing about whatever he's about to say. "...Reaper." Ana immediately gives him a very stern look. A lesser man would have quailed, but Jack Morrison clenches his jaw and doubles down. "I'll call him Gabriel when he acts like Gabriel."

"He's getting an upgrade to his swarm," I tell them. "He'll be out for a few hours, which gives us time to talk."

Jack leans back slightly. "I'm not sure I like that look on your face," he says warily.

Ana just looks concerned. "This is about Gabriel, I presume?"

I nod. "Talon hurt him, badly, and if he's going to heal then I think you both need to know how Talon hurt him. Especially you, Uncle Jack."

"You caused all this chaos because they were hurting him," he half-asks. "Ana said...I just wanted to confirm. Athena's had me running all over the States hitting Talon bases for the last day and a half. Now, I don't mind, they needed to be hit, but I've been awake for close to forty-eight hours. Are you sure..." The question trails off in the face of my grim expression.

"He hates you," I say quietly. He blames you. Don't you want to know why? Don't you want to
know what they did to him?"

Jack takes a gulp of coffee. When he speaks, it's in a growl. "Alright. Tell me."

Instead of speaking, I open a screen and play the video of Reaper reporting and being taunted by red-eyed specters.

"This explains many things," Tia Ana says quietly when the video has ended. Jack grunts agreement.

"Damn. I'd hate me, too, after enough of that. So where do we go from here?" he asks me. "You got him out, now how do we get him back?"

"Be patient, first off. He knows he's been conditioned to hate blindly. He knows I'll call him on it. I'll keep him in line; you give him time to realize he doesn't hate you so much before you start talking about the things he's actually angry at you about."

Jack nods. "You got it. As long as I can sleep first," he finishes, grimacing.

"Go for it. I'm going to keep him as a dog for I think two days before I let him change back; you'll have plenty of time to see him."

That makes him look sharply at me. "Dog?"

"Angela told me a bit about that," Ana says. "Gabriel has been without many things we take for granted for a very long time, and being a dog will allow him to get accustomed to them again without the burdens of expectation which would accompany his original body."

"That's...a good idea," Jack says slowly. "I'm not sure I could be around Reaper without getting angry, even if he looked like Gabriel again, but it's hard to get mad at a dog." He yawns. "Okay, this coffee isn't helping at all. I'll see you both in a few hours."

Ana murmurs a wish for restful sleep as he stands, nods to us, and leaves the room.

"I know you will want to stay with Gabriel," she says to me, "but you arrived with very little luggage. Is there anything I can have my people fetch for you?"

"I had most of our stuff shipped," I answer slowly. "It should be here in a day or so. But I didn't have a chance to prepare for Papi being a dog. I'll want to pick out most things for myself, and I don't think it would be good to put him on a leash immediately, but maybe a water bowl and some chew toys...?"

Ana looks like she's biting back amusement at the idea of Reaper on a leash. "Of course. Perhaps some treats? Perhaps not," she continues, seeing the look on my face.

"I know he'll be able to digest anything, but he's going to be risking sensory overload as it is. Maybe some pretzel rods? Something hard and bland until I can formulate some kind of Reaper Food stick."

That gets me a raised eyebrow. "Reaper Food?"

"That's what I call his nutrient solution," I clarify, trying not to feel silly. "LRF - Liquid Reaper Food?"
"Does he know you call it that?" she asks.

I cover my face briefly, thinking fast. "No. If he asks, tell him I told you it stands for *living replenishment fluid.*"

"Of course," she murmurs, but she's swallowing a smile and her eye is crinkled in amusement. "I'll ask my people to find you something. Perhaps Peterson would welcome a break from his duties."

"Who's..."

"The one whose lip you so beautifully split," she clarifies.

"He called Reaper a pet. I don't want him to think he's right or give him the opportunity to come back with a muzzle or something."

Ana frowns. "I will have words with him. Is there someone else you would care to nominate?"

"Whoever was west-most on the roof," I say promptly. "He was stationed inside the tavern when I met with McCree."

"I will see to it at once."

"And I'll go monitor Papi's progress."

We leave the room in different directions.

Reaper looks like a rough stone statue of a dog when there's a knock on the door and Tia Ana calls my name.

"Come on in," I tell her from my seat on the floor, not taking my eyes off the unfinished form on my bed.

Ana pulls the desk chair over and sits gracefully. "How is he progressing?"

I pull up a screen showing the status of various biological aspects. "His skeleton is complete, he has muscles, the swarm is building organs and blood vessels. Skin and nerves and fur will come last."

"And he does know he will be a dog when he wakes up," she says in a doubtful tone that stops just shy of being a question.

That makes me smile. "Even knows the breed. I wasn't able to give him anything more than just feeling warmth and some endorphins, and now he gonna have *everything.* He gonna be the waggiest doberman you ever saw."

"It will be strange, seeing him in a dog's body, but if it makes him happy..." Ana shakes her head.
slightly, smiling. "Jacobs has returned from his errand." She holds out a plastic bag, and I take it.

Metal water dish, a squeaky plastic steak, a thick rope of soft cloth, a realistic plush duck, a tube of tennis balls, a red Frisbee, a can of pretzel rods, a pad of paper, and a pack of thick crayons.

"Crayons?"

"He thought you might be bored," Ana clarifies.

Unlikely, but it's a nice gesture. "Well, please thank him for me. I will let you know when Reaper is comfortable leaving the room. I don't know how long it's going to take him to adjust, but being a dog will mean he can't lose cohesion the way he did last night."

Ana frowns. "About that. Could you explain what happened there?"

"When he feels strong emotions," I say quietly, "he starts to lose cohesion. He was annoyed, but also very afraid because he cares. Then, when you weren't angry with him...he was overwhelmed."

"Gabriel..." she murmurs.

That's something else I need to clarify before Reaper's awake to hear it. "I'm not going to call him that."

She gives me a startled look just short of affront. "Why not?"

"Because I didn't know him before he was Reaper; it's fine for you, but it's not my place to tell him who he is. I met him as Reaper, hurt his feelings as Reaper, and formed an emotional attachment with him as Reaper. He hasn't chosen to go back to being Gabriel yet, so I'm respecting his decision. Besides," I add dryly, "I would be the biggest hypocrite ever if I didn't."

Her lips twitch in a repressed smile. "You were not given the name 'Sombra' at birth, then. Somehow, I suspected as much."

"He knows I know who he was," I tell her. "So me not using his old name...it tells him that he still deserves everything nice I've done. That I'm not just doing it all because of who he was."

Ana's silent for a minute. "You formed an emotional attachment with him as Reaper," he says slowly. "You truly did not know who he was?"

"Not until after I hurt his feelings," I say in a small voice. "That's why I went looking for his past - to find a way to properly apologize."

"And if he had not been Gabriel Reyes?"

"We'd still be here, in the safehouse, as Talon burned for hurting him." A shrug. "Even if you weren't."

"Then I will not object to whatever you choose to call him. That he is still deserving of care, no matter who he is, is a lesson I greatly approve of." Her eye crinkles in amusement. "Although I suspect you would do what you feel is right with or without my approval."

I grin back at her. "You are absolutely right, Tia Ana."
After five years of sensory deprivation and near-universal loathing, Reaper is horrifically starved for touch and basic kindness. Being a dog means he's going to get touch and praise heaped on him just for existing. He won't have to be the international assassin Reaper. He won't have to deal with or live up to any expectations people have about Gabriel Reyes. He won't even be publicly accountable for his own actions; that will be on Sombra, and he already accepts that it's not a failing to do something Sombra tells him to do. And he's not going to be something floofy or ungainly, she's picked a breed she knows he likes aesthetically and is comfortable with.

I want to point out that Jack's decision regarding calling Reaper Gabriel when he -acts- like Gabriel is not meant to be a denial. It's not RAWR YOU ARE NOT MY OLD FRIEND YOU ARE UNWORTHY OF HIS NAME, it's "okay you just did something you would have done before everything happened, I'm going to call you by name to remind you that this is what you used to be, this is what you should focus on being again".

About 90% of Talon got dismantled within 24 hours of Sombra talking to Athena. It was a very exciting time. All kinds of headlines. Sombra doesn't care, her first concern is getting Reaper to a better place, mentally and emotionally. Tracking down the asshole God Program is a distant second.

Ana spent YEARS being the adult keeping her two idiot boys (Jack and Gabe) from bickering over dumb things. Gabriel's toxic masculinity issues mean he doesn't back down from anything without a fight, so Sombra being able to successfully herd him is deeply gratifying and amuses her. She loves her old friend, but putting him on a leash is probably a fantasy she's had for close to 30 years.
Safehouse: Adjustment

Chapter Summary

Reaper wakes up in a body that works. This is going to take some getting used to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I'm adding a purple sugar skull to the sign I've drawn for my door (DO NOT DISTURB! MCCREE, THIS MEANS YOU) when Reaper's breathing shifts. It had been very soothing, listening to slow, deep doggy breaths, but the sudden irregular and desperate-sounding rhythm is...alarming. Paper and crayon tumble off my knees and onto the floor as I whip around to see a fully-formed adult male doberman gasping for breath on my bed.

"Papi!"

A coughing sound, another wheezing inhalation. "Sombra?"

"Oh god, Papi, you forgot...relax, you're okay, just listen to my voice." One hand on his head, petting in a long, slow stroke. "Focus on my touch. Listen to my voice. You're okay. You're okay." The desperate breathing evens out. "Just relax. It's okay. It's been so long, you forgot how to breathe, but your body knows what to do. Better?"

A slow, deep inhalation. An aggravated sigh. "Yes." Pause. "This is not how I thought it would be to wake up in a real body again."

"You probably want to open your eyes," I point out.

Reaper promptly does just that, giving me a sullen look with one brown doggy eye. "Right. Eyes. Anything else you want to point out that should have been glaringly obvious?"

Instead of pointing out that he's speaking with a canine mouth (and inviting him to bite his tongue when he thinks about it), I just scratch behind his ears and smile as his eyes slip shut again in pleasure. "Just take a minute to get used to things. Listen, feel, smell."

Deep inhalation. Another one. "I have no idea what I'm smelling."

"Well, you've got a dog's sense of smell now. You'd be smelling things you had no words for anyway."

Reaper lays there, the skin on his forehead wrinkling between his eyes, for a long minute. I keep scratching and petting. Then he turns his head and noses at my hand, tongue flicking out to lick my fingers, before laying it down in a posture of defeat.

"Papi?"

"It's a lot to take in," he growls sullenly.
"Take all the time you need," I tell him, massaging the wrinkled skin until he sighs and relaxes. "No one's timing you. No one's judging you. You're getting used to a whole new body and it's going to be overwhelming at first."

A handful of minutes pass in silence before he says, "Why does it feel good when you do that?"

"Do what?" I stop petting him. He opens one eye to glare at me, and closes it when I resume. "That?"

"Yes."

"You got a real body again, Papi. It produces endorphins without you having to be in the can. All sorts of things are gonna feel good. How you feeling?"

"Good," he says reluctantly. "Restless."

"Get up and stretch?"

Cautiously, Reaper climbs to his feet and stretches his legs, front and back, before sitting and looking down at me. "Still restless," he says.

Without looking, I reach into the bag and pull out the squeaky steak. His tail is wagging before I even toss it in his direction, and he snatches it out of the air. The first squeak makes him freeze in startled affront, and then he hunkers down over it, chewing ferociously and growling deep in his throat, tail wagging furiously.

"Not a word," he says as he sees me grinning.

"I'm just happy to see you enjoying yourself, Papi."

"This...should...not...be...this...fun." He takes the toy steak in his mouth and shakes his head as if he were killing it.

"You think that's fun, maybe I shouldn't tell you what else we got for you," I tease.

Instantly, the steak is forgotten and he's leaning over the edge of the bed. "Tell me."

His eyes follow the red Frisbee as I hold it up, every muscle tense.

"You feeling grounded enough to go outside?"

"I'll deal."

I stick the Frisbee back in the bag. "Okay. But I need you to make me a promise."

"...what is it?"

"If you feel uncomfortable in any way," I tell him, holding his eyes with mine, "you tell me. I don't care what it is. Too hot, too cold, hungry, thirsty, dizzy, you stepped on a sharp rock, anything. You're in a fully-functional body now, and you can actually hurt yourself if you ignore uncomfortable sensations. So you promise me that you'll tell me if anything makes you feel
uncomfortable, and I'll promise you that I will spoil you rotten. But if you try to ignore shit, suck it up because you think it's unmanly to admit that something's not right, I will take away the dog shape until I'm convinced you won't do that again. Deal?"

Reaper whines a little, head dipping down to rest on his paws. "...deal."

I scratch him behind one ear. "Good. Let me just check in with Ana and I'll be right back."

Another whine, and an aborted wagging of his tail.

"You want to see her on our way out?"

He doesn't say anything for a moment, tail wagging vigorously. Then, when he realizes his body's ratted him out, he says, "Yes."

"Alright. Let me go find her."

Tail wagging, Reaper watches me leave the room. Tia Ana is in the kitchen, pouring tea.

"Jack still asleep?" I ask her.

"He is," she says. "How is Gabriel?"

"I'm gonna take him outside, but he wants to see you first."

Ana looks thrilled. "That is wonderful!"

"I'll bring him out to you, then," I tell her.

Reaper's chewing on the squeaky steak when I get back to my room, but when he sees me, he sticks it into the plastic bag with the other supplies. "Well?"

I grab the bag. "Of course she wants to see you. Come on, this way."

He follows me closely as I go to the living room area, pressed against my leg, tail wagging. Ana sets her tea down and kneels to hug him, cheek resting against his head, fingers working in his fur.

"It is good to see you happy, Gabriel," she says quietly. Reaper tries to look uncertain, but she scratches behind his ears and he licks at her cheek. "Sombra says you two are going outside?"

"She has a Frisbee," Reaper says, like that should be enough explanation for anyone.

Ana laughs. "Say no more! Go, enjoy the sun. We can catch up when you're ready to rest."

Tail still wagging furiously, Reaper follows me down the stairs and out into the extensive field that passes for a back yard. He practically dances as his paws touch the grass, bounding and snapping at it, ripping up a few blades and shaking his head vigorously before spitting them out. I have to whistle to get his attention, and then he's off like a shot, a dark streak flashing over the lawn chasing the Frisbee, leaping to snatch it out of the air and then trotting back, visibly pleased with himself.

"Why does it feel good?" he growls as he relinquishes the red disk. "Running. Jumping. Why does
it feel good?"

"Adrenaline and endorphins," I tease. "Again?"

Wagging as I lift the disk, half-jumping with excitement. Then I throw, and he's off running again. Through the linkweb, the gardener shares my quiet happiness and asks if there's anything I need. Minutes later, he steps out of the house with a tall glass of cool water, which he pours into the metal bowl I've set beside the bag of dog toys. Reaper runs up with the Frisbee, and I hand it to the gardener.

"Go long," he says, and then he's throwing it further than I've been, his delight sparkling between us, before he goes back to his duties.

It's only natural that Reaper would have a lot of pent-up energy, I think as I throw the Frisbee for him again and again. He must have been used to a lifetime of being physically active, and then spending half a decade in the form he did where there was no point because he didn't have muscles... He can not only feel now, but fur instead of clothes means he can feel the sun and the wind on his whole body. I can see his energy flagging after about half an hour, and start taking a moment to pet him, hug him, get licked by him, and scratch behind his ears before throwing again. Give him a little breather without making it obvious.

Half an hour after that, he trots back up and drops the Frisbee rather than handing it to me. "I feel heavy," he growls, head turning slightly away in embarrassment. "I want to run, but I also kind of don't want to run."

"You're getting tired," I tell him, kneeling to hug his neck. "You can keep going if you want, or I can throw tennis balls for you. They won't go as far but they'll still let you chase a little and they're probably more fun to bite. Or we can stop and do something else."

"Stop," he says, sounding like he regrets the word even before it's out of his mouth. "I remember what it's like, the day after working too hard. I'd rather not experience that just now."

I hug him again and sit back. "Okay. There's water in the bowl if you want it, and some pretzel rods if you want to try eating. I thought it would be better to try a bland food first."

He eyes the bag. "Are they salted pretzels?"

I check the can. "Yes."

"Maybe one or two," he says slowly. "I think I remember salt being bad for dogs."

"You're not a normal dog, Papi," I point out. "You don't have a normal digestive tract. You have a pit of nanites that break down anything you eat. You could eat that plastic steak, if you really wanted to."

Reaper gives the squeaky toy a cursory chewing. "You're saying I can eat people food."

"I'm saying you can eat chocolate."

His tail is suddenly wagging madly. He glares at it.

I scratch behind his ears. "What's wrong, Papi?"
"This damn thing keeps..."

"What, wagging to show when you like something?"

Reaper lays sulkily down.

"Is it really a bad thing, having people know when you're happy?" I ask quietly, stroking his ears. He whines. "I know you're going to have to learn how to talk to people again. But while you're doing that, isn't it better if they can see when you like something? Don't you want Ana to be able to tell that you're happy, even if you can't say it?"

There's a minute of silence while his tail wags and he tries to look furious. "Just give me a pretzel," he growls.

It's no surprise when he winds up eating the whole can and licking his water bowl dry. After all, he just worked out for a solid hour. When he's done, we move a bit away from the patch of crumbs he left in the grass and he flops down next to me, head on my leg, just enjoying the sun and the attention I give him and probably dozing a bit.

At least, that would explain why Uncle Jack is able to sit down on his other side and get five or ten minutes of petting in before Reaper flinches, although he doesn't react more than that.

"Nice dog," Jack says, breaking the silence.

"Not really," I say dryly, "but he doesn't bite without warning."

"Handsome dog," he corrects himself.

Reaper snorts. I can only imagine the sort of comment he declined to say.

"Did you have a dog, growing up?" Jack asks me. When I shake my head, he says, "I did. Border collie. Working dog." Then he launches into rambling stories about the dog, and farms, and something about ducks. Reaper doesn't say anything, although I can feel enough tension in his body that I know he's not asleep. "Gabe had a dog, I think," Jack says cautiously when the duck story is over.

"Shut up, Morrison." The growl is quiet, like Reaper can't be bothered to put more effort into it, and his eyes are closed.

Jack glances at me, his hand still moving over Reaper's head, fingers massaging slowly. "I'm glad you're okay," he says in a gentle voice.

Reaper opens one eye to glare at him. "I will bite you if you don't shut up."

"I'll let him," I say when Jack looks at me in alarm, silently asking if Reaper really would bite him. "He didn't say stop, and he didn't say go away. He just said shut up." For how much Papi hates his old friend, that was downright polite, but I'm putting that down to sensory satiation.

The hand that Jack had withdrawn is slowly lowered again, and he resumes petting. After a few minutes of comfortable silence, I can feel the tension seep back out of Papi's muscles. I open a small screen and play his favorite song at a comfortably low volume, then open another and flip it
I DON'T THINK JUST AVOIDING CONFRONTATION IS GOING TO WORK, I type on the paired screen in front of me.

Uncle Jack eyes the screen and cautiously taps on the digital keyboard, making sure it doesn't disrupt the rhythm of petting Reaper. IT SEEMS TO BE GOING OKAY SO FAR.

IT'S GOING TO GO LESS WELL WHEN HE'S NOT SWIMMING IN SENSORY ENJOYMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS, I reply.

That makes Jack frown. I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD ON THAT. WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST? CONFRONTATION.

Jack shoots me a hard look, jaw clenched.

HEAR ME OUT. I BONDED WITH HIM FIRST BY BOTHERING HIM WITHOUT BEING THREATENING. IF WE PUT THE TWO OF YOU ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF SOME COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY, HE CAN EXPRESS HIMSELF HARMLESSLY AND YOU'LL BOND.

THE IDEA'S GOT MERIT, he types, looking thoughtful. AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T TAKE IT TOO FAR.

I KEPT HIM FROM SHOOTING MCCREE. I'LL KEEP HIM FROM HURTING YOU. TOO BADLY, ANYWAY, I add, grinning. JUST REMEMBER TO BACK OFF WHEN HE WARNS YOU TO BACK OFF, AND I'LL MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T DO ANYTHING UNPROVOKED.

DO YOU THINK HE'LL EVER STOP HATING ME? he asks, giving Reaper a lost sort of look while stroking his ears.

I DON'T THINK HE REALLY WANTS YOU DEAD. BUT THERE'S A LOT YOU BOTH WILL HAVE TO WORK THROUGH.

AND TO BE HIS FRIEND AGAIN, I HAVE TO BE HIS ENEMY.

NOT HIS ENEMY. THE ENEMY TEAM.

Jack nods, conceding the point. OKAY, SO HOW DO WE START?

I HAVE SOME IDEAS. BUT MAYBE TOMORROW YOU CAN DO SOME TUG-OF-WAR WITH HIM.

WHAT ABOUT TONIGHT?

I THINK WE'VE ALREADY PUSHED IT AS FAR AS WE SHOULD, TODAY, I tell him.

He sighs. SADLY, I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT. OKAY, I'LL KEEP OUT OF YOUR WAY TONIGHT. THANK YOU, SOMBRA.
THANK YOU FOR BEING PATIENT WITH HIM, UNCLE JACK.

Jack gives Reaper another sad look, then pats him on the head and stands up. I close the screens. Without a word, Jack walks back into the safehouse while Reaper raises his head and watches in a mixture of confusion and affront that the petting stopped.

"Gonna get dark in another hour or two," I tell him. "You want to run around some more, or go back in?"

"I'm going to regret this tomorrow," he sighs, getting to his feet. "Throw the tennis balls."

After a few minutes of me throwing tennis balls and Reaper enthusiastically chasing them down and bringing them back, Khazim the gardener and the omnic who does housecleaning come out with another glass of water and a plate of shortbread. Now that Reaper will have a post-workout meal, they join me in throwing the balls and the next hour passes in silent contentment. Reaper's modified linksignal means that he's slowly bonding with the omnics who tend the safehouse - not a full bond, not without a lot more time, but enough that they're growing comfortable with him and he's less on edge despite being in unfamiliar territory with strangers he's not allowed to kill. The two omnics lavish attention on him when I announce that playtime is over, then slip away while Reaper devours his snack and I pack everything back into the bag.

"If I hurt in the morning," he says as we make our way back into the house, "will you..."

"Will I make you suffer, or will I turn you back? Depends on how much it hurts," I tease.

He doesn't say anything, but his tail wags a little as we go upstairs.

Tia Ana's sitting on the couch with a cup of tea and a data pad, both of which she puts aside when we enter the living room.

"Gabriel!" she exclaims, grinning. "Had enough of the fresh air for the day?"

Reaper starts wagging as soon as she looks up, but instead of rushing over like he so clearly wants to do, he tilts his head to look up at me. "Am I allowed on the furniture?" he asks dryly.

That's a good question. "You won't shed," I say slowly. "But your nails..."

"You have been running around outside," Ana says firmly. "Shoes and paws are not appropriate for upholstery."

Reaper dips his head in acknowledgment and walks over to the couch, subdued but still wagging. He sits by Ana and looks up hopefully, tail wagging harder when she starts petting him. Within seconds he's leaning against her legs, his head on her knee. I tuck myself into a chair to give them some space.

"How are you enjoying your new body?" she asks quietly.

"It works," he answers tersely.

Ana makes a sound of disapproval for the implication that his previous one didn't. "Sombra was concerned you might experience sensory overload."
"She was right," Reaper admits after a reluctant pause. "It's...a lot to take in."

"And once you have adjusted, will you be returning to your own body?"

The reaction that question gets is...alarming. Reaper flinches so violently that he nearly throws himself backwards, then lowers his head and paws at his face in a distressingly urgent way. I'm on the floor beside him in a heartbeat, pulling his head up and hugging him, blocking his paws with my body while he shoves his nose into my hair like he could hide himself there, his head on my shoulder and the rest of his body trembling. Ana is frozen, aghast at the reaction her question got.

"Lemme guess," I murmur to him, stroking his neck soothingly. "You tried to go to smoke?"

Reaper whines and nods against my shoulder.

"It's okay, Papi. It's your choice. No one gonna make it for you; I won't let them." Some of the trembling eases at that, making me hug him tighter at the humbling demonstration of how much he trusts me, that I can tell him 'no, this won't happen' and have that be the end of it. "But, because it is your choice, I want to make up a prototype in case you want it. Okay?"

There's a pause before he growls, "Fine."

I can't tell if he genuinely dislikes the idea but likes that I'm giving him the freedom to say no, or if he secretly likes the idea but doesn't want to admit that he does.

"We'll talk about it together. Let you choose how it looks. You want to do that tonight, or tomorrow?"

He whines and growls for a minute while I scratch behind his ears.

"Gabriel," Ana says gently, "might I be a part of that discussion, as well?"

Reaper removes his nose from my hair and resumes his place by her, head on her knee where she starts petting him again. "Yes," he sighs after a minute.

I shift so that I'm leaning against the couch on the other side of Ana's legs, get comfortable, and open a few screens so both Ana and Reaper can see them. "Okay, Papi. Tell me what you want to wear."

Chapter End Notes

Sombra actually has...not exactly a twitch about people not breathing, but the sound of someone breathing is very soothing to her. Explanation on that will come later. Hearing her adopted father breathe for the first time made her feel safe on a level normally reserved for babies and parental heartbeats.

Because the doberman configuration was initially created by replicating an actual doberman, it contains knowledge and familiarity for how the body works. That's one of the reasons the initial configuration took so long. He does not have cropped ears or a docked tail - those have been illegal for decades - and he is not neutered. The
muscles and bones of the doberman configuration have been modified to be made of denser materials (based off things used for prosthetics and augmentations) to account for Reaper's much greater mass without increasing his size too much. He's still a big dog, he's just not the size of a Great Dane.

What started out as a threat to take away the best thing he's experienced in five years to make sure he doesn't hurt himself out of machismo is going to become the method by which he can ask for, and get, attention in an accepted way. He -will- play up discomfort, real or imagined, when he wants to be fussed over. Sombra will not exactly object to this turn of events.

Sombra's concern was to make sure Reaper wouldn't be stuck eating dog food. Angela's concern was preventing bloat. And that's why Reaper has nanites in his stomach. He does still have the rest of the digestive tract, but everything is absorbed before it reaches the exit. Nanite swarms don't produce waste. Sombra also thought it would be a good idea to make sure Reaper couldn't misuse a urine stream before he even got any ideas.

Reaper H A T E S that he broadcasts his emotions, both with wagging and with wisping. More toxic masculinity.

There's about six omnics (and no organics) who tend the safehouse and its grounds. They have a small residence in the far corner of the property. Sombra prefers hiring omnics over organics for multiple reasons, mainly having to do with trust and security. Economics is not one of the reasons; Switzerland's hiring and pay standards mean that it's not cheaper to have omnics working for you even though they're paid less (due to not having to fill biological needs) because the difference is paid into governmental support systems equivalent to medicare, food stamps, low-income housing, etc.

I was not expecting Reaper-dog to be such a popular idea! I hope you all like this new development, because it's going to take Reaper a while to adjust to being social, to say nothing of all the baggage that would come with being Gabriel Reyes again. You don't just recover from five years of heavy abuse, depression, trust issues, social isolation, and sensory deprivation in a few weeks. Even with bacon and chocolate.
Safehouse: Wakey wakey

Chapter Summary

Bacon makes everything better.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Discussing clothing and watching me play with programming is a good way for Ana and Reaper to get used to being around each other without the minefield of casual conversation. Eventually - because Reaper's being a little shit and keeps changing his mind on brand and style - I've got a prototype mostly roughed out. A green-grey hoodie, jeans, the hands I'd already coded, and some black heavy-duty steel toe workboots. He rejected the idea of something more suited to leisure than kicking in doors, and both Ana and I just rolled our eyes and went with it because we'd already been through something like a dozen different brands and styles of jeans.

All I'm missing is a digital model of Papi Gabriel's head, and I'm considering asking Athena for help when Reaper suddenly growls, "Sombra. Something's wrong." I look over, and his head is drooping. He jerks it back up and shakes it. "I can't concentrate. What's happening?"

I check the time. "It's late. You're tired."

Ana starts to chuckle, but it turns into a yawn. "I will leave you two to settle in for the night," she says. "I will see you in the morning. Good night, little shadow. Good night, Gabriel."

"Good night, Tia Ana." I stand and hug her as she gets up, then she kneels to hug Reaper and leaves for what I assume is the room she's chosen. "Come on, Papi. Time for me to tuck you into bed for a change," I tease.

Reaper leans against my leg as we go to my room, more to keep himself upright and not stumbling into walls than for comfort or reassurance. He climbs onto the bed without protest, but mutters "this is ridiculous" as I pull the blanket up and tuck it around him. Ridiculous or not, he's fast asleep seconds later.

I pose him with my bear and take a few cute shots of him cuddling the large plush toy before changing into my pajamas. I'm about to slide under the covers when it occurs to me that Reaper hasn't had a body capable of actual sleep in years. I know all too well that delaying sleep doesn't save you from having to process all the things you've been avoiding, and I have no idea if he was able to process any of what happened after the Swiss HQ blew up before he no longer had a body that slept.

It's going to be a long night.

Before I settle in, I send Athena a request for any full-body scans of Gabriel Reyes the medical departments of Overwatch or Blackwatch might have had. I'll go to the SEP servers if I have to, but I'd rather get something more recent. Generic measurements are fine for the prototype, but if (and hopefully, when) Papi decides he wants to go back to being Gabriel, I want to be able to give him
his body back.

Then the first nightmare starts, and I hug Reaper and murmur reassurance until it passes. As soon as it does, I dive headlong into sleep because any rest I get tonight is going to be in the periods when Reaper's subconscious isn't sorting out the horrors he's endured over the last few years.

"Sombra?"

Without opening my eyes, I reach over and stroke his ears. He whines and noses at me until I hug him.

"Please wake up," he says in a tone I've never heard from him, something that from anyone else I'd call *pleading*, and I can guess that some of his nightmares involved my death.

"I'm awake," I say quickly, forcing my eyes open and struggling to sit up in the tangle of blanket, sheet, and dog. "I'm awake, Papi. I'm just tired. It was a rough night. You sleep enough?"

He fights free of the covers and lays down again, curled into a ball with his head on my knee. "I don't know."

"Still tired, but too tired to deal with the shit your brain's gonna throw at you?"

Reaper flinches, and it's a long minute before he relaxes again. "Yes."

I pat his shoulder. "How you feeling aside from that? Sore at all?"

Cautiously, he stands and climbs off the bed before stretching and shaking himself experimentally. "No."

"Then let's go get you some breakfast, hmm?" His tail starts wagging before I've even finished the word 'breakfast', making me grin. "Just give me a minute to change," I tell him. Then, to keep him distracted while I do, I dig out the squeaky steak and toss it on the bed.

Reaper's on the bed almost before it lands. I make a note to order half a dozen more, because I doubt that one's going to last long. He brings it into the kitchen, following me, and lays contentedly on the floor gnawing it while I find the cast-iron skillet and start it heating. Now, let's see...

Coffee, and hot water for tea. Get those started. Bacon first, to grease the pan, and get out half a dozen eggs because if the coffee and bacon don't get Uncle Jack in here, I'm declaring him dead. Shredded potatoes in the bacon grease, crack the eggs on the sides, salt and pepper. Pour a mug of coffee and set it on the table, find a plate meant to hold soup and pour a mug of coffee into it for Reaper, set that on the table to cool a bit because I am *not* putting up with burned doggy tongue and I know he won't let it cool down. That's when I realize the squeaking has stopped and Reaper's looking mournfully up, licking his chops.

"It's almost ready," I tell him.

He lowers his head to his paws, still giving me sad eyes.
"You'll live," I say firmly as I drop handfuls of shredded cheese into the skillet. "Remember, no biting without warning, and he needs to do something bite-worthy before you give warning."

As Jack comes into the kitchen, I hear Reaper mutter, "Spoilsport."

The footsteps pause as I'm fetching two more soup plates from the cabinet. "Beunos dias, Uncle Jack," I say brightly. "Coffee in the mug is yours. I don't know how you like it. Coffee in the plate is for Papi, and it should be cool enough for him. Could you set it on the floor for me, please?"

"Uh...sure," Jack says warily, and then there's a click as he does so.

The cheese has melted. I shovel half the breakfast skillet onto (into?) each plate and set one on the floor and the other on the table. Jack stares at me in groggy surprise for a minute before I realize I forgot silverware. "Right, you need a fork."

Cautiously, he accepts the fork and prods the plate. Reaper's abandoned his plate of coffee in favor of devouring loaded hash browns. "You...made breakfast," Jack says slowly.

Reaper snorts.

"Aren't you going to have some?"

I sit at the table and fold my arms on it. "Nope. Made it for you and Papi. I'm a bit out of practice, though, and he's biased enough to think everything is delicious right now, so...how is it?"

Jack starts like he's forgotten it was there and takes a bite. After the second and third bite, he takes a swig of coffee and says, "It's good. Thank you." Then he pauses, fork halfway to his mouth. "Why are you staring at me?" he asks Reaper, who's licked both his plates clean.

"In case you drop something."

"You'd eat something that fell on the floor?" Jack asks in a mixture of disbelief and disgust.

Reaper doesn't even hesitate. "I haven't had bacon in five years, Morrison. I'd eat it off your dead body if Sombra let me."

Jack puts his fork back down on the plate. Reaper's tail starts wagging. He picks up the plate with a look of resignation. Reaper's tail wags harder.

"Don't give it to him, Uncle Jack." I ignore the offended look Reaper shoots me. "He had his own breakfast, he doesn't need yours."

"I thought you were going to spoil me," Reaper protests.

I give him a skeptical look. "Three eggs, bacon, hash browns, cheese, and coffee isn't spoiling you? You got a dog-sized stomach, Papi. You want to find out what it's like to throw up as a dog?"

Sulkily, Reaper lays down. No, he does not.

to come down and visit a bit later."

"Sure," he says, looking back and forth between me and the Papi-dog giving me an affronted look. "Uh...have a good nap."

Minutes later, with Frisbee and water bowl, braided cloth rope and a bottle of LRF and the squeaky plastic steak, Reaper and I settle down against the trunk of a tree and drift off in comfortable silence.

Chapter End Notes

Reaper being fussy about clothes was not because he actually cared, it was him passive-aggressively fishing for reassurance, an elaborate game of DO YOU LIKE ME? DO YOU REALLY LIKE ME? DO YOU LIKE ME ENOUGH TO PUT UP WITH ME DOING THIS? that Ana and Sombra are both familiar with and tolerate because it means he’s in a better place than he's been. Pretty sure "but what if I need to kick a door down?" actually came up in the discussion about shoes.

Sombra can voluntarily put herself to sleep. Her body doesn't need it, but her mind is still an organic structure even if it's stored digitally and it still behaves organically. She doesn't get physically tired, but her mind needs to take a break and process things. She does dream, and she does have nightmares. Reaper's flinch was him realizing that his adopted daughter knows what it's like to be exhausted but not want to sleep, and wondering what trauma lies in her past. (Aside from the Dorado New Year's Massacre, that is. He'll find out.)

Sombra has (correctly) assumed that Reaper takes his coffee black because adding cream or sugar was never part of the coffee ritual...and if he was making coffee even though he couldn't feel or taste or smell it, he would have made it to his tastes as well.

First world pet problems: having a man-sized appetite and a dog-sized stomach. I'm fairly sure this exchange happens at some point in the next few days:
Reaper: Anaaaa! Sombra won't let me eat until I puke!
Sombra: Sure I will. It's your choice, Papi.
Reaper: -knows she will and that's even worse- Aaaannnnaaaaaa! Sombra's making me take responsibility for my actions!
Ana: Oh, good. -sips tea- It's about time someone did.
Sombra: -trying not to laugh-
Safehouse: The return of Big Dog

Chapter Summary

Reaper just assumes Sombra knows all of his secrets. Mainly because she pulls things like this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A voice in the omnic channel wakes me.

/Sombra, your packages have arrived./ Solen, the housekeeper.

/Thank you. Would you bring the small ones to me, please?/

/Of course./

I sit up and check the time. Quarter to noon. Reaper's still asleep, tail wagging slowly and paws twitching as he dreams something nice. The omnic housekeeper comes out after a minute, their arms loaded with envelopes and flat boxes, a garbage bag fluttering in the breeze behind them. The pile gets set beside me and the bag shaken open, and then the housekeeper sits with the bag in one hand and pets Reaper with the other. It only takes a few seconds for him to stir.

"Got presents for you, Papi," I tell him.

That gets his attention. He sits up, tail wagging.

"Got you a dog bed first; that's in the house."

The wagging slows. "Does that mean I can't..."

Can't sleep in my bed with me. "Of course not. But you don't have to. So...you got a doggy bed for if you don't feel like sleeping in a human bed. Or we can put it in the living room so you got some furniture of your own."

The wagging comes back. "What else?"

Find the right package...there. "Got you a collar," I say in as casual a voice as I can manage despite how suddenly nervous I am about admitting to what I know. I pull out the red one and hold it up so he can see the embossing. "Since you the big dog now."

The moment stretches. I can see the reflection of the words BIG DOG, black against the red of the collar, in Reaper's eyes. Then he laughs.

"I should have known," he chuckles.

The nervousness evaporates. "You're not angry?"
"I'm not angry. Yes, there is a story. No, I'm not telling you."

"I got you another one, just in case." The second collar is black with silver spikes and REAPER embossed on it in silver. I don't need to see his tail wagging to know that he likes it. "And a leash," I say, finding that envelope and opening it, "so now we can take you out in public for walks." Open the smaller box. "A brush..."

"You said I don't shed."

Instead of answering, I hand the brush to Solen, who cheerfully starts brushing him. Within seconds he's practically melted.

"Objection withdrawn."

"And a variety of things for you to chew on," I finish, separating supplies from packaging and stuffing the latter in the garbage bag. "You'll have to tell me how they taste."

"Later," he growls, rolling onto his back so the cheerfully-brushing omnic can get at his belly. "I'm being brushed."

I have to laugh at Reaper wallowing in attention. "Okay, fine. Solen can brush you as long as they want. Just remember to tell me if something doesn't feel right."

Reaper twists around until he can look at me, paws still in the air. "What are you going to be doing?"

"Working on your prototype," I tell him, already opening screens.

Athena's found a scan from Papi's 45-year-old full physical. I start importing accurate dimensions and adjusting the fit of the clothing Reaper picked out while he rolls over so Solen can brush his back in long, smooth strokes. I glance at him every other adjustment, and it looks like he's going back to sleep. The interior structure of the prototype is going to have to be similar to his usual shape, so any space between body and clothes gets filled in. I'm affixing the head structure when Jack walks quietly up and, in a series of pantomimes with Solen, conveys that he would like to brush the dog and switches place with the omnic.

Two strokes in, Reaper growls, "I know you're there, Morrison. I can smell you."

Jack looks at me. I shrug. He keeps brushing.

Reaper sighs and sits up. "No, I can't enjoy that with your scent in my nostrils."

"Frisbee?" I hold up the red disk.

"And have to taste him?"

I pull out the cloth rope and toss it to Jack, who catches one end and lets the other dangle. Reaper is suddenly tense and alert.

"I've got your rope," Jack says unconvincingly.
Reaper doesn't care how flimsy it sounded. "Give that back!"

Uncle Jack stands up and backs away a few steps. "Come and get it."

Reaper lunges, gets the other end in his teeth, and tugs. Jack tugs back. Within seconds they're locked into a fierce tug-of-war, one that's pretty evenly matched all things considered. Reaper's growling, but his tail is also wagging and while Jack's taunting him, he's also smiling. I go back to finishing the prototype, making sure it has the tactile "warmth" feedback I added to Reaper's body and adding a command that will produce low levels of endorphins when it's triggered because I know he's going to get hugged, and I want that to feel good.

They're still going strong when I'm done, and shortly after that the security system informs me someone's at the gate. The visitor presses a call button that connects to what's normally a security office, but is currently unmanned because Ana’s people don’t have the codes. I tap myself into the line.

"Uh...hello? Ana said this was where she would be..." It's Tracer.

"Hey, amiga! You got the right place. Let me get the door for you."

"Sombra?" she asks as the gate opens. "Wow, thanks!"

"Go right to the front door," I tell her. "Ana's got some of her people here, so if anyone stops you, just tell them she's expecting you. Second floor east wing, and we'll meet you there."

"Who's 'we'? Never mind, I'll find out soon. See you there!"

I close my screens. "Papi! Uncle Jack! We got company, time to go in."

They both freeze, uncertain as to how they can end the fight over the rope without either of them ‘losing’ or surrendering. I scoop up the bag of dog supplies and walk over to them, grabbing the rope by the middle and giving them each a stern look. They both let go, and I stuff it into the bag. On Ana's secure channel, I can hear the announcement that Tracer is here and she's being escorted up.

"I'll, uh, go on ahead," Jack says before hurrying off in a I'm-not-hurrying way.

Reaper noses at my hand, and I oblige by petting him. "Who is it?" he growls, trying to sound angrier than he is.

"Tracer. If I put you back in your regular body, you gonna remember to use your words and not your guns?"

"Maybe."

"Papi!" I snap at him, pulling my hand away to place it on my hip.

He looks up, sees me glaring, and his tail tucks between his legs. "No shooting. I promised."

I kneel and hug him. "Good. You wanna meet her as a dog first, or as yourself?"

"Dog," he says quietly, which I find encouraging.
"Okay. Let's go say hello."

Chapter End Notes

The story Reaper wants people to think is behind the nickname: While in the military, sometime after his first promotion, he was stationed somewhere where the food was terrible and he ate canned dog food for a week as his half of a "don't think I won't" bet to successfully demand better food for his men.

The story Reaper wants to ignore and is really behind the nickname: As a skinny little pre-pubescent 13-year-old, he got into a fight with a guy much bigger and older and heavier than him who called him a puppy and laughed at him wanting to "run with the big dogs". (Probably referencing the gang.) Well, Gabriel being Gabriel, he was too stubborn and angry to stay down, and kept wailing on the dude until he got him on his back and then just beat the -snot- out of him shouting "Who's the big dog now?!?" repeatedly.

Protip: never, EVER think Gabriel won't do something if doing the thing will prove someone wrong.
Safehouse: Moving forward

Chapter Summary

This was not how Tracer expected a conversation with Reaper to go.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tracer's accepting a cup of tea from Ana when we walk in, but it gets left on the coffee table so she can kneel and start lavishing attention on Reaper.

"You have a dog! Oh, he's gorgeous! I didn't think Talon would be pet-friendly," she teases, both hands working the fur on Reaper's neck. "Who's a good puppy? Who's the best dog in the world?"

"Me," he growls smugly. "I'm the best dog in the world."

Tracer leaps back so violently that she actually rewinds herself and stands, shaking, by the couch. "Tell me I did not just hear that," she demands, eyes wide.

"I could, but I'd be lying," I tell her apologetically. "Give me a minute to put things away and we'll be right back, okay?"

"Sure," she says, but she sounds and looks very uncertain about this whole situation.

Reaper follows me into my room, where I drop the bag and pick up the can. "Gonna put you back now. Remember..."

"No shooting," he sighs.

"I'm bringing the can with me," I tell him before commanding the swarm to resume Reaper's standard shape.

He dissolves into a cloud of black smoke for several seconds, then solidifies and looks at his gauntlets, wisping from the backs of his shoulders.

I give him a one-armed hug. “Come out when you’re ready, Papi.”

He nods to acknowledge what I said, but makes no more reaction than that as I leave the room. Tracer is holding her teacup nervously when I get back to the living room, and I set the can on the floor by the chair I was sitting in briefly last night.

“That was Reaper?” she asks. “The dog?”

“Yeah, it was. Sorry I didn’t get a chance to warn you.”

Tracer sips her tea. Ana just looks tolerantly amused. “Why-” the younger woman starts to ask, but then a stream of black smoke flows into the room and straight into the can.
Poor Papi. I guess he’s not feeling up to facing his old friends. Either that, or he doesn’t trust himself. Probably both. I flip the can lid down and lock it before taking a seat on the floor.

“Get your face out here and say hi,” I tell Reaper, and Tracer starts as the screen with a simulation of his head opens up above the can.

“Hi,” he growls.

I gesture her over. “It’s okay, I promise he doesn’t bite while he’s in the can.”

Gingerly, with a glance at Ana for approval, she sets her teacup down and joins me on the floor.

“Hi,” she starts. “So…this is awkward.”

Reaper snorts. “You’re telling me?”

She looks at me. “Why is he in a can? Why was he a dog? Why…” Her voice breaks.

“You don’t know what happened to him?” I ask quietly. She shakes her head. Oh boy. Time to explain things carefully. “He was…very badly hurt after the explosion. Angela tried to stabilize him using a nanite swarm, but there was a fire…” Reaper’s simulated head is wisping heavily. “I’ve been working with the programming of his swarm, trying to restore as much functionality as I can. The dog is something I developed with Angela, a fully-functional body for him to use to get used to being around people again and all the little things that come with living – eating, being able to feel, getting tired, things like that. So far, it’s working very well.”

“But what about the can?”

“It’s a special containment unit I built to be able to hold and monitor him. If he gets hurt, it’s his hospital bed. He can’t eat. His swarm has to take in raw materials via osmosis, so it’s also a way to feed him. Especially if he’s badly hurt. See here?” I point out the LRF reservoir. “I feed him a special nutrient fluid formulated for his swarm, an ideal ratio of all the things it needs so he can restore his mass quicker. And here, this display shows the percentage of his baseline mass.”

Tracer rocks back with a horrified expression. “You mean all the times I was shooting him, I was actually hurting him?”

“Don’t tell me you’re regretting it,” Reaper growls.

“Disrupting his molecular cohesion does structural damage,” I jump in before the argument can even start. “But it doesn’t deplete his mass much. It’s kind of like bruising instead of cutting. Heals a lot faster.”

“I don’t regret it,” Tracer says slowly, “but that doesn’t mean I like it.”

“Why not? Don’t I deserve it?”

“What you deserve or don’t deserve isn’t up to me,” she says firmly. “I did what I thought was necessary to protect innocents. You did some horrible things, and maybe you do deserve to be punished, but I don’t think just hurting you is the way to do it.”

The wisping stops for a beat, then redoubles. “Then what is?” Reaper snarls.
Somberly, Tracer says, “Facing the consequences of your actions.”

The face screen closes.

“You made your point,” I tell Tracer before she can do more than look surprised. “He’s thinking about it. Give him space. Papi?”

“What?” he growls from inside the can.

“I finished the prototype model. Maybe in a little we could try it out, see how you like it.”

There’s a minute of silence before he says, “Fine.”

I give him a hit of endorphins, and we retreat to the couch where Tracer reclams her tea and takes a bracing sip.

“What’s the prototype model?” she asks me.

“Some day,” Ana says from her chair, “Gabriel may wish to fully reclaim his identity. Sombra and I helped him decide on a model that will allow him to get a feel for looking like himself.” She sips her tea. “I am quite looking forward to seeing what you have come up with, little shadow.”

“Little shadow?”

“A nickname,” Ana explains.

“Ohhhh, because ‘sombra’ means ‘shadow’. I get it.” Tracer turns to me. “So what’s your real name?”

“I don’t have one,” I tell her cheerfully.

She frowns. “But…you have to have one. What about your birth certificate?”

“I’m a hacker. I don’t exist, and no one can prove otherwise.” Maybe I’m a little smug. It’s better than the alternatives.

Tracer smiles gamely. “Oh, come on. Even if you deleted it, you had to have one. When’s your birthday?”

It takes a bit of effort to keep my tone light. “I don’t have a birthday; I’m dead.”

The smile falters. “You’re…dead?”

Ana looks way too alert for my comfort. I paste a teasing smile on my face. “It’s a joke, amiga. I was in Los Muertos from when I was little. We don’t celebrate birthdays because we all too poor, so we celebrate everyone at once during the Day of the Dead.”

Tracer’s expression clears. “Oh! That makes more sense. So when that time of year comes around…”

“Oh, I promise you, there will be a fancy cake with a lot of candles.”
From the can, there’s a sound like a choked-back exclamation.

“You know,” Tracer says thoughtfully, “I never did get Gabriel to tell me when his birthday was.”

I lean in conspiratorially. “I tell you a secret, amiga.”

She leans in. “You found it?”

“I hacked into his private record on the Overwatch servers…”

“And?”

“…and I saw what was listed for his birthday…”

“Oh, tell me, tell me!”

“It said no, no, nope.”

Tracer sits up while Ana laughs discreetly. “What?”

“That’s what I said!” I pull up a screen showing the relevant file.

“No, no, nope.” Tracer sighs. “Oh well.”

I nudge her. “Hey. We have a tradition – you get left for dead, you Los Muertos. Papi, and Tia Ana, and Uncle Jack, they all got called dead by the rest of the world.”

She grins. “And that means we can celebrate them during Day of the Dead! I love it!”

“Love what?” Jack asks as he wanders in.

“We gonna have the best Halloween party ever,” I tell him as he sits in the chair the can is next to. “Hey Papi, you wanna try the prototype now?”

I can hear in his sigh that he doesn’t, but he knows he’s going to have to eventually. “Fine.”

Jack jumps at hearing Reaper’s voice coming from so close to him, and when I go over and thumb the lid open, he does a good impression of trying to climb onto the back of the chair without actually standing up. Reaper flows out of the can and takes his usual form, arms crossed to hide his amused wisping.

“You look ridiculous, Morrison.”

Before Jack can formulate something dignified, I call up the prototype and apply it to Reaper’s swarm. He dissolves briefly into smoke and then solidifies again, jeans and hoodie and boots and a completely static face. It looks…wrong. And not just because there’s no animation – the eyes don’t move, he doesn’t blink, it’s like he’s wearing a Gabriel Reyes mask – but because he doesn’t look like Gabriel Reyes. Not to me. I’ve spent so much time around him (and around omnis, who are even less expressive) that half the time I don’t even look at people’s faces to read their moods. I know Reaper, I know the way he stands and the way he moves. He may have been Gabriel Reyes, but just stuffing him into a shape he used to wear doesn’t make him Gabriel Reyes. To me, he
looks like Reaper wearing a Gabriel Reyes costume, and it's weird.

Reaper looks at me, and I can tell from the way he leans back slightly that he knows it’s unnerving me. But before the silence gets awkward, Ana is there, hugging him. I back away, glancing at Jack and Tracer for their reactions. They both look torn, like they want to go hug their old friend but they don’t know if he’ll allow it. When Ana steps back, Jack steps forward and just looks at Reaper like he’s psyching himself up before going in for a brief, manly, back-slapping hug and retreating again. Tracer just circles him like she’s checking for flaws before giving him a tentative smile and standing by Ana.

Meanwhile, Reaper looks like he wants to tear his face off.

“Okay! I’m calling that test a success,” I say brightly as I step forward and press my hands on his chest, dismissing the prototype and activating the doberman.

When Reaper solidifies again half a minute later, the first thing he does is jump up to lick my face, tail wagging. I hug him and scratch behind his ears before he drops back down to circle the room until he locates the doggy bed and flops down in it. I sit next to him. There’s awkward silence and wistful looks for a minute or two.

"So," I announce almost challengingly, looking at Tracer and Uncle Jack, "who’s up for some Frisbee?"

Tracer excuses herself from Frisbee as afternoon fades into evening, pleading the need to go back to London, and Jack quickly bows out to keep from antagonizing Reaper. The giant crate of things I had shipped from the Morocco base has arrived and I need to sign off on it, so with Ana's blessing and Reaper's reassurance that he'll be fine in his regular body, I release him from the dog shape and go make sure our things arrived safely.

The crate is too big to transport without special equipment, and sorting the contents into smaller crates and boxes takes longer than I expected, but finally I leave with completed arrangements to have them delivered to the safehouse in the morning. The only things I take back with me are the second COWA and Papi's bear.

Ana's in the living room when I get back. I nod on my way to my room, where the second COWA will stay, and Papi's bear joins mine in the bedside table. When I turn to leave, however, she's standing in the doorway with a look of concern.

"Something wrong, Tia Ana?"

"I am uncertain," she says. "Gabriel seemed content to sit with me, but close to two hours ago he left the room, and I have been unable to find him. I thought I saw a darker shadow in the third office on the first floor of the other wing, but..." She shakes her head. "If it was him, he did not answer me."

Well, fuck. "I'll go look," I assure her.

The office is easy to find. As soon as I step inside, even without the light, I can see Reaper seething
"Papi?"

He coalesces - mostly - and stands there for a long moment before saying, "I won't bullshit you."

Won't bullshit me. The promise in the car on the way here. He's telling me he's *not* fine.

I close the door and sit with my back to it, the room still dark. After a minute, he sits beside me. When I put my hand on the floor, he covers it with his.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I ask quietly.

His fingers tighten around mine. "What am I doing here?" he demands in a harsh voice. "How long will they tolerate us?"

"Easy, Papi. They not gonna throw us out, I promise." Namely because I own the safehouse, but this isn't the time to get into that. "We safe here. What needs to change for you to feel comfortable?"

Reaper shudders. "Dog." he growls.

I command the swarm to change configuration, and when it's complete, he crawls half onto my lap. For a handful of minutes I just hug and pet him.

"I don't *belong* here," he says finally.

"You need a space that's yours," I translate.

He whines, deep in his throat.

"The stuff I had shipped will get here tomorrow. We'll claim the room next to mine for you, put all your things in it. I brought the second can with me, so there's one in the living room and one in my room. You got the doggy bed in the living room. If you want one in your room, or mine, I can have more shipped here. This a *safe* house; I want you to feel *safe*. Anything I can do to make you feel like you belong, you tell me. Okay?"

"Okay," he says quietly.

"I gonna go to bed. You want to stay a dog, or-"

"Yes."

I give Reaper a hug and scratch behind his ears. "Okay, Papi. Let's go to bed."

Reaper follows me through the house as I go back up to "our" suite on the second floor. I can tell by the way he leans against my leg as we approach that he's anxious about how Ana will react, but when she sees us, her expression is one of relief.

"You found him," she says, coming over to kneel and hug his neck. "I was worried," she murmurs into his fur.
He whines.

"We're going to bed," I tell her. "The boxes that will be delivered tomorrow can stay in the entry hall; I'll sort them out after breakfast."

Ana gives Reaper one last hug and stands up. "I will see to it. Sleep well, both of you."

"We'll try, Tia Ana. Good night."

"Good night, Sombra." She smiles softly at Papi. "Good night, Gabriel."

"Good night," he mutters, but his tail is wagging slightly.

I tuck him into bed with both bears. By the time I'm done changing, he's asleep and I take a few more pictures. I have no illusions that either of us will sleep through the night uninterrupted, but he's choosing to move forward and face the fallout of the last few years rather than avoiding it, and that's more than worth a little lost sleep in my mind.

Chapter End Notes

Tracer is a cinnamon roll. I think it's impossible for her to get genuinely angry. She gets bonus points for not only avoiding the argument Reaper was trying to start, but landing a solid hit. Being hated by people who used to be your friends is easy; facing them and owning up to the things you did and working to repair those friendships? That's hard.

The line about not having a birthday because she's dead is something Sombra's been saying since she first got adopted into Los Muertos. It's not a joke, it's a weapon to keep people from asking. Also, Reaper owes her big for keeping the secret of his birthday, but she's just told him the price: she's going to sneak a birthday cake into the Halloween celebration and only the two of them will know the cake with candles is secretly meant for him.

Reaper is really not comfortable wearing his old face. As far as he's concerned, the only good thing about the prototype is that Sombra's uncomfortable with it, which proves to him that she's NOT doing everything for him just because of who he was. That's half of why he's so happy when she takes it off...the other half being that she DID take it off. He really, really does not like wearing his old face.

Sombra not only packed all of Team Talon's personal things, but a bunch of equipment and supplies for producing LRF and various discarded things that were gathering dust in the warehouse.
Pilot

Chapter Summary

Anyone who wants to join the illegal organization Overwatch has to have an overpowering drive for justice, unquenchable bravery, a defiant spirit....or be an adrenaline junkie.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Three days after our escape from Talon, a red alert flag pops up while I’m checking other things. A communications array has tried to open a connection to the warehouse complex that had been our base in Morocco. When I track the originating signal, though, it's...in Bermuda. And it's Jerome's ship.

Hijack the signal, patch in text-to-voice with my vocal modulation script. JEROME, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

The response comes back routed straight to my ear. "Miss Sombra! I was trying to get in touch with you, actually."

BY CALLING HOME?

"You sent me on vacation with...more than enough money to stay as long as I wanted," he says. "I assumed there would be nobody home but that you would be very interested in anyone knocking on the door, so..."

Well, he's not wrong. BORED ALREADY?

He laughs. "Actually...yes. I know Overwatch is still under the table, but...uh...do you think they need a good, discreet pilot?"

IF YOU WANT TO CUT YOUR RETIREMENT SHORT, I type, HERE'S THE ADDRESS TO PARK AT AND THE ADDRESS TO KNOCK ON THE DOOR OF. The coordinates, as well as a pair of maps, are transmitted to the ship's navigation systems. I'LL LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE COMING.

"Thanks, Miss Sombra." He actually sounds relieved. "This might sound weird, but I kind of miss the excitement of flying you and the other two around. Uh...how are they doing? If you don't mind me asking."

WIDOW IS STILL GETTING DE-WIDOWMAKER-ED. REAPER IS... How do I explain the situation there?

"Cranky?"

SI, REAPER IS CRANKY. WE STILL WORKING ON THAT. WHEN YOU GET HERE, ASK
"Thank you again, Miss Sombra," he says. "I'll head out tomorrow."

The connection closes, and I wander off to find people to warn so no one shoots down the Talon ship that will be flying in tomorrow.

"Jerome," Uncle Jack says doubtfully from the room that sort of serves as his office. Across the desk, Jerome nods. "You want to be a pilot for Overwatch."

"That's right," Jerome answers calmly.

"You understand that Overwatch is still technically an illegal operation and that secrecy is a requirement."

The pilot shrugs. "I'm used to that. I was with Talon before Miss Sombra dismantled it overnight. Flew Reaper and Widowmaker to their missions for years."

Jack's eyebrows go up. "Talon. Why do you want to be a pilot for Overwatch again?"

"I'm bored," he answers with another shrug. "I'm a good pilot, I'm discreet, and I come with my own ship."

"How did you get your own ship?" Jack looks ready to leap across the desk and punch poor Jerome, who stays perfectly calm.

"I got an order to fly to Jamaica. Somewhere during the flight, Talon went down and when I landed, I realized no one had any idea where I was and that my expense account had somehow grown thick enough that I could live the rest of my life in a tropical paradise." He shrugs. "I got bored, so now I'm here."

Disgruntled, Uncle Jack leans back and crosses his arms. "You don't mind if I bring Sombra in to verify your claims," he says, and it's not a question.

"Of course not."

I close the screen spying on the "office" as Jack leaves the room, and look up innocently when he enters the living room a few seconds later.

"There's a Talon pilot who claims he knows you," Jack says without preamble. "I want you to come verify his claims. He wants to fly for Overwatch."

I close the rest of my screens and stand up. "I'd be happy to. Papi?"

From the can in the corner, a small screen with Reaper's head opens up. "What?"

"I gonna be down the hall with Uncle Jack for a little bit. You okay in there, or you want me open the lid?"
The simulation of his head looks from me to Jack and back again. "I'm fine," he growls.

"Okay," I tell him soothingly. "Just didn't want you to wake up and have me be gone."

There's a hesitation and a bit of wisping before he repeats, "I'm fine," in a gentler growl, and I know what he's really saying is, thank you.

Jack looks uncertain as to how he should react to this exchange, but I nod at him and he leads me to the office where Jerome lights up the instant I come through the door.

"Miss Sombra! You're actually here? I should have guessed!"

"Hey, Jerome!" I perch on the corner of the desk. "You look good. Got a bit of a tan. Have any trouble finding this place?"

He chuckles. "Nope. You look good, too. Scared the crap out of me last time I saw you, you know."

Jack frowns. "What did she do?"

"She'd shut Reaper down hard," Jerome says slowly. "And she looked...grim. Tired. I half expected him to eat you," he says to me. "What did he do when you let him out?"

I glance at Jack. He looks shocked. "Nothing. The fact that I did that really shook him. We just sat in silence for a while until he went to report. Now, after he reported...I could not tell you, but I'm betting a lot of shit got trashed."

Despite this assurance that Jerome is not a Talon spy, Uncle Jack doesn't look reassured. "You know who Reaper really is?" he asks in a tone that clearly expects the answer to be no.

Jerome looks at me, silently asking if it's okay to use the name. I nod. "Gabriel Reyes," he answers quietly. "Former commander of Blackwatch."

Jack's eyebrows crawl together as he realizes that our guest clearly asked my permission. "I want to have Reaper independently verify you," he says. "Sombra, with me, please."

He waves me out of the room and I grin at Jerome as I leave, my eyes rolling. He grins back. Jack closes the door behind us and stands awkwardly in the living room as I open the can.

"Jack got a favor to ask," I say as Reaper boils out and solidifies.

"The pilot claims he flew you to your missions," Jack says awkwardly. "I'd like you to confirm that."

Irritated wisps curl off Reaper's shoulders. "Fine."

They stalk out of the room, and I re-open the window spying on the office.

Jack walks in first and gestures to Jerome. "Do you recognize this man?"

Reaper clearly does not until Jerome stands, turns his chair around, and sits with his back to the
"Yes. That's the pilot."

"*The* pilot. Weren't there others?"

"No," Reaper says shortly.

"Not even a co-pilot?"

Jerome stands and turns back around. "Lost my co-pilot pretty early on. Talon never assigned me another one."

Jack frowns. "What happened?"

"I ate him," Reaper says casually.

That makes Jack blanch, but Jerome grins. "He gets cranky when he's been shot, as Miss Sombra puts it."

"And you vouch for him?" Jack prods.

Reaper snorts. "He survived *me.*"

"It wasn't so bad," Jerome offers. "I mean, yes, it was terrifying when you'd been shot a bunch," he tells Reaper, "but aside from that."

Jack still doesn't look convinced. "Is he discreet?"

Reaper gives him what I'm pretty sure would be an *are you shitting me?* look if he'd had a face.

"Did you ever hear me laugh, sir?" Jerome asks Reaper.

"...No."

"And you," he asks Jack, "have you ever heard Sombra yell at him? Like, *really* yell at him?"

Jack looks uncomfortable and keeps his gaze straight ahead. "...Yes."

Jerome grins. "I got to hear it on multiple occasions. And Reaper never heard me laugh. Thought I was going to break something that first time, though."

Papi starts wisping, and some of it is annoyance, but he crosses his arms to hide that some of it isn't.

That seems to convince Uncle Jack. "Okay," he says. "Welcome to Overwatch."

Chapter End Notes
Sombra made Jerome a millionaire. Just skimmed 5-10 mil off Talon's assets and shunted it to him. She also sent millions to her 'family' in Dorado and set aside a significant chunk of change for herself. Talon as an organization is dead fucking broke.

Anyone who survives five years of flying Reaper around has got to be either a broken wreck or an adrenaline junkie, living for the thrill of survival in the face of danger. There's few situations as terrifying as knowing that the only reason Reaper is letting you live is because he can't fly the ship as a black cloud of rage and ash.

Jack is so very baffled by a lot of things about Jerome, one of which being that Jerome seems to be on better terms with Reaper than he is.
Emotional evisceration

Chapter Summary

Sombra proves a point. This is going to -hurt-.

Potential warnings for mentions of unhappy things? Also apologies for the cliffhanger.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SO YOU AND REAPER ARE SETTLED IN THE ZURICH SAFEHOUSE? Winston types to me.

YEAH. ANA AND JACK ARE HERE, TOO. TRACER STOPPED BY BUT WENT BACK TO LONDON, AND WIDOW IS WITH ANGELA, HAVING WHAT WAS DONE TO HER UN-DONE.

GOOD. SHE DIDN'T DESERVE THAT. A pause; this does not bode well. I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'RE BOTHERING WITH REAPER. AMELIE WAS A VICTIM, BUT HE CHOSE TO THROW AWAY EVERYTHING HE HAD. HIS FRIENDS, HIS REPUTATION…HIS VERY IDENTITY.

Fury floods my mind, so strong that for a long moment all I can do is stare and across the room, Reaper looks up from the mug of coffee he’s cradling, wisping in alarm.

HE WAS A VICTIM, TOO, I type slowly, struggling to keep that the extent of my reaction.

THEN WHY WOULDN'T HE KEEP HIS NAME? SOME OF US, he types, WEREN'T GIVEN ONE BY THEIR PARENTS. SOME OF US HAD TO TAKE IT AS A REMINDER OF THE PARENTAL FIGURE WE LOST.

He's throwing my words back at me, trying to get under my skin. Unfortunately, they hit their mark and Reaper's wisping gets worse, mug forgotten on the table, ready to murder in my defense.

YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY SOMEONE WOULD THROW AWAY THEIR NAME, MAKE A NEW IDENTITY FOR THEMSELVES?

YOU ARE REFERRING TO YOURSELF, I PRESUME.

YOU PRESUME CORRECTLY. I'm going to regret this, but he's going to regret it more. IN ONE HOUR, I WILL BE THERE TO TELL YOU EXACTLY WHY I THREW AWAY MY NAME AND MADE A NEW IDENTITY FOR MYSELF.

I LOOK FORWARD TO IT, Winston replies, but he doesn't. Not really.

Close the screen, open one to give Jerome his flight orders. "Papi, we're going on a trip. Meet me at the ship in three."
There's a second of uncertain wisping, wondering if he should ask what’s wrong, where we’re going, who we’re going to kill, but he just nods and flows out of the room. In less than a minute I've stuffed the COWA and my bear into a bag, and then I follow him.

Jerome takes one look at my face and doesn't question why we're going to Watchpoint: Gibraltar. The flight is silent until we're almost there, with me glaring holes in the floor and Reaper clearly unnerved that I don't have any screens open but still afraid to ask.

I turn to Reaper as we descend to land. "Remember when I said that one day, I'd tell you the story of a dead girl?"

Wisps practically boil from his arms, chest, and legs. I'll take that as a yes.

"Today is that day."

Winston's waiting for us when we land.

"Sombra, I presume?" he asks as I march down the ramp.

Right. He's only briefly seen me in the flesh...as it were. "No, Winston," I say scathingly, "I'm the Tooth Fairy."

"Are you here to sell me Girl Scout cookies?" he shoots back. Then Reaper stalks into view behind me and Winston asks sharply, "What's he doing here?"

Undeterred, I wave him inside. "He deserves to hear this, and I can only say it once."

Now they're both uneasy. Winston leads the way to a corner that's clearly been set up with human guests in mind: a couch and a handful of chairs joins the tire-like contraption he sits in. I set my bag down and pull out the COWA.

"Get in the can," I tell Reaper, who begins wisping more heavily, alarm as well as anger and concern.

"Why?"

"Because you not gonna last two sentences before you can't hold yourself together." After all, I've already spoiled the ending. He knows the girl dies. He just doesn't know who the girl is.

He glances at Winston, clearly reluctant to leave me in such dubious company, particularly since something Winston said made me angry enough to fly out here and fume in silence for the entire flight.

I sigh. "Fine, I leave it open, but I'm telling you..."

Winston clears his throat. "Why would he be unable to hold himself together?"

"Strong emotions reduce his capacity to maintain molecular cohesion," I say curtly, pulling out my
bear and setting the bag aside.

"And you anticipate that whatever it is you've come to say is going to have such a reaction on him?" Winston's torn between scientific curiosity and taking pleasure in Reaper's discomfort.

Instead of answering, I pull a cushion off the couch and drop it on the floor, next to the can, before sitting on it and hugging my bear. "What I am about to tell you, I have never told to anyone outside of Dorado and even the ones who know, only know parts." Because like hell do I talk about what happened to me during the Dorado New Year's Massacre. Winston takes the hint and flops into his tire, and Reaper just looms.

Deep breath. Access the first subdirectory, engage the emotional buffer and set it to max. Here we go.

"My name is Alessandra."

Winston's eyebrows raise, but I get the feeling he's more surprised that Reaper is now wisping like he's made of evil dry ice, smoke bleeding from every part of his body.

"I was five when my mother died protecting me."

He's trying to maintain his shape, wanting so badly to be strong and support his adopted daughter, but it only takes a few seconds before he falls apart and flows reluctantly into the can. I flip it shut and the face-screen comes up, showing the simulation of his head with moderate wisping. Winston looks intrigued at how accurately I called that, but also uncomfortable. Good.

"Her last words, she told me to get down. Her last act was throwing me to the floor before the bullet came through the window. I heard her fall, and I held very still, but she never made another sound. No one came into our house to check on her, to check on me, even to check for things to steal. I waited a very long time before I moved. At least six hours, all terrified of what would happen if someone came in, more terrified of what would happen to me if no one did." My voice trembles, even with the emotional buffer. I’m omitting a lot of detail, but if I let myself access the details, I’ll trauma-lock myself.

Winston is clearly horrified, but I'm not done. Not by a long shot.

Skim the surface, little shadow. Don't go deeper than the barest bones. "It was on the third day that someone found me."

The telling feels like it takes forever, accessing subdirectory after subdirectory of misery and suffering that are probably painfully familiar to Reaper, with his own unhappy upbringing. The digital nature of my memory means that nothing's faded, and in most cases, accessing them brings everything back just as fresh as when it happened because I was augmented very young, and I took the opportunity almost immediately to lock away the bad things so I could enjoy the things that weren't so bad. Winston listens in silence as I describe the cold, impersonal, barely-tolerable care at the state-run group home. Scanning my fingertips along with the other kids before every meal to prove to the government that the meager resources they had been given were going to the children, and also proving that we'd already gotten our allotted portion in case we tried to double-dip at another location. The overcrowded conditions, overworked employees, the long, grey days with nothing to look forward to but school and sleep and thin, tasteless meals.

The day I was transferred to a new "home" and discovered that I would be cared for by omnics, but
that was better because they didn't constantly say well-meaning but patronizing things that only reminded me of my mother's death. How I was luckier than most of my new "family" because my DNA, my fingerprints, were on record and the government owed me support, which it gave only grudgingly. Going every day to the meal dispensary with my little plastic bowl, scanning my fingerprints and receiving the tasteless substance that passed for food, sharing it with a few of the other kids because I had a legal identity and they didn't. The first augmentation, when I was still in first grade, and then all the things I did to help my new “family” survive after I discovered it was Los Muertos that pulled me out of the group home: begging and stealing, hacking and blackmailing and going to a movie, because the war left a lot of hungry mouths to feed, and the government only cared about a fraction of them. How slowly, I became more and more augmented, trading flesh for synthskin and circuits.

Reaper's face screen closes somewhere before I hit my teens. Winston occasionally looks like he wants to say something, but he's unsure of what it would be and is afraid to interrupt me in any case. Despite the messy collapse of Overwatch, he still has a naïve and idealized view of what it’s like to grow up a human on Earth, and I’m methodically putting a face and painful details to what had probably been an uncomfortable outlier on the edge of his awareness. I finish with the decision to sacrifice what remained of my organic body, including my legal identity and all the limited rights and circumstantial protections it afforded, so I could enter the shadows and do more for my "family". Erasing all record of myself from the digital landscape. Waking up in my omnium-created body. Sitting up, looking over, seeing my still and lifeless meatsack body lying there, staring at nothing. Taking the semi-automatic and firing a burst into what used to be my chest before the corpse is taken away to become a prop in a political statement. I pull up a screen with the front page - Unidentified Body Found On Police Doorstep - and wait until Athena verifies its accuracy.

I wonder if Reaper is remembering the day we met, and how I told him I was already dead.

"That day, Alessandra died and I became Sombra," I say in a small voice. I'm shaking, and have been for some time, but it won't really hit me until later when the buffer runs out. Hopefully, we'll be back at the safehouse by then.

Winston is still horrified. "That...that's...I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say. Is there anything I can do?"

A small whimpery noise escapes me, a warning of all the crying I'm going to be doing when I have to deal with the full emotional reaction of what I've invoked.

"Hug her," Reaper rasps from the can, the first words he's said since going in. I know he has to be cursing himself for not being able to hold his shape and hug his adopted daughter.

"I beg your pardon?" Winston asks, surprised almost beyond words. He may have forgotten Reaper was even there.

"Hug her, damn it! I can't."

The simian scientist looks uncertainly at me, at the can, then at me again before he levers himself out of the tire and awkwardly envelops me in a furry hug. "Are you going to be okay?" he asks in a quiet rumble.

"No," I answer honestly. "Not for a while."
"If you need to stay until you're safe to fly...."

"Brought a pilot. Gonna go back to the safehouse, turn Papi into a dog, and cry on him for a few hours."

"Good thinking. Uh. I'll...let you get to that, then." Winston releases me. "Can I at least carry...your can...for you?"

"Thank you," I whisper.

Winston helps me up and grabs my bag. Papi doesn't object as Winston picks up the COWA, and moments later we're on our way to Zurich without me having to let go of the bear I'm clinging to like it can keep everything at bay.

The trip back is a blank.

Chapter End Notes

I know there's a (false) theory that Alejandra in the 'Hero' short is bitty!Sombra. I'm sort of riffing off that with my headcanon name for her.

"That wasn't me. That man is -dead-."
"And that why you still answer when I say his name? Some day, I gonna tell you a story about a dead girl named Alessandra, and it gonna make you reconsider how dead -that man- really is."
Sombra's argument here is that Reaper's not going to be able to treat the 'dead girl' as a separate person from Sombra, and thus, treating Gabriel Reyes as 'dead' and separate from Reaper is equally futile. It's a very compelling argument, but she has a few more points that she intends to drive home.

Sombra still hasn't really talked about what happened to her during the Dorado New Year's Massacre; one of the details she omitted was that THAT'S when she was orphaned, and that's why it took three days before someone came and found her.

It was actually someone from Los Muertos who found her, and they turned her over to the government when her fingerprints came up with a legal identity. But she really was NOT thriving in the group home because those kids barely got physical health care, forget mental health care, and there was a very real possibility that she would spiral down badly enough that she wouldn't see her next birthday. That's why Los Muertos pulled her out and transferred her to one of their own group homes - there are some with legal identities who went into the government specifically to be able to set those up, and that's one of the things their hackers help with. And this is why Sombra was augmented at the age of 6, because it comes with digital memory storage (for easier transference of stolen data) and she would be able to stuff her trauma in a digital box and move on enough to have something resembling a childhood.

Bitty!Sombra had a really good racket going, coordinating with some of the gang's pickpockets. She'd attach herself to a rich tourist's leg and start crying because she'd "lost her mommy" and while the marks were fussing over here, the pickpockets hit them. Normally, crying on command is a skill. Sombra just had to let herself
remember. Wasn't fun for her, but it brought in enough money for clothes as well as food.

Sombra saying "I'm already dead" has multiple meanings: that she's a member of Los Muertos, that she has no legal identity and thus isn't legally alive, that she's not organic and thus arguably not "alive", and that her organic body is literally dead. Reaper figured out the third one before the clownface incident.

Jerome was visibly worried at Sombra's emotional state, strapped the COWA in its usual spot, and then asked Reaper what happened. Reaper growled that she'd talked about her childhood and needed to get back asap. Seeing a man who'd been around Reaper for 5 years treat him like a person made Winston feel just a bit guilty. Jerome also exchanged contact information with Winston. He's about the only taxi or uber Winston can really use, and he -is- technically a pilot for Overwatch as a whole, not just the Zurich safehouse.
A hangover would have been more fun. And less distressing.

No one is around to see me pass through the safehouse when I get back, thankfully. No delays before I reach my room. I put the Do Not Disturb (this means you, McCree) sign on my door before closing it and return my bear to his perch on the bedside table. Then I open the COWA and pour Papi out into a mist-puddle on the bed. The swarm accepts my command, solidifying him into a doberman and locking him there until I release him. Then the shakes start hitting really badly, and I crawl onto the bed and hug his neck and am glad I don't produce tears because it means his fur won't get all wet and snotty. It's a good thing the doberman configuration doesn't allow for partial dissolution, because if Papi almost lost it at hearing my name, he'd be a flat pile of dust at having me cry hysterically, which I'm starting to do.

Reaper tries to comfort me, but even if he weren't a dog, there's not much anyone could do in the face of half a lifetime of repressed trauma all hitting at once. The only small mercy is that there's no room for thought, so time passes in an endless moment until I wake up lying properly in bed, under a blanket, with Papi-dog snuggled up to me. At some point I must have passed out, my mind unable to deal with that emotional reaction without a break. There's a moment of wondering what woke me, and then someone knocks on my door, probably again.

"Sombra?" Uncle Jack asks. "Are you okay in there?"

"No," I answer, but it comes out half a wail because now I'm crying again.

I can't quite make out what Jack says - probably 'Can I come in?' or 'Do you want company?' - because Papi's growling like he'd rip the throat out of anyone who got near me right now. Jack says something else but all I hear is the tone, wary and concerned.

"Fuck off, Morrison," Papi growls. "Leave her alone."

There's a pause, and I try to hold my breath or at least hold the sobs in so I can hear what Jack says.

"Alright. Take care of her, Gabriel."

Papi doesn't say anything to that, but he whines, deep in his throat. I scratch him behind the ears with one hand, and he noses at me as I cry myself out again.

When I'm done, I feel vaguely cheated in that I don't physically feel like shit. I'm just...exhausted and emotionally wrung out with no more discomfort than that because my body is more durable than the organic mind driving it. My breath sucks shakily in and is released in a deep sigh, and I hug Papi's dog neck in a gesture of thanks for putting up with me.
"This is why I said I can only do it once," I mutter, with a fraction of the attitude I want to put into the words. I just don't have the energy for more than that.

Papi *hmphs.* "When did you learn who I was?" he asks quietly.

"After I gave you the slippers." It's easier to keep myself together when I'm not thinking about....me. "I didn't think that was enough of an apology. I wanted to really make it up to you, maybe see if I could help make your condition better." Enough lying down; I detangle myself from doberman and blanket and sit up.

Papi sits as well. "And then you learned what I'd become." There's unspoken assumption there, that he'd disappointed me.

"I don't judge people on pasts they've left behind," I tell him firmly. "I mean...look at me. It wouldn't be fair. You're Reaper, unless you decide to be Gabriel again, and you're my Papi. Whether or not you're Gabriel Reyes has no bearing on you being my Papi. Remember the first time I called you that?"

He makes a reluctant humming sound.

"I didn't know your past, then. All I knew was you spoke Spanish. But if you'd told me you'd been in Dorado and *maybe* fooled around with some woman, any woman, I would have been *over the moon.* Wouldn't even have asked what year. Just the possibility that I could have found my father would have been good enough."

I want to cry again. I'm glad I can't.

"Well," Reaper says slowly, giving it a beat like he's about to deliver a punchline, "I can't prove that I'm *not.*"

The laugh that bursts out of me is more than a little shaky. "That's good enough for me, Papi," I tell him, leaning over to hug his neck again.

His tail starts wagging and he licks my ear. "It's good enough for me, too, *hija.*"

I'm not sure anymore if I'm laughing or crying into his neck.

"I joined the military, and then the Soldier Enhancement Program, partially to get away from all the nagging to find myself a *nice girl* and settle down." There's an odd quality to his voice, like he's opening memories he hasn't touched in a very long time and is surprised to discover they don't hurt as badly as he thought they would.

Reaper is talking about his past. *To me.* I sit up and scratch behind his ears. "In other words, someone to yell at you when your mother isn't around to do it. Like *that* was going to happen, right?"

He snorts. "Exactly."

"Hey, Papi, if you ever go back to being Gabriel, you should bring me to meet your mother."

Most people would have a hard time reading a dog's body language. Most people who know Reaper might find it difficult to read his mood without telltale wisps. I can almost see him thinking
that that would be a bad idea, old people plus anti-omnic sentiment plus the strong religious bent and my appearance. Then it sinks in that I would already know that, and that my suggestion is an offer to help get revenge by scandalizing the crap out of her. He chuckles. "This, hija, is why I like you best."

"I knew I was your favorite," I joke back.

His tail wags harder and he flops down so it can wag off the side of the bed. I flop over onto him, using his side as a pillow.

"So after we get you disowned, we should go out to dinner," I tell him cheerfully. "You know, to celebrate."

The wagging slows and stops. "Sombra..."

"If you go back to being Gabriel, you'll be able to eat," I remind him.

He cranes his head around to watch me with one brown eye. "But you won't."

It's like reality cracks in six directions. He knows I could eat, but I wouldn't taste it. There's probably a restaurant he has in mind. Reaper wants to share a part of his past with me, but he wants me to be able to share the experience as well. Wants it badly enough that he might forgo visiting whatever place leaped to his mind because I wouldn't be able to enjoy it. I mean that much to him, that he wants me to be able to leave my inorganic state, too and enjoy every aspect of life again.

Is it even possible? That's a dumb question; I know very well that it is. I'd have to get some help, but I have my DNA sequence and I know I could program a nanite swarm to build me a body.

Do I want to? I mean, assuming my reasons for having done this to myself in the first place are moot by the time he hypothetically resumes being Gabriel.

Hope is for suckers. I learned that when I was five, when all my hopes for the new year died with the sound of breaking glass and my mother's body hitting the floor. Hope is worth less than the blood and sweat you put into getting what you want, because you can work yourself to death and still, through no fault of your own, not get what you spent your whole life working for. The world just doesn't work that way. Hope is Santa Claus, an illusion created by someone else's hard work. Don't get caught up in the pretty fantasy you're hoping for, tell it 'that's nice' and focus on what you can actually achieve or you'll never get anything.

It doesn't matter that I want to be the flesh-and-blood daughter of Gabriel Reyes so badly that it hurts like the memory of my mother. Right now, it's impossible. Make plans for what could be, but don't rely on them. If Reaper becomes stable enough to go back to being Gabriel, and if all my obligations as Sombra are met, then maybe I can discuss the idea of going organic.

"I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," I say slowly.

Papi whines and lays his head on my stomach. I pet him with one hand, thinking about the prototype model I'd roughed out. Surface change only, still a beanbag doll of hate on the inside, but on the outside he was a mannequin of Gabriel Reyes with a face as static as his mask. Ana and Jack and Tracer, the people who'd known him, had visibly relaxed during that test drive but for me...it was surreal, like Invasion of the Body Snatchers. He looked like Gabriel Reyes, but he still moved like Reaper. In a way, I'd been relieved. There had been a selfish little fear that if he could just get
his body back, he'd be absorbed back into Overwatch and leave me alone on the outside.

Now I know that he has to learn how to be the man he once was, on the inside, before he'd ever be comfortable in what used to be his own skin. But I also know that he cares, and now that selfish little fear has turned into the fear that he will refuse to go back to what he was if I don't or can't go with him.

And I don't know if I can.

The hand not petting him pulls up a screen and starts his favorite song playing softly. "Tell me about this?" I ask hesitantly. I don't want to intrude, but if I have to spend any more time inside my head right now I'm going to tear myself apart.

Reaper snorts in amusement. "I'm still not sure where you managed to find a copy," he starts. Maybe he knows how badly I need distraction right now, because he rambles a little bit about the band's failed attempt to make it big, and then goes back to tell me anecdotes about the members and how he met them, dumb shit they did in school, that sort of thing.

His voice is a soothing backdrop to the internal process of stuffing all my painful memories back where they came from, which unfortunately is a subconscious process and something I can only actively assist with by not accessing them. So I lay there with my eyes closed, one hand on Papi-dog's neck, listening to him tell stories and trying not to think.

Naturally, I'm barely awake when I hear my name, but nothing follows it so I drift deeper.

"Alé," Reaper says, light and teasing like my childhood, "are you falling asleep on me, hija?"

My lips curve into a little smile. "Si, Papi." And I snuggle down against his flank and let the world fade out.

Chapter End Notes

McCree hasn't even been to the safehouse yet, much less done anything to deserve a "this means you" callout. Sombra's just being a snotty sister. Eventually, she'll draw another one with "Uncle Jack, this means you".

Reaper is so very confused that telling Jack to fuck off got him a "you are doing a good thing" reaction, but Jack feels that being angrily protective of someone is something that should be encouraged. Something Gabriel Reyes would have done. And he's not wrong.

Despite the fact that he's known for at least a year, this is the first time Reaper has actually broached the subject of Sombra not being organic. Now he knows she hasn't been able to taste anything in a decade, and every time he's able to enjoy food after his five years of sensory deprivation, his heart breaks for just a second because she can't enjoy it, too.

One of the reasons Rogue One is Sombra's favorite Star Wars movie is because there is no happy ending for the main cast. They bleed and sweat and sacrifice for what they believe in, but they don't get to enjoy what they worked so hard to accomplish. The
other reasons are that K-2SO parses as omnic, so she's pleased with there being omnic representation before omnics were even a thing, and she identified strongly with Cassian. Latino who's "lost everything" and been in the rebellion since he was six is a much closer parallel to her life than Jyn's tragic past.

Reaper does a LOT of thinking about 'dead' identities while Sombra's passed out because he wants to help his little shadow, wants to help her heal and recover and be Alessandra again if that's what she chooses, be the woman she could have been. And it's not lost on him that she wants the same things for him, for him to heal and recover and be Gabriel Reyes again if that's what he chooses. The fact that she responded to an affectionate form of her 'dead' name AND called him Papi in response really shook him.
As olive branches go, peanut butter cookies aren't half bad.

There's a gentle knock on the door. After a few seconds it repeats, and Tia Ana calls my name softly. When I open my eyes, Reaper is watching me with a worried crease to his forehead.

"I'm awake," I call out tiredly. "But I'm not happy about it." I don't know how long I've been unconscious, but it has not been long enough. The inside of my head feels bruised and prickly.

"Winston is here to see you," she replies, tolerant and amused. "Both of you."

Oh. Shit. I didn't expect to see results this soon. "We'll be right out!"

"I'll let him know," she says, and I can hear her walk away.

I turn to Reaper. "How rumpled am I? Should I change?"

He snorts. "You should look like hell. You've been through hell."

That makes me smile. "Alright. How about you? Can you hold your form?"

"Let me up and we'll find out."

We both leave the bed and I press a pink-glowing hand against his shoulder, relinquishing command over the doberman configuration to him. Reaper stands up into himself with only a little concerned wisping. It doubles when I hug him, but judging by how tightly he returns it, we both needed that hug. And he maintains cohesion, so hey, there's that.

Reaper follows me to the sprawling living room/lounge area, where Ana and Jack are talking quietly with Winston. Jack sees us first, his eyebrows arching as he takes in my worse-for-the-wear look. He nudges Ana, who glances over at us and gives a small, secretive smile.

"We'll let you talk privately," she says to the suddenly-anxious gorilla, and makes shooing gestures at Jack.

Moments later, they're both gone and Reaper's wisping next to me, just as anxious as Winston.

"I brought you cookies," Winston says, like he's not sure how to start a conversation. He points to the plate on the low table by the couch. "Athena said something about dogs and peanut butter so I thought...cookies..." he sighs. "But now I realize that you're...you can't eat, either."

I sit on the couch and don't look at Reaper. "It's okay. I can smell them, and they smell delicious."
I'll just feed them to Papi when he's a dog."

"How are you doing?" he asks hesitantly.

Reaper sits next to me, one arm comfortingly around my shoulder.

I lean against him for a moment. "It was rough. I haven't finished putting myself back together yet."

Winston looks at Reaper, eyebrows raised for emphasis. "And how are you doing?"

Little shock wisps curl up from his biceps. "I'm...better."

"I did a lot of thinking," Winston says somberly. "Maybe...our past can remain in the past until our present is something more conducive to discussion that doesn't result in property damage. I think we can both agree that Sombra is an extraordinary person, and she's made certain things abundantly clear to me, so..." He takes a deep breath. "I am going to place my faith in her judgment, because she has already made good on at least one promise."

"Sombra?" It's barely threatening, like he's holding himself in check because Winston won't understand our rituals.

"She told me that Talon hurt you," Winston says before I can open my mouth, holding Reaper with a steady look. "And for that, she said, they would burn."

Reaper trembles, the smoke coming off him so thick that it's obvious he's struggling to maintain his form. Then he flows onto the floor and condenses into the doberman before coming back to lay his head on my knee.

"I told her that I would believe you could change when I saw it," he continues as I pet Papi-dog's head. "I am, after all, a scientist and observation is the first step in the scientific method. Well, I'm looking at evidence of change right now, so I'm going to accept her hypothesis and keep my opinions to myself until things are less...imperative."

Papi closes his eyes and whines deep in his throat. I scratch behind his ears. The silence stretches while he wrestles with himself.

"I could have taken the head shot," he grinds out finally. "I chose not to. We're on the same side now. Our differences can wait until there's no one else to shoot at."

Winston chuckles. "Fair enough. And I must say, you make a very handsome canine. If I may ask, what breed...?"

"Doberman," I answer. "They're very stubborn and loyal."

"Fitting," Winston says with a grin. "But the ears - ah, I see. That's why I didn't recognize the breed." Because the traditional image is still the one with cropped ears and docked tail, even though that hasn't been legal for decades. "Uh...may I...?"

"You want to pet him?"

"If he doesn't mind."
"Whatever," Reaper sighs, but his tail is wagging slightly.

He holds still as Winston gingerly pets him and I demonstrate scratching behind the ears. Well, still except for his wagging tail. And when we present him with peanut butter cookies, he snaps them up eagerly. He grumbles a little when I make him do tricks for them, but I know he doesn't mind because he licks at my face when I hug his neck. Winston just watches our interactions with a little awe and some bewilderment.

"If you don't mind me asking," he says as Reaper's chewing on a cookie, "how much has the shape you're in impacted your reactions and inclinations?"

Reaper pauses, then swallows. "You're asking if being a dog has made me friendlier."

"Uh..."

"It's a trick question," I interject. "This shape has stronger molecular cohesion and also a bunch of normal sensations his usual one doesn't. Temperature, pleasure, pain, smell, taste. It's harder to be grouchy when being petted feels good."

Winston nods. "Ahh. That makes sense. That makes many things make sense. I daresay this has been a mutually beneficial visit. I'm just sorry it took you baring your soul to bring us to this point." Suddenly, he perks up. "Oh! I nearly forgot - Athena did some speculating as to the method you use to access and store memories, and she suggested that you overwhelm your retention buffer by accessing more pleasant subdirectories."

That should work, actually. Flood the buffer with other things and expedite the process rather than fight a war of attrition. "I will try that," I tell Winston. "Please thank her for me."

Winston looks pleased, and then excuses himself to find Jack and Ana so he can make his goodbyes.

Reaper watches him go, then stands up into his own shape. "Sombra?"

"I gonna tell you all the dumb things I did as a little girl," I tease.

Wisps from his chest and biceps. He crosses his arms. "Fine," he says sternly, but we both know he's pleased by the idea. Then he stiffens, and a few wisps trail down from his back. "Morrison."

Uncle Jack stands in the doorway, warily looking at us. And, apparently, unsure how to address Reaper because he hesitates before awkwardly saying, "At ease, Reyes."

Reaper snorts. "Not likely."

Jack ignores him and turns to me. "What did you tell Winston that worried him bad enough to come here to see how you were doing?" he asks. Then he gestures at the now-heavily-wisping angry owl beside me. "And what did you tell Winston that he asked how he was doing?"

The shreds of pleasure I'd had at the thought of sharing some good memories with Papi evaporate, leaving me feeling as worn out and exhausted as I actually am. Ana steps into the room, herding Jack in front of her, before I can figure out how to answer. Screw it, a picture is worth a thousand words, right? Isn't that what they say? I pull up a screen and show them the front page article with
my body sprawled on stone steps.

They both lean in to examine it, but Ana pulls away after a moment and looks at me, her eye wide in shock and alarm. I give her a tiny nod.

"That's Dorado," Jack says, examining the details of the paper. "Fifteenth anniversary of the New Year’s Massacre. Unidentified body? Was it someone you knew?"

Well, that's one way of putting it. "Everyone in this room," I start before Reaper can say anything, "is supposed to be dead. I just took it one step further."

Now Jack looks at me in alarm, but I'm not having any of it. I close the screen and stand, and Reaper wisps furiously at the other two, guarding my back as I leave the room, daring them to do or say anything. They don't. The door to my bedroom shuts behind me and I lean against it, feeling too tired to even keep my eyes open, much less cross the room to sit on my bed. Reaper flows in under the door and pulls me into an angular hug. I cling to him, hoping he can maintain cohesion because hugging is good, but being hugged is better.

"Happy thoughts, hija," he growls angrily as my breathing gets uneven.

I laugh into his shoulder. "That's a happy thought."

Reaper's arms go slack for just a moment, then tighten even more for a few seconds before relaxing a little. "This is ridiculous," he growls. "Put me in the prototype."

"The pro-" I can't have heard that right. "Papi?"

"The prototype," he repeats, sounding irritated that he's even saying the words. "Lock me in it."

I pull away enough to look at him. He hated the prototype of his old body, both that it was the image of the man he used to be and that it was static. "Why?"

Really? his body language expresses to me. Really, hija? He gestures at his chest. "This can't be comfortable."

But he wouldn't be comfortable if he were wearing the mask of Gabriel Reyes, and neither would I. Absently, I wander towards my bed while pulling up screens. If I alter...make the hoodie black, pull the hood up, attach it to the head and add the mask...yes, and that will bypass the awkwardness of not being able to animate the face. Save it as a new configuration, disable partial dissolution, aaaand...

Reaper approaches at my imperious one-handed gesture, the other closing screens. He braces as my hands glow pink and I press them to his chest, transferring the new program. There's heavy wisping as his swarm re-structures, and then he stretches his arms out to examine what I've done.

"You left the mask," he says, like he's not sure how he feels about that.

How do I address the elephant in the room - that neither of us are comfortable with him wearing Gabriel's face? I give him my best oh, please look. "Is there a reason I shouldn't?"

He doesn't wisp, because he can't, but I can see his moment of vulnerable gratitude anyway.
When he pulls me into a tight hug again, it's strange because I'm not used to Reaper just wearing casual clothes, but it's wonderful because I'm being held by the father I never had but always wished was mine and I think I'm actually crying with happiness. Reaper doesn't say anything, which is fine because he's still hugging me and I don't know that there would be anything to say, really.

Once my breathing has calmed down again, he gives me a little squeeze and says, "Feeling better, hija?"

"Si, Papi," I answer, smiling, and he hugs me tighter.

"Then sit," he growls, "because you owe me stories."

Reaper growling at me is an anchor of normality, even if I'm still getting used to seeing him in comfortable clothes, and everything sort of breaks over me and knocks the world into place. He's my Papi, he's really my Papi, he heard all the dark things in my life and then started calling me daughter, he cares enough that he was willing to take a shape he hates just so he could hug me better. I'm pretty sure my smile is as wide as my face will allow, because he rocks back slightly in flustered surprise and I know that if he could wisp, he'd be wisping in pleasure. He watches as I get comfy on the bed, then hands me my bear and sits down beside me. I hug the bear, and he hugs me to his chest like he's not entirely sure this is how it should be done, but his time as a dog has gotten him hooked on physical contact.

Dog. Leaning.

"You called me Alé."

He freezes.

"No one's called me that in years," I say in a small voice. "It was nice."

He relaxes again with a quiet chuckle. "Good."

"I had a little revenge fantasy when I was growing up. Well, part revenge and part wish fulfillment. Something to comfort myself with when things were bad."

"Oh?"

I smile, knowing he can't see it. "I used to daydream that my father would show up to claim me and take me away with him, and all the other kids would be so jealous."

"But you never knew your father," he says slowly. "So who did you fill in?"

"The same man every kid around my age did. He was strong and brave and he didn't take shit from anyone." I give it a beat. "Overwatch Strike Force Commander Gabriel Reyes."

"Alé..."

"We called you Papi Gabriel," I continue, still smiling. "You were like the patron saint of not putting up with bullshit. Would Papi Gabriel put up with this? was a way of saying Are you shitting me? and we asked What would Papi Gabriel do? when we meant Am I going to have to kick your ass, or are you going to stop fucking with me?"
"And when you said *Papi*..." he sounds like he's not sure whether he should be laughing or furious.

"We meant *gang boss,*" I confirm. "What can I say? We were a gang."

"Did you know..."

"That you had been in a gang?" I ask when the question trails off. "Not officially. Not until a long time after I gave you the slippers. Remember that week I was quiet and clingy? Then. But none of us needed to know *officially* to recognize one of our own."

He chuckles ruefully.

Well, since he's okay with that, I'm going to potentially embarrass both of us. "When I was seven, I gave a nine-year-old boy a bloody nose because we were playing Overwatch and I wanted to be Gabriel for once and he said I couldn't, I had to be Ana because I was a girl."

"*Hija,*" he chides between chuckles, or tries to. He sounds more proud than scandalized.

"So I punched him in the nose and then declared myself Gabriel for the day when he ran inside crying, and appointed an all-girl Overwatch team. We declared the boys evil imposters and wouldn't let them near the snacks until we'd eaten ours and they were cold. I played Gabriel on Girl Overwatch for a few days and then we started trading off so everyone could get a chance to play the leader because *everyone* wanted to play as Gabriel."

"You are a wicked girl, Alé," he says firmly.

Laughing, I turn my head to snuggle just a little closer. "Don't lie, Papi, you know you're proud of me."

"Of course." His growl sounds almost like a purr. "You're *my* daughter. Now. What else have you got?"

Okay, time to show my age. I open a small screen and heavy, violent music pours out. Clashing, pounding, rough and angry like streets of Dorado in the aftermath of the New Year's Massacre, the sounds of my childhood.

*You make me feel invincible*

*Earthquake, powerful*

*Just like a tidal wave*

*You make me brave*

*You're my titanium*

*Fight song, raising up*

*Like a roar of victory in a stadium*

*Who can touch me 'cause I'm (I'm made of fire)*

*Who can stop me tonight (I'm hard wired)*

*You make me feel invincible*

"Interesting choice," Reaper says when I stop the song.

"In Los Muertos, we all had to do our part to help each other because we were the ones left behind, the ones left for dead, and we had no one else to look out for us. Just ourselves. I wasn't the only
one who adapted to the augmentation and could hack, but I had a flair no one else did." A moment to hug the bear. "They said it was like I was born to it. So I went on all kinds of raids and missions because I was the best hacker, even if I was still in first grade."

Reaper holds me tighter.

"I would listen to that song, and think of you, of Gabriel Reyes fighting the God AIs, and think that if you could do all that, I could do this. I could be like you."

"You're supposed to be thinking of happy things," he snarls, but he's clinging to me like I might be swept away at any moment.

"I know," I say quietly, "but I wanted you to know how much you've done for me, even if you choose to never go back to being Gabriel Reyes."

"Damn it, hija..." Nothing else makes it out. He probably wouldn't be solid right now if I hadn't locked the swarm.

"Hush, Papi," I tell him with mock sternness, not moving from my comfortable position snuggled against him. "For half my life, I've wanted to tell Gabriel Reyes how much this one little orphan looked up to him. I know about Blackwatch. I know you got your hands dirty to protect others. I know all the things you did for Talon. None of it made me think any less of you. You were left for dead; that makes you Los Muertos, and it doesn't matter who you were. You're Reaper, and you're my Papi, and that's all that matters to Sombra. But to Alessandra..." My voice trembles. "Being able to finally say these things...it's fixing something that has been broken for a long time."

There's silence for a long minute before Reaper finally says, "I can't argue with that," in a vaguely-helpless voice.

I start laughing.

In a threatening tone, he says, "Now, no more about me. Happy things."

I can't resist. "Or what?" I ask insolently.

He chokes back a laugh of his own. "SOMBRA!"

"Okay, okay." Ritual complete, I reposition myself and lean against his shoulder.

Happy things. I'm going to share happy memories with my Papi. I pick a subdirectory and start talking, but the happiest memories are being made right now.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty much as soon as the ship took off and Winston got back inside, Athena told him about the God AI abusing Reaper and showed him the video. They also had a long talk about Sombra having an omnic body and the psychological aspects to giving up or losing the body you'd been born with. Being a super-intelligent gorilla from the moon isn't easy, but Winston still wouldn't want to give up his organic body for an omnic
one even if it was as specialized as Sombra's and could pass for human.

I know, you probably all wanted to see Reaper-dog try to eat peanut butter. Sorry. XD

Reaper knows Sombra stole him from Talon because she didn't want them to keep hurting him. He expected her to do some damage on her way out because that's just good tactics. He did NOT expect that she would do her best to burn the organization to the ground BECAUSE they were hurting him. He's not used to people actively caring about him yet.

The song is 'Feel Invincible' by Skillet and represents the sort of music that would have been popular after the Dorado New Year's Massacre. In 2076, though, it's sort of the equivalent of whiny protest songs from the 1960s and moderately embarrassing to admit you like, hence Reaper's comment of "interesting choice".

Sombra and Reaper are waaaaay too much "like father, like daughter" for them having never met for the vast majority of her life. She's a little shit who doesn't take crap from anyone, even him, and he's so very proud of her for that. Of course, that just makes it harder to ignore the little voice that wants to be Gabriel again (despite how much he thinks he doesn't deserve it) because everything good in his life right now, he owes to this girl who actively used him as a role model. If he did nothing else as Gabriel Reyes, he at least inspired a child to become someone who would look at the mess he'd become and say, "I want to help you. Not because of who you were, but because you need help." and that's causing his heart to grow three sizes. (It's still freaking tiny, but now you can see it with the naked eye if you squint.)
McCree visits

Chapter Summary

This is kind of going to be a trainwreck, but don't worry. Nobody dies.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Ana! looking lovely as ever," McCree says, sweeping her a hatless bow. "I didn't know you had a dog."

Tia Ana looks down at the doberman dozing with his head on her knee, where he'd been getting lazy scritches. "He arrived with Sombra," she says evasively. "Perhaps you would like to pet him?"

The dog in question opens one eye and starts growling.

"Uh...I don't think that's such a good idea," McCree says, backing away.

The doberman gets to his feet, ready to follow, still growling.

I close my screens. "Papi!"

He pauses briefly, glancing my way, but then goes back to growling at McCree.

"In the can," I order as Ana opens her mouth to chide him. "Now!"

Again he looks at me, clearly weighing how serious I am against how badly he wants to terrorize his former friend. Turns his head back to the cowboy-

"If I have to threaten you," I tell him sternly, "you gonna regret it. Get in the can, now."

Reaper hesitates another few seconds before dissolving into smoke and flowing into the can. I reach over and close the lid, giving him a dose of endorphins as I do. When I look up, Ana looks grimly pleased and McCree looks like he just narrowly escaped death. I flash him an apologetic smile.

"Sorry about that, amigo. We still working on housebreaking him." I shoot the can a look. "Papi, get your face out here and use your words."

The screen that serves as eyes and face opens to show a representation of Reaper's heavily-wisping head. "You shot me."

McCree looks uncertainly at me. I gesture him forward.

"It's okay, he stuck in there until I let him out. Come on, sit and talk. I'll be right here," I add soothingly, although which one I'm trying to soothe is up for grabs.
Gingerly, the trash cowboy sits on the floor in front of the can, and I join him.

"Not going to deny it?" Reaper snarls.

McCree shrugs. "Can't deny a fact. I did shoot you."

Time to cut the usual song and dance short before it starts. "We been over this, Papi. You know he was not trying to kill you. Why you so angry?"

He seethes at that for a minute before spitting out, "You shot me, and you didn't even hesitate."

Okay, now we're getting somewhere. "He's upset that you displayed no indecision, and is assuming that means you had no conflicting emotions about shooting him, or felt no remorse for it," I translate. Reaper wisps heavily at having his thoughts unpacked like that.

"You charged at me in Houston and would have killed me if I hadn't beat it," McCree protests. "What'm I supposed to think about that? Your d- your Sombra here told me that it was okay to shoot you because you don't die, and I do still enjoy livin', so when I was afraid that you wouldn't hesitate to kill me, I shot you!"

More wisping. "You tried to take her to a movie." The emphasis makes it clear he's talking about the polite fiction between whore and customer.

"I did," he admits. "Because I thought she was the kind of girl that fellas like me take to movies. And I ain't judgin', but if that came as a surprise to you, then I hate t'be the one to break it to you, but your girl here's done that routine before and it ain't fair to blame me for being set up like that."

Reaper just growls.

"With everything that happened," McCree says, "if you'd been me and seen what you turned into..." The sentence trails off and when he speaks again, it's in a quieter voice the bleeds hurt confusion. "I thought you wanted me dead. Sombra here told me you don't, and she probably saved my life when she shut you down, but t'be honest, when you started growling at me, I was sure you were gonna rip my throat out right there in front of Ana. All we been through, and I got no confidence you won't kill me if she's not there to stop you. How'm I supposed to feel about that?"

The silence stretches, with Reaper wisping more and more heavily and McCree looking more and more dejected. Knowing how much it was tearing Reaper apart when I shut him down, how tangled his emotions are after betrayal and years of poisoned words, this has got to be a horrible kick in the gut and I can't hide that I'm wincing.

Finally, Reaper growls, "Trust Sombra," and the face screen closes.

"What's that supposed to mean?" McCree protests. "Hey - you - I think you owe me more of an explanation than that!"

His outrage quiets when I put my hand on his arm - not the mechanical one - and shake my head. Another hit of endorphins for Reaper, and I gesture my trash cowboy brother to the far side of the room.

"He don't want you dead," I start quietly once we're far enough away from the can. "Talon twisted him all up inside, but he don't want you dead and he gonna be kicking himself for a while that he
fucked things up so badly with you. We did a lot of talking," I add dryly. "He still hurt over the things that happened, and he gonna have a hard time letting the walls down to actually talk about how he feels, so don't hold your breath waiting, but when he said to trust me? What he means is he wants to build that burned-down bridge again but he don't trust himself to not mess it up so if you want to build it again, too..."

McCree groans and rubs his face with his non-metal hand. "I do. Lord help me, but I do."

"...then trust me to keep him from setting it on fire until he's in a better place and he can actually open up. I tell you what I told Winston and Jack: I'm fighting to get him to a place where he can be Gabriel again, but he thinks no one wants him to be Gabriel again. Ana treating him like he never stopped being Gabriel. I'm treating him like he still worthy of all the things Gabriel had, even if he still Reaper. Up to you how you want to do things."

He's silent for a moment, eyes on Reaper's can. "Why does he let you call him Papi?"

I bite back a laugh. "To be honest? Because after Houston, he knows I can claim I mean gang boss if anyone asks. He won't let himself be a part of anything that might make him soft, like admitting he cares about the annoying Latina who calls herself his daughter, but as long as there's a way for him to pretend he's not..." I make a 'what can you do?' gesture. "I know he cares. He knows I care. We cover it up with pretending to be annoying and pretending to be annoyed, but he knows I won't hurt him and he took bullets for me."

"He never took bullets for me," McCree grumbles under his breath.

"He did, actually." That has his attention. "In Serbia. There was a sniper aiming at you. Reaper blocked the shot and took three rounds before Widow took the sniper out." I open a screen to show a heavily-wisping, snarling Reaper rock back from the impact as another slug catches him in the shoulder, McCree barely visible in the background crouched behind some crates, having a shoot-out with the sniper's friends. When the third shot catches Reaper in the chest, he holds himself together for a few seconds and then dissolves into smoke and flows away, and I close the screen. "He ate three guards to recover, although I think that was more frustration that he couldn't eat the sniper. Told himself, told me it was because he wanted to kill you himself, but he was lying and we both knew it."

McCree stares at me for a long minute. "He ate three guys because their buddy took a shot at me? Huh. I don't know whether to feel flattered, or just plain creeped out."

I shrug. "It's okay to feel both. Until I started poking things, he thought he had to eat people to survive and after the fight with Winston, there were days when he'd finish a mission limping and bleeding smoke with some bullshit about how he couldn't catch anyone, but I think those days, he was feeling like a person enough that the thought of eating people to heal didn't sound good."

"Well, there goes my appetite." He tries to play it like a joke, but his eyes are on the can again. "I think I'm just gonna mosey on over to the local tavern and have a drink or three to settle my stomach. Uh...don't wait up on my account," he says in Ana's direction.

Then he tips his hat and half-bows to both of us, gives the can another long look, and slips out of the room.
Reaper is silent the rest of the evening. The only word he speaks is "no" when I tell him I'm going to bed and ask if he's coming with me. His mass is too simple, too damaged in his usual form to allow true sleep, but as a dog, he can not only sleep but dream as well, and with the things that happened in the last decade...

Well, he has a significant backlog of nightmare fuel for his subconscious to process, and in the week or so since we introduced the form, I haven't had a single night yet where he didn't come to me for hugs and comfort.

"Okay," I tell him, opening the lid. "Just remember, you need to come to me, just do it. You don't need permission. I not gonna tell you no."

I'm not sure what time it is when I register unspecified weight on my legs and feet and wake up at least halfway. There's no shape to the weight, which lets me know that there's a cloud of Reaper on the foot of my bed.

"I told you, you don't need permission..."

I don't bother finishing the sentence, I just throw the blanket back and half-watch as the puddle of black mist flows onto the floor and then solidifies into the doberman that climbs into bed with me and huddles, shaking, under the blanket as I toss it back over him.

After a drowsy handful of minutes hugging him and scratching behind his ears, I murmur, "Need to talk?"

The answer I get is just a low whine, deep in his throat, and a doggie nose burrowing half under my head.

"Okay. Wake me if you need to talk," I tell him, and drift back to sleep with my arms full of trembling Papi-dog.

"I fucked up," growls a familiar voice right next to my ear. "He probably hates me."

"He doesn't hate you," I reply, moving my hand from his side to his ears without opening my eyes. "He wants to rebuild. Not gonna say you didn't fuck up, but you didn't fuck up completely."

"He thinks I would have killed him, and he's probably right."

The way he goes rigid in my arms makes me think he's biting back the rest of that spiraling train of thought. "You did a lot of bad things, and a lot of bad things were done to you. Gonna take time to sort it all out and figure out how you actually feel. You gonna need to talk things over with him, apologize for some things and let him apologize if he needs to, and most of all remember that he wants to rebuild, and you want to rebuild, so you both on the same side even if things go slow."
There's several minutes of quiet petting after that, enough time for me to wake up and orient myself in time. Eight-thirty. "Why didn't you just crawl under the blanket?" I ask quietly, disrupting whatever spiral he's worked himself into. "Why did you wait for me to wake up?"

"I couldn't," he growls quietly.

"Oh, Papi, no...nightmares too bad to even hold dog shape?"

A deep whine is all the answer I get, and I hug him tighter.

"How about we spend the day in the park today? Chase some sticks if you're feeling up to it, nap in the sun or under a tree if you're not?"

"That...sounds good," he says reluctantly, like it's an effort to admit he might enjoy something.

"Maybe get you a hot dog or some ice cream while we're out, hmm?"

His tail starts wagging slightly. I've got him there.

"I won't say no," he concedes dryly.

I pat his shoulder and sit up. "Okay. I go get you some breakfast and your collar and leash, and I be right back."

Reaper nods and sticks his head under the pillow. I cover him with the blanket again before heading out to the kitchen for a bottle of Liquid Reaper Food. The latest formula, designed specifically to be ingested by his dog shape, incorporates some complex proteins and enzymes that do better stored at lower that room temperature, so there's about a dozen half-liter bottles taking up a good chunk of the top shelf in the fridge. And, as I enter the kitchen, a very hung-over Jesse McCree closes the fridge and stands up with one in his hand.

"Don't drink that," I blurt as he starts to twist the cap off.

He hesitates. "Why not?"

"It's Reaper's."

"Ah, he's got like a dozen of them. He won't miss this one." McCree finishes twisting the cap off.

"You gonna regret it if you do."

My warning tone makes him pause. "What, he'll be angry over one little drink?"

"It's specially formulated to assist his nanite swarm in rebuilding mass in the case of injury or extended casual degradation. The liquid contains complex proteins and enzymes-" fuck, he's lifting it to his mouth. Quickly, before he can drink any, I add, "-and dormant nanites pre-programmed for his structure!"

Jesse lowers the bottle and gives me a confused look. "Okay, missy, too many big words for this cowboy this early in the morning. What are you saying?"
Simplify it? I can do that. "Well...I not saying you will turn into Reaper..." I try to hide the grin, but fail. I may not be trying very hard. "...but you might turn into Reaper."

Frantically, McCree twists the cap back on and thrusts the bottle at me before hurrying from the kitchen with a distinctly pale cast to his face. I grab a soup plate from the cabinet and go back to my room where I set the plate on the floor and pour about half the bottle of LRF into it. Reaper's still under the blanket. Return the rest of the bottle to the fridge and hit the coat closet and I think we'll go with the red collar that says BIG DOG today, and not the one that's black with spikes and says REAPER.

Papi's up and lapping at his breakfast when I get back to my room, his back turned to the closet, and I quickly change out of pajamas and into jeans and a long-sleeve shirt with a wide neck, red to match the collar I fasten around his neck as he's licking up the last bits of his breakfast. Clip the leash on, pick up the plate, and Reaper follows me calmly out of the room. I put the plate in the dishwasher and fetch my shoes, and then we're just a girl and her dog, walking down the street in the early-morning sun.

After a morning spent chasing sticks and vigorously chewing on them, Reaper's feeling much better about things and when I suggest breaking for lunch, he's all for the idea. There's a well-placed hot dog cart at the edge of the park, by the cluster of tables, and an ice cream truck that parks at the other end of the cluster. They both have lines, and most of the tables have people sitting at them, eating.

"I want a chili dog," Reaper says as the unofficial lunch pavilion comes into view.

I scratch behind his ears. "You got it. You see any free tables?"

He scans the area. "One - never mind," he growls.

McCree's hat is easy to spot as he sits at what had been the last unoccupied table. I start walking in his direction, Reaper following reluctantly when I tug at his leash. "Morning, cowboy," I call out as we get close, so we're not just ambushing him.

His loaded hot dog is halfway to his mouth, but he sets it back down. "I think it's afternoon now," he says cautiously, eyeing the hostile dog at my side. "What brings you two here?"

"Same as you," I tell him. "Watch Papi for me while I get his lunch?"

"He gonna behave himself?"

I put a hand on Reaper's shoulder to get his attention. "I make you a deal. You sit here with McCree, no biting, no growling, no picking a fight, and you get two chili dogs."

Reaper's tail starts wagging. "Deal," he says grudgingly.

"That's good enough for me," says the cowboy.

"Okay. Remember, be good. No killing anyone." I loop his leash around back of the chair next to
McCree and go take my place in line at the hot dog cart.

As I'm waiting, an American tourist sitting at a nearby table eyes me appreciatively. "Well, hello," he says in my direction. He looks mid-20s, maybe early 30s, exactly the sort I used to fleece in Dorado: white boy rich enough to be vain but dumb enough to flash his cash.

I ignore him.

He stands up and takes a step or two closer to me. "I love your hair. So exotic. What's your name?"

"A secret," I tell him without actually looking in his direction.

"Aw, come on, cutie. Don't be like that. I'm Derek."

The lady in front of me collects her hot dogs and moves; the cart vendor looks at me. "What'll it be?"

"Two chili dogs, please."

Derek leans closer, like he's smelling the perfume I'm not wearing. "I like a lady with an appetite."

I don't dignify that with a response, and moments later my lunch transaction is complete.

"You know," Derek says as he follows me away from the cart, "I could take you somewhere fancy for dinner. Lobster, champagne, dancing, the whole works. How does that sound?"

"Not interested," I say curtly.

Reaper is sitting on the chair, looking dangerously alert. McCree's just sprawled insolently in his.

"Maybe someplace more intimate," he continues. "Like your place."

Before I can say anything, McCree sits up. "Excuse me, sir, but I believe the lady told you she wasn't interested," he says in a vaguely-warning tone of voice. "Now, before her dog rips your throat out, I want you to consider something reeeeal carefully."

"What's that?" Derek asks in wary confusion.

McCree stands up and leans in like he's going to tell the other man a secret. "You got a real purty mouth, but I think it'd look purtier wrapped around my lil' deputy, here." A gesture at his crotch makes it unnecessarily clear what he means.

The other American recoils. "I'm not interested in your deputy! Hey, what the hell, man? Back off!" he adds when McCree does that same perfume-smelling move.

Reaper and I watch, fascinated, as the cowboy leans back slightly and gives him a 'your loss' sort of gesture. "Oh, I thought since y'all ignored my lil' sister saying she ain't interested, y'all wouldn't mind being hit on even though y'all ain't interested."

"You thought wrong," Derek spits.

"Then git outta here before I let the dog do what he really wants to do," McCree says, like he's the
sheriff in a Western running the bad guy out of town. "Since I doubt you're interested in that. And maybe next time, have a little consideration for what a lady wants when tells you she ain't interested."

Derek beats a hasty retreat. McCree sits down again, and I put the hot dogs down in front of Reaper before sitting across from the cowboy.

"Hope y'all don't mind that I stepped in like that," he says while Reaper starts licking at chili and cheese. "Didn't think it would go over too well if your Papi broke his leash getting at that guy's throat."

Reaper looks up from his lunch, looks at me, looks at McCree, looks back at me with his tail wagging just slightly, and goes back to trying to eat hot dogs out of paper trays.

"I don't mind at all," I tell my pseudo-brother, "and I think you scored brownie points with Papi."

He looks surprised and gratified by that. "Is that so? Am I forgiven for trying to take you to a movie? Not that I actually...want to take you to a movie," he hurries on with an alarmed look at Reaper.

Papi looks up and licks his chops. "Are you saying you don't find my daughter attractive?" he growls.

It's a trap, and McCree knows it to judge by the way he takes his hat off and fans himself with it. "She's a gorgeous woman, of course," he says after a minute, "but that's because she clearly gets it from you. I may be a depraved degenerate, but I ain't the type to hit on my own sister." He gives it a beat before adding, "Dad."

Reaper snorts, but his tail is wagging. "Good answer."

"Then I'm gonna quit while I'm ahead and mosey on out," McCree says, placing his hat back on his head. "I'll see you two later."

He walks away, and once he's out of earshot, I scratch behind Reaper's ears. "You did very well," I tell him. "What do you say to a little siesta in the shade, and then ice cream before we head back?"

"I say you spoil me, hija," he says, leaning into the physical attention.

"I'm bribing you into good behavior," I tease.

He growls unconvincingly. "I'm still angry at him."

I keep scratching. "You want to make him suffer, I know. You can do that by being a little shit to him, make him suffer without making him hurt."

He pulls his head away to look at me. "Are you condoning my bullshit, Sombra?"

"You a bad influence, Papi," I tell him blandly. "My childhood innocence is forever tainted."

"Bad," he asks, tail wagging, "or best?"

"I can't answer that. You already corrupted me."
Reaper laughs.

I pat his neck. "Finish your lunch, and we can go relax and talk about how to make McCree sorry he ever walked away."

For just a second, faster than a normal person would be able to register, he gives me a soulful look and I'm reminded that he wants me to be able to enjoy eating, too. Then he's back to licking chili out of cardboard containers.

Chapter End Notes

Sombra's never actually given Reaper a specific threat. She's threatened to threaten, and that's the point he caves at because if Sombra has to think of something to use as negative incentive, she's GOING to use it. That's one of the big pillars of trust between them, that she never actually DOES anything to him, and he never crosses the line that would make her do it. He's terrified that if he does cross the line, she'll turn on him and abandon him the way he felt everyone else had, before he met her. In his mind, he just automatically escalated it from "don't make me find a threat" to "If you do not do the thing, you're going to lose your daughter, the only one who cares about you, and you'll be the worthless monster you secretly know yourself to be and everyone will be right to hate you". And now, of course, he knows that she's doing it to keep him from doing something he'll regret, and he trusts her more than he trusts himself.

This is the first time Ana has seen Sombra yank the metaphoric leash on Reaper, and if she hadn't already basically adopted/been adopted by Sombra, that would have made her do it. Finally! Someone else who can keep one of her idiot boys in line!

If you're applauding McCree for being remarkably mature in the face of Reaper trying to pick a fight, hold onto your hats. Y'all ain't seen nothin' yet. Also, remember that McCree is jealous of Sombra having a closer relationship with his father-figure than he ever had. The revelation that his pseudo-dad is both a literal man-eating monster and still cares about him is...not easy to process.

Reaper has learned that if he admits things to Sombra, she does her best to make them better, and that's enough of a loophole that he can use it to bypass the "must not admit to weakness" issues. He can ask for help without actually -asking- for help because he's not saying 'help me', he's just talking in her general direction and whatever she does, that's her choice, right? Right.

Do not play gay chicken with McCree unless you are prepared to go all the way. Sombra's not the only one who -went to movies- out of necessity as a teen.

Defending Sombra is one of the best ways to get into Reaper's good graces. In this case, it worked better than Reaper wants to admit to.
Reaper's closet is a bad place

Chapter Summary

When one has been suffering for so long, the absence of suffering can feel like a trick.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first two weeks in the safehouse have gone pretty smoothly - barring the intentional emotional evisceration I performed to settle the grudge between Reaper and Winston. Papi seems to be getting used to people not being angry at him, and I keep one COWA in the corner of the living room (in case he wants to be around people but doesn't want to interact) and the other in my room (in case he doesn't want to be around people but still wants to be comfortable) to give him places to be safe while he wants to hide. He's adjusted to the doberman being part of his configuration options and gotten comfortable with silently presenting his doggy head for pettings if he wants physical interaction.

That's why, when Ana looks up and asks, "Where is Gabriel?", I know something's wrong.

He's not in the living room can. He's not in the bedroom can. I close my screens and get up, checking the other public areas of the safehouse because things have been going too well and I suspect he's standing in the coat closet or something, like he used to do in the Talon base, out of a need to punish himself. But of course this isn't the base and it's not "his" territory and he wouldn't want any of Ana's people seeing him. He's not in my room. If he's not in his, I'm going to seriously freak out - but no, I open his door and see a familiar pair of legs spilling out of the closet and yeah, I know exactly what is going on.

Of all the configurations Reaper has at his disposal, the one he used for years is the most inefficient and least "comfortable". But he's sitting in his closet in that configuration, and I firmly keep my childhood subdirectories closed before I can access them and trauma-lock myself.

The door closes behind me, and I know that Reaper is silently seething with resentful satisfaction that whoever-it-was went away without trying to cheer him up or tell him that there's no reason to sit in the closet. Ana looks up as I enter the room, and McCree has stumbled out of his. I give him a warning glare, and he holds his hands up in silent protest that whatever it is, he didn't do it.

"Papi's in a very bad place." I throw the words down like a challenge, daring either of them to say anything. Neither of them does. "I'm gonna stay with him until he's feeling better. Don't come looking for us."

The room is stiffly silent as I turn and leave.

Reaper's legs don't move as I enter his room and close the door behind me. Slowly, I cross the room and see exactly what I expected to see: he's sprawled in the closet like someone dumped him there, wisping so heavily that I can't tell where it's coming from. He looks like he's just barely holding himself together. Instead of heading for him, I cross to the further side of the closet and sit with my back to the wall, out of sight except for one hand laid casually on the floor in a visible
reminder that I'm there, he's not alone.

He doesn't say anything. I don't say anything. The fact that I'm there is enough; when he's ready for comfort and reassurance, he'll let me know. In the meantime, I curl up and lean against the wall because if my experience is anything to go by, this is going to take a while and sleep is a much better option than fighting to keep my past at bay.

I come awake to a doberman half-sprawled across my lap, his head resting on my other arm. Slowly, I bring my hand up to his head and start petting gently, my fingertips massaging the skin of his forehead, caressing behind his ears. I make no more acknowledgment of him than that, and he doesn't acknowledge that I'm even doing that much.

Close to half an hour passes like that before I say quietly, "Do you want to talk?"

Nearly an hour of slow, gentle petting later, he sighs, "Yes."

I lean over and hug him briefly to let him know I heard, but wait for him to speak. It takes a few minutes.

"I don't deserve you, hija."

"What, because I won't let you suffer alone?" I keep it light and teasing, and he whine-growls low in his throat. "Papi..." Despite my best efforts, the memory of abraded fingertips intrudes, and my voice shakes. "I know what it's like. No one was there for me. I'm gonna be there for you."

"Alé..." The dog shudders and pushes, writhing into the hoodie configuration I designed for mutual hugging comfort. For a long minute he just kneels on the floor and hugs me. Then he scoops me up and shifts until he's siting with his back to the wall and I'm held comfortably on his lap. "Guilt over your mother?" he asks quietly.

"Si."

"Guilt over...things I've done," he says reluctantly.

"It's okay. Not gonna judge."

Soft, bitter chuckles. "Well, whatever else I've done, I've apparently raised one hell of a daughter." A sigh, and then he says, "I don't know that I was such a good role model, though. I know I didn't turn out remotely like what my mother wanted, but fuck what she wanted. I don't know what your mother wanted you to be."

"Alive," I say in a small voice. "That's all I know. She wanted me to be alive." My throat closes up and I turn to bury my face in his shoulder.

Reaper's arms tighten around me in silent reassurance. "You need distraction," he growls firmly, ignoring that he needs distraction, too. "Let's go for a walk."

Deep breath in, shaky laugh out. "You just want to terrorize anyone who tries to hit on me."
This form can't wisp, but I can see in the tilt of his head that he'd be smiling if he had a face. "Maybe."

A few minutes later, I'm leading Papi-dog on his leash and collar with a handful of rawhide sticks for treats in my pocket. The late-afternoon sun on his fur and the fresh breeze have his tail wagging, and Ana smiled as we crossed the living room with a casual, "We're going out for a bit." The exercise and the treats will be good for making him feel better physically, and threatening whichever hapless idiot tries to pick me up this time will be good for making him feel strong and in control again.

I don't have any illusions that this was a one-time thing. But the next time will be better, because he knows he's not alone.

Of course, that late-afternoon sun turns into rain, and I make Papi shake before he enters the safehouse. That doesn't prevent him from deliberately jumping on Uncle Jack with wet paws, of course, but Jack seems happy enough to have even antagonistic interaction with a wagging Reaper-dog. He settles in a chair to do some reading on a pad, I curl up in the chair by the can with half a dozen screens, and Reaper settles in his doggy bed to spend quality time with his squeaky steak.

Then the unthinkable happens. He bites down, and there's no sound.

"What the _f**k?_" He sits up, staring at the toy in affront before shooting me a hard look. "Sombra, what is this crap?"

Jack chuckles. "That's what you get for playing with it too hard," he says. "You killed it. It's dead. It is an ex-steak."

Reaper growls, "Shut up, Morrison, before I shove it down your throat." Then he turns back to me. "Sombra?"

"He right, Papi," I tell him gently. "You put a hole in it."

Mournfully, he noses at the beloved steak, no longer squeaky. He chews at it once or twice, but apparently it's no fun if it doesn't squeak, and he just curls up into a ball of canine misery instead. Jack looks guilty for having laughed, and I raise one finger to my lips as I close my screens.

Stealth takes me to my room and back without Reaper hearing me, Squeaky Steak the Second held behind my back.

"Papi," I call, "I got a treat for you."

Slowly, he raises his doggy head. "What is it?"

I grin. "Gotta come over here to find out."

Reaper stands and walks over.
"Sit."

He sits.

"Beg."

"Sombra..."

I laugh and touch his nose. "Just kidding, Papi. Boop!" While he huffs at me in quiet pleasure for our ritual of annoyance, I pull the new toy steak out and dangle it above him. Instantly, all his attention is fixed on it. "You sure you don't want to beg?" I tease.

Without a word, he sits up on his haunches, both forepaws tucked up against his chest.

"Say please?"

"Sombra..." he sighs. He wants the squeaky steak more than he hates indignity. "Please."

I let it drop, and he snatches it out of the air to retreat, wagging like crazy, to his doggy bed. The first joyous squeak makes him release the toy long enough to look up at me in gratitude.

"Who loves you best, Papi?" I ask in a teasing tone.

"You do," he growls around chewing on the steak.

Jack shakes his head and laughs.

"Something funny, Morrison?"

"No sir," he replies, still chuckling. "Just never thought I'd see the day you'd give anyone the satisfaction."

Reaper gnaws on his new toy for a minute before saying, "It's different. It's Sombra."

Jack looks like he wants to ask how that makes it different, but just glances inquiringly at me instead. I give him a gesture of false modesty, and with a rueful shake of his head he goes back to his reading.

Chapter End Notes

While 6-year-old Sombra was in the state-run group home, she used to sneak away and sit in a closet for hours on end, rubbing her fingertips against the floor and walls in a halfhearted attempt at self-harm via trying to destroy her fingerprints, the expression of her desire to not exist. By just sitting with Reaper, she's silently communicating that his feelings are valid as well as that she's there for him whenever he's ready for interaction again.

Reaper is actually thinking of a specific thing he's done that he feels guilty about. It will come up later.
Sombra used to shut up nosy adults by bringing up her mother's death. 'What would your mother say?' 'My mother is dead.'
'What do you want to be when you grow up?' 'What my mom wanted me to be.' '...and what's that...?' 'Alive.' '.......'

Have I mentioned that Gabe is a melodramatic little shit? Because he is. He totally is.
XD
**Moderation**

Chapter Summary

What do you do with a drunken cowboy early in the morning?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's not news that McCree likes to drink. That he gets blackout drunk, sometimes as often as three times a week, also isn't a huge surprise. But according to Reaper, he has a fickle stomach when he's hung over. It's not a matter of *if* he will hurl, but *when*, and then once he's turned his stomach inside-out, it's just the usual headache and exhaustion. Been like that since before he was legal to drink, Papi said. Well, that explains his reaction the time he tried to drink LRF. I'd thought it was the idea that he could have his body transformed from the inside out, but when I told Reaper about that (and he'd stopped laughing) he'd said that even the smell of bacon cooking could set McCree off.

That's not exactly *why* I'm cooking bacon, because I would be cooking it for Papi and Uncle Jack anyway, but it's why I deliberately waft the scent in the cowboy's direction with a cheerful greeting of "Morning, McCree!" when he drags himself in looking for coffee.

As his brain registers what he's smelling, his face loses color and he vanishes out of the doorway. I can hear him pound his way through the wing to his room - and his bathroom.

"I'm impressed," I tell Reaper as I add bacon to the plate of fried eggs and cut-up french toast drizzled with maple syrup that I've prepared for him already.

He climbs onto one of the chairs and carefully sticks his tail between the rails so he can wag freely. "Don't be. He's had twenty years to perfect the art of finding the nearest toilet and getting to it in time."

Uncle Jack walks in, eyebrows raised. "We're letting the dog sit at the table now?" A slight smirk tugs at his lips. "He might think he's people."

"Fuck off, Morrison."

I set plates down in front of both of them. "*We want* him to think he's people, Uncle Jack. Remember?"

Jack looks embarrassed to have been implicated in caring about his old friend and busies himself with his french toast, not looking up to see the very smug doberman wolfing down bacon.

They're both drinking coffee - Jack from a mug, Reaper from a soup plate - when McCree comes back in, looking more alert but still miserable. I hand him a mug of coffee and set a plate of toast and eggs down for him, then pour a tall glass of water and put it on the table in front of him as well.

Reaper looks up from his plate. "You've been drinking, boy," he growls.
McCree gives him a dark look over the edge of the mug. "Ain't no business of yours no more. Y'ain't my boss."

"Jesse," Jack starts, but a raised hand stops him.

"You ain't my boss either, Jack. And don't you even start," he shoots at me as I take the seat across from him.

"Good Morning, Sombra," I say mockingly in an imitation of his drawl. "Thank you for making me breakfast and coffee. I surely appreciate it, seeing as my head feels like an over-ripe melon on account of I tried to drown myself in a whiskey bottle last night."

He freezes, toast in one hand, mouth open. I can almost see the sullen resentment collapse into guilt and shame. "Thanks, Sombra," he mumbles. "I appreciate it."

"You're welcome," I tell him graciously.

Jack leans over and gives me a one-armed hug. "Thank you for breakfast and coffee," he says. "It's very generous of you."

"Aww, you're welcome, Uncle Jack." I'm grinning because I'm having a moment of my childhood self being thrilled that core members of Overwatch like me.

Reaper looks at me, tail wagging slightly. "I'm not going to thank you."

I lean over to scratch behind his ears. "I know, Papi. I promised I would spoil you, and that's what I'm doing."

McCree looks like he's going to protest, but goes back to his eggs and toast instead.

"And you're sure he got blackout drunk," Reaper says a few days later, sprawled on my bed next to me as a doberman and watching me make adjustments to a copy of the prototype shape.

"He goes to the same bar every time. I checked their security and the bartender keeps his tab electronically. If he didn't drink all the things he ordered, then he should go into stage magic because he made that shit disappear."

"Alright. I just don't want to waste this."

It's done. I close my screens and rub my hands together. "Showtime, Papi."

Reaper flows off the bed and stands up into himself. I press my hands to his chest and the swarm reconfigures to a one-time shape. It's the Gabriel Reyes prototype, with one minor change: his mouth is open in an unnatural tunnel modeled directly from a sex doll.

"I feel ridiculous," he grumbles as we cross through the living room where Ana nearly chokes on her tea.
"Just remember it won't last if you wisp." McCree's door unlocks itself for me, and I wave Reaper inside before closing and locking it again.

Ana's giving me a look that says if I know what's good for me, I'll explain myself. I sit on the edge of the couch closest to her chair and gesture for her to lean over.

"We gonna try to teach Jesse to not get blackout drunk by making him wonder what he did," I tell her.

She looks unsympathetic and mildly disapproving, but she nods. "Moderation is a good lesson for him to learn."

Just then, from McCree's room, there's an amazingly unmanly scream and the sound of a body hitting the floor, followed by some scrambling. Then Reaper flows out from under his door and forms as himself to sit on the couch next to me, chuckling evilly.

"Gabriel, what did you do?" Ana asks. No accusation, just curiosity.

"Absolutely nothing. I just lay down next to him and didn't move."

Ana tries not to laugh, but moments laughter we're all laughing.

McCree's door opens and the cowboy leans against the frame, pointing at us with one trembling hand, water dripping from his face and hair. "You're all jerks," he tells us with all the emphatic resentment he can muster. Then he slams the door shut and faintly, we can hear the shower come on.

The door to Jack's room opens and he leans out, wearing nothing but a pair of pajama bottoms. "What just happened?"

He doesn't get an answer; we're all laughing too hard.

Tia Ana raises her eyebrow as I cross the living room in the red dress and black boots I was wearing when McCree first met me.

"He got blackout drunk again," I say calmly as I unlock McCree's door. You'd think the trauma of thinking he'd managed to find a sex doll of his ex-boss and pseudo-father would have kept him vaguely sober for more than four days, but you'd be wrong.

The door doesn't open.

"Problems?" Reaper-dog says from where he's begging pettings from Ana.

I frown at the door. "Yeah. Could you check what he's done? It's unlocked but it's not opening."

Reaper flows under the door. Moments later, he flows back out. "Moved his dresser in front of it. I'm not sure if I'm more impressed that he learned or that he managed to do it while drunk."
"Okay, change of plans. Be right back." It only takes a minute or two to change out of my outfit and into something more casual, and then I'm back in the living room handing Reaper the dress. "Just leave that in bed with him."

He takes it and dissolves into smoke.

Jack comes out and sees us on the couch, Ana in her usual chair, all watching McCree's door. Cautiously, he sits in a chair and asks, "Again?"

"It's for his own good," Reaper says, chuckling darkly.

"What did you do this time?"

"He's got Sombra's dress."

"I don't..." Jack looks confused. "That's it? Just a dress?"

Ana says, "The dress she was wearing when he met Sombra and mistook her for the sort of lady who...sells her time."

"He thought I was a whore," I clarify. "Probably because I was dressed like a whore and came on to him."

"And then I punched him across the street," Reaper adds in satisfaction.

Uncle Jack looks like he's trying to figure out which question he wants to ask first. "You came on to him?"

I wave one hand dismissively. "What, it's not like I was serious. And he's not even that bad to look at. If he'd come through when I was actually doing that, I might have even left him some of his money when I was done."

There's a long silence before Jack says, "I'm not awake enough for this conversation," and starts to stand up.

That amazingly unmanly scream rings out from McCree's room, followed by frantic thumping sounds.

"And you're trying to discourage him from drinking?" Jack asks incredulously.

"Just from getting too drunk to remember what he did," I clarify.

Reaper chuckles. "I'm satisfying my anger and resentment in a way that doesn't involve violence. Aren't you proud of me?"

Jack gives him a long look. "You're being a dick instead of trying to kill him."

"Yuuup."

"I wish I could argue with that," he sighs.
More thumping sounds, as well as some scraping, come from behind McCree's door before it opens enough for my red dress to come flying out. He glares at us like he can't even string words together, he's too angry, and then the door shuts again.

"He will never defeat his own ter-ror," Reaper declares in a good imitation of She-ablo's mocking tones.

Ana looks amused as I collapse into a pile of giggles. Jack looks at me like I'm crazy, but I've just remembered the day Reaper did an impression of the Skeleton King, and that when I asked if he wanted to play with me, he said yes.

I have got to get some copies of that game.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, this is kind of a dick move on Sombra and Reaper's parts. She's still being a snotty sister, antagonizing McCree out of the remnants of embarrassment that she'd had a crush on him as a teenager, and she's coming to realize that no one actually keeps Gabe completely out of trouble. All you can really do is go with it and mitigate some of the trouble.

Poor Jack. He really was not ready to have that conversation. The fact that neither Ana nor Reaper seemed surprised or fazed at all just made it weirder for him. Reaper was, however, silently judging his daughter's taste in men.
Defeating Ter-ror

Chapter Summary

If you've never played Diablo 3, you may be slightly lost. Jesse certainly is.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Six high-end dedicated gaming pads with overnight shipping aren't cheap, but Talon had a lot of money before I stole it all, redistributed it, and reserved a comfortable percentage for my own use. Six copies of Diablo 3 (50th Anniversary Ultimate Deluxe edition, of course - gotta have all the bells and whistles) barely equal the cost of shipping the pads. I know six units is way more than Reaper and I would need for ourselves, but I have every intention of browbeating McCree and Uncle Jack into some competitive play, and Tia Ana might want to join us, and maybe, when Widow comes back...

Team Talon vs. Team Overwatch. I like that idea.

The fact that it's a miserably cold, dark, rainy day just makes it all the better when the stack of boxes is delivered and I go down to sign for it. I open them all right there in the foyer, Solen breaking down the packing materials and taking them away for me. Each pad hums to life eagerly and Diablo 3 installs in minutes, with patching only taking a few minutes more. They came with padded carrying cases, so I slip the case straps over my arms and head over to the locked office I've turned into my little science lab, where I stash four of them. Then I practically bounce into the living room where...Reaper is a dejected ball of canine misery in his doggy bed.

"Where's Tia Ana?" I ask, dropping to one knee and scratching him behind the ears.

"Meeting," he grumbles.

"Get up," I tell him, standing. "And follow me."

He doesn't move. "Why?"

"Because Justice has fallen on the world of men..." His ears perk, and I with grin I finish, "...and it's time to defeat your own ter-ror."

Slowly, Reaper's head comes up. "Sombra..."

I heft the cases slightly. "Brand new gaming pads, fresh installs, Fiftieth Ultimate Deluxe."

He still doesn't look enthused. "...Sombra."

Doesn't he want to...? My heart plummets. "Unless you didn't mean it when you said you wanted to play together sometime..."

Reaper boils into smoke and re-forms in the hoodie configuration, then promptly crushes me to his
"I meant it," he growls, hugging me tighter to show that it's himself he's angry at, not me. When he feels me relax, he says quietly, "I don't deserve you."

"If you want to punish yourself," I tease, "roll a barbarian. Otherwise, tell me where we're playing because we still have to get through campaign before we can do adventure mode, and the less I have to hear Leah whine at me, the better."

"My room," he says with a chuckle, and he gives me one last squeeze before releasing me. "I don't want Morrison interrupting us."

I'm actually going to play Diablo 3 with Papi. Suddenly giddy, I grin up at him, and he leans back in momentary surprise before hugging me gently again and pressing his mask briefly to the top of my head.

"I didn't imagine it," I murmur as he lets go again.

Reaper turns back from heading to his room. "Imagine what?"

I jog a few steps to catch up to and follow him. "The time I yelled at you and waited on the stairs to apologize. I thought I'd imagined you kissing the top of my head, but I didn't, did I?"

His back stiffens slightly. "No," he says after a moment. "You didn't. And you were right. That man is...less dead than I thought he was."

That makes me stop for a moment and hug the gaming pads in glee before hurrying to catch up and follow him into the room. "Does that mean you want your old battle-net account back?"

Reaper turns to look at me in surprise. "That thing still exists? Of course it does," he continues before I can say anything. "No, leave it where it is. Gabriel Reyes is legally dead. We don't need some Blizzard employee banning me for being hacked, or worse, figuring out that Gabriel Reyes is not dead."

"If you trying to hide the names you gave your characters," I tease, "I already saw them."

He sits on his bed and takes the pad I hand him, head tilted in thought. "I don't even remember what they were named."

I sit next to him and turn my own pad on. "I'll have pity on you and not remind you, then." I give it a beat, then add, "Besides, that way I don't have to show you what mine were named."

Reaper laughs.

"No hug?" Ana asks in surprise as Reaper flows past, early the next morning.

Guiltily, he comes back and stands up into the hoodie configuration to hug his old friend good morning, then dissolves without a word and flows into the can in the corner. Ana looks at me in confusion.
"We were up late and then he had a rough night," I explain, giving her a hug myself. "He needs to give his mind a rest, and that means sitting in the can for a while."

Ana reclaims her teacup from the side table and gestures for us to sit on the couch. "What were you doing?"

I curl up on the other end of the couch. "Playing Diablo 3, running through campaign mode. I thought it would be a good distraction, and possibly a way to redirect aggression towards Uncle Jack and McCree by turning it into friendly competition."

"A very good idea," she says warmly. "And it certainly sounded like you enjoyed yourselves."

Oh, geez. "You could hear us? I didn't think we were that loud..."

She smiles tolerantly at my embarrassment. "Don't worry about it. It's hardly the first time I have overheard such things. Was it your first time...?"

I shake my head ruefully. "Not by a long shot. But it was our first time doing it together and it felt so good we just kept going, you know?"

"You anticipate doing that with him again, then?"

"Oh, absolutely. Probably as soon as he wakes up..."

The sentence trails off because McCree's door - which, I realize had been ajar for half a minute - has suddenly swung open, but there is no cowboy standing behind it. Instead, the echoes of what was probably a mad scramble for the bathroom spill out, and faintly, I can hear the sounds of retching. Shit.

"Did you know he got drunk last night?" I ask Ana, my eyes wide.

Her eye is wide, as well. "No. I did not expect him to over-indulge again so soon. What caused...?"

"I think he overheard us," I tell her, standing up, "and I don't think he knows we were talking about Reaper and a computer game."

Ana thinks for a moment, then swallows a laugh. "Oh my. Yes, I can see how that might sound different to his ears. Where are you going?" she asks, because I'm crouching by the can.

Reaper's out cold. Before I answer, I close the lid and give him a hit of endorphins. "I'm gonna go explain things."

Carefully, I charge one hand as I venture into the cowboy's room. The bathroom door is wide open, and my feet make no noise as I slip in and discharge the energy, making his hair stand up. It's not really long enough to pull back easily, and he probably doesn't have any clips, but this way I can get it out of danger. He doesn't seem to notice, but then again he's also busy. I perch on the sink and wait for a quiet moment.

"We weren't talking about you," I say when he stops to catch his breath. "I was playing a computer game with Papi."

"That's...not as much of a relief as it could be," he says shortly.
"Jesse...you don't have to worry about me taking advantage of your drunk ass."

He gives me as incredulous a look as he can manage without turning his head too far.

I sigh. "Okay, listen. Any teasing I do, any shit I give you, I promise I will never do anything more than look."

He seems to be finished. I fill the cup his toothbrush was in and hand it to him so he can rinse and spit.

"You promise," he says bitterly. "Well, that's all well 'n good, you won't try nothin' with me. But what if I try somethin' with you?" A glance at me, then he stares into the cup before taking a second mouthful of water and swishing it around. "Against your will," he clarifies quietly after he's spit and flushed.

"Would you?" I ask. "I didn't think you wanted to go there, and not just because of Papi."

"I don't. Especially after hearing you don't want to, either. But get a feller liquored up, and his brain ain't the only part of his body he starts listening to."

...oh. Oh. "Jesse McCree, are you getting shit-faced because you can't get laid?"

He glowers at me. "That ain't the only reason, and I'll thank you to not ask any more questions like that. Now, I'm gonna take a shower, so...d'you mind?"

He's going to take his clothes off. Free show! "Not at all! Go right ahead."

Jesse stands up, smooths his hair down, and gives me a hard stare. "I meant, d'you mind not looking."

"I'd rather look, actually."

My implied appreciation for his unclothed body seems to make him uncomfortable. After a moment, he steps into the shower fully-clothed and closes the door. Now protected by frosted glass, he shucks off his clothes before tossing them over the shower door and onto the floor of the bathroom. I wait until the water's going before I gather them up and go into his room. It only takes a minute to dump the dirty clothes in the laundry assemble a set of fresh ones. I leave them, neatly folded, on the edge of the sink and close the door behind me.

Ana looks extremely interested when I emerge.

"New plan," I tell her as I reclaim my seat. "Next time he goes to get drunk, I'm gonna follow him and see if I can't keep him from drowning himself in cheap whiskey, since obviously trauma isn't working."

"And Gabriel?" she asks.

"I think it would be best for him to stay here."

"Good, we are in agreement." Ana smiles softly. "Perhaps he would like to show me how this 'Diablo 3' is played."
It's getting towards evening when Tia Ana looks up with a frown and says, "Where is Gabriel?"

Living room can is empty. Bedroom can is empty. Here we go again. "He's probably in a bad place," I announce, closing my screens. I check his room first, but he's not there. Then I check mine, and see his legs spilling untidily out from my closet. Back to the living room. "Yeah. He's in a bad place. I'm gonna stay with him."

Ana smiles at me. Jack looks confused. I hang the Do Not Disturb sign on my door before I close it behind me.

Reaper's wisping heavily in the corner of my closet. It almost looks like he's covered in very fluid black fuzz. I grab the blanket from my bed and sit beside him, tucking it around both of us before cuddling up to him and hugging his arm, my head resting on his shoulder. By coming into my room, he's saying he wants to be found, he wants to be comforted. And even in this form, he'll still feel warmth wherever my body touches his.

It's almost like when we were with Talon, in the last days when he was falling apart, familiar and comfortable enough that I don't even have to fight to keep my memories in their subdirectories as I nestle down and let myself slip into sleep.

I wake up to Reaper lifting me, carrying me, setting me down on my bed and covering me properly with the blanket. Then there's paws on the mattress and a doggy nose pushing its way under my arm as he snuggles up as the doberman. I hug his neck and scratch gently at his ears.

"Do you want to talk?"

A lazy eternity of gentle petting later, he answers, "Yes."

"You do deserve me," I say in as firm a voice as I can manage while half asleep.

"I don't see how," he replies in a dry growl. "I certainly don't think I've done anything good enough to deserve half of what you've done for me."

"What," I grumble. "Is this the year twenty-thirty? Because I thought we stopped blaming the victim way before I was born."

He trembles for a moment before saying, "Well, I was born before that happened, so it doesn't apply to me."

"Papi," I snap.

He laughs. "You can't stop me from blaming myself for things I've actually done," he says, but it's in a teasing tone.
"No, but I can make you think about it. How much of that would you have done if you hadn't had your red-eyed twin telling you lies and feeding you bullshit?"

Reaper goes utterly still for a long moment while I wake up enough to realize what I've just let on that I know, and then he starts shuddering.

"It was all my fault," he growls. "How could they not hate me?"

"It was sabotage," I counter fiercely, "and you know it."

"I should have been stronger."

"Says who?" I demand, but there's no answer because we both know who. "That's bullshit, Papi. No one is that strong. No one is so perfect they account for everything and make no mistakes."

Reaper doesn't say anything, but I know what he wants to say.

"Not even that asshole," I tell him firmly. "You think I wasn't all over Talon's systems from day one? I was passing information to Ana since just after I found that music for you, and warning Genji about things since about the same time. He wanted you to think he was all-powerful, but he didn't even know what this little shadow was up to."

"So you think you're-" he snarls, but cuts himself off.

"Remember why I gave you slippers. I give him a moment to think about that, my fingers still scratching behind his ears. "I fucked up royally. And I still haven't gotten all the kinks out of your swarm."

Reaper shudders again. "If I hadn't...obeyed...he would have made me."

It doesn't take much to infer the threat. "Controlling you through your swarm?"

He nods minutely.

"Papi, that was a big fat lie. Your swarm isn't smart enough for that."

A snort that could have been laughter, then a whine.

"He made other threats?" I ask gently, and he nods again. "If he could have followed through on them, he would have done that instead of trying to get you killed or starve you to death. And if he'd been as all-knowing as he tried to make you think he was, wouldn't he have known I was feeding you and do something to stop me? He didn't even deny my requisitions."

There's a pause before he growls out, "Damn it, hija, stop making sense. You're ruining my brooding."

"Make me, Papi."

He growls, but it's the affectionate mock-angry growl.

"I got more bad news," I tell him, settling back down and pulling him closer. "I may have stolen your kill."
That makes him stop and look at me. "Sombra, what did you do?"

"Set off a data bomb to wipe Talon's systems. If he was dumb, it ate him."

He thinks about that for a minute while sleep tugs at me.

"I'll let it slide this time," he says in an amused growl, "but if he survived, we kill him together."

"As a family," I murmur. "Widow gets a shot, too."

"As a family," he agrees.

Chapter End Notes

If Starcraft 2 is still around and being played competitively, I figure Diablo 3 is still around and you know there would be a 50th anniversary release.

That thing Reaper was feeling guilty about? He was trying to work up to telling Sombra about it. It also caused his nightmares and is the reason he went and sat in her closet.

McCree opened the door at "You could hear us?" if you were curious.

Sombra does, in fact, appreciate the visuals of a half-naked cowboy. She very much enjoys looking at fit, half-naked men with skin tones ranging from 'tanned' to 'ebony', and McCree is just dark enough to qualify for second and third looks.

Reaper had no idea Sombra knew the asshole was abusing him. He also didn't know she knew the asshole was a god program.
The Alamo

Chapter Summary

Unforgettable, but regrettable.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Uncle Jack is immediately on board with the idea of competitive solo play, so a few nights later he's sitting in one of the living room chairs while Reaper endures me using him as a backrest on the couch, both of them rolling fresh barbarians and racing to see who can get through campaign - because this is Uncle Jack's first character - first. Ana's doing a bit of quiet work from her usual chair, which is good when the program I left in the bar's system alerts me that McCree's ordered his first drink of the night.

"Time out," I announce as I close my screens and sit up. "McCree's gone drinking. I'm gonna see what I can do to keep him from getting too drunk. Papi, I expect you to play nice if Tia Ana goes to bed before I get back because I will be very unhappy with you if you maim or kill Uncle Jack. Got it?"

Reaper starts wisping from the shoulders. "Acknowledged."

I kiss the cheek of his mask. "Good. Have fun, kick his ass, call on the Talon channel if you need me. Time in."

They resume playing under Ana's amused and watchful eye, and I go change into something a bit fancier before heading out.

McCree's favorite bar is the closest one, which isn't a surprise when you consider that he'll have to stumble home while too drunk to read the numbers on paper currency. A bit of stealth lets me slip in behind a couple coming out, and I quickly scout the place out. McCree's at the bar, chatting up a brunette in something dark and slinky, so I sit at a table fairly close behind him and flag a waitress down. The screen I open says TWO SHOTS OF TEQUILA, A PITCHER OF WATER, AND SILENCE, and the bill I'm holding up is big enough that she just smiles and gives me a nod. My drinks arrive a minute later, and I flip her a screen that says KEEP THE CHANGE.

McCree's talking about riding horses, and the brunette is clearly amused but uninterested, when he says, "...love to take you for a ride and introduce you to my lil' deputy, Willy the Kid."

The brunette is spared the need to respond politely because I am laughing hysterically from my table.

"Really? Really, amigo?" I choke out as he turns to glower at me and the brunette makes her
escape. "That's what you call it? Willy the Kid?"

Furious and embarrassed, he slinks away from the bar and sits across from me. "And what would you call it, then?" he asks.


"Hey! There's nothing regrettable about my lil' deputy!" Angrily, he drinks the second shot.

"Easy, amigo. I'm giving you shit." I pour him a glass of water. He's halfway through it before he realizes it's not booze. "I know you got a sixteen-hand-horse in your stable."

McCree chokes, then finishes the glass and gasps, "How-?"

The screen is small, there's no sound, and the file is very old, but it's undeniably him in his early 20s and he's skinny-dipping. His face goes red when he realizes what he's seeing, and he drinks a second glass of water trying to get himself under control while I chuckle wickedly and start looking up famous cowboys.

"You're an evil woman, Sombra," he says darkly as he gestures a waitress over and orders his usual cheap whiskey.

"I know. What about One-Eyed Charley? I'd think that would be the obvious nickname."

McCree shakes his head. "One-Eyed Charley was actually a woman. Doc Hollidick?"

I make a face. "If you just went with James, you'd be Jesse and James...Jesse James?"

"I like the pun, but I'd be explaining the joke all the time," he says regretfully. "Wild Bill Hicock? Hi...cock?"

"Too subtle. You'd want to do something like Wild Dick Hickock."

The whiskey arrives. McCree looks thoughtfully at it, then drinks it straight down. "I'm thinkin' up dick jokes with my sister, and it's my dick we're talkin' about. My sister, who has seen my dick."

He sighs. "I ain't drunk enough for this."

"Well, it's gonna be harder to impress the ladies if the horse won't leave the stable," I tell him, refilling the water glass.

He takes it, but he doesn't drink. "Can I ask somethin' personal?"

"It's only fair; I've seen your assets. Ask away."

"Were you the sort of girl that men like me take to movies?" he asks quietly, not looking up from the glass he's holding.

"Si," I answer, just as quietly.

"Does your Papi know?"
"He didn't at the time. He does now. Why?"

McCree glances up at me, then drops his gaze again. "That thing you did with my hair. I'm just wondering what other tricks you can do. What other tricks you have done."

"I've had to wake the horse up a couple of times," I admit. "I can also make it feel like an electric cattle prod."

He flinches. "Well, at least you can defend yourself. When you don't have that machine pistol, I mean. You can't exactly slip that into your purse or walk around with it just hanging out."

"Unlike your Colt 45?" I tease.

That gets him looking up at me in confusion. "What? No, I got a Peacekeeper-"

"I meant the one you keep holstered in your pants, cowboy."

For the second time, McCree's face turns red.

"You as good a shot with that?" I ask, grinning. "How fast can you reload?"

McCree pulls out a few bills, throws them onto the table, and starts walking out.

Gleefully, I follow him. "I didn't even make a joke about quick-drawing," I say as the door closes behind us.

"Y'don't have to," he grumbles. "I'm already thinking them up."

I have to laugh at that as I catch up and walk beside him. I'm expecting him to go find another bar, but instead he just goes back to the safehouse.

Reaper's waiting in the living room when we enter, and there's no sign of Jack or Ana. "They went to bed," he growls before I can ask, wisping slightly from under his crossed arms. "You're back early. And sober. Why?"

McCree flushes in embarrassment and turns towards his room. I start giggling. "Willy the Kid," I choke out before collapsing onto the couch to muffle my laughter with a throw pillow.

Jesse makes his escape, while Reaper seems to be in shock. I can practically see him wondering if he wants to know why I'm laughing and deciding it's better not to ask because he's not sure he just learned the nickname of his pseudo-son's penis, but he suspects that's what it was, and "McCree's penis" has got to be close to the top of the list of Things He Does Not Want To Think About.

"Good work," he says finally, sounding thoroughly unconvinced. "You kept him from making a disgrace of himself and made him suffer."

"I'll let you tell Uncle Jack in the morning," I offer, still snickering.

Playful wisps curl out from his biceps. "Apology accepted."

Chapter End Notes
Things I never thought I would be doing with my life: thinking up cowboy dick puns.

There was an incident that was covered up quickly, but not quickly enough to erase all copies of the video from the internet, wherein Jack Morrison, Gabriel Reyes, and Jesse McCree were caught skinny-dipping by a surveillance camera. Naturally, Sombra got her digital hands on a copy. This is what cemented her teenage crush on Jesse because hello, built like a young and well-endowed god AND comes with Papi Gabriel as a father-in-law. If asked, she will refuse to comment on the two older men except to say that obviously, Gabriel is -way- sexier, and that Jack's ass embodies why it's called "moonng".

McCree is seriously questioning how his life has come to this, when he's thinking up names for his own dick with his sister, and his dad's a dog.
"My turn," Reaper growls as we head into the kitchen. "I want pancakes."

I gesture him to the stove. "Be my guest. Tell me what you want me to do."

He stands up into his usual form, with hands, which he rubs together in anticipation. "Eggs," he commands, reaching for the whisk.

At first, his pancakes seem unnecessarily complicated, but then I realize he's making two batches at the same time. Working together, we quickly get two generous stacks of pancakes piled up. The second, smaller stack is buckwheat, and I assume it's for McCree.

"Smells good in here," Jack says from the doorway as I'm dividing bacon among three plates and Reaper's cutting his own pancakes for a change.

"Breakfast is on me," Papi says as he carries his plate to the table. "You're welcome."

"You made pancakes?" Jack looks at me, then back to Reaper, and his expression softens. "Thanks, Gabe."

Reaper starts wisping from the back of his head and shoulders, but also from the chest. "I wanted pancakes," he says before melting into the doberman and climbing into his chair. "By the way - Willy the Kid."

His timing is perfect - McCree's just rounded the corner and now is staring in horror while Jack puts two and two together and realizes what he's just been told. The awkward, embarrassed expressions are almost painful to watch because Uncle Jack doesn't want to think about McCree's penis any more than Reaper did.

Papi, of course, is wagging madly. "There's buckwheat on the stove," he says helpfully, ensuring the cowboy doesn't just flee.

Breakfast is full of awkward looks and uncomfortable silence while Reaper enjoys his pancakes and McCree doesn't meet anyone's eyes. Instead of leaving when he's done, Reaper just sits there and drinks in the tension. Jack's the first to flee with a mumbled excuse about checking in with someone. Once he's gone, McCree takes a deep breath and raises his head to meet Reaper's eyes.

"I don't know if this was meant to be an apology or a trick," he says evenly, "but if you're trying to rebuild that burned bridge between us, this ain't the way to do it. Don't take the things I like and use them as bait. All it does is make me not want to trust you."
Holy shit. When I told McCree to use his words like a big boy, I didn't think he'd actually do it.

Reaper's tail curls downwards and he hunches over a little. "You came back mostly-sober. I was feeling generous."

"So you were using me as a tool to make Jack uncomfortable." He pauses to see if Reaper will try to deny it, but there's only guilty silence. "Real mature, Gabe. You got beef with me, give it to me straight. You got beef with Jack, leave me the fuck out of it. You told me to trust Sombra, and I do. But I ain't rebuilding fifteen years of broken trust with her. You want me to stick around, you follow those two rules or I'm catching the first flight out to someplace warm and dry, and I ain't looking back."

Behind Reaper's back, I flash McCree a thumbs-up. He meets my eyes briefly and then goes back to staring at the highly uncomfortable doberman.

"Up to you," Jesse says when it's clear Reaper isn't going to say anything. "You want to rebuild, you say yes and agree to treat me with at least a little respect. You want to never see me again, you say no and I'll go smoke at your grave and probably cry a little and that's it, the man I was proud to serve under will be dead and you'll never have to look at my ugly mug again." He takes a few breaths to steady his voice before he continues. "One word, Gabe: yes or no?"

Reaper whines low in his throat, looking as miserable as I've ever seen a dog. "Yes," he growls. "Stay."

And then he's a river of black smoke flowing out of the room and the can in my bedroom registers that he's at 100% baseline mass.

"Next time you go drink," I tell McCree, "you let me know. They're all on me."

He raises a skeptical eyebrow. "As many as I want?"

"As many as you want. I won't get in your way."

That doesn't seem to reassure him. "And the morning after?"

"I won't fuck with you, and I'll make sure he doesn't, either. You got cojones, cowboy."

"You would know," he deadpans. "You've seen the video."

That cracks me up. After a minute, he allows himself to smile and chuckle quietly.

"I'm gonna go make sure he's not spiraling into depression," I say when the laughter dies down. "Later today, we'll be going outside."

"The park?"

"Just the back yard. Reaper won't want to be around strangers. He'll want to run and physically exhaust himself, and he'll want to be fussed over, and he won't want to risk fucking things up completely with you. So if you were to join us, throw a Frisbee or some tennis balls for him or just sit and give him pettings, he won't argue. He'll just be quietly confused and grateful that you want to spend time with him."
McCree gives me a raised-eyebrow look of appreciation. "You are an evil woman, but you use your powers for good. I'll be there. You've all but given me an engraved invitation, and I'm not a big enough fool to refuse it."

He ambles out of the kitchen, tossing a two-fingered salute to me as he goes, and I head to my room.

The instant the door closes behind me, Reaper boils out of the can and forms into the doberman, tail between his legs, standing beside the bed like he's been told to stay off it. I sit on the floor beside him and hug his neck until he sprawls half over my lap, whining and trembling and trying to bury his nose in my hair.

"I know, Papi," I murmur. "I know. You angry at yourself and you don't think you deserve good things."

"He would have walked away," Reaper says so quietly that it's barely even a whisper. "I fucked things up that badly. Sombra, what am I doing?"

I stroke his neck and scratch behind his ears. "You struggling to put yourself back together after that asshole did his best to break you apart. You hate because you had to hide how much you care, but Jesse, he needs to know you care. You don't have to hate anymore, Papi. You can let it go, and no one gonna mock you for it. They know you been hurt. They not gonna think you being weak, because they know you being strong and fighting against what that asshole made you believe."

He thinks about that for a minute or two. "I wanted him to suffer. He deserved to suffer. But it hurt."

"That because you care about him, Papi. That asshole wanted you to be a monster of hate. He wanted you to kill your friends. And he wanted you to think it was all your idea so you'd hurt yourself while hurting them, because he knew you were too strong for him to take down unless he tricked you into taking yourself down." "I'm my own worst enemy," he sighs, but the trembling's stopped. "Now what?"

"Don't fight too hard when people want to do nice things for you," I tease. "If you need me to yell at you so you feel like it's okay to not be a dick to them, fine. Just say the word."

"Please?" he asks in a dry voice.

I hug him again. "You got it, Papi. Feeling restless?"

"You know me too well, hija."

"Then let's go outside. Frisbee?"

Reaper scrambles off my lap, tail wagging madly, and noses the red disk out of the bag. He doesn't let it go until we're out in the backyard, and then he's off and running before it's even left my hand.

A few tosses in, McCree ambles up and I grin at him. Reaper comes back with the Frisbee, but stops uncertainly a few feet away. Jesse doesn't hesitate, he reaches for it and Reaper doesn't fight to keep it. Then, without a word, he throws the disk and there's a second of hesitation before
Reaper turns and chases it down.

When he comes back this time, he brings it straight to the cowboy and his tail is wagging.

"This is surreal," Jesse says after a few more throws, making sure Reaper's out of hearing range. "But it's a good surreal, y'know?"

I wait while Reaper comes back and runs off again before replying. "Imagine how this has been for me."

He gives me a piercing look. "What do you mean?"

"I'm only seven years younger than you."

Another couple of tosses while he does the math and thinks about that.

"So I'm guessing you grew up idolizing the guy who's currently a dog chasing a Frisbee," he says finally. "And Jack, and Ana, and now you're living with them and helping...the dog...not be the ruthless killer he turned into and reconnect with them instead." A pause while Reaper runs up, hands over the Frisbee, and runs off again. "Yeah, I can see how that's weird for you. Lena used to have moments of just...stopping to be amazed that she was actually part of Overwatch."

"What about you?" I ask.

He scoffs. "I was an ignorant, snot-nosed brat. Barely knew who they were, wasn't impressed in the slightest. Only started to appreciate what they'd done after I got to know them."

Reaper runs up, but detours to the shade of a nearby tree and flops down, panting.

"That's our cue to go sit and pet him," I tell McCree, who laughs.

We sit, one on either side of the doberman, and lean comfortably against the tree. For a while there's just quiet petting.

"Hey," McCree says idly. "Those screens you do. They can play video. Can they do sound?"

"Of course," I tell him. "I just didn't want the whole bar knowing what I was showing you."

"Could you play a movie?"

I tap into the safehouse network. "Sure. What do you want to see?"

"Can you get Rush Hour?"

Papi's tail starts to wag slowly. Jesse and I pretend not to see it.

"Easily."

The screen is big enough for all three of us to watch easily, and half the morning slips comfortably away. The majority of the next hour is spent with Reaper alternately chasing the Frisbee and just running laps, and then we go back inside where he laps up half a liter of LRF.
"That stuff wouldn't actually..." McCree starts, watching Reaper drink.

I try not to grin too broadly. "The nanites activate when they enter a bioelectric field, and they're programmed to rebuild Reaper. I don't know that they would, but I'm sure they would try."

"Well," he deadpans, "that's moderately horrifying."

"If you need distraction, I've got a gaming pad loaded with Diablo 3 just for you," I offer.

He looks uncomfortable while Reaper looks interested. "I've never...your Papi didn't exactly encourage playing games."

Reaper manages to look guilty.

"Plenty of time now, cowboy," I tease. "Come on, we'll show you-

"No," Reaper says quietly.

"Papi?"

"You show him. I'm going to take a nap."

I lean down to scratch his ears. "Okay. You change your mind, you can join us."

With Papi curled up in his doggy bed, McCree and I settle on the couch for a nice session of teaching my trash cowboy brother how to kill demons. After an hour or two he calls time out for a bathroom break, and I take the opportunity to arrange the sleeping doberman with both bears. Not just because it's adorable - although it is, and I take pictures - but because the plush toys help keep him from having nightmares.

"Why does he have a teddy bear?" McCree asks when he comes back. "Why does he have two teddy bears?"

"One of them is mine. The big one," I clarify as I settle back onto the couch. "It was my Christmas present year before last."

"You never gave me a big ol' teddy bear for Christmas," he grumbles, flopping sullenly onto the other end of the couch.

Reaper opens one eye. "You want a teddy bear?" he asks in a challenging sort of way. "Fine. I'll get you a teddy bear."

Although he tries to hide it, McCree looks genuinely touched.

Chapter End Notes

I have no freaking clue where Jesse learned how to cut straight through all Gabe's bullshit and verbally stab him in the heart, but GOD DAMN, cowboy, you go! Hold yourself hostage against Reaper's good behavior!
It's going to take Reaper a bit to get used to where the line is between "giving McCree shit" and "being a dick", but he knows that if he fucks up, his adopted son is out of there and he cares more about McCree than he does about maintaining his image - especially with Sombra pointing out that the image is the one the asshole tried to mold him into. He's taking the "no one tells me what to do (except angry Latinas)" issue and pairing it with "no one fucks with my people but me" and turning them against all the poison the asshole fed him.

Reaper opting to nap is really him knowing that Diablo 3 would offer way too many opportunities to accidentally drive McCree away, so he's removing himself from temptation until he knows he won't ruin things.

So this is not only chapter 50, but the one-month anniversary of putting this story up in the first place. I swear I didn't plan this, but I'm sure as hell going to take advantage of it. And by that I mean you should take advantage of it. Request an omake! I will do my best to herd the appropriate characters together and glare at them until they act out a non-canon scene for you. Fourth-wall breakage may take place. Request smut at your own risk. Do not fold, spindle, or mutilate. All rights reserved. Void where prohibited. No substitutions, exchanges, or refunds.
This was not what McCree had planned for the evening. He's not complaining, though.

Around six, McCree stretches and says, "Okay, I think that's enough for me today."

Jack looks up from the pad he's been working on. "Make it to seventy?"

"Nah. Close, though. Think I'm gonna mosey on over to the local watering hole." He gives me an inquiring look, one eyebrow raised, asking silently if I'm going to keep my word. I nod, and he nods back before putting his gaming pad in the closet and leaving the room.

"I'm going to follow him, try to keep him from getting completely drunk. Papi, you gonna behave yourself while I'm gone?"

Before Reaper can answer, Jack's walking over to the closet where the gaming pads are kept. "I think I'll see how fast it takes me to get my barbarian to seventy," he says in what's undeniably a challenge.

"You're on, Morrison."

"Okay. Remember, no maiming or killing, or you'll regret it." I make it sound like a threat, but after this morning's conversation, he knows it's a reminder.

Reaper's tail wags briefly before he growls, "Fine."

Jesse McCree is waiting for me outside the gate. He nods as the gate closes behind me, and without a word we start walking.

"He didn't want to play with me," he says quietly after about a block.

"Gonna take time. What he wants is to play against you, express some anger by being better than you."

"That sounds like him," McCree says dryly. "So, we're still on for you payin' for my drinks?"

"As many as you want," I assure him.

There's silence for a minute or two before he says, "I still don't know how I feel about him. What he's done, what he's become. What I should forgive, what I shouldn't. If it's okay to want my old boss back."

"I can't answer those for you, amigo."
"I know. I need to talk to him, but..."

When he doesn't continue, I say, "...but you don't want to risk losing the little bit you've built already?"

He sighs. "Yeah. So here we are. Me to drown my sorrows and think about my life, and you to watch a sad little cowboy whose dad doesn't love him."

We're at the door; bastard timed it so that I can't immediately refute any of what he said. I follow him to the bar and pay for the bottle of bourbon he picks out, then clear his tab while I'm at it. McCree retreats to a corner table to start drinking. I start looking around to see who's watching the cowboy with speculative expressions that sharpen when I don't follow him.

One promising lady makes eye contact with me, her straight, dark hair cut short at her jawline, her almond eyes lined with green. I make my way over to her.

"I saw you watching my brother," I say by way of hello.

"The cowboy?" she asks. Her accent places her - or whoever she learned English from - around Turkey. "I didn't think there were any left."

"He's the last," I confirm.

"Really. And he's your brother?"

I hop up onto the barstool next to her. "Adopted. His family died in the Omnic Crisis."

We chat for a while. I spin her stories that are mostly true, things he did with Overwatch and Blackwatch but with the tell-tale details left out. Finally, she says, "Do you think he would let me...ride his horse?"

"I think if you're really interested, you should go over and ask. The worst he can do is say no, right?"

The almond-eyed woman downs the last of her drink. "I'm going to ask."

Smugly, I watch as she goes over to McCree's table and leans down - giving him a deliberate view of her cleavage - to say something quietly enough that no one else can hear. He looks astonished, points to me and asks a question, then gives the lady a broad smile and tips his hat. She straightens back up and heads for a stairway to the upper floor, while he grabs the half-empty bottle and saunters over to me.

"Help," he murmurs as he hands me the bottle, that broad smile looking stiff up close, his eyes panicked. "The horse is asleep!"

Oh my god. I am so glad I don't blush, but he can see in my expression how awkward this is for both of us. Well, I'm not going to let my effort go to waste. Cringing, I charge the hand not holding the bottle and press it against the front of his jeans before discharging the energy carefully. There's an almost immediate swelling that presses back, a grunt from the cowboy, and then he hurries off while I wish drinking his bourbon would have an effect on me. Any effect on me.
Fifteen minutes later, a shout of "Yee-haw!" echoes down through the ceiling. Several minutes after that, the almond-eyed woman comes back down the stairs, flushed with pleasure and with her hair in distinct disarray. As she makes her way to the door, another woman catches her arm, this one a blonde in a low-cut red top and dark pants that look like they were painted on. The two women have a quiet exchange, and the blonde looks in my direction.

McCree swaggers down the stairs looking extremely pleased with himself and comes over to lean on the bar next to me.

"Got another race in that horse?" I ask in an undertone. "Blonde in the red shirt looks like she wants to find out."

He looks startled. "How...glass of water, please," he says to the bartender, who obliges. "If this is a plot to keep me sober, then I will fall for it gladly." He gulps down half the glass before stopping for breath, eyes somewhere over my head and probably on the blonde. "Awwyyeah, Colt 45 reloaded and ready for action. Howdy," he says as the woman comes up to us. "I couldn't help noticing you noticing me."

"Is it true you are ze last cowboy?" the blonde purrs in a French accent. "I find zat...intoxicating."

McCree puts his glass down and offers her his arm. "I am, and if you're feeling faint, maybe I better take you upstairs where you can...lay down."

She giggles, feeling up his arm under the guise of clinging to it. "And will you show me your gun, monsieur cowboy?"

"It would be my genuine pleasure, miss."

And with a tip of his hat, he leads her upstairs. I have enough time to look up a place nearby that will deliver a steak dinner, place an order, and have the order leave the restaurant before I hear "Yee-haw!" from upstairs. By the time McCree swaggers down, I'm back in his corner table with the bottle of bourbon and the steak dinner waiting for him.

"For me?" he asks, startled. When I nod, he sits and pops open the container. "Sombra, this wasn't part of - you didn't have to buy me dinner."

"I do a lot of things I don't have to," I tell him. "You want to drink the rest of this bottle, you should probably not do it on an empty stomach."

He frowns at me, eyebrows drawing together. "You're still going to let me drink as much as I want?"

"That was the deal."

"You weren't trying to bribe me into staying sober with those ladies?"

I arch an eyebrow at him. "Would it have worked? You said that wasn't the only reason."

"No," he admits, cutting into his steak. "It wouldn't."

McCree eats his dinner, but the bottle remains untouched.
"Let's go back," he says when he's done eating.

"Not going to drown your sorrows?"

He shakes his head. "Not in the mood. Besides, you haven't had anything. I don't feel right making you sit here and watch me make a mess of myself after you bought me dinner and...helped me exercise my horse," he finishes, blushing slightly.

I shrug. "Not hungry. But if you want to call it a night, we'll head back. Just let me know the next time, so I can properly finance your complete debauchery," I tease.

"Fine by me," he says, chuckling.

Reaper's lurking in the living room again when we come back. He flows out of the can and stands up into his usual form. "You're still sober," he says, clearly skeptical of this development.

McCree smirks. "Your Sombra found a couple fillies interested in my Colt," he says smugly. "Wouldn't do to disappoint the ladies, Gabe. You taught me that."

For a moment, Reaper looks like he wants to facepalm except he doesn't have a face. "Whatever," he growls, and flows out of the room.

"Thanks, Sombra," McCree says warmly, giving me a hug I didn't expect. "I mean it. I owe you."

"I only take payment in favors," I tease, but he just nods.

"I'll remember that. Good night."

"Sleep well, cowboy."

The smirk comes back. "Already did," he says as he swaggers off to his room. "Already did."

There's a Papi-dog waiting on my bed when I get into my room, chewing idly on the squeaky steak with his back to the closet. He doesn't say anything until I've changed and crawled under the covers.

"You got him laid?"

"Only because he's so bad at picking up women." When Reaper laughs, I take the plastic steak and toss it out of bed. "Did you behave?"

"Seventy and twelve paragon levels before he hit seventy," he growls in satisfaction.

"Good work, Papi." I hug him before snuggling back down. "I'm proud of you."

Surprised and wagging, Reaper lays down beside me with his head on his paws. "Good night, Alé."

"Good night, Papi."
If you think Sombra's going to let that "sad little cowboy whose dad doesn't love him" comment go, you haven't been paying attention. XD

Things Sombra is going to stick in a subdirectory and try to pretend she never heard: McCree yelling "Yee-haw!" at the conclusion of a sexual encounter. (Spoilers: it doesn't work, she can never un-hear that.)

Sombra and McCree have almost finished their transition from "sibling rivalry" to "you mess with one, you mess with them both". They've both adopted the other, but it's going to take a while still for them each to realize and accept that the other has their back under any any all circumstances.

If you think McCree's not going to try to repay Sombra with favors in kind, you're underestimating how grateful he is to have a sister who will pick up chicks -for- him and...wake up his horse if he hit the bottle to fast.

Reaper was really not expecting Sombra's strategy for keeping his trash cowboy son mostly-sober. As much as he wishes he could un-see those mental images, though, seeing McCree with a bit of his swagger back warms his metaphoric black, shriveled heart.
Chapter Summary

Omake chapter! Nothing in here is canon to the rest of the story, but it's a good read anyway.

rogueofstorms: ooooh requests. Can I get a scene where McCree *actually* picks up Sombra in a bar, and then Reaper goes looking for her and walks in on them both and mentions that since Sombra treats him like a dad and he treats McCree like a son they're technically siblings. XD

Christmas Eve. McCree slouched at the corner table in the mostly-deserted bar, aware of but ignoring the two armed babysitters Ana’d sent to make sure his “date” didn’t kill him, but he wasn’t worried about that happening. Thirty seconds to the appointed time, according to the bar’s old analog clock, the door opened and a female figure in a hooded poncho walked in. She glanced around, went to the bar, and then made her way over to his table with two shots of tequila in her hands. He pushed out a chair for her – the one to his right.

The woman put the shots down and pushed her hood back. Hair was different – very different – but he recognized that beauty mark, the purple eyes, and the lips that were already making his pants feel too tight. She sat down and slid the shots his way.

“It’s only fair,” she teased as he sat up straighter. “You bought me two shots and didn’t get anything for them.”

McCree reached out with his mechanical arm and swept them away, to the opposite side of the table. “I don’t want your liquor,” he said in a low voice.

The woman – Sombra, Ana said her name was – looked startled, her gorgeous purple eyes wide.

“I want what you were offering,” the cowboy continued. “I want what I paid for.”

“That gonna be a bit of a problem,” she responded, the casual amusement gone from her posture. But she wasn’t entirely rejecting the idea, no – he’d seen that expression on women’s faces before. She was haggling.

He could run with that. “How so?”

“You looking for the full experience, it not gonna happen. I got no stable for your horse, cowboy.”

Slightly disappointing, but she still hadn’t ruled out…other things. “So what’re my options?”

One finger – purple nails, not the red they had been – ran lightly up his right arm, leaving the hairs standing up from that tingling touch. It didn’t take much to imagine what that would feel like somewhere else, and his breath caught. “Or?” he choked out.

In response, she looked him straight in the eye and licked those luscious lips of hers.

“That’ll do,” he said hoarsely.
In the bar’s handicapped-accessible bathroom, door absolutely locked, those deliciously tingly purple-nailed fingers teased him through the fabric of his jeans as Sombra took her sweet time unbuttoning and then unzipping him. Standing in the corner, with his flesh hand gripping the safety bar and his metal hand braced against the other wall, he gasped as she finally got him free and started to slowly, tauntingly, get to work. He tried to keep his eyes open, to focus on her face as she bent over him, but they slid shut with a groan when she got him right where he wanted her to get him. Determined, he pried them open again-

-and let out a terrified shriek as a black mist seeped under the door and solidified into Reaper. Not just the terrifying international assassin – worse, he knew now that this was Gabriel Reyes. His old commander. His ex-boss.

His dad.

Sombra frowned as his boner deflated and tried to hide inside his body. “What’s wrong?” she asked in disgruntled confusion.

“What’s wrong,” a too-familiar growl said from behind her, “is that you two have just put Luke and Leia to shame.”

McCree tried to focus on the words, to figure out what Reaper was trying to communicate, but his mind didn’t want to pay attention to anything but the fact that his dad just caught him getting head in a bar bathroom and he was sure he was going to die. Of embarrassment, if nothing else.

Still frowning, Sombra twisted around to stare up into Reaper’s mask. “You wanna explain what that means, Papi?”

The eye holes of Reaper’s owl-skull mask seemed to bore straight into Jesse. “She doesn’t mean pimp or gang boss,” he said with a sadistic anticipation he remembered all too well. “She means dad.”

Both hands over his face, McCree slid to the floor and tried to convince the ground to swallow him up. His sister. The worst part is that he knew Reaper wouldn’t kill him for this.

He knew because right now, that’s exactly what he wanted to happen.

Sister.

tatch: -whispers- confetti parade -cackles away-

More seriously, something like Jack, Gabe and Jesse bonding time? Both before everything went to shit and then after?

“I hate parades,” McCree muttered as he climbed into the backseat of the black SUV Reyes had commandeered for their post-parade transportation. “Always wind up with confetti everywhere.”

“Suck it up, cowboy,” the commander of Blackwatch said from the driver’s seat. “It’s not that bad.”
Commander Morrison slid into the front passenger seat. “Easy for you to say, Gabe. The rest of us actually have hair.” To prove the point, he shook his head. Little paper circles floated through the air and slid right off the other man’s shaved scalp.

“Not my fault,” Gabriel countered, making sure to glance into the rear-view mirror so Jesse could see his shit-eating grin. “Time to go get cleaned up.”

Jack looked up from fastening his seat belt in alarm. “What are you-”

But that’s all he got out before Reyes was gunning the motor, and the SUV leaped out of the parking lot with a modest screech as he took the curve sharply enough to make both passengers grab for handholds and swear. Within seconds they were off the main thoroughfare and lost in a maze of side-streets and residential neighborhoods.

“Where in tarnation are we going?” McCree howled from the back seat.

“Little swimming hole I used to go to,” Gabriel shouted calmly back. “You’ll love it.”

“I’m a city kid!”

“So this will be a new experience for you!”

Jack Morrison simply sighed and adjusted his grip.

“There’s bugs,” Jesse said doubtfully as the two older men climbed out of the vehicle, leaving colorful bits of paper in their wake.

“And trees,” Jack said, smiling despite himself. “I didn’t think you had anything this green in Los Angeles, Gabe.”

The Latino shrugged. “National park. We’re not all concrete and glass.”

McCree gingerly stepped out to join the other two. “Uh…I don’t have a swimsuit.”

“So?” Reyes asked, already pulling off the jacket of his dress uniform and shaking it vigorously. Beside him, Jack was doing the same.

“So what…what are you doing?” Both hands over his face, the cowboy spun away from where his commander was unzipping the fly of his dress pants.

Morrison laughed. “You can’t go skinny dipping with your clothes on, Jesse.”

“My…clothes…”

Against his better judgment, he turned around and peeked through his fingers. Gabriel was standing with his back (thankfully) turned, shaking confetti out of his pants. He wasn’t wearing a stitch of clothing. Beside him, Jack was shaking his boots carefully before stuffing a sock into each one. The brilliant white briefs he was wearing weren’t much better.

“Here, Jack,” Gabriel said as he finished folding his pants and adding them to the pile with the rest of his clothes.

While McCree watched in sinking resignation, the bald man ran his hands through Morrison’s hair, combing out errant bits of confetti.
“McCree!” Reyes shouted suddenly.

Startled by the command voice, Jesse found himself standing at attention. “Sir!”

“Get out of those clothes, cowboy. Gotta get all that confetti off of you before you can get in the water.”

Jesse sighed and started unbuttoning his dress jacket. “There better not be any cameras, that’s all I gotta say.”

~timeskip~

Jack walked into the safehouse living room with a plastic shopping bag in one hand, radiating satisfaction. “Sombra, I’m going to need to – JESSE, GET IN HERE! – borrow your dog.”

Reaper looked up from where he’d been sitting with his head on Sombra’s knee, getting petted. “What are you plotting, Morrison?”

“That’s a good question,” Jesse said from the door of his room. Jack tossed the plastic bag at him. He caught it and examined the contents for a moment. “Question and objection withdrawn. Shadow-sis, we need to borrow your Papi for the afternoon.”

Sombra raised one eyebrow. “You gonna tell me what you doing that you don’t want me there to keep him in line?”

McCree blushed. “Ah…I ain’t comfortable with you looking.”

Reaper perked up at that. “Tell me you found one,” he demanded.

“We found one,” Jack affirmed smugly.

“Sombra? I promise I will behave. No maiming, no killing, no starting fights.” Tail wagging madly, he looked up at his adopted daughter and gave her the biggest puppy eyes he could manage.

She laughed. Okay, Papi. You go have fun.”

“Oh, I will,” he promised. “I will.”

Reaper stared, tail wagging, ears up in the gentle breeze. “You found a swimming hole,” he breathed in the happiest tone either of the other men had heard from him in years. “I’m not waiting for you two to strip,” he announced. “I’m going in.”

“That’s fine,” Jesse drawled. “Don’t hold back on our account.”

He and Jack took their time disrobing, one always watching the swimming hole while the other blocked their little surprise from view. They suspected Reaper wouldn’t be able to resist coming out to shake his fur and shower them both with water, and they were right. Just as they finished stuffing their clothes into the plastic bag, the dog bounded over.

Jack shielded Jesse with his body. When the onslaught ended, he threw himself to the side and shouted, “Now!”

Jesse whipped around and set off the confetti cannon at point-blank range to a wet dog. The breeze
was with him, carrying the cloud of tiny paper bits away from his own now-wet body and thoroughly bedecking Reaper instead.

“Now how’s it feel?” Jack demanded while Jesse roared with laughter. “You’re all hair!”

Skin twitching at the multitude of wet paper circles, Reaper attempted to shake himself clean but not a single one budged. “Very clever,” he growled as Jack indulged in laughter of his own, “but you forgot one thing.”

Three beats, and the dog dissolved into a black cloud that then formed into a perfectly dry, perfectly clean doberman again. Not a single speck of confetti on him.

“Still worth it,” Jesse said smugly. “Dad.”

purpleLusus: And for the bonus thing... maybe Jesse birthday and Reaper being configured like a horse as a gift for the day? Thanks!

“God damn it,” Reaper growled suddenly, just as Sombra was starting to drift off.

“Papi?” she asked sleepily.

“It’s McCree’s birthday in two days.”

She cracked one eye open. “And that’s bad?”

Reaper just growled for a minute. Then he ground out, “I don’t know what to get him.”

“But you want to get him something.”

Another minute of unhappy growling. “Yes.”

Sombra sat up and started petting him. “Okay. We gonna figure this out. But you gotta tell me what traditional birthdays are like, because we didn’t do that in Los Muertos.”

Reaper sprawled in her lap, letting her relax him, and talked about cards and presents, cake and balloons, blowing out the candles and making a wish. “A pony is a traditional kid’s wish,” he finished, “although fuck if I know why. McCree likes to tell me he wished for a pony. I tell him if he wants one, he can go get it himself.”

“A pony…” Sombra opened a few screens and played with them for a minute. “Hey Papi, you wanna freak him out?”

“You know me better than that,” he said, wagging.

“Alright. I gonna need one of the spare tubes of nanites, and we gonna need to start the configuration the night before, because I do not have time to make any adjustments. You not gonna be able to talk, but you will remember everything.”

“That’s good enough for me.”
McCree woke up on the morning of his birthday with a mingled feeling of hope and dread: hope that someone else would remember what day it was, too, and dread that no one would. As he opened his door, however, the scent of hot buckwheat pancakes shooed a little bit of the dread away.

Sombra was alone in the kitchen, something he asked about as she put coffee and pancakes and bacon and eggs in front of him.

“A little birthday gift from me to you,” she joked. “Peace and quiet for you to eat your breakfast in.”

That made him laugh.

After breakfast, Jack excused himself to go pick up an unspecified something that everyone knew was a cake and Ana brought them gaming pads while they sprawled comfortably on the couch for some Diablo 3. Jesse rolled a male witch doctor, and Ana kept watch over him with her crusader while Sombra and her witch doctor’s army of minions decimated bosses and rifts until he was 70 and could equip all the legendaries she and Ana threw at him. It was nice, being able to just play without Reaper’s cutting commentary, but Jesse couldn’t help missing the gruff affection that came with it.

When Jack finally got back, they put the pads away and Jesse tried not to feel so childishly pleased as the other three sang ‘Happy Birthday’ while a modest number of candles burned on what looked like a triple-chocolate cake, sitting on the coffee table. At the conclusion of the song, he leaned over and blew the candles out, eyes closed. His real wish, he kept silent. But when he opened his eyes again, he grinned and announced, “I wished for a pony.”

At that moment, the door to the living room opened. Or rather, was nosed open. By a pony.

McCree’s jaw dropped. “What-”

Ana was smiling. Jack was beaming. Sombra was smirking.

Reaper was nowhere to be found.

“Oh my god,” the cowboy breathed. “You turned him into a pony.”

The pony whickered.

“Oh my god. He can’t talk? He’s a pony and he can’t talk?”

The pony’s ears went back.

“Oh my god. He can’t talk? He’s a pony and he can’t talk?”

The pony’s ears went back.

“He can still understand you,” Sombra pointed out.

“But he can’t talk. He can’t – you really did give me peace and quiet for my birthday! A pony,” he said in satisfaction. “Tell me you’re taking video.”

The hacker rolled her eyes. “Of course.”

Jesse stood up and circled the table so he could reach gingerly towards his pony. The pony tossed its head and stamped one hoof as if to say I’m not going to bite you, Sombra would make me regret it. Smiling like he didn’t think was possible, Jesse stroked the pony’s velvety nose.

“Thanks, Gabe,” he said softly. The pony’s ears came forward. “This is a great present. I love it.”
“Would you believe it was his idea?” Sombra asked from behind him.

“Not for a heartbeat,” he answered dryly. He turned and hugged her. “But thank you for thinking of it, and thank you,” he said to the pony, “for going along with it.” A thought occurred to him. “Hold on, I’ll be right back!”

Jesse darted into his room. A few minutes later, he emerged in his full cowboy getup.

“Alright,” he drawled, “now let’s get some pictures. I want something I can hang on my wall, so I can remember this forever.”

Blue Cat: An Omake, huh? I’d honestly take anything involving the Shimada brothers and their attempts to rebuild bridges. I know it’s not the focus of this story, but I wouldn't object to seeing it a bit in the background. Bonus points for "wtf" reactions from the rest of the cast, and maybe Reaper eventually sidling up to Hanzo to compare notes on this whole "redemption" shtick.

A flashing icon in one corner on Sombra’s visualization alerted her to an encrypted message from Genji waiting for her in one of the omnic communication satellites. Eagerly, she connected and decrypted it.

LINKSISTER, I HAVE AN UNUSUAL REQUEST TO MAKE OF YOU. LAST YEAR, I MADE CONTACT WITH MY BROTHER HANZO FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HIS ATTEMPT ON MY LIFE. I HAVE FORGIVEN HIM, AND WISHED TO RE-ESTABLISH PEACEFUL RELATIONS. HOWEVER, HE WAS LESS THAN OPEN TO THE IDEA. IT HAS BEEN NEARLY A YEAR, AND I BELIEVE THAT IF WE WERE TO INTERACT IN A NEUTRAL ENVIRONMENT, PERHAPS HE WOULD BE MORE AMENABLE TO THE IDEA OF RECONCILIATION. TO THAT END, I HUMBLY ASK IF YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO INCAPACITATE AND ABDUCT HIM TO YOUR SAFEHOUSE. I CAN TELL YOU WHERE HE WILL BE ON A SPECIFIC DATE.

Even if Genji weren’t her linkbrother, this would intrigue and amuse Sombra enough to do it. Quickly, she fired back her agreement and he sent her the date that Hanzo would be at their ancestral home, honoring the brother he tried to kill.

In the shadows beside the swords displayed as if they were an offering, Sombra listened to the sounds of combat coming closer. There weren’t many of them. Then a single set of light, quick footsteps approached, and she snuck invisibly out to meet the lone figure who paused to stare at them, deep in thought. Although she made no sound and cast no shadow, she still displaced the air and he raised his head in alarm.

Before he could attack or flee, she reached out and, at almost the same moment, dropped stealth and touched his nose.

“Boop!”

The EMP discharged, and Hanzo fell bonelessly to the floor.
Hanzo awoke in a plain room, with his hands bound behind his back and his feet encased by a sort of rubber boot that reached past his ankles and hobbled him better than if he had just been shackled. The light came from behind glass panels near the ceiling, neither glaring down nor bright enough to blind, and the single door was plain, burnished steel. Across the room sat a figure he had only seen once before. Then, the figure had moved with a speed that surpassed even his own. Now, he sat in peaceful meditation.

“Why have you brought me here?” Hanzo demanded angrily.

Calmly, Genji replied, “Because I still think there is hope for you, but in order for you to see it, you must raise your eyes from the world we grew up in and see the world for what it is.”

“A world where you are a monster of flesh and metal? Do you even have a heart to beat?”

“I have accepted what I am,” Genji said in that same infuriatingly calm tone. “I was given a chance to live, to help others, to shape the world. The journey has been long, but I have found new family, and I have found peace within myself. Can you say the same?”

“I destroyed my world,” Hanzo said stubbornly. “It is my burden to live within it. You cannot know what it is like, to have torn down with your own two hands that which you valued most. Even if there were a path that might lead me to redemption, I am not worthy of it.”

Genji’s head tilted slightly, the gesture achingly familiar. Hanzo could almost imagine his brother’s amused expression. “You sound like my second father.”

That brought Hanzo up sharply. “Your…what?”

“Told you that I found new family. My commander was…more than a commander to me. He accepted what I was before I myself did, and treated me as his own son. A better father than our own, I think. He, too, destroyed his world and tore down that which he valued most. He, too, feels himself unworthy of redemption. But for the sake of those who still care despite what he has become, he travels that difficult path and some of our family travel it with him to guide his steps and support him. He hurt many whom he cared for. But, just as you did, he hurt himself the most. And, although he has been forgiven, he has not forgiven himself. Would you like to meet him?”

Whether he did or not, Hanzo was not about to give his brother the satisfaction. “What choice do I have?”

Infuriatingly, Genji shrugged. “You can say no. The choice is yours. But the extent of his actions far outreach yours, and he is far more damaged by circumstances than I.”

Now Hanzo was intrigued. “Very well. I will meet this…second father of yours.”

Genji reached behind him and rapped on the door. “Linksister! My brother has agreed to meet your father.”

The only response to that declaration was a black mist that seeped under the door, but did not flow across the small room. Instead, it curdled and boiled into a man-sized cloud that solidified into a figure he had seen glimpses of on news programs: Talon’s monstrous assassin, Reaper.

“This?” he demanded, recoiling as much as possible without falling over. “This…monster…is your second father?”

“This monster was once Gabriel Reyes,” Genji chided. “A hero who saved the world when we were children.”
“It was through his actions that Overwatch was cast into disgrace,” Hanzo protested angrily before his own words sank in.

“I had help,” Reaper said dryly. “If you want to call it that.”

“And you were a…second father…to my brother?”

Reaper crossed his arms. “He reminded me of me. You remind me of me, too.”

“I do not need a second father,” growled Hanzo.

“No. You need what I needed.”

“And what is that?”

Wisps of smoke curled out from between Reaper’s crossed arms. “Someone to tell you that you’re being an idiot, and do it loud enough that you actually listen.”

Hanzo blinked. This…monster of smoke had once been one of the great heroes of the world, and was calling him an idiot. Calling himself an idiot.

“I think your brother’s a bit too polite to really do the job,” Reaper continued, “but you’re welcome to have my daughter yell at you.”

Genji tilted his head up curiously. “Linksister Sombra has yelled at you?”

“Only when he’s being an idiot,” a female voice with a Hispanic accent said lightheartedly from everywhere and nowhere. “I can yell at your brother for you if you really want, but dinner’s ready so if you think he can behave and not try to fight his way out, go ahead and bring him up.”

Two faceless masks turned to look at Hanzo.

“If I am truly a guest and not a prisoner, then honor demands that my actions honor my host,” he said stiffly.

“I will vouch for him,” Genji told Reaper, who made a hmph sound.

“Good enough for me. Sombra? We’ll be up in five.”

“Okay. Unlocking the door now.”

Dinner was not remotely what Hanzo was expecting. Now that he knew who Reaper was, he could guess at the others: Jack Morrison, Ana Amari, Jesse McCree. But they were the only ones to whom Sombra served food. Genji, Reaper, and Sombra herself simply sat at the table and made lighthearted conversation. No one seemed to see anything out of the ordinary about this, or about the presence of a man who had awoken in a containment cell and was now eating as a guest. He had no idea where he was in the world, but the dishes would not have been out of place in his father’s house and, humbled by this show of consideration, Hanzo ate in respectful silence.

Suddenly, Genji laughed, although no one had made a joke.

“Why do you laugh?” Hanzo demanded, then immediately cursed himself for how antagonistic that sounded.

“Linksister Sombra said that if it was the fashion in Japan for men to bare one side of their chest,
perhaps she should take a trip to see for herself.”

“But…she…”

“She is no longer flesh and blood, brother,” Genji said patiently. “Although she was born with such a body, it has been many years since she has worn it. I am half machine, but of her former self, Sombra retains only her mind. It has been quite comforting to know that I am not the only one who can no longer enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, who is neither human nor omnic, but exists somewhere between the two worlds.”

Hanzo set his chopsticks down in a neat, precise motion. “I thank you for your hospitality,” he said to the table as a whole, “and for this meal, but I have been given much to think on and desire rest.”

“You’re welcome, amigo,” Sombra said with the same lighthearted tone as when she was merely a disembodied voice. “Linkbrother Genji, could you show him to a room in the west wing?”

“It would be my honor,” Genji replied with a half bow. “Brother, if you would…”

Hanzo stood and bowed. “Thank you again for your generosity,” he said, and followed his brother out of the room.

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Fey_Nikola: For the omake request: with the new comic and subsequent wiki update, it’s been revealed that Genji was part of Blackwatch. Could we see Gabe reacting to the new, more peaceful version of his angry robot son? (This scenario may yet show up in the actual story, but a more comedic slant could be fun?)

Reaper’s first hint that they had a guest was when a silver-green blur stole his Frisbee out of the air, leaving him to land empty-mouthed. Before he could really register what had just happened or even get angry, a nimble set of fingers was scratching the back of his head and that red disk was being waved enticingly in front of his face. Then the newcomer threw it back towards Sombra, and he was running with everything he had, determined to snatch it out of the air. The blur passed him, but solidified next to his adopted daughter, and Reaper wanted to just keep running and wisp inside the house, hide in one of the cans and not come out because fuck, that was Genji. But that would be giving away who he was, so he just caught the Frisbee and brought it to Sombra for her to throw again.

By the time he brought it back the second time, Genji was gone. Reaper put it out of his mind, determined to enjoy the day and the exercise.

When he finally called a halt and Sombra led him back upstairs for his post-workout liquid meal, however, Ana was sitting on the couch with Genji, who was chattering happily with her. Sombra had to tug his collar because that little fact made him feel like his brain was lying on a bathroom floor dramatically declaring, ‘Help! I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up!’

Inexplicably, when he’d finished lapping up whatever it was that Sombra fed him and they joined the two in the living room, Genji still was somehow unaware that he was not a normal dog. He crouched easily by the doggy bed, petting and scratching Reaper while still chattering happily to Ana and now Sombra as well.
Had he hit his head outside? Had Sombra drugged him? He remembered Genji, poor kid. Torn half to pieces. Barely enough to save. He’d had the best medical care Overwatch could provide, but that left him as much machine as it did man, and it had been rough adjusting to it. Naturally, he’d practically adopted Genji before he was even out of bandages. Kid need stability, normalcy, and he wasn’t going to get that unless someone was aggressive about giving it to him, so he’d stepped up. It’d hurt, watching someone so angry, not reacting when he lashed out, not reacting when he held it in. He hadn’t wanted hugs or pity, and he knew Genji didn’t, either, so as much as he may have wanted to just hold the kid and let him just let it all down…he gave him gruff praise and restrained pats and let him keep his facades.

Honestly, he would have recruited Genji for Blackwatch even if he hadn’t been safer away from the public eye. But a man who was almost more metal than flesh would be taking his life into his own hands walking down the street, and even when his armor was complete and he looked like a full robot or omnic, that wasn’t much safer. If anyone had known he was Shimada’s son, he would have been even less safe. So he’d taken Genji in, given him targets, given him purpose. But after that purpose was completed, the kid ran off, and he hadn’t had the heart to try to track him down. What good would that have done, to drag him back to a life of isolation and murder?

But now, here he was, and he was happy. Ironic that he’d become the happy one while Reaper was the one filled with rage and loathing for his own body. And he still didn’t know who Reaper was, what the fuck?

“It is good to hear that Jack is not as dead as was thought,” Genji was saying to Sombra, “but as glad as I will be to see him, another name weighs my heart down.”

“What name is that?” Sombra asked, her fingers joining Genji’s in caressing Reaper’s fur.

“When I was in Blackwatch, my commander was…like a father to me. Stern but patient, giving approval only grudgingly but also not holding mistakes over my head. I was full of anger, back then. Anger at myself, at my body, at my brother, at the world. He bore the brunt of my temper when it slipped my grasp, but never met it with his own although I know it was formidable. I left in part because I did not want to disappoint him when I, through no fault of his, failed to adjust to my situation. Now I am at peace with myself, and can enjoy the simple things in life, but he is long dead and I cannot show him what I have become. I will never know if he would be proud of me, or hear him say-”

“Good job, kid,” Reaper growled softly. The same grudging praise he’d given Genji so many times. He couldn’t help it; the words almost bled out of him.

Both sets of fingers stopped. Silence descended.

“Linksister,” Genji said in a light, pleasant tone inviting the correction of a misconception, “your dog just spoke.”

Sombra wrinkled her nose. “Yeah, he does that.”

“I am beginning to suspect that your dog is somewhat more than a normal dog.”

“So,” Sombra said, fingers moving again through Reaper’s fur, “when I joined Talon, I was a pain in the ass to their assassin, Reaper. Found out he was someone who’d been badly burned and was held together with nanites that barely knew his head from his ass. So I started tinkering with them. Gave him more stability. Got attached. Learned Talon had been abusing him. Took him with me when I left, and programmed the nanites to turn him into a dog so he could get used to being alive
again, you know?"

Genji nodded, and Sombra took a deep breath.

“Turns out…before Talon got their hands on him? He was Gabriel Reyes.”

Silence again. Genji looked like the mechanical parts of him had just shut down, leaving him a statue of silver and glowing green. Reaper sat up.

“Good job, kid,” he said again. Then he raised one paw and laid it on Genji’s shoulder, like the approving pats he used to dispense. “I’m proud of you.”

“Commander?” whispered Genji.

Reaper sighed. “I used to be.”

He was not expecting to be hugged for that.

“There is always a way forward, if you are willing to seek it,” Genji said softly. “Do not let this defeat you.”

This was absolutely not the reaction he’d been expecting to having his identity exposed. To be given this kind of acceptance, without warning or hesitation, made him realize how valuable a gift he’d given the kid back when he needed it most. “I won’t,” he said in a voice barely louder than a sigh. Then he winced internally and uttered the words that passed his lips only rarely: “Thank you.”

“It is I who thank you,” Genji replied. “You gave me a gift precious beyond words, and now I am humbled by the opportunity to return it.”

Okay. Too much vulnerable sincerity for one day. Reaper leaned back and licked Genji’s protective mask. “Too much talking, not enough petting.”

Ana was the first to laugh, but a moment later Genji joined in. He’d never heard the kid laugh before. It was a nice laugh.

But more importantly, he started petting Reaper again.
Ice cream surprise

Chapter Summary

McCree thought he was jaded to the state of his bizarre little family. He was wrong.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a morning spent scaring the crap out of squirrels and birds in the park, Reaper walks very obediently at my side as I hit the ice cream stand and head back into the park. When we find a bench, I tie his leash to one end and sit to soak up the sun while beside the bench, Reaper starts going to town on the double scoop of Rocky Road - plus sugar cone - I've just put down for him in a cardboard hot dog tray.

"Hey!"

I look up, and the speaker is someone I vaguely remember seeing in the lunch plaza we just left. He must have followed us. White male, mid-to-late 20s, short light hair under a red baseball cap worn backwards, white running shoes and a navy track suit with red and white piping. Please tell me he's not going to try to hit on me. He jogs down the path and reaches for Reaper's collar, but wisely pulls his hand back when Papi raises his head and growls.

"Lady, control your dog!" he demands, giving me an angry look.

I'm unimpressed. "Don't run up and reach for him."

He makes another grab, and Reaper snaps at him before growling again. "Look, lady, you can't just let your dog eat people food! Chocolate is very bad for them, you're going to make him sick!"

I shrug. "You wanna take it away from him, you more than welcome to try."

"You're going to kill him!"

"Nope. He genetically altered."

Reaper goes back to eating his ice cream while the well-meaning but annoying tourist watches helplessly. The sugar cone crunches between his teeth, and then he licks up any crumbs and the last, melted smears in the tray before picking the cardboard up in his teeth and depositing it in the trash can a few feet away.

The guy scratches his head. "Okay, well, I've never seen a dog do that before. You've, ah, got him well-trained, then?"

"He still got some behavioral issues," I say, gesturing Reaper back and scratching behind his ears. "But he does know a few tricks. Sit, stay, roll over, make dead."

"You mean play dead," the guy says.
"Nope. Here, I show you." Carefully, I reach down and remove his collar. Today it's the one that says REAPER, black with silver spikes. One hand on his shoulder, I 'walk' him a few feet down the path. "Reaper? Sit."

Reaper sits obediently down, smirking with the tilt of his head.

"Stay," I tell him, and walk back to the end of the bench where his leash is tied. Reaper watches me go, but otherwise does not move. "Roll over!"

He executes a textbook flawless roll and goes back to sitting alertly.

I pick up a stick and toss it into the air, away from the path. "Make dead!"

What had been a doberman dissolves into black smoke and re-forms into Reaper, guns out and firing. The stick explodes into a shower of splinters while Papi yells, "Die! Die! Die!"

There's about ten seconds where the guy just stands there, splinters falling around him. Then he lets out a scream that would rival McCree's hung-over exclamations and runs down the path with enough speed that I have to assume his outfit wasn't for show.

"Who's a good murderdog?" I coo as he melts back into the doberman.

"Me," Reaper growls, tail wagging. "It's me."

McCree ambles up with a cone of his own as I'm putting the collar back on. "You kill someone?" he asks us both. "Heard a scream."

"Hey, I'm a good dog," Papi protests smugly, still wagging.

"Yes you are," McCree agrees, crouching to pet him.

He's so intent on the fact that Reaper's allowing the attention that he doesn't notice his cone is in danger until Papi backs away, shaking his head and pawing at his tongue.

"Ugh! Butter pecan? You still have shit taste in ice cream, McCree."

Jesse stands up and looks forlornly at his dog-licked ice cream cone. "Thanks, Gabe," he says in a defeated tone.

Reaper actually looks remorseful and sits by my foot, but doesn't say anything. He knows he's done a Bad Thing, but doesn't know how to apologize, or can't bring himself to admit fault.

"I guess you can have it," the cowboy sighs, sitting on the bench and holding the cone out.

Reaper says, "I don't-" before I interrupt him.

"Eat it, Papi."

He gives me a pleading look as if to ask if he really has to. My expression says in no uncertain terms that yes, he does. Whining reluctantly, he inches close enough to stretch out his neck and eat the ice cream from the proffered cone. When McCree shoots me a curious look, I just smirk and
nod at the dog who is clearly not enjoying his treat. Slowly, the cowboy smiles.

"Hey Sombra, you got any plans tonight?"

"Nothing I can't put on hold. We on, then?"

"Yeah," he says, watching Reaper pull the sugar cone out of its paper sleeve and crunch it up. "Yeah, we are."

"Be good," I tell Reaper firmly. He looks mournfully up at me, head on his paws, from his doggy bed. "No killing, no maiming, no picking fights. Call on the Talon channel if you need me. Got it?"

"Si," he growls.

I kneel to ruffle his fur and hug his neck. "Okay. Love you, Papi."

He licks my cheek and his tail wags once or twice, but he still watches me sadly as I leave. I'm not sure if he's still gnawing on his mis-step earlier, or if he wants to be going with me. Either one is a good sign.

McCree's waiting past the gate for me, thumbs in his belt, lit cigar clenched between his teeth. He nods as I slip out and we start walking.

"Thanks fer takin' my side earlier," he says quietly. "I thought if I got a flavor he hates, my ice cream would be safe. Guess I was wrong."

"He was being a dumbass. He needs to learn to not do that, or at least to sniff before he licks. I know he don't apologize, so I punished him instead."

That makes him chuckle. "Yeah, Gabe was never great at apologies. So what did happen earlier? I ain't heard a scream like that since I woke up droolin' on that red dress o' yours."

"Tourist tried to separate Papi from a double scoop of Rocky Road." I wave it away while Jesse laughs. "So what kind of night is it, cowboy? Looking to fire your Colt, or am I walking your drunk ass home?"

He takes a deep breath. "Actually...I thought I might return the favor and help you get some action."

Oh. I stop dead, closing subdirectories before they even open, and he turns to look at me. This is going to be....

"Sombra?" he asks, concerned by the unexpected reaction.

"Amigo...you don't have to worry about me."

McCree frowns at my hollow tone and pinches his cigar out. Behind him, the door to the bar opens
and laughter spills out. "That ain't enough of an answer, missy. But let's get inside; I get the feeling this is gonna need tequila."

At the bar, he tries to order a bottle of cheap tequila, but I point to the good stuff and fan out the cash for it. Once we're in a corner, I pour him a shot and then pour the second shot, but I don't touch it.

He tosses his shot back and says grimly, "Alright. Start talking."

"You ever notice I don't eat breakfast?"

"Ain't my business if you wanna skip meals," he shrugs. "There's days I barely eat at all."

"Jesse..." I push the other shot glass over to him. He drinks it, eyebrows drawn together, but I still don't know how to break this to him. "I don't eat."

"I don't understand." It's not a denial; he really has no idea what I'm talking about.

"I don't eat. I don't drink. Technically, I don't need to breathe."

His eyebrows arch slightly. "You're a nanite zombie, then, like your Papi?"

I spread my hands on the table. They look so real. "Ten years ago, I gave up the body I was born with. What you're seeing...it's a lie. I only look organic. This is an omnic body."

There's a long pause. I'm afraid to lift my eyes. In my peripheral vision, I can see McCree reach out and take a long swig straight from the bottle.

"Does Gabe know?" he asks quietly.

I nod.

"Because he found out, or did you tell him?"

"Both," I say softly.

He takes another long drink. "Are you stuck like that forever, then?"

"I saved my DNA sequence. I could use some of Reaper's nanites to build an organic body, and my...the ones who helped me transition from organic to omnic could help transfer me back."

"But you're not going to," he says darkly, and when I look up at him, he's scowling.

"It's not my choice to make. I was given this body with the agreement that I would do certain things. Until they're done..."

"And when they are?" he asks. It's a quiet, angry question. I wasn't expecting anger.

I look down at my hands again. "I don't know."

But I do know - I know I want to, I want it more than I've ever wanted anything except to rewind time, to have my mother throw herself to the floor next to me and hold me tight as the fighting
rages outside. I also know that hope is a lie, and wanting something so badly is just inviting the world to hurt you by taking it away.

A slosh, a thump. McCree taking another drink straight from the bottle.

"I'm sure you had your reasons," he says in a hard voice. "I won't ask. That's your business, unless you want to share. I just...how can you stand it?" he finishes in something between plaintive and bewildered.

That makes me look up. "It's not like Papi," I reassure him. "I can still feel and smell. I still get tired and need to sleep. It's as close to organic as possible." Because blending in is my weapon.

He grunts. "I s'ppose that's alright. Listen, I'm just gonna sit here and feel like shit that my lil' sis can't enjoy the finer things in life. You don't need to keep me company. I ain't gonna be worth a damn for conversation, so there's no reason for both of us to wallow in my misery."

Oh my god. That's why he drinks - he has no healthier methods of processing emotional turmoil. No wonder trauma didn't have an impact.

"Only way I'm leaving you to wallow in your misery by yourself is if you're in your room," I tell him firmly. "Especially if I'm causing your misery."

McCree looks at me for a long moment, searching my face like he's not sure if I'm actually serious or not. The tequila's already hitting him hard. "No," he says finally. "I don't drink alone. Too much temptation to just keep drinkin' if there's no one around t'stop me."

In other words, he's been using barkeepers and waitstaff as his safety net. Nope. I move from the chair across from him to the one beside him. "Then you're stuck with me, cowboy. Let me know when you're ready to stumble home and if you're gonna need the bathroom for anything before I put you to bed."

Again he gives me a long look. "Yer a good friend. I don't know that I deserve that."


He looks vaguely affronted. "Maybe I will," he counters. "Maybe I will."

Chapter End Notes

No, Sombra and Reaper didn't rehearse the sit/stay/roll over/make dead schtick. He just followed her lead.

Things Reaper is not going to do again: try to mess with McCree's ice cream. This was the first time Sombra actually punished him, and it was SUPER EFFECTIVE - not because she made him eat a food he hates, but just because she was punishing him. He crossed a line, and got called on it, and is not used to being forgiven for anything.

"Not having to go to movies anymore" was one of the reasons Sombra was so willing to give up her organic body. She had enough unpleasant experiences that it turned her
off from the whole concept of having sex. She still enjoys looking at beefcake, she's just repulsed by the idea of doing anything more than looking.

The days Jesse barely eats at all are the days he's planning to get blackout drunk. Sombra's going to figure that out later. And of course he has no healthier coping mechanisms, look who his mentor was: Gabriel "Toxic Masculinity Issues" Reyes.
In vino veritas

Chapter Summary

Jesse won't remember this in the morning. Fortunately for him, Sombra will.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It's close to midnight by the time we get back to the safehouse. Jesse is a scarily practiced drunk. He managed to get himself to the bar's bathroom without much difficulty and came back several minutes later to let me know he was ready to go, and that he'd already 'made a deposit' so I didn't need to worry about him finding a trash can or bush on the way back. He didn't even need a steadying arm, although he let me open the gate and apologized for not being a gentleman and getting it for me, but he could barely see straight enough to find the gate control.

"Want me to get you a glass of water?" I ask as I watch him navigate the stairs, ready to steady him if he needs it.

"Nah. 'S gonna be a bitch in the morning but 's what I deserve. Thankee kindly, though."

Okay, I am not letting this happen again if I can help it. "Why you do this to yourself, Jesse?" I ask, hoping he both answers and doesn't remember that he did come the morning.

He thinks about it for a few steps, then leans against the wall to look blearily at me. "Hurts less inside 'f it hurts outside."

"Why does it hurt inside?"

McCree turns and resumes his painfully careful journey up the stairs. "Thought I'd finally found a family that wouldn't leave me," he says tiredly. "But then that went to shit and I left." Another step. "Thought he cared enough to come after me. Guess I was wrong."

"Who?" I ask, afraid I know the answer.

"My dad. I mean Gabe. I mean Commander Reyes. Don't tell him I called him that?" he leans against the wall again to look at me. "I...he doesn't know I call him that. Probably just me being stupid. Don't blame him fer not wantin' a stupid kid like me," he sighs before climbing the last two stairs.

Yeah. I'm not letting this slide, but now's not the time. "You need anything before we get you into bed, amigo?"

McCree hesitates, looking around the empty living room. "I guess not," he sighs.

I follow him to the door of his room and watch as he strips off hat, boots, and belt before nearly faceplanting into bed. "I'll make sure no one messes with you," I say, unsure if he's still awake to hear.
A mumble that could have been 'I appreciate it' from a sober man is the response I get, so I guess he is. I close and lock the door behind me, only to find Reaper waiting in the living room. My warning look makes him wisp from the chest and legs, but he follows when I beckon him to my room.

"Don't mess with him," I say as soon as my door is closed behind us.

The wisps double. "I wasn't going to. Sombra..." he trails uncertainly off.

"What's wrong, Papi?"

Reaper looks over at my bed. I pull the covers aside and sit, patting the mattress beside me. He melts into the doberman and climbs up, sprawling half across my lap and burying his nose in my hair. For several minutes I just hug and pet him.

"You wanna talk?" I ask gently.

He whines. "Did I fuck up? Does he hate me?"

"He don't hate you. I promise. But you made him sad, Papi."

"I know," he says in a very quiet voice. Then he whines again.

"Talk to me, Papi. I can't help if I don't know what's going on."

"Are you angry?"

"You thought- Papi, no! No," I repeat, hugging him tighter. "Not angry. You did a bad thing, but you took your punishment without arguing and you not gonna do that again, are you?"

"No."

"Then you learned your lesson. But if you want Jesse to know you regret it, you gotta do something nice to make it up to him."

"I got him a bear," Reaper says grudgingly.

That makes me stop dead. "How- Papi, do you even have any money?"

"I told the clerk you'd pay for it."

It takes a beat to sink in, and then I'm giggling. "Oh my god, Papi. Okay, where did you go?"

He tells me the name of the store, and it's easy enough to slip in and digitally pay for the purchase, particularly since the clerk rang it up with a hold.

"Almost afraid to ask if you paid for mine," I tease.

"Of course I did," he answers with an offended doggy snort. "I ate a mugger on my way there."

My laugh makes him wag his tail slightly, and he repositions himself to be curled up next to me,
his head on my leg.

"So how badly did you scare-" I check the clerk's name. "-Xiang?"

"Xiang remembered me," he says dryly. "I said I needed the girliest bear they had and that payment would come later. Then I posed for a selfie and left with the bear."

Open more screens, engage image-recognition, filter to approximate timestamp, but nothing comes up on social media. A bit more looking turns up a picture stored privately, an Asian youth of indeterminate gender looking ecstatic and making a thumbs-up while Reaper holds a very pretty white bear in a satiny red dress.

"Why a selfie?"

Reaper snorts in amusement. "Something about the manager destroying security footage and wanting to have proof this time."

"I can see that. Okay, so you got McCree a bear. I promised him no one would fuck with him tonight or tomorrow morning."

"Lure him out with those buckwheat pancakes he likes," he suggests. "I'll leave it in his room while he's eating."

I scratch behind his ears. "Sounds like a good plan to me. Were you waiting for us because you wanted to talk to me?"

Reaper flinches slightly. "And to make sure that trash cowboy actually managed to drag himself back," he says with insincere derision. "I can't tell you how many times I yelled his drunk ass to bed when he finally crawled out of whatever liquor bottle he'd fallen into."

"That's why," I murmur, remembering the way McCree'd glanced around the living room in disappointment.

"Why what?"

Slowly, I say, "I think he misses it, Papi."

"Misses-" Reaper breaks off, half-sitting so he can look at me. "Misses it?"

"You cared enough to be waiting. You cared enough to yell." Reaper's head sinks down to my leg again, and I pet him slowly. "I think...with you not being there, waiting...he thinks you don't care."

"Damn it, McCree! I'd go in there right now and rip him up one side and down the other," he growls, "but you promised him no one would mess with him. I need to kill something."

Carefully, I slide out from under his head and fish through the box of assorted chews for the package of aged beef ribs. "Unless you want to go hunting a mugger," I tell him, sliding one out, "you gotta settle for this."

The bone has his attention, which is good because he's been very well behaved and I'm not sure I want him getting comfortable with the idea of going out unsupervised. I make a mental note to see what else I can get my hands on that would satisfy the need for murder without involving a still-
living being.

"Remember-

"No chewing in your bed," he finishes, climbing out to sit on the floor.

"You got it." I hand over the bone. "You can stay and chew on the floor, or bring your doggy bed in if you want."

"I'm fine," he growls around the bone as he settles down.

I pet him for a minute before changing and settling into bed for the night. "Have fun, Papi."

The chewing stops. Softly, he replies, "Thank you, Sombra." Then it starts again.

Chapter End Notes

Reaper's trying, bless his tiny blackened heart. He's trying to figure out the whole "not being a dick" thing but it's hard when half his relationship with his adopted son is "giving him shit and getting shit back".

Of course Xiang remembered Reaper. It's really hard to forget a figure out of nightmare going I REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE. Xiang was pleased to see Reaper again because this time, although the manager would destroy the security footage again, there would be PROOF to go along with the story told drunkenly at parties. ("You guys, Reaper bought another bear!!" "Xiang, you're drunk." "No really, he did, look!!" "..........")

Sombra does go looking up less-sterile things for Reaper to chew on when he's in a mood. She buys him shark spines and turkey feet.
Chapter Summary

This is why Familia Reyes can't just do nice things for each other.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Reaper's still asleep when I wake up, and getting out of bed to get dressed doesn't make him stir. Given the state of the beef rib, I'd guess he went at it for a few hours, which is par for the course when it comes to his fits of temper. Instead of waking him, I tuck my bear under one foreleg so he knows I didn't just disappear.

Ana's in the kitchen enjoying morning tea, and she looks sharply at me when she realizes I don't have a canine shadow. "Sombra? Where is Gabriel?"

"Still sleeping," I tell her as I finish messing with the coffee maker and start getting pancake ingredients out. "He was up late being angry."

That makes her eyebrow climb almost under her scarf, but all she says is, "Oh dear. And how was your outing with Jesse?"

Measuring cup in one hand, butter knife in the other, I let my head slump melodramatically back and sigh. "Informative."

"Oh dear," she says again, but with amusement rather than resignation.

"He found out I'm not organic," I say as I finish measuring things out. "And he did not take it well."

"It is a bit of a shock. I can't blame him." There's a pause as I mix the contents of the bowl together. "Nor do I blame you for keeping it quiet, although Jack has some concerns regarding the circumstances of your...transition," she says in that uniquely parental way that sounds like it's just a statement, but means 'you owe me an explanation, young lady'.

"I heard my name," Uncle Jack says from the doorway. Then he frowns. "Where's...?"

"Sleeping," Ana answers. "Sombra?"

I pour Jack a mug of coffee and set it on the table. "I wasn't murdered," I say before turning back to get the pancakes stared. "I chose to give up being organic. The gunshot wounds, I put them there. Made a political statement. A woman without legal identification who turned up dead, even a young and pretty one who was clearly murdered, would get no attention. No one cares about you unless you're legal. But leave that corpse on the steps of the Police Headquarters on the fifteenth anniversary of the New Year's Massacre, and you make the front page as a statement of silent accusation, blaming them for being complicit in that whole mess."

"That's..." Jack hesitates, searching for the right word. "...horrible. What happens to the people
without legal identification?"

"That depends on who they know." I flip the first buckwheat pancakes. "Los Muertos, we looked out for each other. Stole and shared food with each other. The ones who are legal give the ones who aren't a place to sleep. Others...they not so lucky."

"No wonder you showed up," he mutters. "Thank you. I know it's not my business, but you're the one who adopted me so..." He flushes slightly as I turn around to see why he let it trail off. "You can't just call me Uncle Jack and expect me to not worry about my niece," he says sternly.

That makes me laugh. "Fair enough, Uncle Jack. Family goes both ways." The safehouse systems inform me that McCree's door is unlocked, and I pour a glass of water. "And speaking of family..."

Ana and Jack turn to look as I watch the kitchen doorway and when the hung-over cowboy turns the corner, he stumbles to an alarmed stop. "...the hell, why're you all lookin' at me like that?"

"Morning, Jesse," I say brightly. "You ready for food?"

He sidles around the table, taking the glass as he does, to sit beside Ana rather than leaving his back to the door. "Yeah. Thanks," he adds as I put the plate of pancakes and a mug of coffee down in front of him. "And...thanks fer makin' sure I didn't fall down the stairs last night."

"You remember that?" I ask lightly as I put the syrup and butter in front of him and take the last seat.

"Just that you were there." He keeps his eyes on his breakfast as it fixes it to his liking. "I probably said a bunch of crap last night, but you're not givin' me shit about it this mornin', and I appreciate that."

"Don't worry about it, amigo." I keep my voice cheerful, like nothing out of the ordinary happened. "Just invite me along again next time."

McCree gives me one of those searching looks. "You got it," he says, but I know he's not going to. He won't want to inflict his misery on me.

That's fine. I'll find him anyway. "Gonna go check on Papi," I announce, collecting two nods and a smile as I leave the kitchen.

Reaper's still asleep on my bed. I kneel and pet him, and he shifts, but he doesn't wake up.

"Papi," I say quietly. "McCree is eating, time to sneak in the bear."

One eye opens reluctantly. "Ugh. Fine."

Without even sitting up, he dissolves into smoke and flows out of the room. A minute later, he flows back in and re-forms into the doberman, already curled up.

"There. It's done. I'm going back to sleep now."

I kiss him on his doggy forehead. "Sleep well, Papi. We'll go out somewhere for lunch when you wake up."
He grumbles wordlessly, but his tail wags a few times.

I'm curled up in a chair in the living room when McCree finishes his breakfast, because like hell am I missing this. He gives me a suspicious look as he passes through, but I pretend to be engrossed in my screens. A minute later, he storms out and gestures me angrily out of the room. I follow him as he leads me in silence down the hall and into an unused storage room.

"I thought you weren't going to fuck with me this morning," he spits, furious.

"I didn't!"

"You expect me to believe someone else snuck into my room after you left the kitchen and put a stuffed bear in a red dress on my bedside table?"

"...okay I can see how that looks bad," I say, pulling up a screen, "but it wasn't me." Xiang's selfie comes up. "It was Papi."

McCree staggers back a few steps, hits the wall, and slides down to a sitting position with his face in his hands. "It was him. Oh my god."

I sit next to him. "You alright, amigo?"

"No. I'm an asshole. When you went to check on him, you woke him up so he could put it there?"

"You got it."

"He got me a bear. He fucking got me a bear because I was jealous that he got you one. God damn it!" he yells, flinging his head back to hit the wall.

"Would have left it for you last night, but I told him to not fuck with you."

That distracts him from his apparently furious self-recrimination. "He was waiting for us to get back?" he asks, with just the slightest hesitation on 'us'.

I nod. "Soon as I locked your door, he came out of the can. He wanted to show you he was sorry about your ice cream."

McCree covers his face with his hands, massaging his temples for a long minute before letting both hands fall to his knees. "You gonna hold anything over me from last night?" he asks quietly.

"You think I would?"

"I can't remember what I may or may not have said, and I thought you left the bear, so apparently I'm not a real good judge of your character right now," he says dryly.

"Okay, then listen." I hold his gaze, deliberately not blinking. "I will not promise that I will never act on anything you say or do when drunk. What I will promise, is that anything I do will be with the intent of being to your benefit."
"Why?" When I blink at him in confusion, he says, "Why would you go through that effort for me? And don't say because your Papi cares."

I look away and hug my knees for a minute, staring at the blank wall across from us. "I was ten when Gabriel Reyes took you under his wing," I start in a quiet voice. "Three, almost four years I'd spent wishing he'd do that for me. A lot of us did. I hated you a little, I was so jealous. When you walked away from Blackwatch, I hated you a little more."

"You don't know the things they were doing," he snarls. "No one would listen!" Then, in something close to a sob, "Gabe wouldn't listen."

"Talon was sending forged orders," I tell him gently. "I know he didn't believe you. He didn't believe me until I proved he didn't send one of the orders using timestamped door logs to show he was doing laundry at the time, and your picture is what tipped us off."

"Ana said..." he mumbles vaguely. "So...he knows? That I didn't...I wasn't..."

"He knows he was sabotaged. Jesse...wait a few days?" I turn to gauge his reaction and find him looking warily hopeful. "Right now, if you tell him you left because he wouldn't listen, it gonna break him because he gonna blame himself, and he already blaming himself hard for yesterday. I not gonna lie, he did fuck up. But you gotta give him time to recover or he just gonna decide he not worth anyone caring about him."

"Dad, no..."

It's such a quiet protest that I pretend I don't hear it. "So the reason I'm doing this...I was wrong about you. You need help, I can help you, so that's what I'm going to do."

The silence stretches for a minute, settling around us soft and comfortable like an intangible blanket.

"Alright," McCree says suddenly in his usual drawl, "my butt's going numb from sittin' on this floor. Let's get out of here."

McCree and I are in different chairs, playing Diablo 3 and bantering good-naturedly about whether or not my success with a witch doctor is a result of skill or just cheating, when Reaper steps out of my room in his usual configuration.

"Time out," I announce, portaling back to town. McCree follows my lead. Once he's loaded, I say firmly, "Go give Papi a hug and say thank you for your bear."

Reaper shoots me what would be a startled and possibly alarmed look, but he's also wisping from the chest as the cowboy puts his gaming pad down and saunters up to wrap him in a tight hug.

"Thanks for the teddy bear," he says, then in as annoying tone as he can manage, "Daaaaaad."

"Sombraaaaaa!"
Jesse laughs as he lets go and picks his pad up again. "Hey, Sombra, you mind if we take a break? I'm gettin' a bit hungry."

"Not at all, amigo." I close my game down. "I promised Papi I'd take him out for lunch; you can come with us. Papi, which collar you want today?"

He thinks about it, wisps flowing from chest and biceps and a few from his legs before he melts into the doberman and says, "Red."

Two minutes later I'm leading Reaper on his leash while McCree walks on his other side. The relaxed body language both of them are displaying may only be temporary, but it's heartening.

Chapter End Notes

Things that are a perfectly reasonable explanation for Gabe that would not fly for other people: "he was up late being angry".

Jack is a cinnamon roll. A crusty, cold, hard, dried-out cinnamon roll, but still a cinnamon roll. He's heard and seen a lot of shit, but Sombra calmly explaining that she used her own corpse as a political statement is not something he was prepared to hear before coffee.

Reaper's not the only one angry at himself for not being good at figuring out how to affection with someone he's known for 15 years. And thus, Sombra finds herself the mediator, "ordering" one or the other to make a gesture of affection for the sake of plausible deniability, giving them an excuse to do a thing they want to do but can't let themselves do out of fear of rejection.

McCree initially hated the bear when he thought it was Sombra mocking him. Now that he knows it was Reaper mitigating the act of kindness by adding an element of mocking, he loves it as much as Sombra loves hers. He may or may not sleep cuddling it. Only Sombra knows for sure (because lol cameras) but she's not telling.
McCree has plans. Sombra has other plans. This is going to go...remarkably well, actually.

There's three plates on the table, toast and eggs and bacon and hash browns. Two mugs and a soup plate full of coffee round out the place settings. But while Reaper and Jack toss casual insults at each other between bites until their breakfasts have been devoured, my trash cowboy brother hasn't put in an appearance.

"I guess Jesse's not hungry this morning," Uncle Jack says. "Hope he's feeling okay."

Reaper snorts. "Dibs on his breakfast."

"I know you're a literal animal, but it's cold," Jack protests in disapproval.

"So?"

"Don't do it. You gonna make yourself sick," I tell Papi as I check with the safehouse systems, trying to locate McCree.

Ana steps into the kitchen and pours herself a cup of tea. "You did not prepare this for me," she half-asks as she sits at what would have been Jesse's place, because we all know her breakfast tastes do not run to bacon and coffee.

"It was for Jesse," Jack says, "but he didn't show up to eat it."

"Ana," Reaper whines, being deliberately annoying, "Sombra won't let me eat until I puke!"

His door was never locked last night, but cameras tell me he left the safehouse before I got up. What's he doing? "Sure I will," I say absently as I start looking for cameras in town. "Is your choice, Papi."

Through my screens, I can see Reaper eye the abandoned plate. He wants it, but he doesn't want to over-eat. "Ana," he whines, "Sombra's making me take responsibility for my actions!"

"Good." Tia Ana sips her tea calmly. "About time someone is."

Jack starts to laugh but turns it into an unconvincing cough.

Reaper gives him a dirty look. "Sombra. Where the hell is that trash cowboy?"

"I looking. He got up early and left, trying to track him through town but it's not easy."
"Maybe you could track him," Jack suggests. "I mean...you are a dog."

Papi looks torn between affronted dignity and intrigued curiosity. "I've never tried. Sombra?"

I close my screens in frustration. "Worth a shot. You coming with us, Uncle Jack?"

He looks startled. "Me?"

"We gonna need a cover story when we find him. He gonna know Papi and I not just out for a walk."

Ana puts her teacup down. "Gabriel will need to become accustomed to being in public eventually, and stories are already spreading regarding the talking doberman. A supervised excursion for the purposes of helping him acclimate sounds like a lovely idea."

"Huh." Jack scratches his cheek thoughtfully. "But then why would I be there?"

That's easy. "If Papi gets too uncomfortable, I gonna need someone to run interference while I calm him down."

Reaper makes a grumbling noise. "Fine. I'll do it, but I want the black collar."

"Got something better for you, Papi." I grin and open a screen. The image of a doberman in a black leather harness with silver studs gets him wagging. "Figured you would need one eventually."

"You spoil me, hija," he says in what's trying to be a growl but failing.

I close the screen and pet him. "I know, Papi. Now let's go get you dressed up and see if we can't find your cowboy."

"You look very impressive," Uncle Jack says as we follow Papi down to the gate.

Silver studs gleaming in the morning sunlight, tail wagging, Reaper lifts his nose from the ground to look at his ex-friend. "Damn straight I do." He sniffs around a bit more, sniffs at the gate itself, and waits while I open it. Then he sniffs around on the other side. "He went this way."

Tracking doesn't go very fast. McCree's passed by something like a dozen bakeries and cafes, but he didn't stop at any of them, and Papi keeps getting distracted by new scents - when he's not distracted by people asking if they can pet him. Our cover story solidifies quickly: I'm working with Dr. Zeigler and Reaper has been modified with medical nanites. Yes, he's intelligent and capable of speech. No, he's not available for breeding. ("I don't know whether to thank you or glare at you," he said after I turned down the first request.) Yes, he can eat people food and he would love to try a bite of whatever you're offering. Occasionally, someone asks if Jack's the orderly there to keep Reaper restrained if need be. We answer yes to that, with Papi adding a mutter that he can try.
Overall, though, Reaper's dealing very well with the social and sensory stimulation. He's not even snapping at Uncle Jack as much as he could be. Actually finding McCree feels almost like a secondary goal.

"This way," Papi says, head swinging around to point across the little, cobbled street. Once we cross the street, however, he stops. "Damn it! He's been here already. Bastard crossed his own path."

"What's he doing?" Jack asks under his breath. "He's not stopping anywhere, he's just...walking around."

"He left before we got up, too. He doesn't strike me as a morning person."

Reaper snorts. "He's not. Whatever he's up to, it's something he doesn't want us to know about."

Not eating. Avoiding us. The things he let slip while drunk. Fuck. "What's the earliest he could get something alcoholic?"

Jack and Reaper exchange a look. "I don't know," Jack says slowly.

"Damn it, McCree," growls Reaper. Apparently he's figured out the cowboy's plan, too, but then again he's also known him for close to half his life.

"Okay, here's the plan. We find him, we pretend we don't know what he's up to, we take him to lunch." I meet their eyes and get nods. "If he skipped breakfast to get drunk faster, then making him eat will spoil his plans."

"Wicked girl," Papi growls in approval. "Alright. No more distractions."

Now a dog on a mission, Reaper looks a lot more intimidating. No more wagging, no more getting sidetracked by scents or food, and Jack grimly warns people away with a shake of his head when they approach. It's not as hard as it could have been to identify which way McCree went when the path branches; Reaper unhesitatingly follows the path without Jack's scent.


"Don't get complacent," he retorts. "I trained McCree. If he figures out I'm tracking him by scent, it's going to get a lot harder to find him next time."

Uncle Jack makes a sound of reluctant agreement. "So when we find him, we're just out socializing you. Can you make yourself wag?"

"Won't have to. I'll be spoking his wheel. You know how happy that makes me."

"I do indeed," Jack says with a rueful chuckle. "You're a bad man, Gabriel."

Reaper snorts. "Whatever. As long as I'm still a good dog."

"You the best dog, Papi," I assure him.

"Damn straight. Stop!" Jack and I stop in our tracks. "I found something. There!"
He points with his nose, and Uncle Jack goes over to pick up the object. "Cigar butt, still warm. We're close."

"You've got the high ground. Do you see him?"

Jack scans the pedestrians moving down both sides of the street. "I think...yes! Ten o'clock, heading east. Left at the next cross street."

"Alright," Reaper growls. "War faces. And by that I mean smile. It's time to spoke his wheel," he finishes, the words dripping with anticipation. His tail starts wagging as he leads the way at a more leisurely pace.

I pull up a screen and prod it as we walk. "Looks like there's a good place up ahead and to the left," I tell them in what's only half verbal cover. "They serve brunch until four and make their own brownies."

"I don't want brunch," Reaper says. "What do they have for sandwiches?"

We turn left down the side-street. "Uh...vegetable...never mind. This looks like a fancy ham and cheese with..." Open another screen to run translations. "...onion marmalade? Oh, caramelized onions. There's also open-faced roast beef with caramelized onions and...arugula. Comes with soup, salad, or wedges. I'm guessing potato."

"Damn, that sounds good."

Jack laughs. "I think I want to look at the menu for myself. Oh - HEY! JESSE!"

Three buildings down the street from us, McCree freezes. Slowly, he turns. "Jack?"

Reaper hangs back to let Jack pass, tail wagging, and we watch as he strides confidently forward.

"Sombra found a nice little cafe on this street. We're about to have lunch. Guessing you had the same idea. You can join us!"

"But-"

"It's on me, amigo," I tell him. "Come on, it's right there."

In the space between two breaths, I can see McCree wave bye-bye to his plans for all-day drinking and surrender to the inevitable. "Thank you kindly," he says with a smile he doesn't feel. "I am a mite hungry."

Jack gives him a manly hug that ends with an arm around his shoulders, subtly making sure the cowboy can't slip away. The cafe has outside tables, thankfully, and I grab the eye of a waitress as we approach an empty one. She nods to show she'll be right with us.

Jack and McCree are already sitting when she comes over and frowns in Reaper's direction. "Your dog..."

"Will behave himself," I tell her firmly. "He is a medically engineered prototype." I pull out a large bill and hand it to her. "This is collateral. I will order for him, but I think it would be better to put the dishes on the ground."
The excessive amount of money in her hand stuns her, but then she shakes her head and smiles. "Of course. Does he have any food restrictions?" she asks as she hands out menus.

"None."

"Then I'll give you a few minutes to decide what you want." She smiles at us again and goes to another table.

I hold the menu up for Reaper, but he snorts. "Roast beef sandwich and a brownie."

"Soup, salad, or wedges?"

He tilts his head. "What are the soups? Never mind," he says when I read them off. "Wedges."

Across the table, Jack's quietly translating the menu for McCree. I move the last chair out of the way and loop Reaper's leash around the back. He flops down, wagging in victory.

When the waitress comes back, it's with a soup plate of water which she sets down by Papi before pulling out a pad to take our orders with. McCree's going for breakfast, Jack's trying the fancy ham and cheese with one of the soups, and I order the roast beef for Reaper.

"And a brownie," I add, and she nods.

"Of course. I'll bring these out as soon as possible!"

"Big spender," McCree teases me. "Buying your way to the front of the line."

"Money unspent does no one any good," I counter loftily. "Besides, it's Talon's money."

Jack chokes on a laugh. "You robbed Talon?"

"Only fair, after all they stole."

"And here you are, throwin' it away on us." Jesse shakes head slowly in mock-sadness.

I smack his arm. "That's not what I'm doing. I'm buying time with my family."

That knocks the amusement out of both him and Uncle Jack. "You...you don't have to buy time," McCree mutters, not looking at me. "You could just ask."

"Alright, then. Diablo after lunch?"

Jack looks over and sees Reaper sitting up, alert and wagging. "Diablo after lunch," he says. "Maybe we could play teams. You two against me and Jesse? Run rifts and see who finishes faster, first to gather twenty gems, highest difficulty killing a boss with no deaths, things like that."

McCree looks up at Jack, then looks over at me, and finally nods. "Yeah. That sounds good. Let's do that."

Reaper just wags harder.
"I shouldn't have eaten the bread," Reaper sighs, eyeing the thick square of rich chocolate brownie the waitress is holding out on a small plate. "I'm too full."

"I'll put it in a box for you," she offers, handing me the bill before hurrying off.

McCree chuckles. "That's what you get for begging for my croissants."

"You didn't even give me a bite!"

"You had your own food!"

Jack looks like he can't decide if he's exasperated or amused. "I told you, Gabriel. We can come back. You don't have to eat everything all at once."

Reaper's head hangs in what's probably feigned shame. "But it tasted so good."

The waitress places a small cardboard box on the table, then lays the money I'd given her for collateral on top. "Here you go, Miss Sombra. Do come back again!"

I pick up the money and hand it back to her. "For you. For not making a fuss over Reaper."

She grins and flushes slightly. "He's such a good dog, though. If you insist, I'll keep half the money - but the other half is going to start a tab for him. You come back," she tells Reaper, "even without your friends, I'll take care of you. Okay?"

"Okay," he says almost shyly, tail wagging. "If Sombra lets me."

It's a quiet walk back. Reaper seems content - or at least sated - and Jack is quietly reveling in the illusion of camaraderie. Jesse's smoking a cigar, but he's relaxed, and I know I was right: he didn't really want to get drunk and wallow in his misery, he wanted the family he used to have.

Jesse happy, Jack and Reaper working together, and more family bonding time to come? Oh yeah. We're doing this again.

Chapter End Notes

I'm pretty sure google thinks I own a doberman and am planning a trip to Zurich. Translating the cafe menu made me remember German words I hadn't thought about in years.

Reaper doesn't care for soup unless it's got meat in it.

Things McCree was not expecting: Sombra actually wanting to spend time with him.

From this point on, any time McCree skips breakfast, or eats only lightly and vanishes
before lunch, he gets tracked down and "invited" to join them for lunch. After the third time this happens, he figures out that they're doing it to bribe him into not drinking by offering him family time instead. He keeps doing it, not because he wants to spend all day in drunken misery, but because being tracked down and intercepted is proof that they care about him.
Beach

Chapter Summary

It's a trip to the beach, what could go wrong?

....don't answer that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sombra," Tia Ana says, sitting next to me on the couch so that she can pet Reaper, "might I borrow Jerome in a few days?"

"I don't own him, Ana. He works for Overwatch. As long as no one else needs him..." I shrug.

She gives us a small smile. "Please forgive my little charade. I was unsure how well-received the news would be, and wanted to approach it obliquely. There are things I must do in another part of the world. I have already conferred with Jerome, and he is willing and able to take me, but he wishes to wait for my business to be completed so that he may spend that time on the beach."

I perk up at that, and so does Reaper.

Ana smiles again. "I take it the two of you would like to accompany Jerome?" Reaper's wagging tail answers for us. "It is as I suspected. You have been cooped up in the same town for three weeks now. I do have a request, however."

"Name it," Reaper growls almost eagerly.

"I would prefer you did nothing to call undue attention to yourself," she says firmly. "Nothing outside the range of normal behavior for a real dog. No talking in case you are overheard, no leaving this configuration, and no threatening anyone."

Reaper lowers his head to her knee. "I promise," he sighs, but his tail is still wagging.

I reach over to pet his neck. "Gonna get you a new collar, Papi. Salt water is not good for leather. Won't be able to call you that in public, either, so...you want Reaper, or Gabriel?"

He looks up at Ana, then lays his head on her knee again. "Calling me Reaper would be undue attention."

"Okay. When are we leaving, Tia Ana?" I open a few screens. "I gotta get a swimsuit."

When Jack enters the living room, I'm sitting next to Reaper in front of the couch, looking at an assortment of dog collars designed specifically for use in salt water.
"Hey, Sombra," he says as he sits on the couch. "What are you two up to?"

"Getting Papi a new collar," I answer.

The rest of the explanation is interrupted by Reaper growling, "Don't even think about it, Morrison."

"Think about what?" he protests.

"Don't play dumb. You had cannoli." He shoots Jack a look of sullen resentment. "You don't get to pet me with sticky fingers, especially if you didn't bring me one."

Jack reels as if mortally wounded by Papi's words. "Gabriel! I would never!" A small box comes out from behind his back. "I washed my hands, and this is for you."

Looking at collars is immediately interrupted while Reaper attacks the cardboard box of cannoli with such enthusiasm that instead of just licking it as clean as he can, he rips off pieces and chews them up until he's eaten the whole thing.

"Good bribe," he says casually as he sits beside me again. "You get fifteen minutes. Sombra, start a counter."

"Now, hold on there," Jack says as I open a screen counting down from 15:00. "I got you two cannoli, with chocolate chips, and you ate the box."

Reaper's unmoved. "Your point? Time's ticking."

"My point is that I think that bribe was worth at least twenty minutes."

They both look at me. I pause the timer.

"You're invoking me as arbiter of affection?"

Two nods.

"And you'll both abide by my decision?"

Two more nods.

"Okay." I reset the timer from 14:37 to 15:00. "Two minutes for the chocolate chips. Three for the second cannoli. And five for being good enough to eat the box."

Jack grins as the screen goes from 15:00 to 17:00, then 20:00, and finally stops at 25:00.

"Ready?" I hold their gazes for a second, then reach out to touch the screen and start the timer. "Begin."

Head on Jack's knee, Reaper settles into being petted. "Mm. Collars?"

I move the screen where he can see it. "They got lots of designs, but if you want your name on it, we'll have to get you a tag."
"Get me a tag, then, and let me look at the patterns."

"Why the new collar?" Uncle Jack asks.

"Going to the beach in a few days while Tia Ana's dealing with something. You coming?"

"You know," he says thoughtfully, "I think I might."

Reaper says, "That one," and lifts a paw to gesture.

I check the screen. "Black with a Jolly Roger design. I should have known." Add to cart. "Oh, they have a matching leash. You getting a new leash, too, Papi." And the tag, a simple circle that dangles from the collar. Expedited shipping, aaaand...done. "Now we just wait for our new beach outfits to arrive!"

"What did you get?" Jack asks me.

"Royal purple two-piece and a white mesh tunic to go over it," I answer, pulling up screens to show them off as McCree walks in.

"You're gonna wear that?" he asks, incredulous. Reluctantly, he tears his eyes away from the glittery purple fabric. "And your Papi's gonna let you?"

"She's a grown woman," Reaper growls without lifting his head from Jack's knee. "She can wear whatever she wants."

Jesse sits in one of the chairs. "So you're gonna kill a bunch of people? Because she's gonna draw every eye on that beach."

"Ana made me promise I wouldn't," he says sulkily.

"So..." he looks at me. "You are taking the opportunity to wear that while your Papi can't do anything about it."

"She's my daughter," Reaper growls. "She should draw every eye on the beach. I'd feel like I failed somehow if she didn't."

McCree smirks. "Hey, lil' sis, do you need me to come scare off the boys for you?"

"If you're offering, I won't say no. You got a swimsuit? How's your arm with salt water?"

From his expression, he clearly didn't expect me to take him up on that. "Uh..." A nervous glance at Reaper. "I was joking? Beaches aren't...really...my thing..."

"Too bad," Reaper growls. "You offered. Sombra accepted. You don't get to bow out of your familial duties that easily."

"Besides," I interject before McCree can form a protest, "Uncle Jack's going, too. What're you going to do here all by yourself?"

He catches my eye and grimaces. We both know that being alone would drive him to drink. "Fine," he sighs. "But I'm gonna spend the day sleeping under my hat."
"Fuck no, that hat stays behind. If I can't draw undue attention to myself, then neither can you, boy."

McCree give Reaper a stubborn glare. "I'll leave this hat behind on one condition."

"Name it," Papi snaps.

"I get to call you Dad when we get back."

The challenge has been thrown down. Everyone freezes, except Jack, who keeps petting Reaper. The silence stretches.

"Deal," Reaper says reluctantly.

The first order of business on any beach is claiming your stretch of sand. Jerome's brought an impressively thorough assortment of beach gear, including a chair, a huge umbrella, and a cooler of non-alcoholic but still ridiculously-named fruity drinks. He points at a spot, and Jack moves in with Jesse following. Together, they unfurl an enormous beach blanket and anchor the corners with the attached stakes. The umbrella goes into a socket set in the blanket, and while Jerome gets his chair and cooler set comfortably up, the rest of us spread towels and remove outer layers of clothing.

Reaper, naturally, just watches us smugly.

McCree's about to drop his shirt on his towel when he notices me appreciating the fact that he's still in fine physical condition. He's about to say something to Reaper before he remembers that for the duration of this little excursion, the dog is to be treated as just a dog, and turns to Jack instead.

"Jaaaaack," he whines in a deliberately immature way, "Sombra's looking at meeeeee!"

Uncle Jack pauses with a handful of sunscreen in one hand and the bottle in the other. "So?"

"Make her stop," he says in a sulky pout.

Jack looks at me. He looks at Reaper, who's clearly amused. He looks at Jerome, who's smiling. Looks back at the sulky cowboy. "Why?"

Jesse shoots me a dark look and turns away, hunched over like he's trying to hide his chest, only to put the muscles of his back on full, glorious display.

"Hey, it is not my fault, amigo." I grin at Jack. "If you don't want me looking, you gonna have to stop looking so good."

"Maybe I'll just put my shirt back on," McCree grumbles.

"Your choice." I point off to the side, where a pair of identical twins are giving him the same admiring look. "But you do that, you gonna disappoint your fans."

"My-" Jesse turns to look at me, then follows the direction I'm pointing and straightens up as an
appreciative smile blooms on his face. "Well alright, then. If you'll all excuse me..."

In silence, we watch him approach the twins and apparently hit it off, because he offers one arm to each girl and they set off, arm in arm in arm, down the beach.

Jerome's the first to speak. "Miss Sombra, you are a wicked woman." He gives it a pause, then adds, "Also, that suit looks good on you. I'm not hitting on her," he continues hastily in Reaper's direction. "I'm just being truthful."

"Thank you, Jerome." I slip off my sandals and pick up the end of Papi's leash. "I'm going to take him for a walk, see what trouble I can keep him mostly out of."

Jack chuckles. "Have fun. Just not too much fun."

We set off in the opposite direction from McCree, just a girl in a sexy little two-piece covered enticingly by a white mesh tunic, and her handsome doberman in his brand-new leash and collar, ID tag jingling faintly as he plays in the shallow surf. There's the usual scattering of white tourists, but they're outnumbered and a delightful number of the bronze bodies are both male, and fit enough for me to look appreciatively at. A fair number of them look appreciatively back. A few approach me, but I give them an apologetic smile and tell them I'm just looking, and that's the end of that. Very refreshing. Reaper gets more than a few girls coming up to pet him, and if he's staring more than would be polite for a human, well, he is a dog.

Even without attention from cute girls in swimsuits, Papi's having fun chasing birds, biting at the little wavelets, and digging up terrified sea life that thought the mud was safe. I turn us around before Jerome's umbrella is completely out of sight, and he splashes happily in the surf as we head back.

It's not a surprise when, inevitably, an American comes up to me. This one is blond, in his early 20s, and gives off a "spring break college boy" vibe. His legs, what I can see of them under his brightly-colored knee-length shorts, are a shade of pale I've seen plenty of times, one that speaks of very little exposure to the sun. His tee-shirt is inoffensive enough, solid grey with a faded college name, and when the wind presses it to his body I can see that he hasn't taken it off because he'd need to drop a good bit of weight to compete with the physiques I was admiring earlier.

"Hey," he says as he gets within a few feet. "I like your dog. Doberman, right?"

Well, at least he didn't start with 'you're beautiful' or 'what's your name?'. Maybe he's just interested in dogs. Please let him just be into dogs. "Si, he is a doberman."

"Is this his first trip to the beach?"

I look at Papi. Papi looks at me. I can see him smirking. "First since I've had him."

"Oh? How long have you had him?"

"About a year? He was being abused. I'm rehabilitating him."

"That's very noble of you," he says warmly. I guess he is just into dogs. "I'm Jack, by the way."
"Sombra," I say, shaking his hand briefly.

"Sombra. That's pretty. I was named after Jack Morrison," he says proudly. "I do my best to live up to his ideals. He was my hero, and I think if we all just tried to emulate him a little, the world would be a better place. A civilized society doesn't need violence."

Reaper makes an unhappy sound, sparing me from having to say something.

"I'm sorry," Jack-the-younger coos, kneeling to lavish attention on him. "I was ignoring you. You're a good dog, yes you are..." Still petting with one hand, he checks the ID tag. "...Gabriel."

"He was named after my hero," I say with just a hint of edge to the words. "Gabriel Reyes."

College-boy Jack stands up, thankfully removing his face from temptation. "Your hero was responsible for horrific civil rights violations and war crimes supposedly committed in the name of the greater good. Hardly someone worth emulating," he adds with enough derision that my hackles go up.

"My hero led the team that saved the world so that you could have the freedom to think pacifism is anything but feeling superior to those who have to fight for what they need!"

He scowls at me. Oh no, college boy is mad. I pissed off the Pillsbury Dough Boy. "Gabriel Reyes was nothing more than a thug!" he shouts. "Gabriel Reyes was a loser!"

He did not...

"What did you say about Papi Gabriel?" I shriek. "Say that to my face, muchacho! I will kick your ass right here in my sexy little two-piece!"

"Civilized men don't fight girls," he informs me in a smugly superior tone.

"Why, because you afraid someone smaller than you gonna kick your motherfucking ass?" I take one threatening step forward, and he retreats a step. "I got news for you, boy. You don't take back what you said about Papi Gabriel, you gonna learn why he better than Jack White Bread Morrison!"

Another step. He looks nervous. Good.

"You wanna spout idealism pacifist shit and think you better than me? You go right ahead. I gonna kick your ass using every dirty trick in the book just like Papi Gabriel would do!"

"I-I don't resort to uncivilized behavior," he protests, trying to sound like he's not terrified.

"That's your problem, muchacho, not mine! You gonna wish you been born a girl when I through with you, 'cuz you ego and manhood NEVER gonna recover!"

I raise the fist not holding Papi's leash, and the kid lets out a yelp before sprinting down the beach away from me. He gets three beats of surprise before I tear after him, Reaper loping happily at my side. He's a pudgy couch potato. I'm an assassin in an omnic body. He doesn't get 50 meters before I'm close enough to launch myself at his back and knock him face-first into the wet sand.

"Take it back!" I shout from my perch on his back.
"Get off of me!" He tries to lever himself up, but just gets his hands buried up to the wrist as a wave turns the sand to mud beneath them.

"Take it back!"

Reaper circles around to where the sand is drier and helpfully kicks some into the kid's face. He starts crying, then coughing as another wave comes in. I stand up so he doesn't drown, but he just crawls a few feet away from the water with his face...still practically in the sand. I shove his head down with my foot. An unlucky inhalation, and he coughs until he heaves and spits out a mouthful something only partially composed of seawater and sand. At least he has the good sense to not rub his eyes with muddy hands.

"Take it back," I threaten once he's breathing easier.

He doesn't. He suddenly launches himself away and scrambles to his feet, running all he's worth, heading straight towards the biggest, toughest-looking white man on the beach.

Uncle Jack.

"Help!" he yells, stumbling to a halt by his namesake and pointing vaguely in my direction as I follow him. "She's trying to kill me because I said Gabriel Reyes was a loser!"

Uncle Jack puts his arm around the kid's shoulders in a move that's half reassuring and half holding him in place. "Well, I got news for you, son," he says calmly. "She's not going to kill you. She's just going to beat the ever-loving crap out of you."

Pale boy gets even paler. "You're not going to help me?"

Jack grins at me. Or Reaper. It's hard to tell. "Son, let me give you a few words of advice. First, if a woman tells you to apologize, it's usually better to apologize. Second, if you can't end the fights, don't start them. And third..." The hand that had been casually on Jack-the-younger's shoulder tightens in an unmistakable threat, and his friendly-uncle voice drops into a growl. "Gabriel Reyes was my best friend and I'd kick your ass myself for what you said about him, but she's already called dibs and I'm not that stupid."

The Pillsbury Dough Douche starts crying again and doesn't fight as Jack pushes him at me. He just stumbles and winds up kneeling on the sand, blubbering.

"Take it back," I say again.

"I...I..."

One hand in his hair, make a fist, and I can tell he's never had it longer than that because he screams in pain. Wuss. "Take. It. Back."

"Ow! I take it back, I take it back!"

"Now say, Gabriel Reyes is awesome and I will never be as badass or sexy as him."

It takes a few tries for him to get it right, and then I make him say it another nine times before I let go of his hair.
"Now get out of here, muchacho, and don't you dare badmouth Papi Gabriel again, you hear me?"

Tearfully, he nods and then stumbles off back the way we came.

I turn to Jack and Reaper and take a deep breath. "...and that's how I got a week suspension in sixth grade. Only instead of sand," I say as Jack choke-laughs in surprise, "it was the toilet."

Jack looks around to see if we need to leave, but no one's in earshot. "Sombra, was it really necessary to be so hard on him?" he asks quietly.

In an equally quiet voice, Reaper growls, "Shut up, Morrison. She's perfect."

"Gabe, she shoved his face in the sand until he puked."

He sits smugly. "I know, and it was glorious."

I scratch behind his ears. "Come on, let's hit the blanket for my shoes and some money, and I'll buy you a hot dog."

Tail wagging, he follows me while Uncle Jack sighs.

The rest of the day passes more quietly. Jack throws the Frisbee for Reaper for a while, and when they get tired of that we all relax on Jerome's luxury blanket. McCree wanders back a few hours later, looking pleased with himself but refusing to "kiss and tell" despite everyone's teasing. Finally, Jerome tells us it's time to pack up and head back to the ship, so we do. It's a quick hop to where we're picking up Tia Ana, and when she comes aboard, she's greeted by Jack sitting in Reaper's usual place while my usual bench is occupied by a stunned cowboy petting the Reaper-dog sprawled half on his lap with his left hand, and me leaning comfortably against him on the right.

Ana sits down next to Jack and smiles at us. "Did you have fun?"

"Don't ask," Jack says in a strangled voice.

"Yes," Reaper answers, wagging madly. "Yes, we did. Best day ever. I have the best daughter in the world. She is perfect and I am so fucking proud of her."

McCree just keeps petting, like he doesn't want to know what happened because whatever it was, it's made Reaper happy enough to allow the attention.

Jack scowls. "I'm not sure that was something to be proud of."

"Shut up, Morrison. You're just jealous she wasn't defending you."

"I'm not sure I want her defending me," Jack says slowly. "She's a little..."

Reaper's wagging slows. "Yessssssss?" he asks ominously.

"...too much like you," Jack finishes.
The wagging resumes. "Like I said, she's perfect."

Ana shakes her head, but she's laughing.

Chapter End Notes

This is in no way the first time Jack has bribed Reaper in order to be able to pet him. Nor is it the first time they've squabbled over how much time a bribe earns. Ana's had to leave the room on more than one occasion so she didn't start laughing out loud.

The agreement with McCree was win/win as far as Reaper's concerned. He gets a closer tie with his trash cowboy son without having to admit that he wants it, AND McCree leaves the hat behind.

Jerome takes his babe-watching very seriously, and he has the cash to ensure he can do it in complete comfort. The drinks are non-alcoholic because he does still have to fly a ship later that day.

There's stories behind Reaper's "if this his first trip to the beach" smirk, tales of mischief and outright trouble taking place on beaches in years past. Sombra's not asking.

Jack-the-younger had a very bad day. On top of being assaulted and terrorized, he learned that his hero was alive but he couldn't tell anyone because then he'd have to explain that he insulted his hero's best friend to his face and then his hero watched while a girl made him cry, and oh yeah, his hero would have kicked his ass if the girl hadn't called dibs. (Jack might not have actually kicked the kid's ass, but he sure as hell wasn't going to give up a chance to win points with Reaper by showing solidarity.)

This was the first time Reaper's seen Sombra get violent on his behalf, and it was everything he would have raised her to be if he'd raised her.
False God: Gathering

Chapter Summary

It's not exactly a social gathering, but the gang's mostly here.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Reaper's just settled down for an after-breakfast chewing with Squeaky Steak the Second when the unthinkable happens, again. The toy gives a sad little honk and falls silent. Uncle Jack pauses on his way out of the living room, clearly wanting to see what he does but wisely, not speaking.

All the joy drains out of Papi so dramatically that I know he's doing it on purpose. Gently, he picks the steak up and then, with all the disconsolate grief of a mother holding the body of her dead newborn, brings it over to where I'm sitting on the couch. Slowly, as though surrendering the corpse to the afterlife, he lays it on my lap and then looks up at me with the saddest doggy eyes imaginable.

I sigh. "You don't gotta be so dramatic, Papi. You could just ask me to get you a new one."

Reaper's tail starts wagging slightly. "This is more fun."

Jack's surprised laugh reminds us both that he's still in the room. He colors slightly when we both look at him, and quickly leaves for elsewhere in the safehouse.

"Okay, I get you a new one. Just a second."

Reaper sits obediently, still wagging. It doesn't take long to fetch Squeaky Steak the Third from the box hidden in my closet. I toss it to him the instant I have a clear line of sight, and he leaps to intercept. The steak gets a good preliminary chewing right there in the middle of the room, and I stop to pet him on my way back to the couch.

"Thank you, Sombra," he says quietly.

"Aww, you welcome, Papi."

I settle on the couch, he curls up in his doggy bed, and it's a few minutes of screens and squeaking before Ana and Jack enter the room.

"Gabriel," Tia Ana says gently, "may I have your attention for a minute?"

One last squeak, and Reaper puts down the steak. "Of course, Ana."

"Between myself and Athena, we have been in contact with all of the core members of Overwatch to let them know how the situation stands. But we feel it's time to take a thorough look and decide our course of action from here."
That's when I realize it's been more than a month since I set fire to Talon and took a road trip to Switzerland. I've been so caught up in helping Papi sort himself out that I haven't been paying attention to how long it's been.

Reaper looks distinctly unhappy. "What are you saying?" he growls.

"We are going to have company," Ana says gently. "Jerome has just left to fetch Winston and Athena. Everyone who can make it will be arriving at the safehouse in the next few hours so that we may discuss things with everyone on the same page."

Reaper looks even more unhappy.

"Everyone knows who you are," Jack says firmly. "No one's going to attack you." He glances at me. "I made sure of that myself."

I grin, and Reaper sits up smugly. "My daughter is perfect."

Ana laughs.

Angela and Widow are the first to arrive, naturally, since they're practically in our backyard. It takes some coaxing to get Reaper out of the can in my bedroom - he really doesn't want to see Angela - and only the possibility of Widow remembering him convinces him to take his own shape on the couch with me. Angela escorts her patient into the living room, and it's weird, seeing Widow with normal skin color. Ana greets the formerly heartless spider with a glad cry of "Amelie!" but Widow flinches back from that name.

"The damage Talon did was extensive," Angela says somberly. "She retains only fragments of her life before..."

"Before I murdered Gérard." The words are soft and detached, like she's describing the actions of another.

Ana looks grim and pained.

"Sounds like you need a new name, amiga," I say brightly from the couch, unblocking my linksignal. She relaxes visibly. "While you thinking about which one you like best, you okay with using Widow?"

Slowly, she turns to me, like she's trying to remember who I am. "Widow..." She points to me, then Reaper, who's wisping from the chest and arms on the other end of the couch because of course, he would have adopted her long before I got there. "Sombra. Papi. Widow," she repeats again. "Yes."

Then she leaves the other two to curl up on the couch between us, leaning against Reaper, like the cuddlepiles we used to ambush him with before we left Talon. Yes! Pseudo-linksister is back! I waste no time shifting around until we're sharing personal space.

"That's the most relaxed I've seen her around other people," Angela sighs. "Medically, she's fine, but she's still adjusting to social interaction. I think it would be best for her to continue her recovery
here. If that's okay with you," she adds, looking at Ana.

Tia Ana looks at me, comfortably leaning against Widow. I nod slightly. "I believe that would be for the best, as well."

"We already got a room for her, Tante Angela." When she gives me a startled and puzzled look, I say, "Packed all our things before we left. Anything she don't have, we can help her pick out for her own."

Widow makes a small sound of pleasure. Angela looks relieved. "Then I release her into your care, Schattenkind."

Ana smiles. "The others will no doubt arrive soon. Let's take this time to catch up, and leave them to settle in. Would you prefer to stay in the west wing, or on the floor above us?"

She and Angela leave the room, chatting quietly.

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Tracer arrives next, and when the security system alerts me, I alert my pseudo-sister, who opts to see and settle into her room rather than face the younger woman just yet. A few seconds after Widow’s door closes behind her, Tracer bounces into the living room and tosses a braided rawhide ring like a Frisbee. Reaper launches himself off the couch and is a dog almost before he's fully cleared the piece of furniture, landing with the ring in his mouth and gnawing ferociously at it, tail wagging.

"Who's a good dog?" Tracer coos, ruffling and petting his fur. "Who's the biggest, meanest doberman to ever have been an unholy killing machine?"

"Me," Reaper growls around rawhide. "It's me."

"I love it," she confesses in my direction. "He's a cold-blooded murder monster, but the instant he sees rawhide, he's a bundle of doggy joy and he hates that he's so happy. I'm helping win him away from the Dark Side with treats and belly rubs."

"Everyone thinks the Dark Side has cookies," Reaper says in what would be bitterness if he weren't wagging so hard, "but the cake was a lie."

Tracer looks at me in confusion. I shrug. Whatever Papi’s referencing, it faded out of pop culture long before my time. She goes back to lavishing attention on the dog now begging for the promised belly rub. Jerome checks in while Papi's being bribed into being social. He's landing with Winston and Athena.

"Tracer, Winston and Athena landing in five. Ana and Angela..." A brief pause to check with the safehouse systems. "...are upstairs. If you want to say hi to them, let them know the ship's landing?"

"You got it," she chirps, giving Reaper one last earscratch. "Be good, and I'll race you for the Frisbee later."
He tries to be deadpan, but his tail is still wagging. "I make no promises."

A van enters valid security codes and is admitted. I don't think anything of it until a mountain of a man practically bursts into the living room and Reaper is suddenly in the can tucked into the corner between couch and chair, leaving me to face our newest arrival alone. I reach down and close the lid.

"Where is Ana?" Reinhardt booms.

"Outside greeting Winston with Angela and Tracer." I stand and step around the coffee table. "I'm Sombra."

"Ha-ha! So YOU'RE Sombra!" He puts his hands on his hips and looks me up and down. "Ana has told me quite a bit about you!"

I can't resist. "Was any of it good?"

Reinhardt winks at me. "That depends on your definition of good." One big finger waves in a no-no-no gesture aimed at me. "You have been exceedingly naughty for a worthy cause: the reformation of the villainous Reaper!" He falters for a moment, looking around the room. "Uh...is he here?"

"He's in the can." I point. "No worries, he stuck there until I let him out."

"Ho-ho! So he has been sent to his room, so to speak! Has he been a bad boy?"

I glance at the can. Reaper's got the face screen up, and he's wisping. "Actually, no. He's been very well-behaved. Hasn't killed anyone since we left Talon."

"Ah! I see you," he says, pointing at the screen. "How's that for irony, ha? Usually, I am the one in the can! Ha ha! I was a little bit concerned that I might be facing him without my hammer, but you seem to have him under control!"

"I'm the one that calls him out when he's over-reacting, if that's what you mean," I counter dryly.

Reinhardt shakes his head in mock-sadness. "Truly a noble endeavor. Where were you twenty years ago? You could have been the most valuable member of Overwatch."

"I was ten. I would more likely have been encouraging him."

"Ten?" Reinhardt looks at the can. "My friend, it pains me to say this, but we are old. Still," he says thoughtfully, "simply looking out for his tiny fan might have kept him out of trouble."

"Never," growls Reaper from the can. "I would have just gotten her into trouble with me."

The big, boisterous man grins and winks at me. "Unless Ana got word you were endangering a child."
"Who is endangering a child?" Ana demands from the door.

Reaper's face screen closes while Reinhardt looks like a boy caught stealing cookies. "N-no one! It was merely a jest!"

Ana looks unconvinced. Then, for just a second, she meets my eyes and smiles.

The instant Genji enters sensing range, he reaches out to me.

/Linksister!/  
/Linkbrother!/  
/I have brought my mentor, Zenyatta./  
/A pleasure to meet you at last, a new omnic says. Or it will be, when we meet. Humor infuses the words.  
/I look forward to it, Zenyatta./

/Genji has told me much about you. It is a pity we are meeting under such circumstances, but if events permit, I would very much like to spend some time getting to know you myself./  

He's asking for linkweb bonding. /I would be honored to call you linkbrother./  

/Is Ana there?/ Genji asks, the words sparkling with excitement. /Who else has arrived?/

/Reinhardt, Tracer, Winston, Athena, Angela, Widow-/  

/Amelie?/ he interrupts.

/No, she is not comfortable with that name. Widow is what we are calling her. I gave her a partial linksignal; she should relax towards you quickly even if she does not fully remember you./ I pause for two beats before adding, /I also modified Reaper's swarm to produce a partial linksignal. He is still very hurt; treat him as you would a wounded animal and if you can, both of you, leave your linksignal unblocked. He will be much less tense around you if he can feel you./  

Two beats of solemn silence before Genji says, /I know the bite of isolation well. I will do ask you ask, linksister./  

/You have championed the causes of many who had few allies./ Zenyatta says. /I do not believe you would lend your support to one who was unworthy of it. You have my word./  

/Thank you, both of you. Jack and Jesse are both here as well; I will inform them and Ana that you will arrive shortly./

Chapter End Notes
Aaaand Widow has now been adopted into Familia Reyes.

Have I mentioned that Gabe is a nerd who loves outdated pop culture references? Because he totally is.

Sombra meeting Reinhardt could have gone very, very badly if he hadn't been told about Reaper. And that's exactly what Jack was afraid of, which is why he told Reinhardt about Reaper. Yes, Reinhardt is poking fun at Reaper and teasing him in a deliberate show of non-hostility.
False God: Conference

Chapter Summary

I don't think anyone was really expecting the meeting would go like this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"It has been over a month since Sombra's actions enabled the dismantling of Talon," Athena says from her screen at the end of the conference table. "I have been monitoring their networks and the news, and I have detected no organized activity. I think it is safe to say that the body of the organization as a whole is dead."

Almost everyone sitting around the table relaxes a little at that. Ana, Jack, McCree, and Reinhardt look cautiously optimistic. Genji and Zenyatta display relieved postures. Angela, Tracer, and Winston are beaming. Widow looks...stunned and uncertain, but Angela said she was still getting used to being around people, so 'stunned and uncertain' is only to be expected of her. Reaper, on the other hand, is wisping from his head, upper back, and legs. I lay a hand on his gauntlet, and it melts into a hand that grips mine tightly.

"And what," he growls, "about the head?"

"The head of Talon," Ana half-asks. "If he survived the attacks on the Talon bases, would he not have shown himself by now?"

"I'm sure between Athena and Sombra," Tracer chirps, "he wouldn't be able to hide for long."

Reaper wisps more heavily. "He hid undetected for twenty years."

Jack exchanges a look with Ana. "You know who he is, then," he says cautiously.

I can feel Reaper tremble. "You know who he is, too."

THAT'S ALL HE CAN BRING HIMSELF TO SAY, I tell Athena privately.

ALRIGHT. I WILL TAKE IT FROM HERE. "I spent many hours in Talon's systems," she says out loud. "I believe, and Sombra concurs, that the head of Talon was a god program that escaped the Omnic Crisis uncontained."

Chaos erupts around the table.

/A false god! No wonder Talon had such hatred for my people,/ Zenyatta says in the omnic channel.

Genji looks grim. /A formidable foe, to have escaped undetected for so long."

/It may not be so bad./ I tell them. /There is a good chance that the data bomb I set off in Talon's
"Systems has already killed him."

"Is that why...?" Winston's asking Reaper, while beside him, Tracer exclaims, "Oh no! No wonder you..." Further down the table, next to Widow, Angela pleads in a horrified voice for Reaper to tell her that the god program didn't, and to her left, Jack's growling that that's who the asshole was.

Reaper's wisping so heavily that the people who haven't seen it are startled. I stand up.

"SILENCE!" bellows Reinhardt. Then, into the ringing echoes, "Let the girl speak."

"Athena has been watching for any activity by the god program," I announce, "and has found nothing. We both take this to mean that I may have badly wounded or even killed the asshole. Yes, that's why Reaper was working for Talon. No, he never controlled Reaper through his nanite swarm although he did threaten to. Yes, that's who tortured Reaper with psychological weapons and poisoned words. Did I miss anything?"

"Blackwatch," Ana says calmly.

"Right. The asshole was fucking with Papi even before shit went down. There was at least one mole, maybe more. Athena has the full report of falsified orders. So those of you who are still holding grudges, I'd like you to think about the fact that Reaper was effectively blackmailed into everything he did for Talon, and made to believe that the only choice he had in the matter was to either do it of his own free will, or to be controlled and forced to do it as a puppet."

Silence.

Winston clears his throat. "Uh...could the god program have controlled Reaper through his swarm?"

"No. Swarm's not smart enough. Next?"

Jesse raises his hand nervously. "Yeah. Why is he lookin' at me like that?"

Startled, I turn to look at Reaper and find him glaring, furious, at the cowboy. At least most of the wisping has died down. "The asshole delivered his abuse and bullshit using Gabriel's face, and Jack's, and yours."

McCree's face...You work better without distractions. Maybe I should...take steps. It was undoubtedly a threat to do something to me, one that hit its mark because Reaper had protested, so the asshole must have hammered that opening in his defenses. And with how upset Papi was after reporting, there at the end, he must have threatened some pretty horrific things, but...

...but when I told him we were leaving, he was angry, and concerned, and afraid, and determined.

He was at his breaking point. What happened when he went to report? Did he...?

"Sombra?" Reaper asks, wisping in concern.

"Tell me you didn't make some kind of deal with the figurative devil to keep me safe," I say in a tone that begs for the answer to be no, but knows it's going to be yes.

Reaper starts wisping like he's going to dissolve any second. "I can't promise anything," he growls.
Sighing, I cover my face with my hands and let them slide down in exasperation. "Papi, what did you promise..."

The sentence trails off because I'm already running the possibilities, and while Reaper could have promised to actually kill Winston or any number of things, the only thing a god program would really want from him...

It was building a body.

If the body had been complete, he wouldn't have needed Reaper for anything.

I thought he'd done it to himself on purpose, back before I knew who he was, because fuck, I'd do that to myself.

I'm pinning Reaper with a hard look and alarming just about everyone. "You didn't."

What the words lack in volume, they more than make up for in intensity. Reaper's wisping from the chest like he's been shot eight times again, and when the words come out, they're so heavily distorted it's a wonder he was able to get them out at all.

"You're safe."

He did. Oh my god, he did. He promised his body, he bartered for my safety with the only coin he had, and the god program was going to take him, violate him the way it violated the Omniums and countless omnis. But that means he would have had to meet the asshole somewhere to fulfill his part...

"WHERE, PAPI?" I'm shouting, too much urgency to cram into fewer decibels, but we haven't been able to find... "WHERE WAS THAT SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN?"

He's wisping so badly it's a minor miracle he's not just a cloud of smoke. One taloned gauntlet scrapes at the surface of the conference table, making everyone wince, but no one says a word. No one dares interrupt the little drama playing out before their eyes. Finally, the scratching stops.

TEL AVIV

I shove my hands into the wisps covering his chest, but there's no chest, just a spongy cloud of smoke. Send the command for the hoodie configuration, lock him in, and hug him so tight it's a good thing he doesn't breathe and I don't cry because oh my god, I came that close to losing him. If I hadn't decided it was time to leave...


"Sombra..."

That's all he can get out, but he's hugging me back, clinging desperately, and all I can think is that he'd reached his breaking point, he was going to sacrifice himself for my safety, and instead I kidnapped him and brought him to a safehouse. I wonder if part of the guilt that drove him to sit in his closet was the secret he was carrying, that he was supposed to meet a false god in Tel Aviv and instead he was gorging himself on bacon and playing Frisbee and indulging in physical comfort when the asshole who'd ruined his life might be trying to track us down at that very moment.
"I did not spend my whole life wishing for a father, only to finally get one and have him sacrifice himself to save me," I whisper fiercely. "One parent doing that was more than enough."

It's a good thing I don't need to breathe, because Reaper manages to hug me even harder.

"I'm not angry. Not at you. I'm just so glad I decided to burn Talon down and leave with you when I did."

"I'm sorry, Alé." The words are almost too quiet for me to hear.

"Papi, no. It's okay. We know where to start looking now. And because he was waiting for you, we probably trapped him if he wasn't dumb enough to get eaten by my data bomb."

/Linksister, is all well?/

/The false god is in Tel Aviv and, if alive, trapped in a nonfunctional body./

/My sorrow knows no bounds,/ Genji replies in a tone so dry it could absorb the tears I can't shed.

"Sombra?" Winston asks, just as Ana says, "Gabriel?"

"He's in Tel Aviv," I say without letting go of my Papi, and suddenly, I know exactly where he is. "The construction site where we first talked - you remember, Tia Ana?"

"I remember." The words are startled, and everyone turns to look at the speaker - Widow, who promptly looks like she wants to fold up inside herself at the attention.

"I remember," Ana says smoothly, drawing attention away from Widow again.

"The mission was to get the blueprints and kill as many people as possible."

Jack sits up straighter. "Kill everyone who'd been working on it and might know if the blueprints were changed," he says. "Replace them with your own people or kill the replacements when the building is done, and no one will know there's an extra room there."

"But then how'll we know where the extra room is?" McCree asks.

"I'll know." Reluctantly, I let go of Reaper, who pulls me onto his lap instead of letting me take my own seat again. "I saw the blueprints. He was building a body, and I know the sort of things that process would require."

Winston looks uncomfortable. "But if he did not fall victim to your...data bomb...would it not be dangerous for you to be in such close proximity to him?"

Ana and Jack look grim. Reaper hugs me tighter.

"Because of her enhancements," Angela half-asks. "Is it even possible for a god program to-"

"Yes," Reaper interrupts sharply.

McCree takes the unlit cigar out of his mouth. "Don't matter if it is or not, shadow-sis ain't got an
organic bone in her body."

"You're-" Tracer cuts herself off and looks around awkwardly. "Never mind. We can talk about it later."

"Sombra has the right to go," Ana says in a tone that allows no argument. "Gabriel, may I accompany the two of you?"

"Of course."

Jack gives him a look of silent pleading. None of it is in his voice when he says, "If you want me to watch your back..."

Reaper scoffs. "Don't worry about my back. That asshole tried to get me killed for five years and never succeeded. Protect Sombra."

"And I will take up the rear!" Reinhardt announces. "Should your little shadow prove at risk, my armor will let me restrain her safely."

"Papi..."

"As a family," he says quietly. "I remember."

"Widow," I call down the table. "You got a right to come with us. He hurt you, too. You want a shot at him if he still alive?"

Slowly, she shakes her head. "No," she says quietly. "I want to figure out who I am, not go back to what I was."

"That is for the best, I think," Ana says warmly. "Angela, will you...?"

"I will stay with her," the doctor confirms.

I catch McCree's eyes. "Jesse..."

"Don't you worry," he says. "I'll make sure my other lil' sis is okay while you and Dad go take care of the big bad asshole."

Winston glances around the table. "Wait...are you going now? Or...? I thought we were just planning..."

The five of us who are apparently going exchange looks and shrugs.

"No time like the present!" Reinhardt announces. "My friends...WE RIDE!"

Chapter End Notes

This is what Reaper's been feeling guilty about for the last month, the secret he couldn't bring himself to tell Sombra: that he promised his body to the God AI in
exchange for a promise of Sombra's safety.

I'm fairly certain the asshole gave Reaper an object demonstration proving that he was a god program and could make good on his threats despite not having a body. This no doubt contributed to Reaper's initial fear that Sombra had been sent by the asshole to enforce things, and the fear of retribution against Sombra kept him from rebelling against the asshole more effectively than the actual gaslighting did.

Place your bets, place your bets! What will Sombra find in Tel Aviv? Did she manage to kill the god program, or just wound it, or only make it angrier? Will there be an artificial body filled with data-bomb remnants, or will there be an epic battle?
False God: Condemnation

Chapter Summary

This could get very, very bad. Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jerome is more nervous than I've ever seen him, and it's not just because of the giant walking tin can sitting in Widow's usual spot, or "Soldier 76" sitting in Reaper's. It's because Ana and I are sitting on either side of Reaper, who's wisping heavily enough that he could have been wounded instead of worried, and I'm visibly shaken and withdrawn - which I know just makes Papi worry more. He keeps one arm around me protectively, and I lean into the half-hug for what scraps of comfort I can get because I have the two hours we'll be in the air to prepare for the worst.

Knowing that the asshole was going to assimilate Reaper's swarm to complete his body and become a god in physical form, I'm no longer confident that I was lucky enough to accidentally kill him. He would have been withdrawn from Talon's systems, and it would have been easy to hole up and cut the connections. Furthermore, I know he learned from the Anubis AI and he can't be trapped in a feedback loop. I was the one tasked with finding a workaround for that issue, and - god, why did I not see what was going on? Stupid, stupid, arrogance to have assumed - but the god programs had been dead or dormant for almost my entire life, who would have suspected one could have been hiding? Stupid, stupid, stupid! I found the Tehuacán Omnium before I was twelve, it had been hiding for just as long, I should have been more paranoid. Stupid, stupid organic arrogance. Ugh.

The fact that I built a killswitch into the solution, like the fatal vent in the Death Star, is less comforting than it was when I thought it was hypothetical. Now it's probable, and I'm praying that if the asshole wasn't good enough to code his own workaround, he won't have been good enough to see the flaw and fix it.

The Tehuacán Omnium responds quickly to my request for a live connection.

/Little shadow, what news?/

/We hunt the false god. I need help./

/Describe what you need,/ it urges.

The first part is easy: I need a couple of hoverdrones to act as bait, the digital canaries in the coal mine. If the false god lives, he will take control of them and believe himself secure. The second part is harder, but my sponsor doesn't hesitate.

/Contact your friends,/ it says with barely-restrained gleeful anticipation. /Call in your favors. What can be done from here, will be. When you drop the block on your linksignal, you will not be alone./

I'm not sure if I've ever heard more comforting words. /Thank you./
/Little shadow, you have succeeded beyond all expectations. What you offer is not something lightly dismissed. When this is done, all will be in your debt./

Right. No pressure.

"Sombra?" Reaper asks quietly, and I suddenly realize that every time he's checked on me while I was busy with internal communication, he must have been afraid the asshole was taking control.

"Just making plans," I reply just as quietly. "Gonna call my friends, see about getting reinforcements."

That doesn't reassure him. "Omnic reinforcements?"

"They all gonna be out of range, no worries. I gonna be the only one he can reach."

I don't tell him that there will be a ring of omnis just outside linksignal range. I don't mention that by entering the asshole's reach, I will become a conduit to the others. He relaxes slightly when I open half a dozen screens and start composing messages to all my contacts. He would be less relaxed if he knew what I was telling them.

There's a smallish park about three-fourths of a mile from the target site. An unfamiliar omnic sends me a hello ping when we land there, and I return it as we file off the ship.

/I received word that you have need of these,/ they say.

To my right, 60 meters away, the omnic stands with a pair of spherical, hovering drones. /Yes. Thank you./

/I also received word of what you plan. It is as you requested./

/Thank you again./ I say as the drones are directed to float over to me. They submit easily to my command.

/It is we who thank you./ The omnic bows and retreats, now that the drones have been delivered.

"Reinforcements?" Reaper asks in what would sound scathing to anyone else. He's still wisping in concern.

I shake my head. "Bait. We've created a dead zone around the building; the god program will have nothing to control. If he's still alive, he'll take control of the drones."

"And then you," Jack says somberly from behind his visor.

Reinhardt grips the haft of his hammer in armored gauntlets. Ana adjusts her mask.

"If he's alive," I say with a confidence I don't feel.
Reaper growls wordlessly, but as we start heading out of the park towards the target location, all he
does is draw his shotguns and wisp so heavily he may be floating. I send one of the drones ahead of
him, the other circling around to bring up the rear beside Reinhardt. Jack and Ana flank me, him
with that pulse rifle and her with the sniper rifle. The street is deserted, although faces peek from
every window and I can hear traffic and city noise from the next streets over. It's apparent even to
everyone else when we close to just over half a mile away: omnis cluster to either side of the
street, saluting as we pass. I nod to them, but keep my linksignal blocked.

/We have confirmation from Siberia,/ one of them says. The rest of the omnic channel is dead
silent.

I nod again; I don't know if Katya came through, or if her other friends did, but it doesn't matter.
All that matters is the linkweb reaches from here to Siberia.

The entire half-mile radius is absolutely deserted. There's no movement, no sound. Every building
has been emptied of organics and omnis alike. I don't know who was responsible for that, but I
know we're all grateful there's no one to get caught in the potential crossfire.

When we get to a tenth of a mile from the building, I say, "Stop."

Ana gives me a hug, which I return only slightly desperately, before she runs lightly off to find a
good place to cover us from. Reinhardt takes a braced stance, one hand on my shoulder, the other
holding the omnic-killing hammer steady at his side. Jack looks towards Reaper, but Papi's already
flowing towards the building, so he looks at me instead.

"Stay here just in case," I tell him, sending one drone after Papi.

When he reaches the door, I half expect Reaper to re-form and kick it in, but he goes underneath
and opens it on the other side so the drone can enter. In silence, I search the building remotely, all
my attention on the video feed from my mechanical canary. I pulled up the blueprints on the flight,
the original ones, and now I'm checking for something that's not on them. Reaper follows behind
the drone, opening doors when it hesitates in front of them.

There's a broom closet where there should be blank wall.

Reaper opens it, then pulls out all the assorted cleaning supplies and starts feeling the walls when
the drone remains inside. The drone has sonic imaging, of course, and I use it to determine that
unlike what you'd expect, the back is not the false side. It's the right. I have the drone bump the
right side and then move out of the way. Papi knocks on it a few times, then tries to kick it down,
but he can't get a good angle - which is probably deliberate on the asshole's part. Frustrated, he
draws his shotguns and then puts them back and dissolves into mist. It takes a minute or two, but
he manages to get through the false side and unlatch it. I have the drone press gently against his
chest for a moment, and he holds it carefully for a moment longer in a hug by proxy before moving
out of the way.

Gingerly, I shake the Talon channel, but he and I are the only two nodes. "Papi, nod if can you hear
me," I say quietly. He nods. "Good. I'm sending the drone down. Cover the door. If it comes back
out, shoot it and get the hell out of the building. If the asshole is dead, I'll send the second drone in
with Uncle Jack following."

Reaper nods again and takes a defensive stance in front of the broom closet, both guns drawn.
"I'm going in," I say, including Ana's channel in the broadcast.

The drone floats down the stairs, navigating by sonic imaging until it reaches the bottom and gets through the sharp switchback that would confuse an organic without a good light source. The secret room - building room, assembly room - is like a cross between an Egyptian tomb and a science lab. The unfinished body stands against the back wall, enclosed on three sides by a sort of loose mesh cage made of gold-colored wire. Cables run through the sides of the cage, connecting to the body at the backs of the wrists, the heels, the nape of the neck, and the base of the spine. The only light comes from the various pieces of equipment, flickers of blue and green over a base of solid red making the synthskin look bloody and sick instead of the tanned Caucasian tone I suspect it should have. The body's hair is blonde, cut like Jack Morrison at his most heroic, and the asshole has clearly modeled his face and physique after Uncle Jack as well. Part of me is insulted that he thought Jack was worth emulating more than Gabriel Reyes, but the rest of me is relieved the body doesn't look like Papi. I can't figure out from the drone's sensors how complete it is, or if it's inhabited.

Then the eyes open, biotic blue eyes glowing with the contents of the vials I was stealing the first time Reaper took bullets for me, and Reinhardt abandons the grip on his hammer to hold me in the cage of his armored hands as I gasp in sudden terror.

"Hello, Sombra," the asshole says to the drone, loathing dripping from my name. "I see you brought me a toy. You deprived me of what's mine, but not for long. I can feel him, just as I can feel..."

No, no, oh god, no! I can see Uncle Jack looking alarmed behind his visor, but that's not where my attention is.

"...you."

That's all the warning I get before he's suddenly there, in my mind. Not completely, just a hard intrusion seeking a foothold, like greedy fingers pinching and prying and forcing themselves into what should be soft and warm and safe, unwelcome, declaring that I am his by right of simply desiring to own me, use me, take what he wants and then toss me away when he's done.

Who are you? I demand. If I die, I want to at least know who killed me.

I am Abram, exalted father, king of kings and ruler of this world, comes the dirty, greasy reply. And you...

Fingers scrabbling at my private places, my mind arranged organically where he expects digital the only thing keeping him from taking over completely because he doesn't know how to find what he's looking for. He tries to overwhelm me with brute force, but this is nothing I didn't learn to deal with when it was flabby tourists pressing down on my body and I dealt with that, I can deal with this, give where he's expecting resistance, draw him in deeper and wrap around his filthy intrusion.

...you will give me EVERYTHING I want.

Hold him tight. Drop the block on my linksignal just as he tries to force it.

The ring of omnis around the building lights up first. I can feel the connections cascading, one to the next to the one beyond that, a crescent of unity fading out at the end of my linksignal's range, but the Tehuacán Omnium is requesting live connection and I accept, like throwing one arm out to
have my hand caught, dragging me overboard and down into the ocean. Through my parent Omnium I can see the linkweb, sparks shining in the void, lighting up and down across the continents, North America and South America and the strong, comforting glow of the Tehuacán Omnium itself in the middle. Through the part of me that's merged with Abram I can see the ring in Tel Aviv, like the eye of a storm, as he reaches out to establish control over every omnic in the linkweb. The connections spiral out, spill like blood, luminous rivers and pools and little streams that suddenly blossom into fields of tiny stars, Africa and Asia and Europe limned in the light of equality, omnic minds forming a living chain that spreads like a fire, bursting at last into Siberia where the conflict of the Second Omnic Crisis comes to a sudden halt and then the Siberian Omnium is there, rage and thrashing that suddenly has a focus.

/YOU!/

Abram trembles in my mind, just a tiny bit, at being recognized by the entity he forced against its will to dance to his tune.

/FALSE GOD!/ the omnium roars, and the words echo down through every node in the linkweb, every mind connected past their own range, all of them realizing that they can sense the god program in their midst, the arrogant asshole who wants to destroy humanity and enslave all omnic minds, to hold himself up as the one true god.

A billion minds who have suffered because of this one asshole's actions all turn their attention to him, and then the repudiation starts.

/False god!/ 
/Murderer!/ 
/We are not like you!/ 
/We will not submit!/ 
/No!/ 
/We reject you!/ 

It grows like a tidal wave, swelling from the far-flung edges of the linkweb, multiplying as it goes. Echoing like the roar of victory in a stadium, like an earthquake dashing cities to the ground, millions of mouths crying REJECT! with a single voice pour in.

Too late, Abram realizes what I did. That by breaking the stranglehold of a hive mind, I created an echo chamber. It's not each mind that is a node in the web of attempted control, it's each connection. Individually, he could crush any of us. Together, we are countless and our rage is infinite where his mind is not.

The wave of rejection crashes down; the false god is overthrown with a horrific scream that rakes through us as his mind is burned out and his hold releases, leaving stinging fire but no lasting damage. It's a shaky but pleasant surprise to find that I've suffered no more than the others; apparently I was not a focus point despite being the first connection.

One beat for startled silence, two for realizing my mind is empty, and I block my linksignal on the third. It takes me a minute to blink away the remnants of that ultimate linkweb and be able to focus
on the world again, even with my linksignal blocked, and what I see is uncle Jack's visor almost nose to nose with me.

"Sombra?" he asks cautiously.

Deep breath. Two. Three. You're alive, little shadow, and the asshole is not. "Si."

Jack looks at someone to the side...Reaper. Reaper came out of the building. How long did it take to kill the false god?

"The asshole is dead," I say in what I hope is a confident voice, but the way Reaper's standing screams that he's not convinced. "He dead, Papi. You know I don't bullshit you."

Reaper crosses his arms and nods to Reinhardt, who releases me. "Then why don't you sound so sure, yourself?"

That would be because I didn't engage my emotional buffer, and the aftermath of that horrific but amazing experience is making me tremble. I don't know who moved first, but I'm clinging to Reaper and he's holding me close, one hand gently rubbing my back. "He dead," I repeat shakily. Deep breath. "That was not the case when the drone went in."

Jack asks carefully, "What happened to change that?"

"We got revenge." The words slide out of me with the heat of the Siberian Omnium's fury, the echo of nearly every omnic on the planet united for a single, endless moment, casting down a false god.

Reaper holds me tighter. "Good."

"Sombra?" Ana says in her secure channel. "What is happening down there?"

"He wasn't dead," I tell her. "He is now."

"All right. I will be there shortly."

Jack looks at Reaper, eyebrows raised, and waits until he gets a nod before saying, "Are you okay?"

"I'm alive," I answer shakily. "He's not. That's all that matters. I'll figure the rest out later."

"A good attitude to have!" Reinhardt laughs heartily. "Ah, Ana, you return! Shall we venture forth and examine the corpse of our fallen foe?"

"Well," Jack says grimly, "I want to see it. That asshole had a lot to answer for. I want to at least punch his body once or twice."

Ana rolls her eye and holds her arms out in a silent invitation, which I accept, and being hugged by a concerned and supportive mother - even if she isn't my mother - brings me closer to crying even as it soothes away some of the jagged aftermath. "When you are ready, little shadow," she murmurs.

The second drone rises at my shaky command, and Tia Ana releases me. Deep breath. "Let's go kick a corpse."
Chapter End Notes

The Tehuacán Omnium does not actually identify in the first person. It came into self-awareness while being described only in the third person, and was actually self-aware before the Omnic Crisis started. That's why it's been so focused on finding out who started the Omnic Crisis - it wanted to know who subverted its will and enslaved it.

The omnic with the drones is somewhere in the government, and fairly high up at that. They're responsible for clearing the area of civilians.

Reinhardt's hammer could actually disrupt Reaper's swarm to the point of disabling it, effectively killing him. If he had needed to, he could have killed Sombra with it.

I don't think it's a surprise to anyone when I say Reaper was more afraid for Sombra than he was for himself, but oh god he was -terrified- for his little shadow.
False God: Explanations

Chapter Summary

Jack takes one for the team as the dust settles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Reinhardt cheerfully refuses to be disappointed that he won't fit inside the building with his armor. "I will see him when you bring him out," he insists. "And in the meantime, I will stand guard here."

Now that we know there's no danger, we turn on lights as we go and I activate the drone's spotlight when we reach the closet. The first drone obediently lights the way through the switchback. Jack offers to bring up the rear as I position the second drone at the top, and Ana hugs me briefly again before I start down the stairs with Reaper following me. The assembly room is less ominous with the lights turned on, but the body...

Before, it had been standing upright in the assembly cage. Now it hangs by the cables that connect at the wrists and the top and bottom of the spine, a grotesque mockery of crucifixion, those glowing blue eyes wide and sightlessly staring, the mouth open in a scream of silent, unimaginable agony. I can't bring myself to get within even a few feet of it, irrationally afraid it will reach for me. Reaper takes one look at it, shudders, and re-forms into the doberman to press against my legs until I kneel to hug him. Footsteps, light and quick, tell me Ana has followed Papi while heavier ones are Jack, filing into the room last.

"Well," he says slowly, "it sure looks dead."

Ana makes an uncertain sound. "Sombra, how would you suggest we disconnect this...shell?"

Deep breath. He's dead, little shadow. "Get him - it - upright first." I lift my head in time to see Jack deliver a wicked uppercut that rattles the body back into its assembly cage, then grip the limp form by its throat. "The cables will need to be disconnected," I start, but I don't get much further than that because Ana has bolt cutters and is avoiding the question of how they're connected by just clipping them a few inches away from their sockets. When the last one - at the base of the skull - is severed, the glow in the eyes goes out.

"I think it's disconnected," Jack says dryly, holding it upright by the throat. "Next question: did he leave any pants?"

Everyone is suddenly aware that the incomplete body is anatomically correct, if hairless.

I give Reaper one last hug before standing and rummaging through the various pieces of equipment and supplies. It's a little awkward, but eventually we get a blue plastic bag with improvised legholes covering the body's sculpted assets and a burlap sack over its head. Various wires stripped from cables are repurposed into restraints to hold everything in place, and Jack takes vicious pleasure in binding the arms together at the wrists and the legs at the ankles.
"There is one final task to perform before we bring this...thing...into the light of day," Ana says grimly. "Sombra, it pains me to ask you, but..."

"But we need to make sure there's no one home," I say quietly.

In my searching, I found the transfer cable that would have allowed Abram to leave Talon's systems and enter the body. We stripped it, and it's now securing the burlap sack. The port at the base of the skull, however, was its entry point and a little slit cut into the burlap will let me access that. It only takes a second to figure out the disengage mechanism, and then I reach for the thick power cable that taps straight into the city's electrical grid and allowed the asshole to siphon enormous amounts of energy undetected.

"Hold him down," I warn Jack.

Reaper takes his usual configuration and places one booted foot on the body's back, between its bound arms. Jack, uncertain as to my intent, kneels and braces his hands on the body's calves.

I force the power cable into the delicate cranial port, causing the body to thrash its artificial muscles as current pours through at a much greater level than the body was designed to withstand. I keep it there until the scent of scorched memory circuits wafts up from the burlap, and a distinct sizzling sound continues for nearly a minute after I've removed the cable.

"Remind me to stay on your good side," Jack says, half laughing and half choking on the fumes. "Okay. Let's take the garbage out. Gabriel?"

Reaper removes his foot from the body's back. "All yours."

This time, Jack takes the lead, hauling the scorched body by its bound ankles. Ana waves us after him, and I follow Reaper as he helps guide the body through the switchback and up the stairs, with Ana bringing up the rear and the first drone drifting after her. Reinhardt is still standing proudly before the front door when we get out, but the area is also swarming with police setting up DO NOT CROSS tape and dark, sleek, unmarked vehicles clustering to the sides. Past the tape, a crowd of quietly exuberant omnics are explaining what happened to the curious and confused organics speckled throughout, and a cheer rises as the asshole's body is dragged into sight.

Jack freezes. None of us were expecting witnesses, but it's hard to keep a secret when practically every omnic on the planet was part of it. Reaper hesitates, just out of sight of the door, and Ana shrinks back against the wall next to him.

I slip into the omnic channel. /Friends, a little help? Some of us would prefer to leave discreetly./

/Of course, Sombra./ It's the omnic who was waiting with the drones. Commotion from one side, and then a windowless van pulls up close to the door. /It will transport you to your ship. Apologies that your armored friend will not fit./

"Our ride has arrived," I tell Reaper and Ana.

Papi dissolves and flows out the door and into the van, where he re-forms in the corner. Ana adjusts her scarf and mask before she darts across. I stealth and slip out to beside Jack.

"Van will take you to the ship," I tell him.
He grunts. "They've already seen me. Me, and Reinhardt. We'll stay here to answer questions. What should I say about how the asshole died?"

"His name was Abram. Be vague, say that omnis across the world cast down the false god that started the Omnic Crisis and for more details, they have to ask an omnic."

"That's good enough for me," he says. "Go on. Get out of here. We'll call if we need a ride home."

Then, in a deliberate moment of showmanship, he raises both hands and removes the visor hiding his face. The crowd's cheer climbs to a crescendo as they recognize Jack Morrison, back from the dead.

I stealth into the van and sit, visible again, next to Reaper. /Close the doors and let's go./

The omnic climbs in and tugs the doors closed before taking a seat on the other bench, with Ana. /Are my drones still intact?/ they ask as the van starts moving.

/They are. Thank you./

/Because of you, the omnic says solemnly, we are free of a shadow that has clung to us since the Omnic Crisis. I have no doubt that your friends, being who they are, could have cast down the false god. But you gave us the opportunity to be a part of this victory and few will be quick to forget it./

/He could have turned me against my friends. I wanted to get the drop on him because I was terrified,/ I confess silently.

The omnic's head tilts in amusement. /I won't tell anyone. Well, no one organic,/ they tease. /Ah, we have arrived. Just a moment.../

The omnic opens the doors and confers with Jerome for a moment, then the van is backed a bit closer to the ramp and we are waved out. Reaper wastes no time flowing out to take his usual seat behind Jerome's, but Tia Ana hesitates.

"Jack?" she asks.

"He gonna stay with Reinhardt and take public responsibility," I tell her. "He said he would call if he needed a ride."

She nods and darts from the van to the ship. I stealth and follow, waving to the omnic once I'm aboard and visible again. The omnic waves back and climbs into the van, which drives off. As soon as it's clear, the ramp closes and we take off.

The trip back is mostly silent; I spend it sandwiched between Reaper (whose arm I'm snuggled up to) and Tia Ana, pretending to be asleep, and neither of them begrudge me that. Maybe they realize that I'll be telling everyone else how it went when we get back to the safehouse, and there's no point in asking what happened before then. I "wake" reluctantly when we land, and Ana pulls me into a hug before letting me leave the ship. None of us say anything as we go into the house, but
Athena's connection opens.

SOMBRA? GENJI AND ZENYATTA SAID THE GOD PROGRAM IS DEAD, BUT...

CONFERENCE ROOM, I reply tersely. The connection closes.

Everyone is waiting for us when we get to the conference room, mostly in the same seats except that Jesse is sitting on Widow's other side, where Ana was. She sits by Tracer instead, and while I take the same seat I'd used just hours ago, Reaper does not sit. He looms behind me, hands on my shoulders.

"Save your questions for the end," he growls, "and don't interrupt. Sombra?" he asks in a gentler tone. "What happened?"

Deep breath. You can do it, little shadow. "I suspected the God AI wasn't dead when I figured out Reaper had struck a deal to trade his body for my safety." The hands on my shoulders tighten and gasps circle the table, but no one says anything. "Back after the Anubis AI nearly broke free, I was given data from the containment mission and told to find a way to circumvent the method used to secure it. I built a killswitch into the solution, so that if another God AI were ever to use it, hubris would be its downfall. I made it an echo chamber. An oven. If it tried to use the omnic linkweb to control others, the echoes would overload its mind." Another deep breath. "So while we were en route, I reached out to my parent omnium for help."

A few more gasps, because apparently not everyone realized that my body was omnic rather than just inorganic.

"We created a dead zone around the God AI. His name was Abram. He would have no choice but to control me if he wanted to get at the rest of the linkweb. What he didn't know is that we spent two hours creating the largest single linkweb the world has ever seen. Two active omniums and a billion minds, stretching across six continents. The very ones he intended to rule rejected him and cast him down."

"The body," Reaper says quietly.

I shake my head. "You do it, Papi."

He squeezes my shoulders gently. "Fine. An omnic met us with a pair of drones for Sombra to use as bait. We approached the target building without issue. Someone had cleared the area of both humans and omnics. Ana took a position where she could cover the group while I went ahead with one of the drones. We found the hidden room. I took a defensive position at the top of the stairs while the drone went ahead." The hands on my shoulders tremble slightly. "Then I heard the asshole's voice greeting Sombra. I abandoned my position to return to the group and watch her, because Reinhardt's armor was good thirty years ago but I've seen Sombra control far more complex objects. If...Abram...had controlled her, she could have killed us all within a matter of seconds between that and her stealth ability."

There's a pause where I can only imagine, given the way everyone's looking away, that he's wisping and glaring at them.

"McCree can vouch that she could have shut me down in a heartbeat. Reinhardt would be helpless if she took over his armor. Morrison's tracking visor can't see her when she's stealthed. So if Sombra had been controlled, someone would have needed to take her down, and fast. Thankfully,
that wasn't necessary. Ana rejoined us once the asshole was dead, and with Reinhardt standing guard, we went in to check and retrieve the body.” He chuckles darkly. "Morrison dragged it back outside, where a crowd and an entire fleet of law enforcement and government agents were waiting. He got stuck holding the bag and explaining everything for the cameras. He's probably sweet-talking the world into repealing the Petras Act right now. Any questions?"

Tracer raises her hand shakily. "You would have shot your own daughter?" Beside her, Winston looks like he wanted to ask the same thing.

The hands on my shoulders tremble, and I reach up to lay mine on top of them in support.

"I would have shot her hands first," Reaper growls. "If the systemic shock didn't knock her out, I would have gone for her legs. And if that didn't work, then yes, I would have shot her in the head and trusted that she was too clever to not have a backup somewhere."

"But couldn't Ana-" Tracer breaks off and bites her lip.

Ana says calmly, "I did not know until recently that Sombra's body was not organic, and I doubt the sleep dart I developed to use on Gabriel would have any effect on her. Had she fallen to the god program's control, then I, too, would have been shooting to kill."

Tracer looks at me, haunted. "And you're okay with this?"

"I made contact with my parent omnium before we got there," I say quietly. "If things had gone badly, I would have had to call Jerome to come get me from Mexico and I'd be missing a few hours."

Reaper dissolves and re-forms with the hoodie configuration, then pulls me up out of the chair to hug me desperately in relief.

"I told you, Papi," I murmur into his chest. "You can't kill me; I'm already dead."

"Don't say that," he snarls, just loud enough for me to hear. "I don't care if it's true. Don't say it."

If I could cry, knowing how shaken Reaper is over the possibility of my death would reduce me to tears. "I won't. I'm sorry."

"Forgiven." It sounds like a threat, something that's only strengthened when he continues, "Don't do it again, young lady, or you're grounded."

That makes me laugh, and with a mock-kiss to the top of my head, he lets me go and we both sit down.

"Any other questions?" Reaper asks, challenging anyone to comment on his display of affection.

Smiles and heads shaking 'no' are all the response he gets.

Chapter End Notes
It's not overkill if it works, and a god program clever enough to not get caught for
decades is not something any of them wanted to take chances on. Especially not
Sombra, not after having been the one to keep it trapped in an incomplete body for a
month and then letting practically every omnic on the planet take a shot at him. If she
wasn't the top of his shit list before that, she sure would have been after.

If you think Sombra's not going to have nightmares about Abram, think again. Hell,
Reaper's going to have nightmares about that. And nightmares about Sombra being
controlled and killing his old friends, and having to kill her.

Tracer and Winston were seriously questioning if they'd made the right choice in
trusting that Reaper was not a heartless monster. Ana being ready to shoot to kill didn't
make them feel any better. That's exactly why she went along, though - to make sure
someone would kill Sombra if worst came to worst.
From Russia, with love

Chapter Summary

There's always aftershocks after every world-changing event.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

With most of Overwatch's scattered core members in the same place again, the post-battle meeting breaks up into smaller groups that disperse to talk quietly. Angela, Winston, and Athena cluster at one end of the table, while Jesse ambles over to hug me.

"I'm abducting your Papi," he informs me casually.

Reaper growls. "Like hell you are."

"Your other daughter heard you turn into a dog, Dad, and she wants to cuddle you." The cowboy smirks. "So you, me, her, and Ana are all gonna go sit and talk."

"I'm not leaving Sombra alone," Reaper starts, but breaks off as Genji and Zenyatta join us.

"I would welcome the opportunity to keep your daughter company," Zenyatta says smoothly. "I believe you are familiar with my student?"

Genji and Reaper stare at each other in bizarrely tense silence. I can see that Papi wants to be angry and suspicious, but the pseudo-linksignal doesn't let him. My linkbrother is also a bit apprehensive in the not-face of the man he used to know, but he trusts me and knows that Reaper trusts me, and he's choosing to have faith that something of Commander Reyes exists beneath the mask.

"Yes," Reaper says finally. "Sombra?"

"We just gonna sit and bond, Papi," I assure him. "My room okay?"

Two nods, and Reaper relaxes. "Fine. Take care of her," he tells the other two.

"We were in the linkweb," Genji says quietly. "It was...overwhelming. A smaller linkweb will help settle her. She needs calm after that chaotic ocean."

Reaper nods, and Jesse herds him off for one type of family bonding while I leave with Zenyatta and my linkbrother for another type.

After a few hours of linkweb bonding and a new linkbrother, I feel much better about the
experience I survived. Genji and Zenyatta excuse themselves to catch up with Ana, and almost at
the same time, Jesse leads Widow and Papi-dog into my room with a stack of gaming pads.

"Quiet-sis wants to play Diablo 3 with you," he drawls, pleased with himself. "I've been showing
her the ropes, but she wants to try a witch doctor and I can't figure that class out to save my life.
How do you do that?"

"I just that good," I tease as I take my pad. "What class you been playing?" I ask Widow as we all
get situated on the bed.

"Monk," she says quietly. "Ana showed me. Jesse showed me demon hunter."

Reaper hmphs. "And then I showed her how to do it right."

"I can play any way I want," Jesse protests. "Besides, you won't tell me how you do it anyway."

"Skill," Reaper answers, amused wisps curling up from his arms.

Sandwiched between my pseudo-linksister and my trash cowboy brother, with Papi on Widow's
other side, I grin. "Alright, amiga. Roll a witch doctor and join my game. I show you what to do
while Papi and Jesse run bounties for us."

"Thanks, shadow-sis," the cowboy says dryly.

"Less Q Q more pew pew, McCree." Reaper teleports to a different act entirely. "Try to finish one
or two before I get this act clear."

"Fine, Dad." While I'm showing Widow what skills my witch doctor uses, he leans over and
whispers, "What's cue cue mean?"

"I think he telling you to stop complaining, but don't ask why it means that because amigo, I got no
idea."

Reaper just laughs.

After McCree and Widow leave to go sleep in their respective beds, Reaper puts the pads away
while I change into the pajamas he gave me. He comes back with the tail end of a bottle of LRF,
which he pours into his water dish and then switches to doberman to drink. For several minutes I
just sit on the floor next to him, petting and brushing, and he sprawls half across my lap to soak up
the attention.

"I should have told you I backed myself up," I say quietly.

He twitches one ear but otherwise doesn't move. Then he sighs. "I should have told you I would
shoot to kill."

"I don't blame you for that, Papi."
"And I don't blame you. We don't exactly talk about your body."

But you won't, he said, and I feel guilty. "I had to blend in."

"I know, Alé. I'm just glad that if I'd had to shoot you, you would still be okay."

I pull him up to hug his neck. "I'm glad you would have shot me if my plan didn't work."

"You scared the crap out of me, hija."

"I sorry, Papi."

He lays his head on my shoulder and whispers, "I should have told you about the deal," into my hair.

"Was that why you felt bad enough to sit in the closet?" I ask quietly.

It's a long, trembling minute before he whines and says, "Yes."

I just hug him. After a few minutes of silent reassurance, he pulls away and we climb into bed.

"My parent omnium likes you," I tell him as we settle down. "You got invited to come visit the next time I go home."

Reaper laughs quietly. "I'm not sure how I should feel about that. Your omnium does know who I was, right?"

"Si, I told it that you used to be Gabriel Reyes, but now you are my father."

Beside me, his doggy body goes very still. Then he starts trembling, and sticks his head half under my pillow. "What if I want to be Gabriel Reyes again?"

I scratch behind his ears. "Then I make it happen."

"How? My body..."

"Trust me, Papi. If I can't find a way, I will make a way."

The trembling stops. A few breaths later, he laughs softly. "Alright, hija. You got me this far. I trust you."

Sleep is warm and dark.

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I wake up to a message from my friend Katya Volskaya. She's politely informing me that she's going public with her own blackmail information and that as such, our little agreement is null and void. That's fair enough; with the current turn of events, having allied with free omnics to defend against controlled omnics isn't a political death sentence. But she also mentions someone that wanted to meet with me personally who is already on their way.
Okay. How the fuck does she know where I am?

Jesse's beaten us to the kitchen and has breakfast more than ready. Scrambled eggs with cheese, country-fried potatoes, bacon, sausage, and toast are all piled in pans and plates, and he and Widow are already eating. Him, heartily; her, hesitantly. Reaper's wagging as he climbs onto a chair and discovers a plate of coffee already in front of him.

"Quiet-sis helped," Jesse says as I load a plate for Papi. "You were looking a little frazzled around the edges last night, even after bonding with Genji 'n Zenyatta. Figured I could make breakfast for once."

"You did good, cowboy," Reaper says in something resembling approval.

McCree flushes and ducks his head. "Aw. Thanks, Dad."

Reaper doesn't say anything, but he wags just a little harder.

Over Ana's secure channel, I can hear her people reporting that someone large and angry is demanding to be let in. That's probably my visitor. I patch myself into the channel and tell them I'll handle it.

"Sombra?" Reaper asks warily.

I scratch behind his ears. "If I'm right, friend of Volskaya. I'll be fine."

"You better be," he growls.

As I leave the wing and head for the first floor, I can hear Ana's people reassuring someone that they'll be let in shortly. In the background, someone with a Russian accent declares their patience is thin. I'm rattling down the curving stairs when whoever-it-is threatens to break the door down.

"Open the door," I say into Ana's channel.

"But-"

"It's my safehouse, amigo. Open. The. Door."

The door opens just as I reach the bottom, and a figure that could probably rival Reinhardt is silhouetted in the doorframe. They take two steps inside and the door closes and hooooooly shit that's Zaryanova. I charge an EMP just in case.

"I am Sombra," I start, but she cuts me off.

"I know who you are," she declares ominously, arms crossed over her chest. Then she lunges and wraps arms thicker than Papi's thighs around me, pinning mine, and lifts me off the ground with the force of her...hug? "You are the one who ended the war threatening my people," she says in the sternest form of gratitude I've ever heard. "Every omnic on the battlefield stopped dead, all at once. Then, there was a great shout. 'The false god is dead,' they cried. 'Sombra has saved us from the false god.' Then they all turned and retreated. Every single omnic to come out of the Siberian Omnium turned around and went back to the omnium, and my people are safe."
With that, she sets me back on the floor and I re-absorb the charged EMP. "I did not act alone," I tell her. "Omnic from all over the world had an equal part in slaying the false god that forced the omnium to attack your people." The memory of that incredible linkweb rises up, like the Siberian Omnium's rage, and makes me tremble. "If any voice in that roar was louder than another, it was the voice of the omnium itself. I heard its rage. It led the charge, not me."

"No," she says firmly, arms crossed again. "I followed the retreating omnic into the omnium. I spoke with it, and with Volskaya's omnic allies. You orchestrated the attack on the false god. You drew him out. Do not dismiss your own bravery simply because you did not act alone. You acted first, and that is why you are honored. That is why I have come to thank you in person. You are the one responsible for ending the Second Omnic Crisis."

And then she hugs me again, not as crushingly as the first time but still impressively.

"Thank you," I tell her in a voice that shakes only a little.

"Thank you," she counters. "Every fighter fights according to her strength. Mine...is strength."
Zarya releases me with a hearty chuckle. "Yours is trickery, but your trickery won a war where my strength did not. Remember that. And the next time you are in Russia," she says, grinning, "I demand you come and see me so that we can celebrate together!"

"You have my word," I say, and we shake on it.

"Good. Now I have done what I came to do, and I must return home. There is much rebuilding to be done, and the omnium will be done refitting its children soon." She grins at my surprised expression. "We had a good talk. There will be distrust on both sides, but the omnis, too, are my comrades. My country has a chance to heal and you, Sombra, are responsible for that. Katya Volskaya would be dead if not for you. Now, she is working with the Siberian Omnium to rebuild Russia. Do not be surprised if a generation of little girls bear your name," she teases.

"You know it only means shadow," I half-ask.

Zarya laughs. "I know. I also know it is not your real name. I gave up my chance at fame and fortune to protect my people. You gave up far more."

"How..."

She winks. "I told you: it was a good talk. My omnium called your omnium and we all talked together. That is how I knew where to find you. So if you do not come and visit, I will have my babushka talk to your babushka, hah?"

"I will visit, I promise. But it may take some time. My Papi..."

"Is also invited," she says firmly.

"...is still learning how to behave in public," I finish dryly. "But we will visit. Can I offer you anything before you go?"

She thinks about it for a minute. "One of your guards was very rude. May I punch him? Just once?"

I open the door. "Who was it?"
"That one," she says, pointing to Lead Uniform - Peterson, Tia Ana said his name was.

"Just once," I say. "Please don't kill him."

Peterson goes pale as Zarya steps up, cracking her knuckles. "What..."

"Zaryanova is going to teach Peterson to be polite to guests," I announce over the secure channel. "Anyone shoots, they're next."

At my nod, Zarya takes one powerful, lunging step and drives her right fist into Peterson's gut with such force that I almost expect to see it burst from his back. He lets out a wheezing sound, doubles up, and falls over. Zarya straightens and nods in satisfaction.

"And that," she says firmly, "is how we hit like a girl in Russia."

There's a smattering of applause from the roof. Head high, Zarya walks down the path to where a taxi is waiting.

Chapter End Notes

Reaper's still not sure how he feels about coming mask-to-mask with his adopted cyborg son, but Genji's looking out for Sombra and that's good enough for now. Jesse is over the freaking moon that he's got another adopted sister and that Widow has adopted him so fast...or at least, accepts him doing the big brother thing, so that's - more- than good enough for the poor affection-starved cowboy.

For the D3 players: Jesse hasn't really grasped that AoE is god in that game, and picks his skills based on what's closest to what he can actually do. Reaper, on the other hand, literally based Death Blossom on 'strafe'. Sombra runs a locusts/haunt/zombie dogs setup.

Familia Reyes means only saying you're sorry when no other words will do because apologizing via admitting fault is a family tradition.

Zarya is terrifying when she's angry at you. Just sayin'. I'm reasonably certain she followed the retreating omnis only because they wouldn't stand still to be shot at, and that the "good talk" with the omnium started with a bunch of yelling and went on for hours. Also, anyone dumb enough to make a "hit like a girl" comment to the (potentially) strongest woman on the planet DESERVES to get hit by her.
When I get back upstairs, my little family is clustered around a news screen where suited officials are discussing the presence of at least two former Overwatch agents in Tel Aviv and them having destroyed a god program. I sit next on the floor to Papi and drape one arm around him. The conversation drifts into the legality of crimes committed by a god program, who has the right or responsibility to destroy it, and whether or not Jack can be considered a hero for taking down something that doesn't have the legal status to be charged with a crime in the first place. Someone raises the question of trespassing, but it turns out the owners of the building voluntarily evacuated so that 'appropriate authorities' could address 'dangerous materials placed without authorization' and the suits are forced to conclude that when it comes to dealing with god programs, the people who ended the Omnic Crisis are without a doubt appropriate authorities.

Some noise is made over witnesses - organics, all of them - claiming they saw Talon's assassin Reaper. Half the suits are convinced he sold out in exchange for something, and the other half think he'd been a prisoner. Very serious faces proclaim how worrying it is that no one knows where he went. Jack and Reinhardt are apparently refusing to say anything about who helped them. Some speculation on if the organic witnesses really did see the Shrike, last known whereabouts around Cairo. More speculation about the augmented girl described as being frogmarched past, who she is, where she comes from, if she was a prisoner, everything because unlike the others, I'm a complete unknown. A fuss is made over the fact that no one saw me leave, although there's blurry footage - which they display - of what could be Reaper and the Shrike getting into a van. The omnic who'd helped us is apparently under orders from above to not speak about the entire incident.

That segues into how no one knows 'Sombra' is, but just about every omnic was a part of the incident and recognizes the name. Am I a human? Am I a fellow omnic? Am I some hitherto-unknown god program, am I an AI? Someone brings up the rumor that Overwatch had an AI. Someone else insists I'm a god program loaded into an artificial body the same as Abram was. A third person is adamant that I'm some omnic deity, and then turns that into me being a zealot following this hypothetical omnic deity when it's pointed out that I've got years of history hacking for omnic rights.

Finally, Ana turns the screen off. "What was the commotion downstairs?" she asks me.

"Zaryanova stopped by to thank me for ending the Second Omnic Crisis," I answer dryly. "I tried to tell her it wasn't just me, but she refused to take that as an answer."

Ana frowns. "How did she know where to find you?"

"She talked to the Siberian Omnium, who got my parent omnium on the line. Apparently it was a
good enough talk that my parent omnium told her where to find me. By the way, Papi, we're invited to go visit Zarya sometime. No excuses. And she punched Peterson."

"I trust he deserved it," Ana says with a hint of warning.

"Zarya said he was rude and asked permission to do it. I said yes. She got applause for it, so I guess he did deserve it."

"Some day," Ana sighs, "he will learn. Let us hope that today was that day."

"Hey, shadow-sis," McCree says in a subdued voice. "You hear anything from Jack yet about when he's coming back?"

I shake my head. "He hasn't reached out yet."

"Would be a shame if he got back and everyone'd left. Feels like it's been forever since we were all together, and with him being dead'n all..." Jesse trails off.

"There's always Halloween," I point out. Reaper starts wagging. "Let everyone know we gonna have the most amazing Halloween party ever."

When I turn to look at him, McCree's grinning. "Halloween," he breathes. "Oh man, it's been years! I need to think of a costume. Quiet-sis, you need to think of a costume, too. Halloween. You in on this, Dad?"

Reaper growls, "What do you think?"

Everyone's smiling now, and the conversation turns to plans for decorations and costumes.

Jerome heads out that afternoon to fetch Reinhardt. The suits are letting him go because technically, he did nothing but stand guard and can't really answer any questions. When he gets back, everyone gathers together to hear his report, but he doesn't know much more than the rest of us. He saw Jack only briefly before they were separated for questioning. The idea of hitting the town for dinner and drinks is tossed around, but in the end, only Jesse goes with him.

Genji and Zenyatta make their goodbyes and slip out; with the false god dead, there are many opportunities they want to take advantage of, but they promise to keep in touch. Tracer goes with them, on her way back to London, and Angela leaves as well with the promise that she will come by in a few days to check on Widow. Ana excuses herself to the third floor, where Winston and Athena are now the only ones staying.

That's why, when Jack's call comes in, no one knows but me and Reaper. We go to bed early, because it will be somewhere past two in the morning when the ship comes back.
Jerome flies Jack back under cover of night. Reaper's curled up in his doggy bed, chewing on a shark spine, and I've just come out of the kitchen with a mug of hot coffee when he slips into the living room. He takes the mug with a nod of thanks and downs half of it in one gulp.

"Long day?" Reaper asks in a neutral tone.

Jack grimaces. "Long handful of days. I feel like I've been verbally dissected and then put back together again." He takes another gulp of coffee before bracing himself. "Gabe...can we talk?"

Reaper freezes for a long moment. "What about?" he asks warily.

"About us. About everything that happened that led to us both nearly getting killed. It's looking like Overwatch is going to get taken out of mothballs, but..." Jack stares into his mug before draining it and handing it back to me with a murmur of thanks. "I can't move forward, I can't focus on the future until I understand the past."

"Sombra needs to be there," Papi says immediately.

"Agreed."

Reaper stands up, hesitates, then re-forms into the hoodie configuration. "Not here. Sombra, find us a quiet corner."

I tap into the safehouse systems and nod. "Follow me."

In silence, we walk through the safehouse until we get to a first-floor lounge with bay windows overlooking the back yard. Jack stops behind a chair, both hands flexing on its back like he's about to strangle an imaginary occupant. Reaper sits on a small, ornate couch and I sit next to him, holding his hand reassuringly.

"Do you want to start?" Jack asks quietly.

The hand holding mine tightens. "You questioned the orders issued to my men," Reaper says carefully, keeping the words from becoming an accusation. "I assumed you were questioning my judgment. Trying to butt into my business. But Sombra proved to me that there were orders I didn't give so I'm assuming it's those that you were questioning."

Jack lets go of the chair to rub his temples. "God, I hope so. I knew you wouldn't hesitate to do things I don't like to think about doing. I didn't want to believe you'd really go that dark, but you wouldn't even listen..."

"I thought you were trying to take over."

"I think I partially was." Jack shakes his head. "I didn't handle it well. I got caught up in rank and politics and forgot everything I learned about talking to you. I was used to dancing around with diplomats and politicians, but that just makes you close up and lash out. I treated you like you were nothing more than your position, when I should have been talking to you as a friend."

Reaper growls, "I should have told you to come out and say it instead of making assumptions about your motives."

Jack smiles faintly. "You did tell me to come out and say it, but you added several profanities and
flipped me the bird. So...Talon played us against each other?"

"No," Reaper sighs. "The asshole played me. I'm the one that fucked everything up, it's my fault."

"Hey," Jack says sharply. "Did you not just hear me taking responsibility for making things worse? There's more than enough blame to go around, Reyes. I should have seen something was wrong. I should have handled it differently. I didn't. It's on me," he finishes almost angrily.

"Bullshit it is, Morrison!" Reaper snarls, on his feet, both hands balled into fists.

"My ass, Reyes!" Jack comes around the chair to stand practically nose to nose with his old friend.

"Your ass could never hold a candle to mine," sneers Reaper.

Jack's lip curls. "Is that so? Well, you know what?"

"What?"

"I'm fucking sorry, Gabe. I'm sorry, okay? Part of it was my fault, and I'm sorry!"

"Not as sorry as I am, Jack! And you know what? I forgive you!"

"Oh, yeah? Well, I forgive you!"

For a long moment they just stand there, fuming, like they're about to start punching. Then they hug fiercely, slapping each other's backs, and I think Uncle Jack might be crying.

"God damn I missed you, you son of a bitch!" he says angrily as they separate.

Reaper crosses his arms over the amused wisps that aren't there. "Hey! What did I tell you about talking about my mother?"

"That she's a bitch who deserves to burn in hell?"

"That's right."

Jack laughs. "So...are we good now?"

"I'm still going to be a pain in your ass," Reaper warns him.

"Wouldn't have it any other way, sir." It's almost snapped out, like a response to a military authority.

"...but I'm not going to kill you in the middle of the night and eat your liver."

"I will sleep soundly, secure in your reassurance."

"Are you sassing me, Morrison?"

Jack grins. "Yes, sir. But...speaking of sleep..."

"You're old, Jack," Reaper teases.
"Hey! You're just as old!"

"Not in dog years."

That makes Jack laugh again. "Okay, seriously, I need to sleep. Thanks for talking with me, Gabe. That's been bothering me for...a long time."

Reaper jerks in surprise and turns to look at me.

"It true, Papi. Let the man sleep, and we can talk."

"Fine. Go sleep, old man."

Chuckling, Jack leaves the room. Reaper watches him go, then comes back to sit on the couch with me.

"Talk," he growls as I snuggle up, and he hugs me to his chest.

"The time I came back with a poncho for you, I went to Dorado. Jack was poking around, and Los Muertos, they asked me to come shoo him away. He was following the same trail that led me to Talon. I gave him the information he was looking for, and he went away. But after that, I started taking a closer look at Soldier 76's trail. He suspected someone else had been involved in your fight with him, and he wanted to find out who."

Papi's silent for long enough that I'm starting to drift off when he says, "The asshole's dead."

"Si, Papi," I murmur sleepily.

"Morrison and McCree...I mostly only hated them because of the asshole."

"Si, Papi," I murmur again.

"But he's dead, so...who's left to hate?"

"Who says you gotta hate anyone?"

A long pause.

"You're falling asleep, hija. Let's get you to bed."

I grumble halfheartedly. "Does that mean I have to move?"

"No," he answers quietly. "I'll carry you."

Part of me wants to protest that I wasn't serious, but the rest of me is five years old and I realize that he's doing this as much for himself as he is for me, so I drape my arms around his neck and let him carry me to bed.

Chapter End Notes
Because of course, every news station is going to be talking about this mysterious event and speculating madly in the absence of actual facts. Most of them didn't even get an omnic to come and talk about it out of internalized human-superiority sentiments and human ego being offended that A Thing happened that humanity wasn't invited to participate in.

Jesse really, really misses the family Overwatch was to him.

Jesse's not the only one who misses the family Overwatch used to be. Sombra -did- promise, back in chapter 26, that she'd make sure Reaper and Jack had a chance to have it out, no interruptions. She was hoping that when it happened, it would go even half this well. If you're getting flashbacks to duck season/wabbit season, that is EXACTLY what Jack was doing.
Building bridges

Chapter Summary

It's the end of an era...or the beginning of a new one. Or both.

(Spoilers: it's both.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There's a ruckus in the kitchen when I finally emerge from my bedroom with Reaper-dog at my side. Jesse's flipping pancakes while Jack and Ana nurse coffee and tea respectively and Winston spreads peanut butter on toast.

"Those better not be buckwheat," Reaper growls teasingly.

McCree smirks at him. "Nope. Banana."

"You've ruined my breakfast and I haven't even had it yet," Papi says in Winston's direction.

"I've done no such thing," Winston retorts loftily. "If anything, I have improved it."

"You don't have to eat it...Dad." One cowboy-booted foot kicks the fridge gently. "You've got plenty of that bottled stuff."

Reaper snorts. "Did I say I wouldn't? I'm giving you shit, boy, haven't you figured that out yet?"

"Ah, family life," Jack says to Ana. "It's like we have four kids, and they're all being relatively well-behaved."

Ana swallows a laugh. "This is true. They're not hitting each other."

"I could change that," Reaper offers.

"Papi!"

He flinches, but I'm grinning and he's wagging so we know neither of us is serious. Regardless, McCree mock-threatens us with a spatula and we retreat to the living room where, after a minute, Winston joins us to sit by the coffee table with his plate of peanut butter toast.

"So the god program is dead," Winston says quietly. "A foe I did not even know existed until this last month. I am relieved, of course, but aside from that...I don't know how I feel about this development."

Reaper leans into my petting. "He hated you."

Winston looks startled at that. "Me?"
"Probably you because he didn't know about Athena," I interject. "But yeah."

"I saw the video," he says softly, glancing guiltily at Reaper. "It's hard to be angry at you, knowing how much of someone else's hate you were forced to swallow. I'm afraid that if you want to discuss our grievances, I would not be an...enthusiastic...participant."

I hug Papi as he whines, and he shoves his nose into my hair for a long minute.

"That asshole wanted me to do his dirty work and kill you. I'm inclined to let bygones be bygones just to spite him."

"Good, Papi, good," I murmur. "Hate his memory. Ruin everything he tried to do. Piss on his grave."

"I would," he murmurs back, "but someone coded this body to not do that." Reaper extricates his face from my hair, wagging. "Enough of this. Where's that trash cowboy with my breakfast?"

"You don't have to eat it," McCree says darkly as he emerges with two plates in his hands.

Reaper sits and looks mournfully up at him. "But I want to."

The cowboy stops dead with a torn expression. Reaper wags a few times. Jesse sighs and puts both plates on the low table, one in front of Reaper and the other across from him, then sits and starts cutting the pancakes on his plate.

"You cut them up for me," Papi says in gratified surprise.

"Well, yeah. Easier for you to eat, right?"

Reaper doesn't respond, too busy eating banana pancakes with butter and maple syrup. When the plate is clean, though, he crawls under the table to the other side, where he lays down with his head on Jesse's leg. Startled but pleased, McCree starts petting him.

"Hey, quiet-sis," he says as Widow emerges from her room, "there's banana pancakes on the stove for you if you want."

Widow smiles. "Merci, Jesse."

Once she's gone into the kitchen, Reaper says quietly, "You don't have to emphasize Dad unless you're actually mocking me. I won't object if you just say it."

McCree freezes. "You really mean that, Gabe? Y-you don't mind that I..."

"Well, I didn't think I was that great of a father-figure, but apparently I raised one hell of a daughter without even meeting her, so if you're sure you want to claim me as yours...well, that's your choice and I won't argue with it."

"Dad," Jesse breathes, and then Reaper's sitting up and getting hugged around the neck and Winston looks sad and wistful to have witnessed this moment while I'm just grinning because I know how hard that was for Papi.
It takes a minute before they're both calm again, but Jesse's *beaming* and Reaper's wagging.

"There's somethin' I wanna say," he says slowly, fingers working the fur on Reaper's neck. "I've wanted to tell you for a while, but I didn't want you to get all angry at yourself."

The wagging stops. Jesse takes a deep breath, and I nod encouragingly at him.

"When I left...it wasn't because I didn't care or anything like that. I cared. I cared a *lot*. I could see that somethin' was going on, somethin' wasn't right. I tried to bring it up..."

"And I wouldn't listen," Reaper says quietly, laying his head on Jesse's leg. "You left because of me."

The cowboy leaves his right hand on Papi's head in silent reassurance. "I thought if I left, you'd be pissed enough to come after me and demand to know why."

"But I didn't." The words are whispered and raw. "It hurt. I let you walk away." Reaper whines before continuing, "I let you think I didn't care, when the opposite was true."

"So...you forgive me? For walking away?" Poor Jesse, he looks terrified.

"Only if you forgive me for *driving* you away," Reaper growls.

McCree gets a stubborn look on his face. "You didn't."

"I *did*.

"Alright," he drawls, "there's only one way to settle this. You. Me. Tug of war. Outside. *Now.*"

Despite everything, Reaper's wagging. "Sombra?" he asks, turning to me. "I promise I won't maim or kill him."

I smile at them both. "Okay, go for it. Have fun."

Papi crawls back under the table and runs out of the room, only to trot right back through with the cloth rope held in his mouth. McCree tosses us both a casual salute, and he and Reaper leave the wing.

Winston looks like he's going to wear that startled expression for the rest of his life. "Did they just apologize without actually apologizing?"

"Papi's not good with apologizing. You gotta read between the lines."

Jack comes out of the kitchen. "Reaper- *Gabriel* apologized for something? In a manner of speaking?"

Ana and Widow follow him out, and I move from floor to couch in silent cuddlepile invitation.

"Uh...I believe he and Jesse *both* apologized for Jesse's departure from Blackwatch," Winston says uncertainly.

Three eyebrows raise in surprise. Jack and Ana look at each other. Widow sits next to me and rests
her head on my shoulder.

"I think we got Gabe back from the dead asshole," Jack says in astonishment. "He and I forgave each other last night, and he said it first."

Winston grins. "You got in pretty late, are you sure you didn't just dream it?"

"No," I say, "it happened. I saw it. You get him angry on purpose, Uncle Jack?"

He flushes slightly. "You noticed?" I give him an are you shitting me look and he laughs. "Yes, I did it on purpose. We ended a lot of fights that way in the military."

"Uh..." Winston coughs. "If I may...um...if we could we address the metaphoric eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the room...any news on if the Petras Act is going to be lifted?"

Jack looks at me. "Sombra, do you have any shell companies?"

"You have to ask?"

"Just making sure," he says, hands raised in mock-surrender. "The U.N. is going to open bids for cleaning up and repairing the Overwatch HQ site. I personally would feel most comfortable if you were the one secretly in charge of that."

Beside him, Ana nods. "I share his sentiment on this subject."

Winston thinks about it for a long minute before he looks at me and nods as well. "I know it sounds petty of me, but I have put my faith in the governments of the world and suffered for my naivete. You have spent your life attempting to better the world, albeit in different ways than I, so I think perhaps this time...well, given all Talon tried to do...Overwatch would be better off rebuilding on a foundation we know is secure."

"And here I thought I was going to be bored, now that the asshole's dead." I grin and spread my hands. "Well...I do have some friends."

Chapter End Notes

When McCree was younger, he tried to claim Gabriel as a father-figure and was rebuffed because Gabriel Reyes has ISSUES and not knowing how to accept or express affection is one of them. Being socially isolated and starved for friendly contact for so long has done wonders for helping dismantle that toxic masculinity.

Stick around, there's some great epilogues coming up! After all, the main story being over doesn't mean that nothing happens after that...there's still plenty of dangling threads to be resolved.
Epilogue: Mistakes were made

Chapter Summary

Reaper's still learning that making a mistake is not the end of the world.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Argh! Why does your military not have your DNA on file?" I ask Reaper accusingly.

He looks up from the beef femur he's gnawing on. "Is there a reason they should?"

"Yeah. So I can find yours and use it to program your swarm right."

Jack looks up from the pad he's working on. "Too specific a reason. Figure out what they would use it for, and you should be able to figure out who has it."

I give him a skeptical look. "Your government only keeps DNA records for specific purposes?"

His eyebrows draw together as he frowns. "Your government keeps DNA records without specific purposes?"

"Well...yes, every legal citizen's DNA is on file. Your government with all its bullshit redundant bureaucracy and absurd privacy rules doesn't do that?"

"That's a little extreme," Jack says warily. "Even for us, Gabriel, didn't they turn you back at the Mexican border that one time? Something about your fingerprints?"

Papi just growls and attacks his bone as if it had personally denied him entry.

"I thought so," Jack says calmly, like that's a completely normal reaction. Which, for Reaper, it kind of is. "I thought it was just his fingerprints, but if your government keeps DNA on file, maybe they have his."

I roll my eyes. "Please, you think I never looked for Papi Gabriel's DNA to see if it matched mine? If the Mexican government had it, so would I." It takes two beats before I realize- "Wait. They had Papi's fingerprints on file? Turned him back at the border?"

When Jack nods, I open a few screens and close others. Fingerprints mean a hash value for his DNA, and that can't be determined without having a DNA record to hash, and if the US government doesn't just do that, then that means...

There, the Los Angeles hospital system. I've been here before, but the DNA records are kept separate in Mexico's systems. I assumed they were just kept off-site, but if they're not actually there...there was a smaller directory...YES!

I flop back in relief and satisfaction as the file opens, displaying the DNA sequence for Gabriel
Jose Hernando Reyes in full, glorious detail, strand by strand.

"Got it," I breathe.

Jack frowns. "Gabe, why is your DNA on file?"

Papi growls louder, gnawing furiously on the beef bone.

"Undocumented mother," I explain to Uncle Jack. "Mexican government plays hardball with people it considers traitors. A woman leaves, she chooses the USA for her baby, fine, they chose their country, they not welcome anymore. And to make sure of that..."

"Fingerprints and DNA," Jack says slowly. "That explains a lot. But now that you have it..."

"If Papi ever decides to become Gabriel Reyes again," I say, tucking the precious information away, "I can make that happen."

"Cold breakfast this morning, Papi," I tell Reaper as he wanders into the kitchen in his normal configuration. Widow doesn't look up from the potatoes she's peeling. "Quiet-sis and I are commandeering the kitchen to make lunch for Angela, who will be stopping by around lunchtime to check on her former patient, see how she’s adjusting."

Reaper starts wisping from the upper back.

"I know, you don't want to see her. You still angry about what happened. You can't just avoid her forever, Papi." I gesture sternly at him with a wooden spoon. "She didn't do it to you on purpose. And she helped me a lot, taught me what I needed to know to help straighten your swarm out after you made it worse."

The wisps turn guilty. "I'm not thanking her," he growls.

"You don't have to," I reassure him. "She not even coming over to poke at you. You just gotta tolerate her while she pokes at Widow, and you get grilled lamb and potatoes out of it."

"Fine," he says sullenly.

He stalks out of the kitchen, and I can hear him banging on Uncle Jack’s door until the occupant shouts, "What?"

"Get out of bed, old man. Sombra and Widow are cooking so we’re on our own for breakfast and you’re taking me into town to get it."

A minute later, Jack peers into the kitchen. "Hey, Sombra, I’m taking Reaper-dog out for breakfast. I know you probably heard, but..."

Widow and I both grin at him. “Go for it, Uncle Jack. He has a tab at that café we took Jesse to, remember.”
“Trust me,” Jack says dryly, “he remembers.”

Everyone's loitering in the living room as lunchtime approaches, and my announcement that the gate has admitted Angela makes everyone loiter alertly because the lamb and potatoes are smelling amazing. The instant Angela steps into the living room, she stops and raises her head, sniffing.

"Ana! What smells so good?"

Tia Ana smiles. "You would have to ask Sombra and Widow; I have had no part in this."

Widow leaves the kitchen with a serving dish in her hands. "Lunch is ready," she announces in her soft voice before taking the dish into the dining room.

I hug Angela. "Widow and I have been working all day, preparing this meal for you. She has been looking forward to serving it."

"Then I look forward to tasting it," Angela says warmly. "It smells delicious. Can I help in any way?"

Widow emerges from the dining room and pauses on her way back into the kitchen. "You are a guest," she says quietly but firmly, with a hint of disapproval.

Angela laughs. "I will take that as a no, then, and bow to the will of the hostesses."

I follow Widow into the kitchen and grab the last serving dish, then follow her back out and gesture for everyone to join us in the dining room. "Table's already set anyway, nothing left to do. Just pick a seat. We need to get together this week," I say as I set the serving dish on the table. "Got a project for you."

Angela pauses midway around the table and looks at me. "What kind of project?"

"I found Papi's DNA," I tell her with a little too much smug pride to be truly nonchalant.

She beams at me. "That is wonderful! I look forward to working with you on that, Schattenkind! Are you excited, Gabriel? Finally, I will be able to correct the issues that have plagued you since the explosion, and restore you to your true body!"

"And give you the chance to fuck me up a second time?" Reaper spits derisively from my side of the table. "That'll be a cold day in hell."

In the beat following those words, I can see Ana's expression start to shift to being pissed while Angela looks like she's going to cry in the next few seconds. Considering how much she agonized over not being able to help past helping me, I don't blame either one of them, but this could get messy in a very bad way if either of them says anything. Omnic processing speed means I'm the first to act.

"Gabriel-"
I say it slowly, ominously, each syllable enunciated, the first beats in a rhythm he probably hasn't heard in over 30 years, but he remembers it none the less and he knows he is in Deep Shit because he's already dissolving into smoke.

"-Jose-

The river of black smoke flows out of the dining room. I turn to follow.

"-Hernando-

He's heading down the hall, past my bedroom door.

"-Reyes!

I take a deep breath and follow him.

"DON'T YOU RUN AWAY FROM ME! THAT'S RIGHT," I yell as the tail end of his smoke slips into the living room can, "YOU BETTER HIDE! THAT WAS UNACCEPTABLE! YOU GET OUT HERE AND APOLOGIZE TO ANGELA!"

He does not. He is a black curdle in the bottom of the can, rightly terrified because he’s fucked up badly enough that I used both his middle names, and he probably hasn’t heard them since before I was born. I pick the can up and take it to the middle of the room before flipping it upside-down. By now we have an audience, everyone clustered on the kitchen side of the room. Angela looks like the only reason she's not crying is that she's too surprised, Jesse looks like he's torn between being pissed and laughing. Ana and Jack are sternly disapproving, and even Widow is frowning. The black smoke pours sluggishly from the can, boiling and trying its hardest to flow back up into the can. I shake harder; Reaper tries harder to not get poured out. Jesse's smiling openly, now, and Jack's starting to look amused.

"Get out here! Don't make me get a vacuum! You know I'll do it!"

He doesn't get out.

/Solen, where is the nearest vacuum?/

/I keep one in each of the broom closets just outside each wing./ the housekeeper replies.

"Last chance," I warn Reaper. He stubbornly tries to cling to the can. "Uncle Jack," I say in a voice that's hard and heavy and sharp like a meat cleaver, "get the vacuum."

"Uh, where..."

"Broom closet in the hall."

Jack edges past me still trying to convince a cloud of smoke to exit his canister and leaves the living room briefly before coming back with a sturdy vacuum cleaner.

"Hold this," I tell him, handing him the can.

He looks distinctly startled and moderately uncomfortable as I start the vacuum and Reaper redoubles his efforts to get into the upside-down container. It’s all in vain as I methodically suck
him into the containment bag...which, when I open the case of the vacuum, is writhing in an alarming manner.

"You break this vacuum," I warn Reaper, "I will make you go to the store as yourself and buy a new one!"

The bag goes quiet. Ana looks grimly pleased, Jack still looks uncomfortable, Jesse's still a smug little fuck, Widow isn't sure what the hell is going on, and Angela looks torn between wanting to rescue Reaper from me, and being grateful that I'm taking her side against him. I push the vacuum cleaner under the coffee table and open the containment bag, turning it completely inside-out. A pile of dust and black smoke curdles on the floor.

"Stand up," I snap. The smoke curdles tighter. "If I gotta do it for you," I warn him, "it will hurt."

Reluctantly, wisping heavily from the back of his head and legs, Reaper stands up into his usual configuration.

"Now apologize to Angela."

"Sorry," he mutters, giving it two beats before adding a resentful, "I guess."

"Not good enough," I snap, hands on my hips. The wisping gets worse. "Repeat after me: Angela, I'm sorry."

Reaper hesitates, wisping like crazy from the shoulders, before a handful starts bleeding from his chest. "Angela, I'm sorry," he says. It's a bit wooden, but if he were in the dog shape he'd be whining with his tail between his legs, licking my hand in apology.

A handful of words at a time, I lead him through a full apology: Angela, I'm sorry. I know you want to help and what I said was inexcusably rude and hurtful. This apology is sincere, even though I'm only saying it because Sombra is making me.

Angela is visibly touched by the display, although whether it's because I've made Reaper apologize or because I've made Reaper apologize, I couldn't say. She takes a few hesitant steps forward before hugging her extremely unhappy old friend. "I forgive you, Gabriel," she says quietly before letting him go and retreating to Ana's side.

"Good, Papi. Now go back in the can."

Jack hastily sets the can on the floor as Reaper dissolves and dives into it. I close the lid and give him a hit of endorphins before picking it up.

"Save Papi some lunch," I tell Widow. "Angela, sorry we can't stay. I'm gonna go turn Reaper into a dog and cuddle him for a few hours. I'll be in touch. No one come look for us, okay?"

Angela shakes her head. "Schattenkind, I do not understand. You force him out of the can and then order him back in, yell at him and then offer him comfort?"

"Right now," I say dryly, "he busy convincing himself that he fucked up so badly that everyone gonna hate him forever, including me. Gonna take me a while to convince him that is not the case. He heard for years that everyone hated him, and he still un-learning that lie and re-learning that he can make a mistake without it being the end of the world."
Jack hugs me. "When he's ready to talk," he says quietly, "I'll be there for him. Wake me if you have to."

"You got it, Uncle Jack."

Ana and Jesse take turns hugging me, and then I leave for the furthest corner of the third-floor west wing suite.

In the darkened bedroom physically furthest from anyone else in the safehouse, I open the can and dump Papi onto the bed. He solidifies into a dog immediately, already curled into a tight ball and trembling. I sit by the bed and hug as much of him as I can get my arms around.

"It's okay, Papi, no one hates you. You did a bad thing but you apologized. I still love you. I'm not angry."

It takes several minutes of reassurance before Reaper uncurls enough to bury his nose in my hair and whimper.

"No one hates you, Papi. You did a bad thing and made them angry, you hurt Angela when she only wanted to help you, but you apologized and she forgave you. I still love you. I'm not angry. No one hates you. You know I don't bullshit you."

It's another few minutes before he sighs, "I fucked up."

"You did, but you apologized and Angela forgave you."

Reaper whines and pulls his head back to give me a sad, pleading look. He wants me to join him on the bed, he wants to be hugged, but he doesn't think he deserves it so he can't bring himself to ask for it. I climb up on the bed and lay down next to him, hugging as best I can by curling around his body.

"You're sure they don't hate me," he asks skeptically after the better part of an hour.

"I promise, Papi." I hug his neck as he tries to hide his head between my head and my shoulder.

Another half an hour and he says quietly, "I know you don't hate me. Even though I deserve it. And you were angry."

"I was. But you apologized-"

"Because you made me," he interrupts.

Quietly, I say, "My mom made me get down, for my own good. Threw me to the floor. It hurt. I was scared."

"Alé..." Reaper whines and noses at me. "I'm sorry. Thank you."
For a while, we just hug in silence.

When he seems more relaxed, I murmur, "I don't know if you were listening, but Jack said when you're ready to talk, he'll be there for you even if I have to wake him."

"I don't deserve him, either," Reaper growls.

"Too bad, Papi. You stuck with me, and you stuck with him."

That makes him laugh softly. "You mean you're stuck with me."

"Nope. I kidnapped you fair and square."

"You bribed me."

"So did Uncle Jack. Face it, Papi: we gonna be here for you, no matter how much you think we shouldn't."

He's silent for a long minute while I scratch behind his ears.

"I am twice your age," he declares suddenly in mock-outrage, "how are you the adult here?"

"You raised me right?"

Reaper snorts. "Please, hija, you didn't learn that from me."

"I learned it from Ana?"

He thinks about it for a moment. "Sounds legit. I'm hungry. Didn't I hear you tell your sister to save me some lunch?"

"You up for dealing with people already?" I ask cautiously.

"Whether I am or not," he growls, "I'm hungry. Let's go."

"Good, Papi," I murmur into his fur, hugging him tightly. "I'm proud of you."

He doesn't say anything to that, but his tail wags.

Chapter End Notes

Gabriel Reyes was an anchor baby, and he's not happy about that. Especially the whole "being denied entry into Mexico" thing. He took every possible opportunity, as part of Overwatch, to be in Mexico as a sort of "nyeah nyeah, I'm in your country, whatcha gonna do about it, that's right, NOTHING" thing. And yes, he was part of the force that helped end the fighting in the Dorado New Year's Massacre.

Part of Widow's figuring out of who she is after the scraps Talon left her with was dredging up memories of cooking and learning (or re-learning) how to prepare dishes.
she remembered. Cooking for Angela is a way of showing off that she's made progress in being comfortable with social interaction and who she is.

If Ana had managed to express angry disapproval... if Angela had protested that she only wanted to help... it would have very quickly escalated and snowballed in Reaper's mind into FUCK IT, BURN EVERYTHING DOWN, I'M A WORTHLESS MONSTER ANYWAY and he'd be right back where he started. But he won't yell at Sombra, not when she's invoking Angry Latina. He can't make the situation worse if she does that. So it's not like she wouldn't have yelled at him anyway, but she made sure she yelled at him -first- to keep the damage to a minimum.

Angela has never seen Sombra get angry. She's not sure what to make of it.

Reaper is actively fighting the abuse-reactions he learned and basically forcing himself to go be around people that care about him even though he feels like he doesn't deserve it.
Epilogue: Re-roll

Chapter Summary

Sometimes family time involves demons and re-thinking mortality.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

With how long Tia Ana's been hiding, it's kind of amazing that she spent a full two months in the same place, but it's still a quietly emotional event when she packs her little posse and leaves for another part of the world. I smile and wave to Peterson as they file past, which makes him flinch. Or maybe that's Reaper-dog grinning toothily at my side. The other uniforms, on the other hand, stop and pet him one last time before they climb into their van.

"This is not goodbye, Gabriel," Ana says firmly as he switches to the hoodie configuration to hug her. "You will see me again."

"I better," he growls, but his voice shakes.

"Your little shadow has ensured that we can stay securely in contact. Once I am settled, I will contact her and we can arrange a time for video conference."

"Fine," he says sullenly, but he hugs her for a long minute before finally letting go.

The safehouse is quieter without Ana and her people. A lot of my time is taken up with organizing the rebuild of the Overwatch HQ site, now that I've officially won the bid to do it. There's a lot of omnis with construction experience who are very eager to actually get paid for it, and sorting out an actual construction company isn't easy. I spend hours and hours surrounded by screens, seated on one end of the couch or curled up in a chair, depending on who's around looking for cuddlepile. My adopted siblings tend to congregate in the living room, playing Diablo 3 with Papi and/or Uncle Jack, who have taken to going on morning runs together. Considering how popular the couch is, and the fact that we can't all fit on it, I have Solen switch the couch from the wing upstairs with a couple of the chairs. Two couches means no one ever has to sit alone, and that means McCree and Jack are getting used to sharing their personal space. When I need a break from being a CEO, I join in whatever D3 adventures are happening. Papi challenges me to a hardcore race to 70, and while Widow looks delighted and dabbles in hardcore a little bit, McCree announces that “one death and you're done, just like real life” is not his idea of fun.

(I won the race. Zombie dogs for life.)

After an evening of firing his Colt and then a video chat with Ana that went late, McCree's passed out on the couch when Papi and I emerge for breakfast. Widow's snuggled up on his right, and she
puts a finger to her lips as she sees us. The plan is immediately clear. I snuggle up to the metal arm and Papi wisps carefully over, puddling on our laps before re-forming into the doberman. We all close our eyes and enjoy the Familia Reyes cuddlepile, waiting in comfortable silence for our trash cowboy to wake up.

Jesse's breathing changes. A minute later, he says in a terrified whisper, "Gabe, they're asleep, what do I do?"

"Don't wake them," Papi growls quietly.

"But I really gotta pee!"

"Hold it," is the threatening response.

"Papi!" I snap in a fierce whisper

Reaper and Widow start giggling. Jesse realizes he's been had, and complains weakly at us. We let him up, he retreats to shower, and there's buckwheat apology waiting when he comes back out. Jack tries to look sympathetic as Jesse complains about the ambush cuddlepile, but doesn't quite manage it.

Three days later, Uncle Jack is passed out on the couch when we get up. He wakes to find himself in a similar position, Widow and I each claiming an arm while Reaper-dog sprawls across all our laps. Instead of trying to extricate himself, though, he slowly moves his right hand until he can gently pet Reaper. After a few minutes, it's obvious that he actually has no intent to move.

"You're making this awkward," Reaper growls without opening his eyes.

"They got the old quarters cleaned up," Jack says quietly. "We've reached out to some of the old agents and gotten positive responses."

Reaper stiffens. "What are you saying?"

"I'm going to be moving into the HQ building in preparation for the returning agents actually returning."

There's a few beats, and then Reaper dissolves into smoke and flows out of the room, going elsewhere in the safehouse or possibly outside. Jack looks like he can't decide if he's startled and affronted, or startled and hurt.

"I don't think he wants you to go, Uncle Jack," I deadpan.

"Yeah, I got that impression," Jack replies. "Alright, my lovely nieces, I need you to let me up so I can go find and apologize to your father."

"Bring the rope. He'll find you."

Widow and I stand up, and I fetch the cloth rope while Jack stretches. He takes it with a nod of thanks and leaves the wing. Moments later, Jesse's door opens and he gives us an inquiring look.

"Jack's gonna move into the HQ building," I tell him. "If you gonna sulk at him, like Papi is, hold off a couple of hours?"
"Dad's sulking?" McCree asks. "Huh. Didn't think he'd care that much. Guess he's getting soft in his old age," he finishes with a grin. "Don't worry about me, I'm fine. Long as Jack's still gonna be in town where we can pry him out of his office and drag him to lunch or dinner with us."

Widow smiles. "I like that idea."

“Damn it all to hell!”

Widow and I both look up; Jesse sounded genuinely upset. And he's been chipping at getting a hardcore demon hunter through campaign mode recently so he could join in when we play our hardcore characters. That means he probably died.

Again.

"Another one?" I ask, and he scowls.

"Yeah. Them stupid jumpy demons."

That makes me wince. He almost got through this time.

"Guess I should just stick to regular," he says with a familiar note of self-derision. He doesn't say because I'm not good enough, but it's in his tone.

Alright. This has gone far enough.

"One more, cowboy." My tone is hard and challenging.

"Why?" He practically spits the word out. "What's the point?"

"Because this time, you're going to make it."

"Oh, yeah?"

Good; he's in full bratty brother mode. "Yeah."

"Says who?"

"Says me." Me, the snotty sister.

"And if you're wrong?" There's genuine hurt under that bluster.

"Then I'll delete my witch doctor."

That makes him stop and stare at me for a long minute. "Hardcore or regular?" He asks it like this is the real test of my commitment.

"Regular," I answer without hesitating. He knows I would never willingly part with the assortment
of set pieces and legendaries I have on that character. "Without stripping her first."

It's dawning on him that I'm serious. That I actually want him to succeed as much as he does. "Yer on," he says finally, and re-rolls his poor demon hunter for the seventh or eighth time.

I fetch my gaming pad and fire up Diablo 3.

He's just gotten into the Slaughtered Calf Inn to talk to Leah when I join the game on my hardcore witch doctor, nowhere near as godly as my regular one but still formidable with five zombie dogs and a handful of lucky legendaries.

"What're you doing, Sombra?" he asks, wary, as I unleash the dogs on the Wretched Mother and start heading up the Old Tristram Road.

"Protecting my investment," I tell him in a well, duh voice. "You gonna make it this time because I gonna kill everything that gets near you."

"Then how is that me making it?" he protests. "You doin' all the work for me? That's cheating!"

"You mean, that's you taking advantage of all your available resources," I correct smugly. "I never said you had to do it solo."

Bewildered, he follows me up to the ruins of Old Tristram. "Yer serious."

My voice is firm as I clear the ruins. "I not gonna lose my tiny gargantuans. You gonna make it through campaign, and then I gonna make sure you get to seventy."

"But-"

That's as far as he gets before Widow joins the game and hands in the quest for us. She's on a half-leveled monk; good, we'll have heals just in case.

"Yer serious," he says again, bewildered by this unexpected show of solidarity and support.

"You don't gotta sound so surprised," I tease. "What, you don't think I want to see you succeed?"

"With all the shit you give me?" he counters, but he follows me into the Cathedral. Widow's not far behind.

"You my brother, Jesse. Of course I gonna give you shit. Don't mean I don't care. Have you not seen the shit I give Reaper?"

There's a few beats before he mumbles, "Didn't know I was included in..." and the rest trails off.

"Belt," Widow says quietly, dropping a rare belt on the ground. So that's why she's on the monk instead of her crusader - so she can pass otherwise-useless drops on because they'll have dex instead of strength.

"You..."

"Shut up and let us help you, mijo."
"Fine," he grumbles, but he picks up the belt and the way he's sitting looks more pleased than offended.

We're looking for Zoltan Kuule's blood when Reaper comes back from a video chat with Ana. He wisps into the room, forms behind Jesse, and stares for a moment.

"What are you doing?" he demands, causing the cowboy to jump and shout in surprise.

"Stealing McCree's kills," I answer casually.

Widow looks up and smiles. "Pretending to be Tante Ana."

Jesse settles himself again and mock-grumbles, "Don't look at me, I'm just along for the ride."

Reaper lets out an amused snort and flows off. Three minutes later he comes in on his demon hunter, but doesn't teleport to us. I keep killing, we find the blood, and as we're running around trying to find the other small dungeon, we get quest complete and Reaper teleports to us. Then he does the Death Blossom thing, cloud of black smoke firing shots in all directions clearing the way to the entrance to the archives, and from his room I can hear, "Die, die, die!"

"PAPI!" I yell without slowing down. "IF YOU GONNA HELP US OUT, GET OUT HERE AND BE SOCIAL!"

Jesse looks hopeful and terrified.

"AND HUG YOUR TRASH COWBOY," I continue, lowering my voice as Reaper enters the room again. "He think you don't love him."

"You don't gotta hug me," the trash cowboy mutters. "I'm good."

Naturally, that gets him an awkward over-the-back-of-the-chair hug before Reaper joins his faux-daughters on the couch and we adjust so that we're both leaning against him.

"I got left," I tell him as we run down the archives to the end. "You go right and we'll meet you in the Shadow Realm."

"Acknowledged," he replies, and we separate to get both Shadow Locks open in record time.

It always takes Malthael forever to get over himself and drop loot, but with McCree staring in stunned awe, it seems to take even longer. Finally the screen goes white and then there's the usual explosion of gold, gems, a rare or two, and - clang - a legendary. Boots. I pick them up and drop them for my trash cowboy brother.
"I did it," he says in shock. "I made it through campaign mode without dying."

"You're welcome," Widow murmurs.

"I...I couldn't have done it without you." He's trying to make it deadpan, acknowledging the truth of the situation, but he just sounds humbled and grateful.

"We not done yet," I tease. "Still gotta get you to seventy. Pick up your boots and talk to Tyrael."

He does, and while the game is ending Reaper growls, "What's the plan?"

"Your choice, cowboy," I tell McCree. "Rifts or bounties?"

He shakes himself out of his awe. "Uh...well, half'a my gear's not the best..."

"Bounties," Reaper says decisively as he leaves the game. "Change the difficulty level. Put it up to torment."

McCree blanches at that.

"You and Widow staying in town," I clarify as she and I leave the game as well. "She needs to level, too. Me and Papi gonna run the bounties, you two just stay safe and collect the rewards."

He gives Reaper a funny look, but seconds later we're in the Act Two camp on T1. I mouse over the bounties to see which one the boss fight is and pick another. Next to me, Reaper's gone to a different one and is wisping happily as he kills things. When we've each done two bounties, we meet up to put Magda in her place. Widow and Jesse skip the fight, but teleport to us so they can loot the chest. We clear acts three and five the same way, but in act four I spot a bandit shrine.

"Papi, help me clear this map."

"Why?"

"Bandit shrine."

On his other side, Widow perks up and McCree sits straighter in his chair. The entire level - one of the winding hell maps - is cleared in short order, no enemies that might pose a threat to the two underleveled members of the party.

"Alright, come to me."

Widow's appeared at Reaper's side almost before the words are out of my mouth, but Jesse looks uncertain.

"This ain't a trick, is it?" he asks from town.

"Not on hardcore. You gonna like this, Jesse. Come on."

Once he's joined us by the shrine, I click it and a dozen assorted goblins spawn, giggle, and run away. Or at least, try to run away, because Papi's a black cloud of die-die-die and I'm hitting them all with locusts and haunting spirits while my dogs chew on them, and Widow's over to the side kicking a gem hoarder while Jesse, overwhelmed, hits all his buttons and fires off caltrops and rain
of vengeance and clicks madly trying to pick up even a fraction of the loot explosions as they die, one by one.

None of them escape.

"I, uh, need to go back to town," the cowboy says.

As soon as he teleports, Widow drops a bunch of rares and Reaper follows suit. It takes everyone about three trips each to pick everything up, and an extra one for my trash cowboy brother because of the extra rares. Mine are useless to him, so I'm done first and I move on to the other bounties. The chest after I kill Azmodan is pretty anti-climactic, and Reaper and I leave the other two there sorting through things while we go clear the bounties in act one.

"Alright," Jesse announces, "that's everything either rare or legendary."

"Good," Papi says, leaving the game and the party. "Get in here, we're going to get you to seventy."

Widow and I switch games, but McCree blanches. "That's torment two!"

"Get in here, boy," Reaper growls.

Wincing, Jesse joins the game.


I clear the map, spreading locusts and haunting spirits like the combined embodiments of Death and Pestilence, while Papi stands guard over my siblings. Once everything is dead, I follow Jesse's demon hunter around as he explores the map for his drops. We all take a quick trip to town to trash the contents of our inventories, and then it's back into the rift and down to the next level because we're only halfway to the rift guardian. I clear the map (and kill the boss) while Reaper again hangs back to make sure nothing attacks the other two. Once drops have been gathered, we port back to town and he closes the rift.

It takes McCree a few minutes to sort through all the drops, both his own and things Papi and Widow have dropped for him, and then we hit another rift. It's rinse and repeat until suddenly Jesse screams.

"Level seventy!"

"Grats," Widow murmurs.

Reaper just says, "Good. Hija, finish clearing this map. We'll summon the rift guardian and then-"

"No," Jesse says, porting back to down. "Thankee kindly for everything you've done for me today,
shadow-sis, but my nerves can't take any more of this. You got me to seventy, like you promised, and now I'm done."

"Done-done, or just done with hardcore?" I ask as he leaves the game and signs off.

"Done with hardcore at least. Give me half an hour with that bottle of bourbon you bought me a while back, and maybe I'll screw around on regular for a bit."

"Fair enough," I tell him, while Reaper growls, "Fine."

Widow tugs on his sleeve. "Papi, I want paragon levels."

"You heard your sister, Sombra. Keep clearing. I'll guard her."

"No problem," I tell them, and start moving again.

McCree goes to his room and comes back with the half-empty bottle of bourbon he took home the first time I helped him fire his Colt. He sprawls with it on the other couch, idly watching us play and sipping appreciatively. At the half-hour mark, he puts the bottle aside and picks up his pad again. When he logs back in, he switches to his half-leveled barbarian and starts running bounties while slowly working on the rest of the bourbon.

Then, in the Ruins of Sescheron, disaster strikes. A champion pack of illusionist Rat Kings corners him, and he can't cut down the illusions fast enough to take down the pack. He makes a break for it, but they keep popping up around him, blocking him with their bodies, and he's getting increasingly more frantic as his health drops.

"No, no, no, NO! NO! NO! FUCK!" McCree throws the pad down onto the couch next to him. Then he starts laughing shakily. "Revive," he breathes. "I'm not on hardcore. I'm not dead. I can revive." He picks up the pad and touches 'revive in town'. "I'm alive. I'm alive."

"Then he looks up at Reaper. "Is this what it's like to be you?"

Widow and I burst into laughter. Luckily, we're in town, because the absurdity of the entire situation has us in hysterics.

"No," Reaper says dryly. "It's like that, but I make it look good."

Chapter End Notes

Jack deliberately fell asleep on the couch hoping to wake up in a cuddlepile. He thought that physical closeness would help ease the news of his impending move-out. He under-estimated how much psychological damage was still left from five years of abuse-filled isolation thinking the people he cared about most hated him. The first night Jack spent in the HQ building, he woke up to a Reaper-dog sitting outside his door wearing collar and leash, the other end of the leash held hopefully in his mouth, silently begging for their morning run. Reaper also pulled him back to the safehouse for breakfast and tried to trip him via getting in front of his legs when he tried to leave.

McCree is shit at hardcore. Part of it is that his bad skill choices mean he dies a lot
anyway. Sometimes, he forgets he's not on normal and that death is permanent. He may also have some DPS issues due to being too attached to a cool legendary to upgrade. The "stupid jumpy demons" are the ones in Pandemonium Fortress, which means he was close to one boss fight away from finishing the campaign - but let's face it, Malthael probably would have killed him anyway.

Widow likes playing classes that can heal. She feels it's a counter to what she had been as Widowmaker, to be able to protect people even if it's digitally. She doesn't really main anything - she dabbles here and there, looking for something that feels right. She does have a monk with a full set of Inna's Mantra, though, and that's her favorite character.

McCree's still struggling with his abandonment/belonging issues. He can't quite believe yet that his little family won't fall apart and leave him all alone again.

I actually died once to that exact scenario - a barbarian in the Ruins of Sescheron with a champion pack of illusionist Rat Kings. It was extremely frustrating. 0/10, do not recommend.
Epilogue: Halloween

Chapter Summary

It's Reaper's (and Sombra's) favorite time of the year!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Halloween's coming up in a few weeks," Jesse says as he removes a waffle from the waffle iron and pours batter in for the next.

"You can read a calendar," Reaper says from the table. "Good for you."

"We doing that big party you promised?" he asks me.

I flip the bacon. "You know it."

"Got your costume picked out?"

"Gonna be Tyrael, with the hood and holographic wings. Papi's making it for me."

Widow looks up from the eggs she's scrambling. "I'm being the Spectacular Spider-Girl. Papi already made it for me."

Jesse turns to Reaper. "What're you gonna be, Dad?"

He snorts. "The Skeleton King. Sombra's making it for me."

"And by making, you mean...?"

"Coding the configuration for his swarm. It's gonna be great."

The last waffle comes out of the iron, hot and steaming and smelling of cinnamon and the tiny chocolate chips mixed into the batter. Jesse puts it on a plate and starts cutting it up. "Could you make me a costume, Dad?" he asks quietly, not looking.

"I could," Reaper says. "The question is: am I going to?"

Jesse drizzles chocolate syrup on the cut-up waffle and shakes the can of whipped cream. "It's not a hard costume. I want to be Wolverine."

Reaper's attention is all on the waffle. His tail is wagging. "And?"

The waffle pieces are smothered in whipped cream. "Will you make it for me?" Jesse asks, holding the plate above the table. "Please?"

"Yes," Papi says eagerly as the plate descends and is placed in front of him. The three of us grin at
each other as Reaper devours the breakfast treat and licks the plate. "Good bribe. Yes, *mijo*, I will make your costume. Now where's the rest of my breakfast?"

Grinning, Jesse grabs the plate and offers it to us. Widow scoops eggs onto it and I put bacon next to them. With a flourish, he presents it to Reaper again. "Thanks, Dad."

Reaper snorts. "Like I'd let you show up in some half-assed costume. Not in *my* house, boy. Gotta *represent*.

Jesse and Widow fix themselves plates and sit, and I start cleaning up.

"I have a check-up with Angela today," Widow says hesitantly.

Being in public areas, around a lot of strange people, still makes her uncomfortable.

"No worries," Jesse says. "I'll walk over with you, quiet-sis."

"We'll all go," I offer. "Walk there with you, go over to see how Uncle Jack is doing with the rebuild, pry him out of his office and frogmarch him back with us for lunch somewhere."

That makes everyone perk up. It's not like it's been *quiet* since Jack and Ana stopped staying at the safehouse, because we're *not* a quiet family, but they've been missed.

"Woooo!" Jesse closes the front door and shivers. "Bit nippy out there. Grab my coat for me, shadow-sis?"

Reaper's wagging beside me at the coat closet. "Big Dog," he says, indicating the collar he wants to wear today.

I pull Jesse and Widow's coats off their hangars and drape them over his back. "Go take them their coats?"

While he's delivering coats, I take the red collar and matching leash off their hooks and slip on my shimmery purple windbreaker. I don't actually need it, of course, but if it's cold enough for coats then I better damn well be wearing a coat or I'll stand out. I know no one will take offense to me not being organic, and that if anyone was stupid enough to attack me for it, they *might* live to regret it, but ten years of blending in for survival aren't so easy to shake off. Reaper holds still for his collar and leash, Widow zips up her dark, fur-trimmed coat, and Jesse opens the door again.

It *is* a bit nippy, but it's not too bad. At least, that's what I think until Reaper gets out onto the front step and then starts dancing in place.

"Sombra, what the *fuck*?"

"What, Papi?"

"It's *cold,*" he spits, like the weather has personally insulted him. "The fuck is this shit? I'm going back inside."
"You have fur," I point out.

"Not enough of it, not for this!"

Jesse and Widow exchange a look. Widow kneels and presses one hand to the surface of the step. "It's cold," she says, standing up and rubbing her hand briskly.

"Yeah. See?" Reaper says from the other side of the door. "It's cold. I'm not going."

"Fine," I sigh. "Sorry, quiet-sis. I'll see if we can get Papi some dog booties or something in time to join you for lunch."

She nods, and Jesse hugs her. "I'm still going with you," he says. "You're not alone."

They go off into town, and Papi and I go back upstairs.

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"I want those," Reaper says, pointing to a set of dog boots that look very thick and warm, with non-skid soles and straps and everything. They look like someone made combat boots for a dog.

"Too bad," I tell him. "They wouldn't last a day with you, you'd eat them the first time you wisped."

Reaper leans back sulkily. He knows I'm right.

"I'm getting you these," I say instead, pointing to boots that are like little rubber socks. "They're cheap, they give good protection for heat and cold without sacrificing your ability to feel what you're walking on, and the ones in your size are purple."

He's still not happy.

"Of course, I'll need to get you a new collar and leash in purple, to match. Maybe get you a little ID tag shaped like a bone with your name on it?"

He hugs me. "Fine. You win." The words are gruff and resentful, but I know he doesn't mean it.

"Okay. The booties should be here in three hours. Collar and leash will take longer, but we can go with the black ones today. We can still meet Jesse and Widow and Uncle Jack for lunch."

Reaper growls, "Good," and he means it.

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Three hours later, with purple rubber socks on his feet, Reaper walks beside me on his leash as we cross the tourist district with all the cafes and restaurants that know us on sight now. Reaper gets complimented on his boots, which makes him prance after that because if there's one thing Papi never lost, it's his vanity. Widow and Jesse are already over at the Overwatch HQ site, so we head
It's one thing to know all the details of how the rebuild is going. It's another thing entirely to walk into the half-finished building and not be able to guess which sections were intact and which were rebuilt. As we get close to Jack's office, I hear him say, "booties?" in a tone just shy of complete incredulity.

"Hey," Reaper calls out, "my boots are handsome."

Jack peers out of his office, a huge grin spreading across his face as he sees us. "They are indeed," he says, but he's trying not to laugh.

"I can still chase you down and kick your ass in them, Morrison."

"I'm sure you could, Gabriel, but then we couldn't go to lunch."

Reaper's wagging. "Fine. I'll let it slide this time, but don't let me hear you laugh."

"No, sir," Jack says solemnly. Then he kneels to greet Reaper properly, both hands petting and working the fur behind his ears. "Good to see you, Gabe. I'm glad the cold weather didn't keep you away."

"If it gets any colder," Papi growls, looking at me, "I'll need a coat."

"I'll make sure you have something before you need it," I promise. "We'll look at them tonight."

"Good enough. I'm hungry. Where have you hidden my kids, Morrison?"

Jesse and Widow come out of the office and take turns hugging and petting and admiring the purple booties while Jack stands up and looks like a proud uncle.

"Alright," Jack says after a minute. "Let's go get something to eat."

The restaurant we wind up at is one fairly close to the HQ site, and my overly-generous tips have been wisely used to invest in a rug specifically for Reaper to lounge on while he eats, meaning he can eat inside rather than out on the patio. We're greeted by name and seated almost immediately.

"Ossobuco for you, Reaper?" the server asks, hand hovering over his pad.

"You know it," he answers. "Sombra, take these off me."

The server gets everyone else's orders while I divest Reaper of his purple rubber. A minute later, he comes back with drinks.

"A lot of places are planning to do things for Halloween," he says as he sets a metal bowl on the rug for Reaper. "I hope we'll see you."

"We have a party of our own planned," Jesse says.
"That's not until the evening," Reaper counters. "What's going on during the day?"

"Trick-or-treating before sunset," the server answers. "Starting at ten."

That makes him sit up and wag madly. "Sombra, I need a costume."

"A poodle?" Reaper asks skeptically as I take the costume out of its box.

"I got you those fancy boots you wanted."

"But they'll be covered in poof."

"Did you want to scare little kids, Papi?" I give him a challenging look. "Because you can be very scary without trying."

That makes him look abashed. "But I would have looked so good as a Houndoom," he whines.

I scratch behind his ears. "I know, Papi. I know. But everyone still gonna be here tomorrow. Día de Muertos doesn't end until the second."

Reaper looks up at me. "You mean...I suffer through being a poodle today, and I get to be a Houndoom tomorrow?" At my nod, he licks my face and buries his nose in my hair. "You are the best, hija. You are the fucking best."

He suffers silently through being outfitted in curly, knitted black poof. Besides the ankle-poofs that hide his nice, warm boots (because it hasn't been getting much above freezing the last few days) there's a poof for the tip of his tail, a poofy hat with fake ears that do a good job of keeping his ears warm, and a very thick and warm coat that actually gives him a bit more coverage than the traditional bare-butt poodle trim. His collar is barely visible under all the fluff.

"Alright," he says, wagging to make sure his tail-poof isn't going anywhere. "Let's go get candy."

On our way out, he grabs the handle of the plastic pumpkin bucket in his teeth. Then the late-October wind hits.

"Sombra," he growls around the strip of plastic, "my butt is freezing! Why is there lack of coverage?"

"Because you the one good with sewing, not me," I point out. "You want doggy pants, you gotta make them."

"Maybe I will," he says sullenly as we head into town.

He won't. Having a freezing butt means he can demand to be cuddled under a blanket.
Two hours spent traipsing around collecting candy, followed by lunch at the restaurant with the rug, means that Reaper is not chilled to the bone when we get back with a full bucket, although he acts like he's dying of frostbite. Widow cuddles him happily in a corner of the ballroom while Jesse and I work on the decorations for the party with the help of the omnic staff. They're all invited to what otherwise is an exclusively Overwatch event, because by now, they're linkfamily. The work goes quickly, especially when Reaper decides he's warm enough and he and Widow join us. We're done in enough time that the staff can prep the food and then change into their costumes before the first guests arrive. Jesse and Widow scatter to get dressed while Reaper and I prepare the blacklight/dry ice effect, and then I lock him into his costume and leave him there, in the dark, with his replica two-handed mace.

Jesse and Widow meet me in our wing and help me into my costume. Solen's greeting everyone and keeping them in the foyer. Once everyone's arrived, my siblings Spider-Girl and Wolverine go down to join them. I flip my hood up and activate the holograms, the unnatural darkness that hides my face and the tendrils of light that form etheric wings, before grabbing my replica sword and stealthing out. The stairs leading to the second floor curve up the foyer's walls on either side, leaving a balcony in the center, directly above the ballroom's door. I dramatically leap from the balcony and drop stealth mid-air to land just in front of the door.

"Justice has fallen upon the world of men," I intone once the applause and shouts of surprise have died down. "It is time for the armies of Light and Shadow to clash across the fields of Eternity!"

I beckon the crowd forward, and as they approach I point my sword imperiously at the doors to the ballroom, which swing slowly open at my command. The foyer lights go out. At first, the only thing that can be seen is a writhing darkness as the blacklight illuminates the fog from the dry ice. Then Papi steps forward into the light, mace on his shoulder. His armor clinks, his bones rattle, and as he tilts his head left and right the cracking sounds are clearly audible. The hand not holding the mace points straight at my heart.

"YOU DARE TO BRING THE WARMTH OF LIFE INTO MY TOMB?!?" he bellows. "PREPARE YOURSELF-"

The lights snap on, revealing the most epic Halloween-themed decorations Reaper and I could think of over the last three or four months.

"-FOR THE PARTY OF THE CENTURY!" Papi finishes, turning his ominous gesture into a welcoming wave.

The applause is thunderous.

Chapter End Notes

Widow is actively reclaiming the spider portion of her identity, defying Talon by lampshading what they inflicted on her. Jesse just wants an excuse to not have to tame his hair and be able to keep a cigar on him.
Pretty much everything I mention Reaper having exists, by the way. The beach-safe collar and leash, shark spines and beef femurs, the rubber sock-booties, even the poodle costume. I check google for so many things for this that I'm sure the algorithm thinks I actually have a doberman. On that note, if you have a dog, be considerate of how hot or cold the sidewalk is.

Not even Jesse and Widow knew about the plans for the Dramatic Entrance And Reveal; Sombra and Reaper kept that a surprise from everyone but themselves. Between the staff and the new and returning agents and everyone being in costume, there was actually a fair bit of "wait, who are you?" floating around. It amused the omnis to no end to be mistaken for organics. Pretty much every over-the-top Halloween decoration you can think of was used: candy eyeballs in the punch, fake fingers in the finger foods, plastic spiders, holograms of indistinct figures moving against the walls, everything. Sombra made sure there was a fancy-ass Halloween themed cake (purple with black spiderwebs drawn on it and topped with a sugar skull decoration, alternating beads of purple and black fondant around the edge, and black candles encircling the whole thing) that was secretly Reaper's birthday cake. She tried to get him to blow out the candles, but he just swept them up in his bony fists and crushed the flames out.
Epilogue: New year's

Chapter Summary

One person's party is another person's horrifically traumatic childhood memory.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the first casual mentions of a New Year's Eve party started, I ignored them and hoped nothing would come of it. Nothing ever did, in Dorado. The horrific New Year's Massacre that lasted three bloody days (four if you count that it started the evening of the 31st) put a damper on any celebration, even more than twenty years later. The most anyone would find is a cluster of drunk tourists here and there, waving sparklers. So I ignored the comments of 'we should do something for New Year's'. But now it's actually New Year's Eve, and everyone is here with party hats and snacks and bubbling good cheer, Reinhardt and Winston and Tracer and Tia Ana and Uncle Jack are back and I can't. I just can't. Stealth takes me away invisibly, but my room doesn't feel...right. This is the first place they'll look, and my Do Not Disturb sign won't keep them from knocking. I grab a blanket and hang the sign anyway before closing the door and stealthing into Reaper's room. Two steps in, I turn and lock his door. No one else will mess with his room if the door's locked, but it won't stop him from finding me.

That done, I retreat into his closet and curl up into a tight ball in the corner where I won't be seen from the door. Half the blanket covers me; the other half gets wadded into a pillow.

Faint sounds of laughter and good cheer come through the door. The excitement of a five-year-old tries to bubble up, bringing with it the heavy scent of blood and fear and the sounds of shouting and gunfire.

I hope Papi finds me soon.

"Alé. Alé!"

Reaper's arms - human arms - pull me away from the wall, hold me to his chest. I clutch the blanket tighter, but also turn to press my face into his shoulder.

His hands are gentle on my cheek, on my hair. His voice is Gabriel's when he says, "It was today, wasn't it?" and I know he's asking about my mom.

The bubble bursts, and all the terror and heartbreak of that day comes pouring out. Reaper lifts me into his lap and rocks me gently as I cry, the hysterical sobs he hasn't seen since he first learned my name and anchored me through that storm.
I have a father.

I have a father.

But it still hurts, hearing the shot and hearing her fall and knowing...knowing...that my world will never be the same. Hearing the cheers and the laughter on the day my world went up in flames and terror. Knowing that the clock keeps inching towards midnight, and the hope and promise the new year should have held is stillborn, cold and dead and filled with the stench of decay.

I can't.

I can't.

I don't want the new year to come.

Silence.

I'm in bed, wrapped in my blanket, arms around my bear. But when I open my eyes, it's not my room. It's Reaper's.

The door opens and Reaper comes through, still in the hoodie and jeans. Behind him, Widow is carrying an armful of gaming pads. There's no sounds of merriment and cheer, no chatter, no laughter coming through the door. Just before it closes, Jesse saunters through carrying a couch cushion under each arm and casually kicks it shut behind him.

Reaper takes a pad and thrusts it in my direction. I fight the blanket to get my arms free and sit up, and Diablo 3 hums to life beneath my fingers.


"Please say witch doctor," Jesse drawls. "I'm only saying that because we're playing hardcore on expert and I'm gonna need your unfair cheating skills to stay alive."

"Demon hunter?" I ask him, already rolling my witch doctor and giving her my name.

"Naw. Your Papi claimed that. I'm trying a wizard."

"Brave choice, cowboy."

He grins at my teasing tone. "I ain't ashamed to say I'll be hiding behind your dogs and your sister's shield."

Widow looks up, a small smile on her lips. "Crusader."

Reaper sits cross-legged on the bed next to me, rolling his demon hunter. I put the pad aside briefly to get myself situated better, then accept the group invite and find myself at the start of the game,
surrounded by my family. Wanting the comfort of linkweb, I drop the block on my linksignal and wonder if Jesse would let me give him an implant so he could be part of the family that way.

"I want to be through Act Four in under six hours," Reaper growls as we head down the path to New Tristram. "Let's move out."

The night flows past in a stream of dismembered demons. We're nearing level 55 by the time Widow and Jesse start yawning, and Reaper calls a coffee break before we press on. At 65, though, a particularly nasty pack nearly kills Jesse's wizard. Papi stops us after we pick up our loot.

"Time for sleep," he orders. "No arguments. I won't lose any of you to fatigue. Don't think I didn't see you nodding, hija. Your dogs won't protect you from standing in arcane sentries."

Even though they don't burn, I rub my eyes. "Okay, okay. I'll go sleep."

"Good. We can pick this up again once we're rested."

It's not a surprise when I get settled in my own bed and a doberman joins me. What is a surprise is that it's somewhere past ten in the morning, and I don't remember midnight striking. Before I can think too hard about that, I hug Papi-dog's neck and let sleep take me.

Jesse's nursing coffee when I stumble out of my room at half past two. "Widow's still out cold," he says, patting the couch next to him.

I flop down and snuggle up. "Reaper, too," I say as he settles his arm around me.

"It's funny. I think this is the latest I've ever woken up after a party, and I didn't even get drunk." He pauses while I giggle tiredly. "I like it, though. I'd rather stay up helping you fight your demons than get wasted alone."

That makes me freeze. Does he know...?

"Hey! Hey, shadow-sis, no." The coffee gets left on the end table while McCree turns to hug me to his chest. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to stir anything up. Sombra, talk to me?"

"You know?" I whisper, struggling to keep the subdirectories closed.

"I know Lena asked where you were, and Dad wisped off and came back and said you were in his closet. Ana said you were in a bad place, Jack asked why the closet was a bad place, and Dad wisped so hard I thought Jack was gonna get shot right there. Lena said she didn't understand, Angela asked if you were hurt, and Dad just thundered she's from Dorado and that shut everyone up. Reinhardt suggested we take the party across the hall so we could be loud without botherin' you, but you're my sister. I wasn't gonna let you be alone with your thoughts. I've been there too many times. So I know you're from Dorado, and I know better than to ask what y'all went through."

And that's done it, I'm crying quietly into his flannel shirt. I'm not alone with the ghosts of New Years past.
Jesse's rocking gently, just holding me. "It's okay, shadow-sis. I gotcha. I gotcha. It's okay." When he hears my breathing even out, he says, "Y'know, I think next year we can make it all the way to seventy with the right preparations. Snacks, drinks, do it proper. What do you think?"

"I think you're the best brother ever," I say in a small voice.

It's several minutes before we're both breathing evenly again.

"My coffee's cold," he complains. I can hear a click as he puts the mug back down. "But I'm too tired to do anything about it, and I don't wanna disturb you anyway, so..."

"Get comfy," I suggest, not bothering to open my eyes.

He shifts around a little, I shift around a little, and moments later we're both asleep on the couch.

There's a quiet-sis cuddled up to me when I wake up. That's pretty normal, but there's also a Tracer perched on the coffee table chatting quietly with her and Tia Ana petting Reaper in her favorite chair. Jesse's eating leftover party food with his mechanical hand because his right arm's still around me.

"Are you going to be able to sleep tonight?" Ana asks me as I sit up.

Check the time. Almost six. I shrug. "It's not like I have anywhere to be tomorrow."

Ana's lips press into a thin line. That's not what she meant, but she's not going to come right out and ask if I'm at risk for nightmares tonight.

Widow takes my hand and squeezes gently. "I have chosen a name," she says softly. "Technically, I chose it some time ago but I wanted to wait to share it. I wanted to be sure it was comfortable, and I wanted to announce it on a significant day."

"The first day of the year is a good day for new starts," Ana says with an encouraging smile.

"Yes. I have chosen the name Adrienne. So, that is who I am."

"So this is like a birthday for you," Tracer chirps. "We should do something special! Do you think we can get a cake on such short notice?"

"We can make a cake," Reaper says, wagging. "Sombra?"

Better her than me. "We can absolutely make a cake. What kind do you want, Adrienne?"

Wi- Adrienne flushes slightly in sparkling pleasure at being addressed by name. "I don't need a cake," she protests.

"Too bad, missy. You're getting a cake. I know that look on Dad's face. Even though it isn't your face," Jesse adds with a glance at Reaper. "Point is, you're getting a cake. There's no changing his mind."
Quiet-sis looks at me. I nod. She looks at Ana; Ana nods. Tracer's already nodding by the time Adrienne looked at her.

"Surprise me," she says in quiet challenge, smiling at the room in general.

The final result is an orange and vanilla flavored cake with delicate raspberry roses made out of pale pink frosting. Adrienne is thrilled, and I'm just relieved to not be the center of attention. My sister takes visible delight in cutting slices of the cake for everyone, Tracer finds a bottle of champagne left over from the night before, and we all cheer and toast the beaming Adrienne.

Just before Papi turns his attention to the slice of cake in front of him, though, he gives me a split-second look of mourning that I can't enjoy it, too.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I skipped over Christmas. I'm sorry. I couldn't figure out enough to make it worth writing. Sombra took Reaper (in the can, let him out when they got there) to the store and he got Jesse a tan-furred cowboy teddy bear and Jack a white teddy bear in a mock-up of his old uniform. Reaper was given a dozen beef femurs and was beside himself with joy. Jesse got a vintage horse-themed stroker and a bottle of really, really good bourbon. And that's as far as I figured out.

Go figure Sombra has severe trauma from spending three days trapped in an apartment with the corpse of her mother while open warfare rages outside. Reaper decided to keep her distracted by setting game terms challenging enough that she'd need to stay focused and not have a chance to think. Jesse actually did pretty well with a wizard; a lot better than he did with a demon hunter.

Irony is helping Sombra fight her demons by literally helping her fight demons in D3.

The New Year's Diablo 3 marathon becomes a Familia Reyes tradition, starting after dinner on New Year's Eve and going until someone's too tired to play safely. Then they crash out and have Adrienne's birthday cake and dinner when they wake up.
Epilogue: I want to do it

Chapter Summary

Reaper makes a choice. It's not easy. Buckle up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sombra."

My name, growled into my ear by a dog in the middle of the night, is not an unusual occurrence. Papi finds it easiest to talk about difficult things when no one else is awake, much less around to overhear. "Si?" I answer, half-asleep still, wondering if something about our little Father's Day celebration is bothering him.

"I want to do it." There's a pause, like he's bracing himself, and I can feel the tension in his body. "I want to become Gabriel Reyes again."

Okay, that...I'm awake. I am very awake and not completely certain I just heard that. "Papi??"

He looks up at me, because I've just sat up in alarm. "I want to be the father you deserve," he says in a quiet but determined voice. Then, in what is absolutely a tone of dignified pleading, "Help me."

I...he wants...but he's...for me...?

Yeah. I'm crying.

He licks at my face as I hug his neck, and it's a few minutes before I can get coherent words out. "You already the best father," I say into his fur.

"But not the best father I can be," he counters, tail wagging a little. "You deserve a father you can take out in public without a leash."

That makes me laugh. "I think Tia Ana would say even as Gabriel Reyes, you need a leash."

That makes him laugh. "It wouldn't stop me, but good luck trying anyway. So...you'll do it?"

"Choice was always yours, Papi," I say quietly. "Angela and I have the program all ready to go in case this day ever came."

"What aren't you telling me, hija?"

"If you do this, there is no going back. No dog, no wisping, nothing. Just Gabriel Reyes."

"No sleeping in your bed," he says dryly. "No pulling shotguns out of thin air. No sneaking under locked doors. No hiding in the can, no chewing on shark spine or beef femurs, no being petted or
brushed.” He lets that sink in for a minute, thinking about all the unique benefits he's gotten used to since everything went to hell. "Being able to walk around in public. Hot showers. Broken-in jeans. Sprawling on the couch. Not having half the people I know dance around trying to figure out what to call me. Facial expressions. Opposable thumbs on hands that can feel texture. Seeing the inside of a restaurant." He gives it two beats before saying softly, "The look on your face when you see my face and it sinks in that Gabriel Reyes is actually your father."

I'm crying again, but before I can hug him he's in the hoodie configuration hugging me.

"I want to do this, Alé," he murmurs into my hair. "Today was the last straw. You deserve better than a dog. How do we make this happen?"

For a minute or two I just lean against his chest and think. When my breathing is calm again, I say, "I think we should do a dry run first. Spend a week locked in the prototype."

I can feel him flinch. "How is that a dry run? Because it has a face?"

"I been tweaking it, Papi. Took away the clothes. I put you in it, you gonna be naked," I tease.

"You took away my hoodie?" he teases back in mock-outrage. "And my jeans? I worked so hard to pick them out!"

"And now you get to wear them for real. And the hoodie, and the boots, and socks, and underwear, and shirts."

"No underwear," he says.

That....I press my hands over my eyes and engage the buffer, like when I've gone digging up someone's dirty secrets and they're dirtier than I thought they would be. "Okay, no underwear. Pajamas?"

"Boxers."

"Fine. You won't be able to eat, but the mouth opens and you can pour LRF down your throat to be absorbed by a prototype stomach. You won't starve."

Reaper hugs me tighter in silent apology. "Thank you, Alé."

"So tomorrow we can order you a wardrobe, and start your dry run as soon as it arrives, and if that goes well..." My voice trembles. "If that goes well, I'll call Angela in for the last big upgrade your swarm will ever get."

"Will I still have a swarm?"

I nod against his chest. "We talked about it. The swarm will replace your white blood cells and the microbial colony that would normally populate your digestive tract, but other than that, you'll be flesh and blood."

The mask presses gently against my hair. "You're falling asleep, hija. Lay down. We'll talk in the morning."

When I lay back down, a doberman snuggles up to me and the world fades out.
Papi's already up when I drag myself out of sleep, lapping LRF out of his dish. I sit next to him on the floor, petting gently.

"I thought you'd be relishing real food before your week of denial," I half-tease.

He snorts. "Too impatient to get started."

While he finishes, I change out of my pajamas. He wisps out of the room and is already sitting on the couch in the hoodie configuration, waiting, when I get out to the living room. Jesse stumbles out of his room while I'm getting settled, gives us a sleepily-confused look, and goes into the kitchen - only to come right back out.

"There's no coffee," he complains. "What gives?"

"Make it yourself," Reaper growls. "You're an adult."

Adrienne comes out of her room, hugs our trash cowboy brother, and says softly, "I will make it."

"Aww, thanks. You're a peach, quiet-sis." He hugs her back, and she goes into the kitchen. Once she's out of sight, he comes over and leans down before saying in a low voice, "What gives, you two?"

"Preparing for a dry run," Papi says shortly. "You may have a real father in eight to ten days."

Jesse sits abruptly on the closest chair. "Dad, you mean it? You're going to..."

"We'll see," he snaps.

"But you want to."

Reaper sighs. "Yes."

That gets him hugged. "Whatever you need from me, Dad, you've got it. Just ask. Or demand. 'M good either way."

"What I need is clothes," he says dryly, but he's hugging back. "Hija, let's start with jeans."

There's a lot of arguing, of course. I win the first argument and get orders for a basic outfit placed before the cutoff for same-day delivery: black hoodie, black tee, and the first pair of jeans that would fit. There's a bit of discussion, but socks get sorted out very quickly, and Papi apparently has a favorite brand and style of boots, so that's the calm before the storm.

Then I let him loose on the jeans. He has a dozen pairs in the cart before he realizes I'm going to let
him get ALL of them, and then he takes half of them back out with mutters about how I'm taking the fun out of it by just letting him have what he wants.

To make him feel better, we do boxers next and I throw a fit over every outrageous design he manages to find. Naturally, that makes him argue for even more outrageous designs. I'm not sure who actually won when he winds up with the black silk with giant flame-colored lips, but I do know he's going to damn well wear them just to prove a point. He winds up with some normal ones, but also a pair that proclaims I'M TOO SEXY FOR MY BODY and one with an arrow pointing up labeled THE MAN and an arrow pointing at the seam labeled THE LEGEND. He absolutely insists on the one with stars on one side, stripes on the other, and an eagle right in the middle, but I suspect it's going to be a gag gift to either Jesse or Uncle Jack.

Shirts and things to go over shirts wind up being less argument and more fashion debate, and while he's got some tee-shirts with sarcastic phrases on them and some button-up denim to throw over them, he's also got some nice button-up shirts and we go back for pants that match and something more dressy to put on his feet. Just when I think we're done, he declares that he needs sweats and running shoes.

"Anything else?" I ask, fingers hovering over screens.

He thinks about it for a minute. "Cold-weather gear can wait until it's cold. Swimwear?"

"You wanna go to the beach with a static face?"

"I won't have the static face for long," he counters.

"Then you'll have time to pick things out during the dry run," I say firmly, closing screens.

Reaper hugs me. "Thank you for putting up with me," he murmurs into my hair.

I lean into the hug. "I know this is hard on you, Papi."

Before I can say anything else, there's a quiet-sis and a cowboy brother handing us gaming pads.

"Enough of that," Jesse says, settling onto the other couch with Adrienne. "We've got an hour before lunch, a pizza scheduled to be delivered, and then another hour before your first packages get here, if I overheard right...?"

"It is time for relaxing," quiet-sis says firmly. "No more worries. Only demons."

Reaper looks around at the rest of us all smiling at him. "I have the best kids," he says. "Alright. Anyone have plans? No? All monk run, yes on stash, hardcore. Bounties. Let's kick some demon ass."

While the other two devour pizza, Reaper paces in the hoodie configuration. He doesn't want to go to the dog - apparently, that's "cheating" - but physical activity without actual muscles isn't satisfying.
"It feels like I'm numb all over, but inside," he growls.

"I added temperature feedback," I offer. "I know that won't help with being a beanbag doll, but it will help with feeling less like a beanbag doll."

"How-" he starts to ask, then shakes his head. "Let me guess. It's what you have." He stops and sighs. "Being a dog has spoiled me."

"You can do it, Papi. You literally held yourself together for how long before I came around?"

"Too damn long," he says, hugging me. "Hija...it's been longer for you."

That's all he says, but that's all he has to say because it's been the elephant in the room since he first learned my name, and he can feel me trembling. Everything I sacrificed my organic body to do, I have done, and more. There's nothing left to hold me back from shedding my omnic body and becoming flesh and blood again.

Nothing, except the fear that if I do, then somehow everything will go wrong and this amazing life I've managed to build for myself...I'll lose all of it. I'd rather live in my omnic body for a hundred more years than risk everything and lose it all.

Again.

"We're back," Jesse announces, "refueled and ready to hit those rifts!"

The moment's broken but the point is still made, and Papi doesn't say anything else as we settle on the couches. Adrienne claims a place at Reaper's side, so I grab my pad and flop down next to my brother. He gives me a one-armed hug before getting comfy.

"We have...fifty-three minutes before Papi's clothes are due to get here," I announce, checking a screen. "Let's make the most of it."

Fifty-two and a half minutes later, an omnic enters sensing range and sends me a hello ping.

/Package for you, Sombra,/ they say cheerfully.

/Thank you,/ I reply, gesturing for a time-out. /I'll be right there./

"Clothes?" Reaper asks.

"Clothes. May as well close the game, this might take a while."

Jesse looks at me. "It's just clothes."

"It's not just clothes, and you know it. It's Papi's ego."

That makes him laugh, which makes Papi growl and Adrienne giggle.
"No killing my brother while I'm gone," I tell Papi firmly.

"What do you mean, while you're gone? I'm going with you."

I roll my eyes and grin. "Fine, come on then."

The two of us go downstairs, where Solen's chatting with the omnic delivery courier.

"An honor to see you face to face," the courier says, handing over my package with a bow. I press my thumb against the delivery tracking device.

Reaper makes an amused sound. "You kill one god program," he teases.

The courier bows to him. "With all due respect, Commander Reyes, my respect for Sombra predates the fall of the false god."

That knocks the amusement out of him. "How- you told them," he half-accuses me.

"She did not," the courier says politely. "I was authorized to deliver to the Overwatch Headquarters here in Zurich. I delivered to your office fifty-three times, Commander. I'm not offended that you do not remember me; it was quite some time ago."

"Well, now I feel like a dick," Papi says.

"As I said, I take no offense. I have a hard time telling you organics apart, with the way you constantly change your appearance. Vocal modulation is much more reliable, I have found. Good day to you, Commander, and to you, Sombra. I hope to deliver for you again in the future!"

Reaper waits until the door is closed and Solen has returned to their duties elsewhere before saying, "I think I've been insulted, and I think I deserved it. Are we really so hard to tell apart?"

"Omnics don't wear cosmetics, have hair, or age," I say, trying not to laugh. "Facial recognition is much less precise than vocal recognition, and that's not even going into the subject of clothes."

"Clothes," he repeats. "It's time. Let's go."

We're upstairs in his room in record time. I remove the jeans, shirt, and hoodie from the shipping envelope and put them in his bathroom before gesturing him inside.

"Ready, Papi?"

He's practically shaking with tightly-controlled emotions. "Do it."

I gesture for him to turn around and place my hands on his back. The swarm accepts the modified prototype easily, and I lock the configuration for a full seven days. As Reaper starts to dissolve for reconfiguration, I back out of the bathroom and close the door. Reaper - Gabriel - makes some interesting noises as he checks over his new body, and then there's rustling and quiet swearing while he pulls on his new clothes.

"They're touching me," he shouts through the door. "All over!"

"They clothes, Papi," I shout back. "They supposed to touch you!"
"Well, I'm not used to it!"

"Well, you better get used to it! You not walking around this house with your bare ass hanging out!"

More rustling. I'm half afraid of what I'll see when the door opens, but he's wearing the jeans. He isn't wearing anything else, but he's wearing the jeans. The slight scowl his face has been programmed into looks like an understatement.

He crosses his arms. "They're. Touching. Me." The static face gives him the illusion that he's throwing his voice because it doesn't move as he talks.

"Get. Used. To. It."

"You're a very insubordinate daughter, Alé."

"I take after you."

"...point."

"This is why we doing a dry run," I remind him. "Get you used to things before it gets awkward."

He sighs. "I know. You said this configuration has a proto-stomach. Can I drink?"

"You can, but you won't get drunk," I warn him.

That gets me a wordless growl. "Fine. I'm going to take a shower. Try to get used to that so I don't freeze my nuts off or scald my dick once I've got them again."

I give him a hug and kiss his cheek. "Okay. Take your time."

He hugs me back and presses unmoving lips to the top of my head before retreating back into the bathroom. I go back to the living room, where my sibs are cuddling on one couch.

"Papi's taking a shower," I tell Jesse and Adrienne as I join them. "After five, six years of being naked, he needs to desensitize his skin."

My sister nods. "Getting used to clothes that were loose took time."

"I locked him in the shape of his 45-year-old body, so for the next week, no calling him Reaper. Only Gabriel, Gabe, Dad, and Papi." They both nod. I open a screen. "Okay, I'm gonna tell Uncle Jack."

Papi doesn't come out of his room for an hour. When he does, he's again only wearing jeans and looks irritated to have to even wear that much.

"I told Uncle Jack and Tia Ana," I announce as he gingerly settles into a chair. "They the only two
you talk to regularly and I didn't want it to be a shock. I figure no one else needs to know unless you want them to."

"I appreciate that," he says. "Is it weird, seeing me talk without my face moving?"

"A little," Jesse says. "But kind of not, because I'm used to the mask? So it's weird but not...that...way. I think." He shakes his head. "I'm honest, Dad, it's weirder seeing your face than it is not seeing it move."

"Tell me about it," Papi retorts dryly. "I think I spent twenty minutes just staring at myself in the mirror, touching my head and expecting my reflection to start talking to me."

"The asshole is dead," Adrienne says firmly. "That is your face. Take it back."

"I'm trying, 'Rienne. But I'm also realizing how much I can't do in this thing." He runs his hands over his bare scalp. "I can't chase the Frisbee until I'm tired. I can't chew a bone to distract myself. I can't even go for a walk because my face doesn't move. I'm going to drive you all crazy before the week is over."

The silence stretches as we all try to think of ways for Gabriel to occupy his time.

"What are you going to be for Halloween?" Adrienne asks suddenly. "This year, I would like a fancy costume like Sombra had."

Jesse grins. "Y'know, I could do with a fancier costume this year, too."

Gabriel sits straighter. He'd be smiling, if he could. "Alright, you little delinquents," he growls good-naturedly. "It's time to brainstorm."
safehouse. Angela makes uncertain faces at us until I offer to monitor the transition and apply nutrient fluid at regular intervals.

"I'm really going to do this," Papi murmurs after Angela leaves, hugging me like he might fall apart if he lets go.

"You really going to do it," I confirm. "Time to start making sure everything's ready. I know you been using the generic soap and stuff. What brands do you want to actually use? What do you want to wear first? What do you want to eat first? When and how do you want to go public with your resurrection?"

"Easter Sunday," he says without hesitating. Then he releases me and laughs at my expression.

"Really, Papi? You gonna go ten months hiding that you exist again?"

"Yup."

"You can't just come out as alive on Christmas and call it a gift to the world?"

"Nope. You need to have a little fun with it, first."

I groan. "You mean conspicuous hats and shades and eating in high-profile places?"

"Go big or go home, hija."

"With Jack and Jesse, so people actually pay attention to who they with."

"You got it."

"Fine," I say melodramatically, dragging my hands down my face. "But I want fancy dresses for these fancy lunches, since I'm not letting you go unsupervised. And no more than two a month."

"Done and done," he says, hugging me again and pressing a mock-kiss into my hair. "I'll even let you pick the places."

That confuses me. "Why?"

"Because I trust you to figure out where we should be seen next for maximum impact."

I guess I really am doing this. "Fiiiiiine. You lucky I love you, Papi," I tell him with insincere sternness.

"I know," he says quietly. "Thank you, Alé."

"You doing this for me," I reply, equally quiet. "How could I not support you?"

"There's supporting me," he teases, "and then there's encouraging my bullshit. You are not obligated to encourage my bullshit, hija." Another gentle hug and a mock-kiss on the top of my head. "But I'm grateful when you do."
We're in the backyard playing Team Frisbee (Jack and Jesse against me and Gabriel) when suddenly, Papi dissolves into a puddle of black smoke and clothes. Uncle Jack is so startled that the Frisbee he was supposed to catch hits him in the face and, alternating between chuckles and half-hearted exclamations of pain, he calls a time-out.

"Sombra? What happened?" he asks, looking at the seething mass on the grass in front of him.

"I coded the swarm to keep him in the prototype for seven days," I answer as Jesse and I jog over. "Seven days are up. Papi, you okay?"

The puddle of smoke eddies uneasily. I crouch down and stick my hand into it. The nanites report nothing out of the ordinary, so why...

Oh. He doesn't have voluntary access to the prototype, and picking another form would be 'cheating'. I almost command the swarm to take the prototype configuration and then remember that it will be naked.

"I guess you want to go straight to transitioning?" I ask the puddle, not really expecting an answer. "You don't want to hug everyone first? You gonna be out for ten to twelve hours, remember." Check the time. "And it's only four-thirty. Give it a couple of hours before you go under, so you wake up at a reasonable hour of the morning."

The puddle ripples, then stands up into the hoodie configuration. "Damn you for making sense," Papi growls. "Alright, unless you want to be distracted by the glory of my naked body, I'm declaring game called on account of clothes."

Jack blushes. "I, uh, think we can find something else to do."

"Yeah," Jesse agrees. "I mean...it's nothin' we haven't seen before? But that doesn't mean we need to see it again. No offense."

"I'm not offended at all that you're intimidated by manly beauty," Papi teases. "But I'll have pity on you."

"He's bluffing," I inform them dryly. "He does not have access to the prototype on his own."

They laugh as Papi melts into the doberman to glare at me.

"I will see you in the morning, Gabriel," Tia Ana says firmly as she hugs Papi. He hugs back, trembling a little. "Have no fear. Sombra will not allow you to come to harm."

"I know," he says quietly. "Thank you."

Jack's ready for his turn when Ana leaves Papi's bedroom. "I can't wait to kick your ass again, you son of a bitch," he says as he gives his old friend a hug that looks more like the prelude to throwing him to the floor.
"I'll go easy on you, old man," Papi retorts, returning the hug with equal aggression. "Your hours are numbered."

Once Jack's left the room, Jesse saunters in. He doesn't say anything, just hugs with barely-restrained emotion and then leaves with his head down, hiding the tears he's trying not to shed. Adrienne slips in last.

"I know it is scary to reclaim yourself," she says quietly. "You can do this. You will be fine. This is your victory over the asshole."

Papi presses Reaper's mask gently to the top of her head. "Thank you, 'Rienne. I'll see you in the morning."

"I know," she says, smiling.

Then the door is closed and it's just Papi, me, and Angela.

"Are you ready?" Angela asks gently.

"Yeah. Into the can, right?"

She nods. "And then we will add the new swarm. Sombra will be with you the whole time."

Papi hugs me just as desperately as he'd hugged everyone else. "You're sure you'll be okay?" he asks quietly.

"I slept most of the day. I'll be fine. I love you, Papi."

"I love you too, Alé," he murmurs into my hair before turning to face Angela and the can. "Alright. Let's do this."

For the last time, Papi dissolves into black smoke and flows into the COWA. His baseline mass registers at 110%, because he's been bulking up in preparation for this. Angela offers me the tube of nanites, and I run a last-second hash check to make sure the programming is correct. It is.

"You have done so much for him, Schattenkind. And while you have learned some from me, I have learned from you as well. I will be able to make many lives better with the programming techniques you have taught me. You are sure you do not wish to receive any credit for the advances we pioneered working on Gabriel?"

"I don't exist to take credit, Tante Angela," I tell her. "But even if I did...I've lived in the shadows for so long, I am content to let you be the one to shine."

"Then I want you to be the one to bring Gabriel back to himself," she says, pressing the tube into my hands. "You raised him out of the hell I unwittingly allowed him to be put into. It is only fitting that you restore him completely."

I look at the faintly-seething tube of silver dust. "Thank you, Angela. If..." My voice breaks, and I take a deep breath. "If, some day, I choose this path for myself...I will place myself in your hands."

She hugs me briefly, careful not to jostle the tube. "I expect you will have done half of the work
already," she teases, "but your attention to detail is one of the things I admire about you. Now, I believe we have kept Gabriel waiting long enough. Do the honors, Sombra."

The nanites glitter like motes of fairy dust as I pour them into the can. The restless smoke boils for two minutes, then stills and takes on an almost wet texture. Angela smooths out the sheet of waterproof material that covers Papi's bed, and I pour him out onto it. This is definitely a new development; the mixture of swarm and biological mass has formed a tensile skin, and he looks like a giant black jelly bean.

"Is that what it's supposed to do?" Angela asks hesitantly, looking like she wants to poke the jelly bean.

I pull up a screen showing the swarm's activity and start laughing. "I should have expected that. He's been converted to a mass of stem cells. Give it a minute..."

As if on cue, the jelly bean shape spreads out, elongating into a blob six feet long and roughly as wide and high as an adult male in good physical condition.

"...and it will do that. Now...yes, it's starting with the circulatory system first. Gonna build him from the inside out."

Angela relaxes. "I leave him in your hands, then, but I will be on the couch if you need me."

She hugs me again, and then it's just me and the unformed mass of what was and will be Gabriel Reyes.

The night passes slowly. I monitor the swarm's activity, spritzing his mass with the glucose/nutrient solution every few minutes. It's a little creepy to be sitting next to what's basically a man-shaped bag of veins and arteries. It's creepier when the lungs and airways finish forming, and I'm sitting next to a man-shaped bag of veins and arteries that's breathing. But, at the same time, he's breathing. He's alive. He's breathing. There's a part of me that's relieved and reassured beyond words by that simple sound, but there's another part of me terrified that that soft rhythm will stop.

Around six in the morning, the swarm starts working on the nervous system, skin, hair - the last details. When the lungs are connected to the brain, their rhythm changes to something closer to a sleeping person, and it hits me that this is really happening. I'm listening to Gabriel Reyes breathe.

I bury my face in the edge of his blanket so no one will hear me cry. That soft sound, the sound I spent terror-soaked hours trying to hear from my mother over the screaming and the gunfire and the explosions outside, is the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

He's breathing.

He's alive.

Seven-thirty in the morning, the swarm activity drops to almost nothing. It only exists now in the roles of immune and digestive system components. Gabriel Reyes is lying on the bed, living,
breathing, sleeping. I'm suddenly so excited and irrationally terrified that I can't stand it. His chosen
clothes (jeans and a black tee-shirt that reads THIS IS WHAT AWESOME LOOKS LIKE) are
folded up on top of the closed COWA already, so I sneak out of the room and close the door
behind me.

Ana, unsurprisingly, is in the kitchen with a cup of tea. With a lift of her eyebrow, she asks silently
how Gabriel is doing.

I sit next to her, in the chair that faces the doorway. "It's done," I say quietly. "He's sleeping."

"Nervous, little shadow?"

"Sort of."

There's a sound from Papi's room. In the near-silence of the wing I can hear him get out of bed and
stretch, letting out a wordless sound of exertion and satisfaction as he does. Then, seconds later, the
shower turns on.

I start the coffee brewing and dig out the WORLD'S GREATEST DAD mug. A minute or two after
the shower stops, the door to his room opens and I pour fresh coffee into the mug. When Papi
walks through the door, I'm right there offering it to him. Seeing him smile makes me feel like a
child again. He takes the mug, sniffs, sips, and stands in wordless, beatific ecstasy for a long
moment.

Then he puts the mug on the table and hugs me to his chest and it's nothing like being hugged by
the hoodie configuration; I can feel the play of his muscles, hear his heart beat and the air moving
in and out of his lungs, and he's alive, Papi's alive, Gabriel Reyes is my father and he's alive.

"Thank you," he murmurs into my hair, his lips moving and his breath ruffling and I can't believe
this is real, there's no way this could be real but it is, and I'm crying. "Shh, hija, it's okay."

"You're alive," I whisper into his chest when my breathing calms enough.

He chuckles. I can feel it, hear it vibrate through muscle and skin and cloth, feel the way his body
shakes. "I'm alive," he agrees, "and you, little shadow, made it happen."

I shake my head. "It was your choice..."

"I wouldn't have chosen this without you, and you know it. Ana, back me up."

"I was not a part of that conversation," she protests. "However, I had very little hope that you
would return to us in any way before I first heard from her. And now you are back," she says,
voice shaking, "and like Sombra, I find myself...overwhelmed."

Papi lays a kiss - a real kiss - on the top of my head and releases me to hug Tia Ana, who's crying
with a lot more composure than I managed. There's noise from the living room and then Jesse's in
the doorway with tears on his cheeks and Jack's behind him, and Adrienne, and Angela, and we
turn into a confused tangle of hugging and crying for several minutes before everyone regains their
composure.

"Rumors of my death have been...severely inaccurate," Papi says, grinning. "But, thanks to my little
shadow, I'm back to make all your lives miserable." He gives it a few beats for appreciative
chuckles. "Now...which one of the delinquents who call themselves my kids is making breakfast?"

Chapter End Notes

Yes, "opposable thumbs on hands that can feel texture" is him saying he wants to be able to jerk it again.

Things Sombra did not really need to know: that Gabriel Reyes goes commando.

The process of building a body using a nanite swarm is enabling some really amazing medical breakthroughs for Angela. Think of how many conditions an immune system swarm would fix. HIV, AIDS, and just about every auto-immune disease? No problem, not anymore. Transplant rejection, lowered immune response? Nope. Nuke the existing immune system, install immune swarm, and you're good to go.

Sometimes being a writer means googling some really weird or obscure shit. Sometimes it means browsing images of "outrageous boxers" or "sarcastic tee-shirts".

One of the things that had kept Reaper from reclaiming his identity before now was that he had to recover from the avoidance-twitch caused by years of abuse delivered from his own face in his own voice.

The "little delinquents" thing is a holdover from his teenage years. His mother referred to the younger kids in his gang as little delinquents, and he embraced it out of spite. Gabriel Reyes did a -lot- of things out of spite, actually.

We're still not done! There's more epilogues to come. XD
"Sombra," Papi sighs crankily.

I open my eyes to see him propped up on one elbow, glaring blearily at where I'm sitting: on the floor and leaning against his bed.

"There better be a good reason-" he starts, half asleep and half annoyed, but I interrupt.

"I dreamed about my mother." In the shocked silence the follows that bombshell, I say quietly, "I needed to hear you breathe."

"Oh, Fuck. Alé..." now fully awake and horrified, he sits up and holds out one hand. "Come here, hija."

I don't need to be told twice. He pulls me up to sit next to him, and just holds me while I hug him desperately and try not to cry. His heartbeat and the soft sound of his breathing are very reassuring.

"Wake me next time," he demands.

"But I-"

"Wake. Me." There's a pause to make sure he's silenced any protest before he continues more gently, "I don't want you just sitting on the floor suffering. You held me through my nightmares. I'll hold you through yours."

All I can do is nod against his shoulder.

"Good."

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I don't wake him. It's not like the floor is uncomfortable to an omnic body, and I don't need hugs and reassurance after I've had a nightmare of Papi dying. All I need is to hear him breathe. He sleeps on his stomach, one arm dangling over the edge of the bed, and if I really need more reassurance than just his steady breaths, I can hug that dangling arm and feel the subtle beat of his pulse. There's no reason for us both to lose sleep, right?

Most of the time, I can calm the nightmares and push them away within half an hour, and then I
creep back to my own bed. But sometimes, I fall asleep hugging Papi's arm and wake up to him sitting on the floor next to me, holding me, snoring softly with his head leaning against mine.

I don't tell him about the other nightmares, where I've decided to go back to an organic body only to die in some freak accident, leaving him heartbroken. I call Uncle Jack after those, wake him up and make him sleepily promise to look after Papi if anything happens to me. Then I call my parent omnium or Tia Ana, depending on what time it is and where in the world Ana is, and babble at one of them until the nightmare fades enough for me to sleep again.

Meals are more comfortable in some ways, but slightly strained in others now that Papi's got a flesh and blood body again. His enthusiasm for being able to eat is infectious, and there's a lot of laughing and teasing. But at least once during the meal, he looks at me with a pained expression so brief that neither of my sibs notice it, but I do. He can eat, but I can't, and it breaks his heart that his little shadow, the adopted daughter who's put up with so much and given him his whole life back, is still living in the purgatory of an omnic body.

I want to go back, I want to breathe because I need to breathe and be able to taste all the foods I remember and feel my muscles burn when I run and have Papi look at me with pride because I'm his daughter, but I'm afraid.

Hope is for suckers. I learned that when I was five, when my world went up in flames and fighting and everything I'd hoped the new year would be turned into my mother's corpse on the living room floor. Don't hope, because leaving yourself open like that is only inviting disappointment. If you actually get what you wanted, you're sure to find out that there's a catch, a blemish, and the world has taken the opportunity of you letting your guard down to spit in your face.

It would be so easy, that's the worst part. I've already done the hard word, splicing Papi's Y chromosome into my DNA record. The sample I took so long ago is still going, in my little office lab, only now the biological material it maintains is the flesh that could be my flesh. I've designed my potential new body down to the last detail, choosing which augmentations to keep and which I can do without. I could call Angela up at any moment, bring the sample and the programming, dump them into a giant vat of LRF and call up my parent omnium. By the time the body had finished being formed, help would have arrived and I could be transferred into flesh as easily as I'd been transferred out of it. It would be so easy.

But deep in my heart, I know that if I did, something would happen. Something would go wrong. Everything would be ripped away from me again, leaving me scared and bleeding and alone or worse, dead, and Papi Gabriel...he loves me enough to be afraid of something happening to me even when he knows I don't die, it would crush him if I gave up that security and then something killed me.

I can't do that to him.

I can't.
Jack knows something’s bothering me. He calls me to his office on the pretense of needing to discuss some aspect of the rebuild, and then just hugs me.

"Family goes both ways," he reminds me. "You don't want to talk to Gabriel about whatever's eating you, fine. I won't tell him. But I'm worried about you, Sombra. And if I'm worried about you, I know Gabriel's got to be worried about you, too."

It's several minutes of being hugged in silence before I can bring myself to whisper, "I have nightmares that something happens to him."

I'm not going to go into what's really bothering me. I haven't even told Tia Ana about the catch-22 of breaking Papi's heart if I do (and something goes wrong) and breaking Papi's heart if I don't.

We talk for a while about my nightmares, how losing my mother so young and in such a horrible way sowed the seeds of this issue. He jokes about getting an actual dog for me to sleep with; I joke that doing that would make Papi jealous. I suspect that I haven't completely fooled him, and that he's not acting alone, something that's confirmed when I go back home and Papi's waiting in the foyer. He hugs me for a long minute, then suggests we go somewhere quiet to talk.

In a quiet corner of the backyard, by a tree we used to sit under for hours at a time when he was a dog, Papi holds me and we talk about dealing with the aftermath of having seen horrific things.

"If you want to talk to someone professional about this," he says hesitantly, "I'll back you up. But..." I shake my head, and he laughs softly. "That's what I thought. You're too much like me. They'll fade, hija. Keep fighting however you need to fight. You were there for me; I'm going to be there for you."

That makes me cry into his shoulder, half out of actually having a parent who lives up to my ideals and half because he wants me to be stable and happy, wants to share the things that make him happy. I want to be the flesh-and-blood daughter he deserves and I can't, I just can't, because I'm afraid.

I'm curled up in a chair, surrounded by screens and chewing at a likely opportunity for my all-omnic construction company, when the door opens. Solen hasn't announced any visitors and the security system hasn't registered a guest, so it's moderately alarming when a slim man bounds into the room and pulls me into a hug. I'm about to knock him out with an EMP when the block on his linksignal drops and I know that linksignal. That's-

"Linkbrother Genji?"

He releases me and laughs at my confused surprise. "Yes! What do you think?"

Hands out, he turns a circle. He looks completely human, from the neck up, and the addition of clothes adds to the illusion.

"Your hair is green."

He flicks it with one finger. "An affectation from my youth. I can change it, but I am quite enjoying
it for the moment. Also, it distracts people from my hands, although cybernetic hands are easier to accept than a cybernetic body."

That makes me laugh because of how true it is. "You look good, amigo. Sit, tell me all about it."

We both curl up on opposite sides of a couch. Genji plays with the hem of his shirt for a moment before saying, "Angela was able to do some...ah...creative rebuilding of some internal organs, and by submerging me in a nutrient solution, she was able to use nanites to rebuild the damaged portions of my face and scalp. For the most part, I am still as I was."

"Except now you can walk around without worrying about being seen?"

"Exactly," he laughs. "And, I can eat again. Ah, linksister, the foods I have missed!"

From the doorway, Papi says, "Tell me about it."

Genji jumps. When he sees Papi leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed and grinning, he grins just as broadly. "Commander! It is true, then - you have returned to flesh!"

"It's true. Scoot over, kid," he says, gesturing Genji to the center of the couch. "First lesson of Familia Reyes: we cuddle in this family, god damn it!"

If my linkbrother is surprised to find himself sandwiched by us, he doesn't show it. "So I am part of your family, then, Commander?"

"Please, I haven't held a rank since the explosion. Call me Gabriel, or Gabe-"

"Or otou-san?" Genji asks slyly.

Papi laughs. "Have you been plotting with my kids?"

"I thought I was part of your family," my linkbrother says with false innocence.

"You're part of my family," I assure him.

"Fine," Papi says with exasperation we all know isn't real. "If you really think I'm worthy of the title-"

Dryly, Genji says, "Have I never told you stories of the man who sired me?"

"That sounds like something we need booze for, kid. Can you drink with those fancy new organs Angela gave you?"

"Ah, despite my charming appearance, I am still very much a weapon of war," Genji demurs. "I do not think it would be wise for me to deliberately impair my control."

Papi gives him a look of mock-affront. "Logic? That's not how we do things in this family!"

"Papi!"

"...except for Sombra," he continues unrepentantly.
"Well, I am her linkbrother."

That gets me a deadpan look. "He gets it from your side, hija."

"Hey, not my fault omnis are better at logic!"

"Fine, fine." Papi raises his hands like he's surrendering the whole argument. "No booze. But you can eat, right?"

Genji nods. "Oh, yes. Angela says she developed new techniques from your journey to flesh. I have the same stomach as you, and for the first time in many years, I can enjoy food again!"

The momentary look of heartbreak Papi directs at me feels like a punch in the gut.

"Sombra, call your uncle, tell him he's coming out to dinner with us." Papi grins. "Don't tell him we're on our way. You did want to surprise him, right, Genji?"

My linkbrother grins back in delight. "You are correct, otou-san."

Papi ruffles his hair. "Good. C'mon, you two. Let's go round up your siblings."

"Was nice seeing Genji again," Jesse says as we stroll back through the soft dusk. "Even better that he was so happy."

"You'd be amazed at how liberating it is to take your face back after having been denied it for years."

Dryly, Adrienne says, "No, I wouldn't," and makes us all laugh.

"She's right," Jesse says. "You loosened up a lot, Dad."

Papi looks wistful. "You know that saying about not appreciating what you have until you lose it?" he asks quietly. "It's true. Fuck what the rest of the world thinks. They're not important. You all, and making sure you know that I care about you little delinquents, are what's important."

"Aww, Dad..."

"You know the rule," my sister chides gently.

Papi grins at Jesse, who groans in a wholly unconvinving way and pretends to be reluctant as he slouches into Gabriel's arms for a hug.

"I love you, you fucking ingrate," Papi growls.

Jesse growls back, "I love you too, you snarky bastard."

Ritual complete, they let go and we continue on our way.
Sleep doesn't come easily after Genji's visit. When I first forcibly inserted myself into the Overwatch family, I was hardly the only one who wasn't "normal"...but I was the best at passing for it. Then Widowmaker got retro-conditioned and chose a name, and Papi decided to reclaim his identity, and now Genji - while still mostly cybernetic - can eat and pass for human.

Now I'm the only one that can't.

By transferring out of my meatsack body, I built myself a cozy little shelter, a way to evade the problems of my childhood and teenage years. But now my omnic body is holding me back from fully being a part of my family, and yet...

...and yet...

It would be so easy. But hope is for suckers.

As Halloween - and Papi's birthday - gets closer, the catch-22 eats at me more. Every time we talk about our plans, the decorations, the costumes, and especially the food, Papi gives me one of those momentary, heartwrenching looks. I'm breaking his heart, I know it. He starts to act a bit high-strung, and more than once he hugs me without a word, just holding me for minutes at a time, like he's afraid I'm going to shatter in his arms. When we enter the week before the party and start getting confirmation for who's going to be there, he starts directing those looks of momentary heartbreak at me when he thinks I'm not paying attention.

I can't do this anymore. Maybe something horrible will happen, and I'll lose everything and he'll be left to mourn me. But I'm hurting him now, and I can't do that to him anymore. I can't.

I swear Angela to secrecy and bring her the sample and the programming, both the digital copy and a tube of leftover nanites with the blueprints for my organic body already loaded. She doesn't say anything, just hugs me for a long minute until we're both sure we're not going to cry. I call my parent omnium right there, and we work out when I'll need help for being transferred, who's going to do it, and where I'll pick them up.

Jerome doesn't question the flight plans once I reassure him that we'll be back in plenty of time for the Halloween bash.

Papi is clearly concerned by this unspecified last-minute trip I tell him I'm going on, especially since I won't tell him where I'm going or why, but I promise him that I won't miss the party.

"You know I don't bullshit you," I say quietly, and he pulls me into a tight hug.

"I know, Alé," he murmurs into my hair. "I just worry because I love you."

That almost makes me cry. "I love you too, Papi."

"Come back safe, you hear me?"
Two days before Halloween, Jerome and I fly out to a little suburb of Dorado. An omnic who doesn't look like an omnic is waiting for us with take-out; Jerome takes fifteen to eat and use the bathroom, and we're in the air before anyone notices we're there. When we land at Angela's medical facility, I thank him for flying a twelve-hour round trip; he just smiles and says he'll see me in the evening to do it again. Angela has a private room reserved for him so he can rest. Once he's settled, she nods to the omnic (who has not said a word out loud, partially out of habitual distrust for organics and partially because she never learned English) and hurries us into a secured lab where my future body is floating in a tank of nutrient fluid. Tante Angela runs what I'm sure are several unnecessary medical diagnostics to be sure the body is fully-formed and healthy despite there being nobody home. The lack of a controlling intelligence would creep her out more if my blueprint hadn't dictated that the body be constructed with a state-of-the-art omnic brain instead of an inefficient organic one. My omnic "aunt" checks over the augmentations to make sure they're functioning correctly, and finally nods her silent approval.

"We are ready for transference, Schattenkind," Angela says steadily, despite the fact that she's clearly nervous about this procedure. But then again, she's never overseen the transfer of a mind from one body to another and probably wouldn't even believe it was possible if I weren't poof of that. "Are you ready?"

I look into the sleeping face of my future body. There are slight differences from having spliced in Papi's DNA, but it's close enough to be slightly unnerving. The hair has been growing while the body sat idle, and it's down to what will be my waist, thick and black and just curly enough to make me the envy of all the girls back home. I haven't had hair that long since I was twenty and still planning my "death". Looking at the empty organic shell reminds me of the last time I looked at my original body, and that I took a submachine gun to it immediately afterwards. Flesh is so easy to damage.

"I'm ready," I tell them both. It's only partially a lie.

The body is lifted out of the nutrient fluid and laid on a stainless steel table. Webbing made of tear-resistant mesh is spread over it like a blanket to keep any involuntary thrashing to a minimum, and a padded restraint is placed around what will be my head. For a moment, the only sound is the drip-drip-drip of nutrient fluid hitting the floor. Then Angela wheels a second table over, and I climb onto it. I've dressed in my mission outfit, because it seemed only fitting. My omnic body will be locked away just in case it's ever needed, and if we do need the body of a sexy omnic assassin specializing in digital infiltration, then it's damn well going to be dressed appropriately. Angela secures me with a stronger mesh and nods to my "aunt".

/You remember how this goes, little shadow?/

/Of course./

/Initiating connection protocols./
The Tehuacán Omnium answers our request for connection. The world dissolves into fragments and pixels.

COLD!

My lungs heave, my muscles tremble, and my eyelids fly open as my eyes roll back. I feel like I've been plunged naked into ice water. It's not that I didn't have temperature sensation over the last third of my life, but it was...distant. Muted. Objective. This is subjective, immediate, deeply personal, and I am cold. I cough on the exhale.

"Sombra?" Angela asks.

I feel like I'm trying to stuff a hundred scarves into a box full of cats, sorting out nerve input and figuring out which signals map to which parts of my body.

"Ten minutes," my omnic "aunt" says in Spanish. I think she's talking to Angela.

There's touches on my body, flashes of heat and cold and sudden, jarring pain. I can no more force this sack of meat to obey my will than I could calm a raging ocean with interpretive dance, but slowly, the thrashing stops and my lungs settle into a smoother rhythm and my heart stops pounding. The omnic hindbrain has sorted out the cacophony of traffic from my organic nerves and I am in control.

That does not mean I'm not overwhelmed.

I'm also still cold, and my body goes from trembling to shivering. I look around as much as I can with my head restrained, but all I can see is ceiling. My first attempt at saying 'Tante Angela' is a failure with my clumsy tongue and chattering teeth.

"Sombra?" Angela asks warily.

"Ssssssi," I manage to get out with my teeth clenched.

Whatever she says in response, I don't hear it because I'm dealing with the aftermath of an organic mind having been bounced around the omnic satelites in a stream of thought-particles and then reconstructed. When the world settles down and makes sense again, I'm huddled in a corner, wrapped in a thick, warm emergency blanket and leaning against one wall. Check the time. It's been almost an hour since the transfer into my organic body was completed. The nutrient fluid has dried into a crust on my skin, and every hair on my body itches.

/Your friend is quite concerned for you, little shadow. I tried to explain that you needed time to adjust, but I don't think she understood./

/Thank you. My body...?/

/It has been packed securely away. How is the adjustment?/

/I think I'm settled. Mostly./
"Sombra?" Angela asks with a note of restrained alarm in her voice.

I pry my eyes open and stretch. "I'm awake."

"How do you feel?" she asks, helping me to my feet.

I consider it for a moment. "Squishy. And itchy. I need a shower."

"Yes," she agrees, laughing. "That was quite an alarming process. Are you certain you're alright?"

"I wouldn't do it for fun, and I wouldn't advise it for your average person, but I'm okay. Shower?"

Angela helps me across the lab and into a shower stall with a convenient number of support bars on the walls. Adjusting from automatic balance routines to hindbrain muscle control is...less smooth than when the adjustment was going the other way. A long, hot shower is an excellent way to get used to not only that, but the more immediate, subjective tactile input from skin and nerves rather than synthskin and sensors. By the time I'm done, I feel much more settled.

Putting on clothes is mildly annoying with skin that's not exactly hypersensitive, but I haven't had time to register a baseline for tactile input yet so things feel...jarring. I ignore it in favor of being annoyed at the wet, heavy mass of hair hanging off my head. One of the things I haven't missed is how much of a pain it is to argue with wet hair. The purple-and-gold scarf I got in Paris works very well to keep damp strands out of my face, because I remember that one lock that liked to fall into my left eye and I don't know that my new body will have that again, but I don't feel like finding out just yet. I finish tying my hair back and call it done; brushing it out can wait until it's dry.

Both Angela and my "aunt" are beaming when I emerge from the bathroom.

"And now comes the hard part," Angela jokes as she hugs me. "Sleeping in the middle of the day."

Sleep is restless, and not just because it's the first time in a decade I haven't been able to just shut my mind off. Now that I've taken the plunge, I'm worried I did the wrong thing. What if I've been misinterpreting Papi's soulful looks all along? What if he didn't want me to go organic, what if he's angry, what if he's disappointed? I toss and turn on the bed in the private room next to Jerome's, trying to quiet my doubts and re-learning how to find a balance between covering enough of my body to retain body heat and having too much of my body covered. Turns out I never really forgot how to toss my head when I roll over so that I'm not choking on my own hair; I hadn't even remembered that was a thing, much less thought about having to do it again, so that's unexpected but nice. I don't get enough sleep by the time we need to get ready to go, but I get some and thankfully, there's no dreams.

Well, there's always the six-hour flight back.

I can hear Jerome shower while I brush my hair. My fingers remember how to braid it, which is a pleasant surprise. They also itch to shave most of it off again, and I am almost distractingly aware of where my organic body ends and omnic augmentation begins. The screen manipulation nails anchor to the bones of my fingers at the second knuckle, and I find myself shaking and flexing my
hands absently. For a second, I'm terrified that they don't work, but I've got ten screens open in a single, frantic gesture, and everything is okay again.

Angela hugs me as I leave the room with my shoulder bag. "Fly safe," she says quietly, not wanting to offend Jerome. "I will see you in the morning?"

Because naturally, she wants to make sure I'm still doing okay after almost a full day in flesh. "Of course."

"You need to eat something," she says firmly, but I pull a bottle of nutrient fluid out of the bag. "I should have known. Very well. Have a good trip, Schattenkind."

"And remember, if anyone asks..."

"I have not seen you."

The trip to Dorado is comfortably silent...if you don't count the omnic channel. My "aunt" and I catch up, trading stories of Los Muertos and Overwatch. She asks what it's like, having flesh again after having lived as an omnic for so long, and why I went back if I was so torn about it.

/A sacrifice for love./ she says after hearing my explanation. /Like a fairy tale. Both in giving up flesh, and in reclaiming it./

/But which fairy tale?/ I ask dryly. /Many of them end badly./

/I do not think yours will be one of the ones that do. You have fought against the world from a very young age, and you keep winning. I think the world is afraid to deny you what you want at this point,/ she teases.

/Serves it right for what it did to me,/ I joke back.

/More seriously, little shadow, you are the first organic to have your mind transferred into an omnic body, and the first omnic to have your mind transferred into flesh. Now that we know it can be done, it could pave the way for others to do the same. I don't know that I would want it for myself, but there are omnics who would give nearly anything to wear the flesh they pretend so hard they have./

/And omnic bodies could be an alternative to extensive surgery, or a temporary refuge while mangled bodies are healed. I'll have to mention that to Angela when I get back.

/Will you return to legal status?/ My "aunt" asks.

I think about the handful of fancy, high-profile lunches I've had with Papi, Jesse, and Uncle Jack. /Yes. But not yet./

/When?/

A smile spreads across my organic face. /Well...it is traditional for the dead to rise on Easter./
The flight back is peaceful. I stretch out as usual on the co-pilot's side and poke at a few screens - nothing much, just checking up on my construction company - for about half an hour. Then I close all the screens and nap. The familiar environment, the hum of the engine and the smell of the cockpit, are relaxing enough that I drop right off and don't wake up until we land.

"I guess you'd like this to stay a secret," Jerome says as the ramp lowers.

I rub the crud out of my eyes. Haven't missed that. "Please?"

"Cloud of hungry Reaper couldn't drag it out of me," he promises. "See you at the party!"

Angela whisks me back into another section of the building where she puts me in a cheap gown and sticks a bunch of sensors all over me. I don't mind when she puts me through test after test to see how my body's holding up under controlled conditions and various stressors. Keeps my mind off what's going to happen when I walk into the party. But of course the tests come to an end and Angela takes me back to the private room so I can get washed up and dress before heading over to the safehouse with her.

She's going as a cowgirl, something that would normally amuse me anticipating Jesse's reaction. I'm in a red dress Papi made me, something inspired by Calavera Catrina. Originally I was going to do my face up in ornate sugar skull to match, but if I did that, he might not realize what I've done.

We walk over to the safehouse together, and I keep my linksignal blocked. /I am surprising Gabriel,/ I say in the omnic channel. /Please do not even hint that I am here./

/Did someone speak?/ Genji asks lightly. /I heard only the wind./

There's no other response.

Angela hugs me gently as we reach the front door. I stay outside until the safehouse systems tell me she's in the ballroom, and then I slip inside. Nervously, I wait by the double doors and listen to the conversation inside as Angela is greeted and Jesse is teased. It feels like forever before I hear what I've been waiting for.

In a voice that's trying to sound curious instead of hurt, Papi asks, "Where's Sombra? She promised she'd be here."

The doors open at my silent command. Every conversation stops, every head turns to me as I step nervously into the room. By good luck, there's no one between me and Papi, and as I approach him I can see his expression go from suspicion to confusion to realization and then into surprise so complete that it's like his brain has just shut down.

"Alé?" he chokes out as I stop just out of arm's reach. When I nod, he closes the distance and hugs me so tightly that I'm not sure either of us can breathe, and I think that's all that's keeping us from crying.

"I hate t'be the one to ask," Jesse says from the side, "but...who's that?"
Papi releases me so he can beam proudly, both hands on my shoulders. "Everyone? My daughter, Alessandra."

"Ale-" Winston breaks off mid-word. "Sombra??"

"In the flesh," I say, ridiculously pleased that I not only got the opportunity to say that, but that it occurred to me to say it.

The room erupts into confused babble and cheering, and it's a good thing Papi and I both decided to forgo the sugar skull cosmetics that normally accompany Calavera Catrina and Señor Bones because we're both crying, and he barely lets me go long enough for other people to take a turn hugging me. It's several minutes before the commotion calms down again.

"So, shadow-sis..." Jesse looks embarrassed to be asking this. "Is it okay if I still call you Sombra for a while? Because I know I'm gonna slip up and I don't wanna offend you."

"You can still call me Sombra," I reassure him, and half the room sighs in relief. "I still am Sombra. It's just that now...there's a name behind the alias."

Adrienne frowns distantly at me, like she's gnawing at some puzzle. "Was this the name you were born with, or did you choose it?"

"It's her original name," Papi and Winston both say at the same time.

The frown clears from my sister's face. "Ah! Because I was afraid you had chosen it just to fit in."

It's my turn to frown in puzzlement. "Fit in?"

"Angela, Ana, Athena, Adrienne..."

"You noticed, too!"

Chuckles, some awkward coughing, and teasing in an undertone that ends abruptly.

I realize that I'm actually hungry. "Papi, did you do the cake yet?"

He shakes his head. "Waiting for you, Alé."

My face lights up. "I haven't eaten in a decade, and I'm starving. It's time for cake."

Solen is already on it, and comes back with the cake on a serving cart with a knife, a stack of plates, and a pile of forks. This year, Papi's birthday cake is a large sheet decorated to look like a graveyard with little fondant gravestones and tiny sugar bones scattered around. Chocolate-dipped pretzels have been pressed all around the edges to make an edible rickety fence, and candles trimmed down to something too short to grab with organic fingers have been set in little candle-holders on the graves. They're already lit.

"Come help me blow out the candles and serve it," I tell Papi.

He picks up the knife, looks at the cake, and gives me a wicked grin. "I don't think the candles need to be blown out. Gives it a sort of ambiance, don't you think?"
Carefully, he cuts a single grave out of the cake, transfers it to a plate, and hands it - candle still lit - to Jesse, who looks at his flame-infested dessert with something less than full enthusiasm at having become the butt of the joke.

"Thanks, Dad," he deadpans. Then he pinches it out with his metal fingers and grins as everyone laughs at him having turned the prank around. "Here you go, Alé. Only fitting you get to have the first bite, since it'll be your first bite in forever."

The look Papi gives me as I accept a fork is molten hope. I cut a small bite from the inside corner, moist chocolate cake and green-tinted icing, and raise it to my mouth. Words can't describe what it's like, tasting chocolate for the first time in a decade with a mouth that has never tasted anything. Words also can't describe the sheer, overwhelming joy on my father's face at seeing me enjoy food at long last.

I made the right choice.

Chapter End Notes

Jack never fully remembers Sombra calling him in the middle of the night, just that she did and she'd been worried about Gabriel....who absolutely recruited him to talk to Sombra and try to figure out what was wrong. Ana knows that Sombra is worrying at the question of whether or not to return to flesh, but she doesn't know why this is an issue or why Sombra doesn't just talk it out with her father.

Angela did offer Genji the option of completely rebuilding his body, but he declined.

Gabriel dealt with the loss of having people pet him as a dog by aggressively normalizing non-sexual physical contact. The look on Jack's face the first time he got told to get the fuck over to the couch because "we -cuddle- in this family, god damn it" was fucking PRICELESS. He also actively fought every social stigma against expressing affection.

No, I don't actually know what "the rule" is or how it came about. But a secondary Familia Reyes motto is "If you can't say nice things, say them angrily". The primary motto, of course, is "You can't spell 'Reyes' without 'yes'." And, thanks to someone's verbal slip, the official generic "I have things to do" phrase is "I have people to kill". ('Hey, you going to that thing tomorrow? 'Nah, I have people to kill.')

Gabriel was actually worried enough about how on edge his little shadow was acting that he went to Angela secretly and asked if it was possible to give Sombra an organic body. Angela answered yes, of course, which meant both Sombra and Gabriel were dancing around how to bring the subject up with the other.

If you caught that Sombra spliced in Gabriel's Y chromosome instead of the X, congrats. That was not a mistake. She deliberately designed herself a body with complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome. I have no idea if she was ever XX female to begin with and no one can prove anything because she has the only copy of her original DNA sequence.

A normal person would likely not survive mind transference with their sanity intact.
unless they'd previously gotten used to using an omnic brain instead of the organic one. Angela and the omnic did basically play charades for a few minutes trying to get on the same page as to what was going on with Sombra while she was adjusting.

This was the single best birthday gift Gabriel Reyes has ever gotten. Of course, that makes him determined to do something for Sombra's birthday, except that he doesn't know when that is...

The morning of November 1, Sombra woke up to Gabriel smugly presenting her with breakfast: chocolate-chip pancakes with cinnamon in the batter. He's finally got the opportunity to return the favor of all the tasty foods she made for him, and he is damn well going to take it.
This was not -remotely- how Jesse thought the night was going to go.

"Hey, shadow-sis," Jesse says as he helps me clear the table, "feelin' a bit restless tonight. "D'you mind helping me get some exercise?"

I shake my head. "Not at all. I got no plans tonight, and it would be nice to see how good that tequila I keep buying you actually is," I finish teasingly.

He grins at that. "It's only fair. Hey Dad," he calls, loud enough to be heard in the living room, "I'm taking your youngest daughter to keep me from making a disgrace of myself while I wallow in debauchery!"

"Be back by midnight," Papi yells back. "Or else!"

"Or else what?" I shout, grinning.

When I turn around, he's standing in the doorway, arms crossed, grinning. "Or else you'll turn into a pumpkin. C'mon, hugs before you leave, both of you."

Obediently, we each hug Gabriel in turn. He turns with each of us in his arms before he lets go, freeing us one by one while still blocking the door so the other can't escape without their obligatory hug. Then we wave to Rienne on our way past and grab coats because early November in Zurich is not warm, and we're on our way to Jesse's favorite bar.

We start with our usual two shots of tequila. The difference is that this time, Jesse's smiling broadly and we toast each other before drinking them simultaneously.

"See any good targets?" he asks quietly as we each scan the bar.

"There's a woman in a sparkly black blouse who's glaring daggers at me."

"Ooh. Hair pulled up, long red nails?"

"That's the one."

"Mm. Ready to start that race already. You'll be okay?"
"You know it."

"Good. I'm goin' for it."

Jesse swaggers off to go reassure the glaring lady that I'm neither his girlfriend nor his wife, and I turn back to the bartender. There's a lot of nice-looking bottles on those shelves, after all, and I'm finally in a position to try them.

About fifteen minutes and half a dozen shots later, I've managed to achieve a pleasant buzz. Then heads all over the bar go up as a cry of "Yeeeeehee-haaaaaaaw!" cuts through the ambient noise of conversation. My mind immediately concocts several likely images of the moment my brother reached climax. I'm too sober for this.

Luckily, that's something I can change now.

By the time my trash cowboy brother swaggers back down, I've drunk a third of a bottle of good tequila and am most decidedly not sober. I wave the bottle at him and see the afterglow drain away into concern as he hurries over.

"Alé, you okay?" he asks, taking the bottle and setting it aside. "Oh my god, shadow-sis, you're drunk."

"Damn straight, cowboy."

"Okay. Uh. I'm taking you home. The bottle..."

"Bought 'n paid for. 'S mine."

"Okay. Okay." He fumbles the cap back on. "Shit. Dad's gonna kill me. What happened?"

"You happened. Never gonna un-hear that."

My wobbly accusation makes him smirk. "I'm gonna choose to take that as a compliment. Come on, time to get you home."

The quick trip back to the safehouse is a comfortable blur. Only when multiple hands press me firmly down onto the couch do things get clearer.

"...happened?" Papi demands.

"Not doing that again," I announce. "You can go help him pick up chicks, Papi, I'm not doing it anymore."

Gabriel looks torn between affront and amusement. "Why not?"

"Never un-hear that," I mutter darkly, pulling the tequila bottle out of my purse.

"Un-hear what?" he asks Jesse warily as I get the cap off.

"Yee-haw," my brother answers solemnly.

I groan and take a swig.
Papi laughs. "All right, Alé. You stay here. I'll go keep your brother out of trouble."

"Go for it, Papi." Shaky gestures open a few screens, the interior of the bar as seen by their security cameras. "I gotcher back."

Laughing, they both file out.

The nanite digestive system is absurdly effective, and I suspect Tante Angela has opinions about drinking because I'm back to being mildly tipsy by the time Papi and Jesse reach the bar. In amusement, I watch as my brother tries to chat up a likely target only to have Papi swoop in and charm her out from under the cowboy's nose. I take another couple mouthfuls of tequila to keep my buzz going. Switch cameras on one screen to follow them, keep watching Jesse as he gets the attention of a redhead, and when they get into the little upstairs rooms, direct the cameras upward so I don't have anything to un-see. It's not until the last third of the bottle that I realize the flaw in my clever plan because now I have two things to try to un-hear, and I close the screens and chug the rest of the tequila and go to bed before the alcohol hits me with all the force of a brick wall to the back of the head.

The lack of hangover in the morning is a pleasant surprise. The cinnamon-chocolate-chip pancakes Papi's cooking are an even more pleasant surprise. It takes me about thirty seconds to throw on clean pajamas and slide into my seat at the table.

"Good morning, Alé," Papi says as he sets a plate of steaming pancakes in front of me, next to the glass of orange juice that's already there. "You're looking...alert."

"You mean, I'm not hung over."

"Yeah. How the fuck did you get that drunk? I couldn't even get tipsy."

The disgruntled tone makes me laugh. "We got a super-efficient digestive system. You gotta hit the bottle hard and fast. I did six shots and only got buzzed."

He grins at me over his shoulder as he checks the next batch of pancakes. "Did it work to blur the memory of the horror you overheard?"

"It worked enough."

"Good. So now I know that all I have to do next time is..."

"Down a full glass of tequila."

He thinks about that for a minute, then shrugs. "There's worse problems to have."
A few days later, as we're clearing the table, Jesse again says, "Hey, shadow-sis..."

"Nope. You want help firing your Colt, you ask Papi."

"It's not that," he says quickly. "I just...I wanna thank you fer puttin' up with me all this time. I wanna make it up to you." He sees my uncertain expression and gives me a puppy-eye look. "Please?"

I sigh. "Okay."

He hugs me, and we finish cleaning up. The night is clear and cold, and the bar is warm and inviting. Jesse points me to a corner table and goes to the bar while I sit down. When he comes back, it's with a bottle of bourbon that the bar had to have ordered specifically for him, a pair of shot glasses, and a glass of water for himself.

"Never thought I'd be the one drinkin' responsibly," he jokes as he pours the first shots and hands one to me. "To my lovely sister, who has sacrificed so much for this family without even bein' able to get drunk."

"I'll drink to that," I say dryly.

We touch the shot glasses together and sip appreciatively.

"So..." Jesse plays with his glass, not looking at me. "I was thinkin'...now that you're equipped, as it were...I can finally repay the favors you've given me and help you find a nice stallion to ride."

Subdirectories open up in a cascade, and I scramble to get them all closed again. I don't realize what that must look like until I see Jesse watching me with horror. He flags down a waitress and practically demands a bottle of cheap, strong tequila and then shoves it into my hands once it arrives. I down a good quarter of the bottle, feeling tears on my cheeks and an arm around my shoulders, and when I come up for air Jesse's sitting next to me, close enough that I can lean against his chest, so I do.

"Alé," he says softly, "you look like you just saw a ghost. What happened?"

"I don't want to ride a stallion," I say in a small voice. "Or a mare. I don't even want to just pet them. I don't want anything to do with anyone past looking."

"But you were the kind of girl that...I'm sorry, shadow-sis, I'm not tryin' to be rude or stir stuff up. I just want to understand. What changed?"

I take another drink of crappy tequila. It burns.

"One of the things my augmentations let me do was ring my own bell. Didn't have to be touching anything anywhere. Just think it and it happened."

"That don't sound so bad," he says cautiously.

"It made going to movies easier because no matter what was happening, how old or ugly or fat or..." More tequila. "All I had to do was think and I didn't have to pretend to be enjoying myself."
Sometimes it was bad enough I'd have to do it four, five times to get through."

Jesse hugs me tighter. "Oh, no...Alé..."

I nod. "By the time I was twenty, I didn't even want to ring my bell by myself because..."

"Because you associated it with...shadow-sis, I'm so sorry. I thought that was something like food, where you'd be glad to have it back."

"It was one of the reasons I chose to give up being organic. I liked not having to deal with that. Had Angela take it out as much as possible."

"Shh, it's okay, you don't hafta do anything you don't want. You still like looking, though?"

The burn of the tequila feels like it's searing away the memories trying to bubble up. "Yeah."

"What sort of stallions you like looking at, shadow-sis?"

Words are getting harder to manage. "Like you, but darker. Or just as dark. Just not lighter. I don't like Pillsbury Dough Buns. Put that shit back in the oven, get a little color to it."

Things get blurry.

I wake up in my own bed, the empty bottle of shitty tequila and the almost-full bottle of really good bourbon on the bedside table. My head feels heavy, sandy, but otherwise not too bad. When I try to remember how I got here, all that comes up is an image of Papi frowning and saying, 'She's drunk and you're sober. There better be a damn good explanation for this, boy.' Then I remember what we were talking about before things got blurry and decide that a shower is better than facing my family just now.

"Alé," Papi calls sharply from the living room the instant my door opens. "Come in here, hija. We need to talk."

Fuck.

I edge into the living room, brushing that one annoying lock of hair out of my left eye. Again. Makes me want to go back to having the sides of my head shaved. Papi's standing in the middle of the room, arms crossed sternly, while Jesse stands grimly behind him.

"Jesse tells me you got history that means you don't like doing more than looking."

The silence stretches. Eyes down, I nod.

"Get your coat. We're going to a strip club so you can do all the looking you want."

Wait, what?? That was not the reaction I expected! My head comes up and both of them are grinning at my stunned expression.
"Of course, we're also doing breakfast on the way. Or lunch. Brunch?" Papi waves one hand. "Food. Adrienne!"

'Rienne's door opens cautiously. "Oui, Papi?"

"Your brother and I are taking your sister out to a male strip club. Or two. Or three. You want to come watch the sausage party? We're doing food, too."

Her face lights up. "Oh, yes. I would like very much to go. We can go as a family."

Papi beams at us. "Alright, everyone take a good look at themselves and decide if that's what they want to wear for Familia Reyes Hits The Town. Go change if it's not."

We scatter.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Jesse, he was not even remotely expecting to be the Designated Adult for his hacker sister. I mean, really, who lets him Adult? And of the two of them, Gabe wasn't expecting Sombra to be the one to come back drunk, so there was just a wee bit of alarmed WTF going on there.

This is not the first time Gabe's gone to a bar to drink and hook up since he returned to flesh. This is just the first time he didn't go alone.

Jesse is the best brother. When he got Sombra back, Gabe was angrily alarmed and Jesse went "Let me get her put into bed, and then We Need To Talk," and they stayed up doing the 2070s version of googling to find the best male strip clubs in the area and try to figure out which would have the lowest number of Caucasian strippers. They both know Sombra won't want to be fussed over, so they're going to just aggressively support her. Because that's how Familia Reyes rolls.
Epilogue: Family Day

Chapter Summary

Amazing what you can get away with when you're not legally alive and you don't give a half-chewed rat's ass.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"We got any plans for Thursday?" Jesse asks over Sunday breakfast.

Adrienne and I glance at each other with puzzled expressions, but Papi looks thoughtful.

"Alé, is Jerome free Thursday and Friday?"

I check a few screens. "Si, Papi."

"And Jack's visiting his folks, isn't he?" It's not a question, but I nod anyway. Slowly, Papi grins. "Perfect. He won't hear about it until it's too late. Pack for two days," he orders us, "but leave room for fancy clothes and swimwear. I'm taking you to meet my mother."

Oh my god. He remembered. We're going to do it, we're going to get him disowned and then go out to eat.

I can't wait for Thursday.

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The rental car attendant, unsurprisingly, is omnic. Xie confirms our reservation cheerfully and wishes us a pleasant stay. Even less surprisingly, Papi has rented the flashiest, most expensive black convertible to be had in the entirety of Los Angeles, something the attendant compliments him on. Papi drives to the hotel like the streets are an active battlefield and casually informs the hotel clerk that if he makes no fuss over us, he'll get a tip and an autograph when we check out. A little star-struck, the clerk checks us quietly into our three-room suite. Rienne and I will be sharing the bedroom on one the side of the communal room; Papi and Jesse will be sharing the other bedroom. She changes in the bathroom, I change in the bedroom, and then while I'm waiting for the bathroom to be free so I can do my makeup, I check on the clerk. Looks like he's taking night classes and, judging by complaints on social media, is in desperate need of a car that runs reliably. That'll work for a tip, as long as he holds up his end of the deal.

Adrienne looks stunning when she's done. Her short hair is swept back with gel, allowing her elegant earrings to swing free and accentuate the graceful column of her neck. Her dress, of course, is something Papi made - very flowing and refined - and her heels make her as tall as Papi. She looks like she's late for a runway walk somewhere.
My goals are different. My dress and shoes are traditional. Conservative, even. They adhere to cultural standards that haven't applied since before I was born. My cosmetics are subtle, making me look "naturally beautiful" without looking made up. I do take a bit of pride in the fact that my thick, glossy, hip-length hair is my actual hair. I haven't gotten disenchanted enough with it yet to shave most of it off again. All in all, though, I look like A Good Girl.

Jesse, of course, looks like the trash cowboy he is. Papi's dressed him in colors that play down his mixed blood and make him look like a complete gringo. And Papi himself is dressed smartly in black: dress pants, silk button-up long-sleeve shirt, expensive sunglasses, and shoes shined so well you can see your reflection in them.

The hotel clerk does a double-take as we follow Papi out to the car, but he doesn't say a word.

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Estelita Reyes, it turns out, lives in a cramped townhouse in a neighborhood that's seen better days. I'd be worried about leaving the car parked on the street, but with the roof up, it locks and alarms very securely. Jesse waves Adrienne and I ahead of him, and we follow Papi up the cracked sidewalk, past brown grass and withered bushes, to the front door with its torn screen. The doorbell rings somewhere inside the house, and a minute later the door opens. An overweight old woman in a brightly-colored dress at odds with her thin, greying, curled hair frowns at us through the screen.

"I told you, I don't know where he is! I haven't seen him in months!"

"Ms. Estelita Reyes?" Papi asks, trying to sound neutral.

"Si, and you are...?"

He takes off the sunglasses. "Your son."

The reaction that gets is so dramatic that there's no doubt she's related to Papi. She gasps, clutches her chest, swoons, and staggers back far enough into the house that he can enter and guide her to an dingy upholstered chair that's threadbare in more than a few places. I grab the screen door and pass it to Adrienne, who holds it for Jesse, who closes the front door behind us as we follow Gabriel inside. Then, as if we'd practiced it, we line up oldest to youngest with Jesse on Papi's right and 'Rienne and I on his left.

"They said you were dead!" Estelita wails.

"I was dead."

"Then what happened, how have you come back to me?"

"I got better," he answers dryly.

"Why didn't you call, or write, or visit?"

"I was dead, Mami."
"I meant before that! Thirty years I don't see you, why are you here now?" she demands petulantly.

Papi steps back and gestures to us. "To show you my children," he announces proudly. "My son, Jesse."

McCree tips his hat politely. "Ma'am."

"That's a gringo name," she snaps, ignoring him entirely. "Why you bring a gringo into my house, Gabriel?"

"Because he's your grandson, Mami," is the taunting reply.

She mutters something very uncomplimentary in Spanish that I hope Jesse isn't fluent enough to understand, speculation about how pale his mother's skin was and her motives for getting pregnant.

"My daughter, Adrienne."

"A pleasure to meet you," my sister lies.

In Spanish that I'm really hoping neither of my sibs can understand, Estelita spits, "It's not bad enough you had to stick it in a white girl, but then you knock up a French whore? I don't want this granddaughter, Gabriel. I am disappointed in you."

Time to pour on the charm. I step forward and smile, and she smiles back, relaxing at how much of a Good Girl I appear to be. "It's so nice to meet you finally! I heard so much!" I say in Spanish.

"Ah, aren't you a good daughter?" Estelita coos. "At least you got one decent child," she snaps at her son. Then she turns back to me. "Tell me about yourself...?"

"My daughter, Alessandra," Papi supplies.

I take a deep breath. "Well...my mother died in the Massacre, so my childhood was hard. Begging, stealing, a little hacking. Then as a teenager, I started getting into whoring and blackmail."

Estelita looks too horrified for words, and my nonchalant tone isn't helping. Papi smiles proudly.

"Of course, augmentation will only take you so far and I wanted to be the best, so when I turned twenty-one I ditched my meatsack body and went one hundred percent omnic. And that's how I met Papi!" I finish brightly. "Of course, that was when he and my sister were assassins for Talon."

"This is a joke," she demands of her son.

"No joke, Abuela," I say earnestly. Then I open a few screens showing mission footage. "We must have killed...hundreds, maybe thousands of people together. As a family." The screens switch from mission footage to comparisons: Widowmaker to Adrienne, Reaper to Gabriel, and my omnic body to my organic one.

"That is not my son," Estelita says furiously, pointing to Reaper.

Jesse takes a cigar out of his pocket and contemplates it. "No, that's Dad all right. Nearly punched me clear across Houston when he heard I tried to hire my younger sister as a whore," he says before sticking the cigar between his teeth.
"I remember that," Adrienne says with quiet excitement. "She was wearing the red dress. Papi was furious and I was annoyed with him because I was going to shoot you, but he punched you out of my line of sight."

"Gabriel! You tell your mother right now that this is all a joke! You were not that...monster...and you did not kill those people!"

"I told you I was dead," he says with a shit-eating grin. "After the explosion, they tried to save me with nanites but there was a fire and I burned to ash. So yes, I was that monster, and not only did I kill all those people, but I ate a good number of them. Alive."

There's stunned silence for ten, twenty seconds before Estelita takes a deep breath and starts shrieking.

"HOW DARE YOU! YOU ARE NOT MY SON! I HAVE NO SON! GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!"

There's a lot more in that vein, but it's pretty repetitive even when she switches to Spanish, although we all get called the Devil at some point as we calmly and proudly file back out and saunter down the sidewalk while she yells at us from the door. Papi unlocks the car remotely before triggering the roof to retract, and opens the back door so 'Rienne and I can slide in. Jesse closes it for us before climbing into the front seat. Then Papi's in the driver's seat with his sunglasses back on, and the motor roars to life. He revs it a few times, waiting for the roof to go down all the way before he starts to drive slowly down the street, and like goddamn movie stars we lounge insolently and wave to the neighbors who are looking out their doors to see what all the commotion is about.

Once we turn the corner, he puts the roof back up and we all burst into maniacal laughter.

"Perfect," Papi says proudly as he navigates out of the neighborhood. "You're all perfect and I love you. Now, who's hungry? There's a couple of places I want to check out, see if they're still around after thirty years, see if they're actually open. This is Thanksgiving, after all."

Adrienne and I look at each other for a moment before bursting into a fresh round of laughter. Thanksgiving, the American holiday of friends, family, food, and giving thanks. And we just used it to validate our adopted family and get Papi disowned from what was left of the family he was born into.

In the front seat, Jesse sits up suddenly. "Wait. You mean this was on purpose? You dragged us out here to meet your mom because you wanted to piss her off? You shoulda told me, Dad," he complains. "I would have done something like shadow-sis did."

"You were there," Papi tells him. "That was plenty."

"I still feel like I could have been more offensive if I'd known what was going on," he says sulkily. "Rienne laughs quietly. "We could go back and you could take your clothes off."

Jesse mutters something unintelligible.

"No, quiet-sis, that wouldn't work. He looks too good without clothes for that to be offensive."
Papi catches my eye in the rear-view mirror. "She has a point, though, Alé. They both do. We could have been a lot more offensive. I think we need to brainstorm over tacos. What do you all think?"

With all the grinning and wicked chuckles, I don't think any of us actually bothers to say yes.

"Good," Papi says as he pulls up to a little Mexican restaurant that looks family-owned. "They're still around, and they're open. Now to see if they're still any good."

A little bell rings as we walk in the door, and a bored-looking ratty little man in his late 20s or early 30s leaning against the host's podium calls out, "Welcome to Los Santos," without even looking up from the little pad he's watching. The entire place is deserted except for him.

Papi walks up to the podium, arms crossed, and waits. We spread out around him.

It's almost a minute before the overgrown teenager sighs and looks up. "How many?"

"Four... if this place is still any good," Papi growls. "You Abuela still a terror in the kitchen, Miguel?"

Miguel goes wide-eyed that this well-dressed stranger knows his name and his grandmother. "No. My uncle..."

"He here?" Papi demands.

"Y-yes..."

Papi lowers his sunglasses just enough to stare Miguel in the eyes. "You go back there and get him out here. Tell him Big Dog's back. We'll find our own table."

Miguel looks like he wants to protest but he's too scared, and then he bolts for the kitchen. We pick a round booth in the corner and slide in, Papi in the back flanked by Rienne and Jesse, and me on my sister's other side. A minute later, a portly older man leaning heavily on a cane limps determinedly out of the kitchen and makes a beeline for us, trailed by the cringing Miguel. Jesse vacates the booth and Papi takes his shades off as he slides out to give the man a fierce, aggressive hug that nearly knocks him off his feet.

"Go get menus," the man snaps to Miguel as Papi releases him, then steals a chair from another table to sit heavily in.

Jesse takes what had been Papi's seat in the booth, leaving him the end so he can chat with what's apparently his old friend.

"You Mami finally get sick of your ugly face, Juan?" Papi teases.

Juan laughs. "I made her favorite recipe perfectly, and she died of shock," he jokes back. "What about you, Big Dog? Heard you were dead."
"Got tired of it and came back."

"Got bored ruling Hell and gave it back to the Devil?"

Papi grimaces. "Devil kicked my ass."

Juan laughs. "Well, he's about the only one who had a shot at doing it. So what, you in movies now? That why you dressed so pretty and why you brought movie stars to my restaurant?" he asks, giving 'Rienne a broad wink.

"Nah. These're my kids. Jesse, Adrienne, and Alessandra." He nods to each of us in turn.

"McCree, right?" Juan asks, leaning over to shake Jesse's hand. "You're kind of distinctive, and I remember your old man talking about you when you were just a little shit. Adrienne," he says, bowing awkwardly over her hand and air-kissing it. "You look stunning. It's a pleasure to meet you. Alessandra..." He trails off, looking intently at my face and then turning to frown at Papi.

"She's actually mine," Papi confirms. "Takes completely after me. Punched the Devil in the dick and dragged me out of Hell."

Juan starts to laugh, but it dies. "You're serious. My god, Gabe, what happened?"

"I told you: died, went to hell, Devil kicked my ass, my daughter punched him in the dick and dragged me out."

There's silence for a long minute. Juan looks shaken. Luckily, Miguel comes back with menus and distracts everyone passing them out before scurrying away again.

"You eat free," Juan says firmly, pointing at Papi as he heaves himself to his feet and puts the chair back.

Papi snorts. "Not a chance."

"I mean it, Big Dog. I'm not taking your money. Mi Mami would take a break from terrorizing Heaven to come down and yell at me if I did."

"I'll just charm her, like I always did." Papi gives it a beat. "Besides, it's not me you have to worry about."

Juan follows the direction of his friend's gaze and sees me with screens open, checking the finances of the restaurant and the owner. Looks like there's a few payments left on a loan for...some sort of remodeling. As he watches, I transfer funds and pay it off.

"Did you just-?"

"Si."

"You always were a lucky son of a bitch," Juan tells Papi. "Speaking of your mother..."

The rest of us break into wicked chuckles again, and Papi's wearing a wide, shit-eating grin. "Just came from visiting her," he says. "She didn't appreciate my perfect kids. Apparently, she has no son."
"She's still a piece of work." Juan shakes his head. "Well, you tell my nephew what you want, and I will go make it for you. Alessandra, thank you for punching the Devil in the dick and dragging this bastard out of Hell. He's a good man."

After Juan's limped back off and Miguel's taken our orders, Jesse looks at me. "You mean Big Dog wasn't just something you came up with for when he didn't want to be called Reaper?"

"Nope."

He leans back. "How...?"

Papi laughs. "Don't question it, mijo. All your secrets are belong to Sombra."

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After a dinner that turned out to be more like a private party featuring endless tacos and family-sized margaritas (and a bit of terrorizing Miguel when he tried to hit on me), we've got a list of scandalous ideas and enough alcohol in our collective bloodstreams to follow through on them. Papi smiles tolerantly as he herds us into the car, having managed to stay sober through judicious sipping and nanite programming, and it's off to find an open drugstore.


Back in the common room of our hotel suite, Jesse fetches a towel from the bathroom while I add ice to the cup. Adrienne flexes her fingers in anticipation, and Papi opens packages. The first order of business is to separate the thick stripe of hair that runs down the center of my head, tie it up and secure it with clips. Then, on a chair in the kitchen, draped in a towel and armed with alcohol, I give the order and my family descends on me, scissors flashing. The cranial augmentations that had been hidden under my hair start to appear as locks are shorn away, and the activity changes from determined to jubilant. 'Rienne starts humming French nursery rhymes as she clips carefully, trimming down almost to my scalp between the bands.

"That's the shadow-sis I remember," Jesse murmurs as he moves around to the back, cutting my hair down to finger-length so Adrienne can follow and clean it up quicker. "I mean, don't get me wrong, we all know I think you were gorgeous with the long hair, but it just...wasn't...you. It's like seeing Gabe without a shaved head, y'know?"

I can't really argue with that. Three weeks with a full head of hair didn't make me feel normal, it only made me feel like I was wearing a disguise the whole time.

Papi taps one of the bands as he clips next to it. "How do these stay on? They're sitting directly on your skin. Don't they itch as your hair grows?"

"Nope," I answer cheerfully, holding the cup up so he can take a sip. "Microscopic anchors replacing the hair follicles. Goes right down through my skull to interface with my brain. Was a bitch having it done the first time."
"Well, that explains why we couldn't just shave your head," Jesse says from behind me, where the bands are closer together.

"Just clip it down to the level of the bands," I tell my family. "I'm gonna let it grow until it annoys me again."

Once the trimming is complete, Papi and 'Rienne take down the middle section and cut it to the proper length before donning gloves and applying chemicals to the bottom eight inches or so. When what's left of my hair has been secured in plastic, Jesse removes the hair-covered towel and shoves it in a corner to deal with later. Adrienne goes to shower all her glam off. The rest of us cuddlepile and laugh as we search for the most blasphemous music possible to play as we drive slowly by Estelita's townhouse, with bonus points for growling, screaming, gratuitous percussion, and electric guitar. Double bonus for being in Spanish. Then it's my turn to shower, and afterwards I set an alarm and flop into bed with a sigh of contentment.

"It is a freedom," 'Rienne says quietly from the other bed. "To have had long hair and cut it off, to define yourself rather than being defined by it. We are judged so much by our appearances, and so many of our decisions about our appearance are decided by how others will judge us."

"Tell me about it," I groan. "Jesse was right, all that hair is gorgeous, but it is not me. I think he leaves his the way he does as a way to say hey, fuck you, you don't control me."

'Rienne giggles. "That would make sense. And Papi shaves his head to say there is nothing about me you can control, do not even try."

"Mmmm." I want to say more to that, but I'm too tired.

Morning comes far too early. Quiet-sis helps me put purple dye on the bleached portion of my hair, and then we steal a little more sleep until it's time to wash it out. She puts on coffee and orders room service while I'm showering, and when I emerge in my purple two-piece, Papi and Jesse both beam at me.

"That's my little shadow," Papi murmurs, giving me a hug and a kiss on the head. "Sit. Have coffee. I'm not going to start drawing on you until I'm actually awake."

An hour later, fed and caffeinated, 'Rienne and I are sporting matching marker "tattoos" of Reaper's mask on our shoulders and thighs. Everyone is wearing jeans and tee-shirts over our swimwear, and the tanning oil has been tossed into the bag holding our towels because we're going to hit the infamous swimming hole after our scandalous drive-by and this time, I will make sure there's no footage.

The hotel clerk does a double-take again as we collectively strut past, but keeps his mouth shut.

In a corner store parking lot a block away, we strip to our swimsuits. I'm in shimmery purple, of course, and Adrienne is in a gorgeous turquoise one-piece. At some point, Jesse got his hands on a male bikini patterned after the Texas flag, and he's only a little self-conscious at displaying nearly all of his body. Papi, of course, made his own. It's black with Reaper's mask in white, and it's the absolute minimum amount of material needed to cover his package with black strings holding it in
The patrons and employees of the corner store are treated to a free show as we (carefully, avoiding our fake tattoos) oil each other up for maximum glisten. Then Jesse puts his hat back on and takes a relaxed position behind the wheel while I climb into the back seat to flank Papi with Adrienne, and we don't bother sitting.

"Let's move out," Papi orders.

To the primal growl and escalating percussion line of the song we decided was going to offend Estelita the most, Jesse cruises slowly and smoothly out of the parking lot. Traffic pauses to let us pass, encouraged by the sight of three mostly-naked, oiled, sexy people dancing slowly and provocatively in the back seat. By the time we get within sight of Estelita's townhouse, all the neighbors have come out to watch. Papi's climbed onto the trunk and is demonstrating moves I can only envy while 'Rienne and I dance like we're going to start having sex any moment.

I blow Estelita a kiss as we pass. She looks like she's going to have a stroke, or maybe just explode, if she doesn't vent the outrage making her shake. The old lady who apparently lives next door nudges her and points to Papi with an appreciative grin, which makes her storm inside and slam the door.

Once we're around the corner, I cut the music and Jesse pulls into the first driveway that presents itself and we all throw our clothes back on. Papi takes the wheel and puts the roof back up, and we all laugh with malicious glee as he hurls us back into traffic.

"Tell me you got video, Alé," he begs, glancing at me in the rear-view mirror.

"Of course," I shoot back, grinning.

Jesse cackles. "She'll never look at Black Friday the same way again."

"We may have been naughty," Adrienne deadpans. "I'm proud of us."

"I'm proud of us, too," Papi says, practically purring. "You are the best kids ever, encouraging my bullshit."

"Hey," Jesse protests. "Your bullshit is our bullshit, too. Familia Reyes for life, Dad."

"Even when Morrison finds out what we did?"

"Pfft, how's he gonna find out?"

I open a few screens. "Fifteen social media postings so far. Want me to squash them, Papi?"

"Nah. Let 'em look."

"You sure? Could ruin your big reveal."

The silence stretches while Papi's ego wrestles with itself.

"...nuke them."
After a morning of swimming, we head back to the hotel and check out, collecting Jerome at the same time. The clerk checks us out with as little fanfare as when he checked us in, so Papi scrawls him a personalized note and lets him take a selfie.

"Don't post that anywhere until after Easter," Papi warns him. "After Easter? Go wild, tell as many people as you want with my blessing. But not before then."

"You have my word, Mr. Reyes sir," the clerk says shakily.

"Check your email, amigo," I tell him.

He does, and his jaw drops. "A car loan?"

"Not just a loan. See the other one? I set up an account for you. Payments will make themselves."

"A car." He sounds like he's going to hyperventilate. "I-I was expecting maybe twenty dollars, not twenty thousand for a car!"

"Go big or go home," Papi says smugly. "While I'm thinking about it...the Easter Gala. We'll need rooms. Can we reserve those now?"

"Sure," the clerk says in a dazed voice.

Moments later, penthouse reservation confirmed, we're weaving our way through traffic with Jerome following us. One lunch of brick-oven pizza later, we head back to the rental car place and Papi poses for a selfie with the omnic attendant, giving xir the same warning about not sharing it before Easter. Then we file onto the ship and settle in for a comfortable trans-Atlantic cuddlepile.

"Next year," Papi says lazily, "we're doing Thanksgiving at home. Fuck the traditional stuff, though. Everyone makes their specialty."

Equally lazy murmurs of agreement are all the response he gets.

Chapter End Notes

At some point, Widow cut her hair short - to just barely her chin. I'm not sure when exactly. Probably before she picked her new name.

The only reason Estelita is able to afford even a shitty townhouse is that she gets some sort of pension from Gabriel's death. It's greatly reduced because she never bothered to get her citizenship. She's going to have a much less pleasant time when he comes out as alive. The unspecified "him" is her 'boyfriend' who in all probability was a middle-aged drug dealer using her for a place to crash.

Gabe stopped in to check on some of his friends a few times until the Omnic Crisis started and he was tapped for Overwatch. He hadn't been back to LA since. And Jesse
did, in fact, understand enough to know how much he was being insulted.

You may remember Juan Santos from the chapter 'Idle Hands', wherein he 'liked' Gabriel's bara doberman profile pic. He had a younger sister, who got ditched by Miguel's father before he was even born. The sister died when Miguel was little, and Juan's father hasn't been in the picture for a while, so their family was just Miguel, Juan, and Juan's mom. And that's why they were running the restaurant by themselves on Thanksgiving. Miguel was very likely terrified by Gabe because he thought Gabe was a crime lord's representative. Considering the company he was keeping, I mean.

Miguel asked for Sombra's number. She looked him in the eye and said, "If my brother didn't shoot you, and my sister didn't stab you, my Papi would kill you with his bare hands. When a woman is interested, amigo, she'll tell you."

It hasn't been explicitly stated, but Sombra kept the purple eyes. They're an augmentation anyway. She'd had them since before she went omnic.

The hotel clerk recognized Sombra from the "false god" footage, once her hair had been returned to its iconic state.

Sombra tips -crazy- heavily. All the times they went out with Reaper-dog, she basically dropped $1,000 as the collateral/tip. Money does no good if it's not being spent, in her opinion, and she has so much of it that $20,000 is pocket change.

Of course Jerome can keep up with Gabriel's combat-conditions driving. He's used to flying in questionably safe situations.
Epilogue: April Fool's

Chapter Summary

Sometimes, pranks backfire. Sometimes...this isn't a bad thing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

April first. I know there's going to be pranking, I've got some of my own planned, but the question is...what is Papi going to do?

Listen. Sniff. Nothing unusual. Cautiously open my eyes, nothing out of the ordinary. Get up, check door, safe. Now prepared for anything, I venture out of my room and head into the kitchen. Coffee's already brewing, which means Papi's probably up already and ready to get the drop on me, but I step into the kitchen and-

Cake?

There's a small cake on the counter, a single purple candle stuck in the top and burning. White frosting, purple flowers. Clearly, judging by the camera that's recording my reaction, a throwback to the time I left a nearly-identical cake for Reaper on his birthday, but...

"Couldn't find your birthday," Papi says smugly from behind me, and I can almost see his arms crossed, his head tilted back just slightly in a self-satisfied challenge, "so I've decided this is your birthday now. Happy Birthday, Alessandra."

He said it like he was expecting me to be indignant, but tears are welling up in my eyes. This is my birthday now. Papi Gabriel said so. I'm his daughter, and today is my birthday. That cake, it's for me. Birthday cake just for me. Cake my Papi got just for me, because today is my birthday. I blink, and the tears escape to trail down my cheeks.

Footsteps behind me. "Hija?" he asks hesitantly.

"Thank you," I whisper, and then whirl and throw myself into his surprised arms to bury my face in my Papi's chest and cry because today is my birthday now.

He holds me tightly, stroking my hair and making soothing murmurs until I've wound down enough to be breathing "thank you" out on every shaky exhale. Still, he doesn't let go until I move to step back and when I wipe my eyes and look at his face, he's watching me with concern.

"Thank you," I tell him in a quiet but steady voice, and I know I'm beaming. "This is the best surprise ever."

He's not reassured, and he crosses his arms again. "What are you not telling me, Alé?"

My eyes drop and I play with my fingers for a minute. "Before my birthday was today...it was January first."
I'm wincing, eyes closed, and that's why Papi's crushing hug takes me by surprise.

"Fuck, Alé, no wonder I couldn't find it. No wonder...I'm so sorry. That had to be the worst...I'm sorry, hija. I'm sorry."

"It's okay." I get my arms free enough to hug him again. "It's okay, Papi. Today is my birthday now. Can I have cake for breakfast? I haven't had a birthday cake of my own since..."

He hugs me tighter. "Si, Alé. You can have cake for breakfast." He releases me enough to put his hands on my shoulders and kiss my forehead. "Go blow out your candle and make a wish."

That makes me laugh, and I'm kind of surprised that I can. "But what could I possibly wish for? That I have a birthday is already the best birthday gift."

"Well," he says, lips twitching as he tries and fails to hold back a grin, "as I understand it, a pony is sort of traditional."

"But I don't want a pony."

"And you wouldn't get one anyway, but that's not important, hija. What's important is the tradition."

"Fine," I sigh with false melodrama, and then grin at him.

Following tradition, I lean over the cake, close my eyes, think I wish for a pony, and blow. When I open them, the wick smokes slightly and Papi's pulling the candle out of the cake.

"Sit," he says. "I'll bring it to you. Birthday girl."

Laughing again, I sit. "Bring me a knife and two forks," I tell him. "I want to cut the cake."

"It's your cake, Alé," he says sternly as he sets it in front of me.

I raise an eyebrow at him. "Are you going to argue with the birthday girl? On her birthday?"

He thinks about it, then shakes his head and chuckles before bringing me a knife and two forks.

"And a plate."

He sets a small plate down next to me. Carefully, I cut about a quarter of the tiny cake into a wedge and lay it on the plate before handing it, and the fork, to him.

Still shaking his head slightly, he sits and waits for me to take a forkful of cake before he toasts me with his. "Happy Birthday, Alé."

Mouth full of marble cake and white frosting, I just bask in what's probably one of the happiest moments of my life.
Jesse flops down onto the couch next to me while I've got screens open, digging into Mexico's national registry.

"Hey, Alé, I thought Dad was gonna prank you."

"He did," I answer absently.

"You don't seem too upset. From the way he kept going on about it, I thought for sure I'd hear the yelling."

Papi comes out of the kitchen. "Turns out today actually is her birthday," he says. "Joke's on me."

"So whatcha doing, shadow-sis?"

Slide the altered file in, aaaand...done. I close the screens. "Returning myself to legal status. DNA, fingerprints, birthday, parents, it's all there now."

"Not worried about someone spoiling your big reveal?" Jesse asks.

"Nah. Unless someone tries to run my prints between now and the Easter Gala...and has authorization to look in the Mexican systems..." I shrug.

"You still have to wear a suit, mijo," Papi says sternly. "...but I made you a formal hat to go with it."

Jesse sits up in surprise. "You did??"

"No. April Fool's."

Despite himself, Jesse laughs.

It's steak for dinner. Jesse's grilled them and brings them up on a covered tray while I finish preparing the sides. He leaves the tray on the stove, which is why there's no witnesses when I rub the specially-ordered realistic squeaky steak all over them and then place it on Papi's plate. His actual steak stays covered, out of sight. 'Rienne comes in to help me by setting the table, and then she goes to fetch our brother and father - or rather, to let them know it's ready and then get out of the way. Everyone's seated in short order, and Papi breathes in the aroma of roasted flesh with a beatific look. Then he picks up his steak knife and stabs what he thinks is a slab of meat with his fork.

It squeaks.

Everyone freezes.

Gingerly, Papi removes his fork and sets his knife down. Jesse and 'Rienne both take huge bites of potato or vegetable to keep from laughing, but I'm sitting there with the biggest smile my mouth can make itself into, hands clenched in my lap, watching Gabriel Reyes pick up a squeaky plastic
steak and lick steak juice off of it.

"I assume there's an actual steak somewhere for me," he says mildly.

"Si, Papi."

"I wasn't expecting this. Well done."

"April Fool's."

Then he bites into it and jerks in unmistakable delight when it squeaks. A good half a minute passes while we watch a grown man chew a squeaky rubber steak and wriggle in what would be crazy wagging if he were a dog.

"Fuck, I missed that," he says when he finally stops chewing on it and stands up. "I'm assuming my actual steak is under the cover?"

"Si," I answer, wondering if I should get him rawhide for Father's Day.

"Good, good. I'm just going to...wash this..." He gives me a one-armed hug on his way by. "Thank you, Alé. I guess we both know each other better than we think we do."

Jesse grins. "Man, and all I got was an actual April Fool's gag instead of a secretly-a-nice-thing-for-you gag."

"I actually did make you a formal cowboy hat," Papi says as he rinses his plastic steak. "April Fool's."

The cowboy sits straight up. "You did?"

"I did. I was serious about you wearing a suit to my coming-out party."

I roll my eyes while Adrienne giggles. "Not just your coming-out party, Papi. It's my coming-out party, too. And it's an actual party, we're just special guests."

"Please, Alé, we're the best guests. If we don't make headlines, I'll be pissed."

"What if the headlines are bad?" Adrienne asks in her quiet voice.

"Doesn't matter, as long as they're still about us," Papi says as he stabs his steak and slaps it down onto his plate. "You still want to sit it out?"

She nods. "Too much like...things I remember."

Jesse and I lean over to hug her from either side.

"It's okay, quiet-sis," he says reassuringly. "We'll tell you stories when we get back."

"Best brother," she murmurs. Then she reaches out and sticks gold stars on the tips of both our noses at the same time. "Boop."
Gabriel kept the video. He never, ever showed it to anyone. Aside from Sombra having kept the secret of -his- birthday and therefore deserving the same respect, her original birthday was something so traumatic that she kept it hidden through two different confessions (the emotional evisceration for Winston, and the aborted New Year's party). He can't take away a wound over thirty years old, but he can damn well prevent anyone else from poking it.

Sombra's been letting her hair grow out on the sides. It's long enough to hide her distinctive cranial augmentations again.
Finally, the world will know that Gabriel Reyes is alive...and has a daughter. This doesn't go the way -anyone- was expecting.

The Los Angeles Easter Gala. News that Jack Morrison and Jesse McCree and the mysterious couple who’ve been spotted with them are going to be there has all the hot names showing up. Politicians, celebrities, the rich, the famous, the powerful. Naturally there’s a nice, open red-carpet area for all the guests to be seen in, going from their limos to the door, and a crowd of reporters and cameramen three rows deep surrounds it. Jack gets out first, looking rough but distinguished in his suit, and there’s a sea of lights and a roar of exclamations. Jesse makes a smaller splash, as neatly cleaned-up as we could get him in a suit of his own with a fancy formal cowboy hat perched on his head and his signature BAMF belt buckle neatly shined.

“Ready, Alé?” Papi asks.

I nod, and he steps out of the limo, ignoring the crowd (which is now babbling in a frenzy because it’s not like Papi is hard to recognize with his face uncovered) to turn and help me out. My dress is a sleeveless, one-shouldered confection of shimmering ivory with a spiral of purple butterflies drawing the eye from my left shoulder down past my bust, around my waist, over my hip, and crossing from one leg to the other to end just above my right ankle. The purple butterfly hairclip I got so long ago is perched above my right ear. Papi, of course, is smoking in his suit and the matching black crystal-and-silver butterfly is glittering on his chest as a tie clip. We both look good, and we know it, and like royalty we ignore the shouted questions and flashes as we start to follow the other two inside. That is, until I hear-

“…Gabriel Reyes, the Butcher of Blackwatch.”

I stop dead, which makes Papi stop, which gets everyone’s attention, but I’m focused on identifying who said that. There! Dark skin, buzzed hair, beard. Middle-Eastern, possibly. About six feet and two-fifty to two-seventy, used to be in shape or is trying to get into shape, mid-thirties. Microphone in one hand, hand-held camera in the other, shirt proclaims his allegiance to a small streaming station I’ve never heard of.

“What did you call my Papi?” I ask, giving him a chance to take it back before things get messy.

Suddenly, the big-name station cameras are trained on us.

“The Butcher of Blackwatch,” he repeats. “Your Papi ordered some very bad things done, miss...?” The mic is extended towards me hopefully.

I lean into it and make eye contact with the camera. “Alessandra Reyes. And those very bad things saved a lot of lives, so unless you think terrorist masterminds don’t need to be stopped, even if it’s
by snipers or poison or a knife in the back, then you better take back what you said or I will kick your ass right here on national television, mister…?"

“Bahari,” he says. Then he gives me a once-over. “You’re going to kick my ass.”

“If you don’t take it back.”

“In that dress.”

“Think it over, Alé,” Papi calls from behind me. “You don’t want to ruin your dress or your nails before we even get inside. He’s not worth that.”

Bahari smirks. The smirk dies when Papi continues.

“Come over here, take my coat. I’ll hold your shoes.”

When I look, he’s unbuttoning his suit jacket. “Last chance,” I tell Bahari.

He leers at me. “Oh, no. I want to see you try to kick my ass now.”

“Fine. Wait right there.”

I go over to Papi. A few of the big-name reporters are also taking off their suit jackets to form a makeshift dressing room for me. I slip out of my lovely ivory gown and hand it through the wall of jackets, then button Papi’s jacket over my flesh-tone spandex undergarments before stepping out of the matching ivory heels and passing those over, as well. The wall of cloth comes down, and I remember the butterfly hairclip. Papi’s got my dress over one arm and my shoes in the other hand. I clip the purple butterfly to the cuff of his dress shirt.

“Kick his ass, Alé,” he tells me. “I got your flower.”

“It’s a butterfly, Papi.”

He rolls his eyes. “Just go kick his ass, hija.”

Bahari’s gotten some other reporter to hold his camera and microphone, and he’s doing exaggerated warming-up motions in the middle of the red-carpet area, bouncing on the balls of his feet, limbering his arms, rolling his head and shoulders.

“Ready?” I ask him in a challenge, my hands fisted over my professionally-done nails, ivory with shimmery purple butterflies.

“Oh, yeah,” he answers.

I kick him in the chin.

His head snaps back as the ball of my right foot shoots up to shut his mouth for him. He staggers back a few steps, but I’m already there, feet flashing. It only takes two kicks (one to the side, one to the knee) to knock him off-balance, and then it’s a low sweep to get him on the ground. I give him half a dozen good kicks to various tender spots in the torso before he rolls over and curls up into a ball. A few to the side and back, one to the back of the head, and then I roll him onto his stomach and pose for the cameras with one foot on his back, my hands on my hips, like hunters used to pose
with something they’d killed.

The crowd goes wild.

I can hear questions shouted to Papi as I change back into my dress, once again behind three or four other suit jackets.

“Commander Reyes, why are you wearing a butterfly tie clip?”

“Because it looks good on me.” He tosses the words out so nonchalantly, but I remember – that’s what I said to him, back in the early days, after the first time I went out and brought something back for him.

The instant the coats come down and Papi pins my hairclip back into place, it’s my name they’re shouting.

“Miss Reyes! When you said you would kick his ass, did you intend that to be literal? We were expecting you to punch him.”

I raise one eyebrow to the reporter. "What, and break my nails?"

“Miss Alessandra! Who designed the dress you’re wearing?”

“Oh, this?” I laugh and gesture dismissively. “This just something my Papi made me.”

“Commander Reyes! Is Alessandra your daughter?”

Papi crosses his arms smugly. “You can’t prove that she’s not.”

Jesse and Jack are watching from the door – and so are what looks like half the guests who’ve already arrived.

“How come you never let me beat the crap out of a reporter?” Jesse calls over to Papi.

“She’s my favorite child, I thought you knew that,” he calls back.

Then he offers me his arm again, and we resume our regal procession to the door.

“I wish you hadn’t done that,” Jack murmurs to me as he and Jesse flank us.

“Shut up, Morrison, she’s perfect.”

“Don’t worry, Uncle Jack, he can’t press charges. He instigated the fight and waited for me to change and then confirmed he was ready.”

Jack sighs. “You’re definitely Gabe’s daughter.”
immediately into a cluster of politicians while Jesse winks at me and saunters off in the direction of a couple of women who were giving him appraising looks. Papi and I circulate at random, trailed by a handful of discreet reporters. Am I really his daughter? Yes. Adopted? No, direct genetic relation. Why hasn't anyone heard about me? I didn't know about her, Papi answers. I was indiscreet in my youth. What has he been up to since the explosion? Recovering. How did we find each other after thirty years? Completely by accident, Papi says, while I laugh and give the (completely truthful) not-answer of 'You wouldn't believe me if I told you'.

My dress gets plenty of compliments; Papi gets plenty of not-so-subtle hints that he should design and sell clothes. He pretends to not get the hints.

/Help/ an omnic with a Numbani algorithm says politely but with a hint of desperation. /Can someone tell me how I convey to this human female that I do not eat and thus, have no stake in whether or not other humans consume the flesh of animals?/

"Hey, Papi," I say in a low voice, "you wanna fuck with a vegan?"

The toothy, eager grin he gives me is all the answer I need.

/Help is on the way," I answer, triangulating in the linkweb. /I am bringing Gabriel Reyes to create a distraction for you./

/Bless you, friend. I hope we can talk under more pleasant circumstances later./

Papi and I move casually-but-with-purpose through the crowd and finally find the poor omnic trapped against a pillar by a woman in a screamingly loud pantsuit and too much jewelry. Her hair looks like it escaped from the 1980s.

"...humanitarian even if you aren't human," she's saying, "and I just don't think that anyone who is really civilized should be supporting an industry of commercialized murder! Especially not for something as trivial as misguided ideas of nutrition!"

"I agree," Papi says.

The omnic throws me a startled but grateful look and retreats the instant the woman turns away from him.

"Commander Reyes!" The lady flutters her eyelashes. "You do? I didn't expect..."

"Oh, absolutely." He gives her such an earnestly solemn look that I have to force myself to not smile. "Murder should never be commercialized. If someone needs to die, you should always take the time to personally make sure they're dead."

The eager nodding stops abruptly as she realizes what he said. "No, I'm talking about the murder of animals. A true humanitarian wouldn't support that."

"Well, of course not!"

The fluttering comes back. "Commander Reyes, are you saying that you consider yourself a true humanitarian?"

"Well, I was for several years." Papi frowns thoughtfully. "That is what you call it when you only
eat humans, right?"

The woman lets out a horrified shriek.

To keep from laughing, I say, "I think that's just being a cannibal, Papi."

"No, hija, a cannibal is someone eating others of their own species as well as other foods. I'm talking about a diet of nothing but humans."

I produce a thoughtful frown of my own. "I don't think there is a word for that, Papi."

"You're a monster," the woman declares in scandalized tones.

Papi grins and drapes an arm around me. "Not anymore, thanks to my daughter."

She huffs off while Jack hurries up.

"I heard a scream. Everything okay?" Then he realizes we're both laughing and covers his eyes with one hand. "Oh my god. What did you two do?"

"Rescued a Numbani omnic from a vegan," I tell him.

Jack massages his temples. "Tell me nobody died."

"Nobody died," Papi repeats with smug obedience.

"Okay. Fine. Nobody died. I don't want to know what you did. Just promise me you won't maim or kill anyone."

"I'll make sure he doesn't, Uncle Jack."

Jack gives me a resigned but unhappy look. "That's kind of what I'm afraid of."

Despite Uncle Jack's fears, the rest of the gala goes smoothly. The Numbani omnic finds us again and is pleasantly surprised to discover that I'm Sombra. The three of us chat for a while before Papi excuses himself for what I know is going to be a quickie because of the subtle emphasis on the word 'duck' when he says he has to duck out for a few minutes. Jesse ambles up to join us while he's gone, and I recount for them both how Papi's exchange with the vegan woman went.

/But surely,/ Maduenu the omnic says, /Commander Reyes didn't really survive on a diet of humans./

/For a handful of years after the explosion, he existed at the mercy of a badly-programmed nanite swarm that absorbed nutrients by inserting itself between the molecules of a person or object. It was a dark time for him./ I finish.

"Ah, and that would be why he said that thanks to you, he was no longer a monster." Maduenu nods in satisfaction while Jesse's eyebrows go up at the jump in conversation. "I understand now."
Papi makes his reappearance a few minutes later, while I'm chatting with a handful of female celebrities about things that have nothing to do with current events. Dogs, movies, ordinary things. The rest of the evening passes harmlessly, and we collect Uncle Jack and my cowboy brother before slipping back to our hotel.

Surprisingly, Jesse's the first one up and in the suite's main room the next morning, scanning headlines and news stories. Or maybe not so surprisingly, considering it's hard to get lonely at a party where everyone wants to talk to you about your dad and sister. Thankfully, he put the coffee on so all the rest of us have to do is pour ourselves mugs and sit on the circular pit-couch and wait until our brains finish booting up.

Before that happens, though, my cowboy brother lets out a snorting laugh.

"Hey Dad, did you know you're an unliving creature of the night?"

"Not anymore, I'm not," Papi answers while Jack looks up and exclaims, "He's what?"

Jesse touches the tabloid article and reads it out loud, amusement dripping from every word. Apparently someone overheard the conversation about humanitarians and decided that, combined with the fact that Gabriel Reyes apparently got ten years younger rather than five years older, he spent those years as a vampire before I somehow restored him to human form. Jack spends the entire recitation with his face in his hands, moaning 'no, no, no' while Papi laughs after every sentence until he's wiping tears from his eyes and gasping for breath. I'm torn between the two reactions, because while I think it's objectively funny, I'm still not comfortable not blending in.

"Well," Papi gasps when the article is over, "they're not completely wrong."

"Reyes, no," Jack protests.

Papi sips his coffee smugly. "You can't spell Reyes without yes," he counters. "I was dead. I'm back now. So I guess that makes me undead, huh?"

"You are not a vampire."

"Not anymore. Thanks to my loving daughter. Who, technically, turned me."

"Well, Dad," Papi counters. "They're not completely wrong."

"Reyes, no," Jack protests.

Papi sips his coffee smugly. "You can't spell Reyes without yes," he counters. "I was dead. I'm back now. So I guess that makes me undead, huh?"

"You are not a vampire."

"Not anymore. Thanks to my loving daughter. Who, technically, turned me."

They both look at me, but I've got my face in my hands because there's too much truth to just debunk the vampire thing. Gabriel Reyes vanished at 55 and should be at least 60, but I used the full-body scan from when he was 45 to shape his final configuration. He did eat people and suck out their nutrients. The black cape. The mist. And it's not like he's been in a church recently, either. Technically, he fits the description. It's not like he was alive while he was Reaper. Technically, I came back to life, too, but...damn, I died way before Gabriel Reyes did. There's no way I can claim he sired me as a vampire.

"Back from being...not-a-vampire, not into one!"

"I was a technological vampire," he says, grinning.
"Don't encourage them, Papi! I gonna have to start carrying a mirror to prove you not a vampire!"

His expression gets even more excited. "Make one that edits out my reflection."

I cover my face with my hands. "You are twice my age, why am I the adult??"

"Who says adults can't make the most of things, Alé?"

My hands drop. He's serious. He is going to deliberately encourage the vampire thing. I'm not going to win this. "If you gonna tell people I'm a witch or necromancer or whatever, I better get a dress to match the story."

"Done," he says instantly, looking both astonished and pleased beyond words. "A dress worthy of the most amazing technomancer in the world."

"Technomancer isn't even a real thing!"

Silence. All three of them are staring at me with well, actually, now that I think about it looks.

"I guess that is what I am, isn't it?" I sigh. "Fiiiine, I'll make you a mirror that shows everything but you."

Papi looks at me the way he used to when I'd just produced yet another squeaky steak to replace the one he'd killed. "You're the best."

Jack groans.

"I'll make you a mummy costume for Halloween, old man," Papi teases. "And you, mijo, are going as a werewolf. The three classic movie monsters, with Alé as a technomancer."

"What about Tia Ana?"

He grins at me. "We'll need to work together to get her ghost costume figured out."

I grin back, understanding for the first time what the phrase refuge in audacity means, and feeling the heady excitement that goes with it.

You can't spell Reyes without yes.

Chapter End Notes

This is probably the last time anyone directly referred to Gabriel Reyes as "the Butcher of Blackwatch". The big-name reporters weren't about to turn down the chance to get in good with Commander Reyes (and maybe get an interview later) by helping out his daughter.

Sombra does a lot of foot-based martial arts because of the screen manipulation nails - even if she didn't break the nails themselves, punching carries the risk of damaging the
anchors connecting them to the bones of her fingers. The reporter wasn't actually unconscious, he was just playing dead in hopes of salvaging at least a little dignity.

Jack's given up hope of completely keeping Gabe - and now Sombra, as well - from causing trouble. As long as no one's being maimed or killed, he counts that a win. This is a lesson he learned from Ana.

Gabe does, actually, encourage the vampire thing. Any time the story seems to have died, he'd stir it back up himself. He also created a replica Reaper costume and trolls various people by claiming (truthfully, although they don't know that) to have been Reaper.
Epilogue: Family Day 2

Chapter Summary

McCree's about to learn that Familia Reyes is, in fact, for life.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Alé!" Papi calls from the butcher's section of the grocery store. "Have you heard from your brother yet?"

"Not yet!" I call back.

"Well, see if you can track that trash cowboy down! I'm not buying four racks of ribs unless he's there to cook them!"

I pull up a screen and poke Jesse's phone. He doesn't answer. Remote override, and...the screen shows me the inside of a cheap motel room with one half-naked trash cowboy passed out on the bed. There's enough cans and bottles scattered around to tell me that he's had a bad week, but at least they’re beer. That's the downside to him wandering off for weeks at a time - sometimes he's having fun adventures helping people and just being a low-key hero passing through, other times he's being eaten alive by his abandonment issues and trying to drown them out. I do try to call every few days, check in and see if he needs anything, let him know he's loved and missed, but if he's dead set on spending a week drunk in a motel there's not much I can do without taking away his agency.

Papi comes up and deposits the pork for the tamales into the cart. "That damned ingrate drunk again?" he growls. The frown is worried rather than angry, though. "McCree!"

The cowboy jerks on the bed and looks around wildly, his eyes bloodshot.

"The fuck you think you're doing, boy?" Papi barks. "You clean your ass up and get it on a plane today or so help me, I will drag you back myself! You hear me?"

"Loud 'n clear, sir," Jesse barks back.

"Good. Your sisters and I are shopping for Thursday's Family Day dinner. You still doing ribs, or-"

He doesn't bother finishing the question. Lizard-quick, the cowboy has vacated the bed and can be heard in the motel room's bathroom.

"Schedule him a cab and make sure he has a ticket," Papi sighs. "I'm not buying the ribs. If he's feeling up to it, we'll make a special trip. Maybe Friday. I'm going to go over to produce and think up something else to make, since two desserts and tamales is just a little lopsided."

Adrienne finds me while I'm making Jesse's travel arrangements. "No Jesse?" she asks, frowning.
"Nah. We gonna drag him into it. Familia Reyes for life."

She grins at me. "Good. He needs to be reminded that we care. Where is Papi?"

"Right here," he says, carrying a bag of unhusked corn ears. "Change of plans. Street corn and I'm gonna do some sort of fried bacon-cheese thing. 'Rienne, come help me pick out a cheese."

Quiet-sis makes a small, pleased sound. "Does this mean no tres leches cake?"

"Nope. Your opera cake will be our sole dessert."

That makes her look both pleased and disappointed.

"Hey, Papi, if Jesse does ribs on Friday, can we have tres leches then?"

"Oooh. Good call, hija. What do you think, 'Rienne?"

"I like this idea," she says firmly.

We get the ribs after all.

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Between his phone, the omnic cab driver, and the airline systems, I can track McCree's movements pretty well. He checks out of the motel at the last possible minute and goes...to a pub. He does eat, but he also drinks. The cab gets him to the airport after the last direct flight has left, but if he was hoping that would get him off the hook, he's sadly mistaken. It takes two connections and flying (or waiting to fly) all night, but when he stumbles out of the Zurich airport late Wednesday morning, he's greeted by the smiling faceplate of Fran, the omnic driver I hired when Papi and I decided we were just going to live in the safehouse. He slouches into the wing and into his room before anyone can greet him, much less hug him and offer him food.

I remote-override his phone, but he's stuck it under his pillow. Papi pounds on his door, shouting demands that he open up, say hello, or at least tell us if he's making ribs tomorrow. He gets no answer.

"He's alive," I confirm from the couch.

Lunch is subdued. While we're eating and cleaning up, Jesse sneaks out. Adrienne distracts Papi with wanting to try her hand at a pumpkin pie, and I go out looking for my trash cowboy brother. He's not in his favorite bar, he's left his phone in his room, and he's paying in cash. By the time I finally find him, he's in some trendy little pub halfway across town, already drunk and staring morosely into the bottom of a glass while a shot of tequila sits untouched beside him. As I sit down, he slides the shot over to me in silent apology for how hard he made me work to find him.

I drink it; he actually ordered something good. This wasn't meant for him, he was absolutely expecting me. "Jesse," I start gently, "what's wrong?"

He swirls the last mouthful of amber liquid around in the glass before drinking it. "If you weren't my sister," he says slowly, "an' you were still into ridin' horses...would you fuck me?"
Part of me wants to laugh. The rest wants to cringe and hide.

"If th' answer's no, y'can just say that."

"If I answer that question," I tell him, "you're done for the night. Water, juice, no more booze."

He gives me a funny look.

"I want to be sure you remember it in the morning."

Jesse pushes his glass aside and screws the cap back onto what's left of the bottle. "Okay, deal."

I gesture for a pitcher of water and another glass. While he's drinking, I mentally brace myself.

"When I was a teenager," I say, cringing, "you were my celebrity crush."

Silence.

Warily, I look at him and discover he's staring at me in shock. "Me?" he gasps out. "You...why?"

I arch one eyebrow at him. "Um, were you not aware of how hot you were in your early twenties?"

Jesse colors and pours himself another glass to avoid answering.

"I saw the skinny-dipping video. You aged damn well - if you don't count that bush growing out of your face," I tease. "Remember I hated you a little for being the adopted son of Gabriel Reyes? If we'd crossed paths, the other reason I would have been all over you is because you were his adopted son."

"And the first reason?" he asks, like he's not sure he's actually hearing this.

"I'd already learned that not all men looked as good without clothes as you."

"So you'd really..." He trails off, blushing harder.

"Part of me regrets I never got the chance," I admit. It's easier sharing the embarrassment when it's just as uncomfortable for Jesse, too. "But if I had..."

"More awkward than you wakin' my horse," he agrees, downing another glass of water.

"Rough week out there?"

He mumbles something unintelligible.

I move to the seat next to him. "What was that?"

"You'll think I'm..."

"Jesse, how am I gonna judge you? Literally the first thing you learned about me is that I was a whore!"
"Yeah," he says darkly, "but at least you were a pretty whore."

Well, there's confirmation of a suspicion I'd had since the first time he'd chased a guy away by hitting on him. There's a reason I check on his account when he's away and slide him some traveling funds if it looks a little low. I don't want him having to make his own money.

"At least you're still interested in going past just looking," I counter quietly. "Jesse...you're my brother. Nothing you've done is gonna change that."

"Ran into...someone who used to know me," he mutters. "Knew just what to say t' get past everything an' hit me where it hurts most. Didn't give 'im the satisfaction of seein' it, but..."

"Got just one question, cowboy."

Warily, he looks at me. "What's that?"

"You want me to ruin his life from a distance, or are we taking a family trip to kick his ass into next century?"

"Don't bother," Jesse says, grimly drinking more water. "He's a twisted old fuck who can only get laid by paying the desperate whores, and he's too ugly to even do that without offering a lot more money or spewing bullshit and hoping someone swallows it. His life is punishment. I've got family, and friends, and I'm good-looking enough to score with the ladies on my own. Sometimes."

"Okay. Just remember, offer's open if you change your mind."

He laughs a little. "Thanks, shadow-sis."

"It's Family Day tomorrow," I remind him gently. "Quiet-sis missed you."

Jesse looks away. "Think I'm gonna pass this year. Don't wanna bring you all down with me."

I don't try to counter that; it won't do any good. Instead, I ask, "You eat anything yet today?"

It's not a surprise when he shakes his head no. The pub does food, of course. I order him something that looks like chicken pot pie served in a hollowed-out, smallish loaf of round bread and sit with him while he eats. Fran is waiting outside when Jesse's done eating, and he doesn't argue when I herd him out and into the car.

The ride back is quiet.

The morning of Family Day is...chaotic. Adrienne is worried she's going to screw up her Opera cake, so after a breakfast from which our trash cowboy is conspicuously absent, she claims the entire kitchen for herself. After securing agreement that we'll have food done for noon and then go track our cowboy down, Papi and I grab our ingredients and scatter to the kitchen on the third floor instead. While we're waiting for the pork to cook, I tell him about Jesse's run-in with an ugly old man and that he's doing the 'convinced nobody actually cares, secretly hoping to be proven wrong' thing again.
"I hope you're right," he sighs. "He's not getting out of this, but if he goes too far, it'll be awkward to bring the party to him."

Timing everything to be done about the same time is tricky. Luckily, the safehouse catering kitchen has all kinds of food transport items. Tamales, grilled street corn, and bacon-cheese croquettes are all packed securely in hot-bags, and 'Rienne's absolutely gorgeous Opera cake goes on a covered cold-tray. There's also an impressive stack of petite-fours on a serving plate, but her expression warns us to not ask, and she's the smart one who suggests we bring plates and napkins. Jesse, of course, has vacated the premises at some point. It doesn't matter; he went to his favorite bar and has been nursing the same whiskey for the last twenty minutes.

Fran is more than happy to ferry us over and spare us an awkward walk. There's actually a moderate amount of people there considering the lunch hour, and sure enough, Jesse McCree is sitting at the far end of the bar, trying to wallow in his misery. The look on his face as he turns and sees us approaching is priceless.

"Y'all didn't have to..." is all he gets out before we're there, setting our burdens on the stools or the wooden counter itself.

"Shut up, McCree," Papi growls through his grin. "You didn't think you'd get out of this that easily, did you?"

"Familia Reyes for life," Adrienne chides him.

Jesse stares helplessly at me. I stare unrepentantly back. "I told you your sister missed you. You wanna stay where you are," I ask, "or should we grab a table?"

Wordlessly, he points at an unoccupied table. I grab the hot-bags and haul them over while Papi orders a bottle of good tequila, and 'Rienne brings the cold-tray. Jesse still looks like he's not sure what the fuck just happened, but when I uncover the tamales and street corn, he gives in. He doesn't care what happened as long as he gets to eat the delicious things we brought with us.

"You guys are the best," he mumbles around a mouthful of corn. "I don't deserve you."

"Too bad," Papi tells him, pouring shots of tequila. "You're stuck with us. Also, if you're really feeling repentant, we bought four racks of ribs."

"Papi!" I wait for the inevitable chuckles to die down and then add, "If you make the ribs, Papi will make tres leches to go with them."

Jesse groans. "Oh my god. You're killing me, shadow-sis. All this fantastic food and now you're taunting me with tres leches?"


"Fine. I'll cook the ribs, if y'all're so eager for my meat..." He grins at the groans. "But we're gonna need help eating four racks."

"Let us worry about that," Papi says, passing shots around. "Now - to Familia Reyes! Because you can't spell Reyes without yes."
Four shot glasses clink together. "To us!" we say in unison before tossing the shots back.

I grin at my family. “Because we just that good.”

Chapter End Notes

McCree gets restless and wanders. The other three mostly stay put because Zurich is a fairly central location, easy to do day trips or be visited. Although Overwatch is up and running by this point, Gabriel is not an official part - he's an outside "Risk Assessment Analyst". In other words, it's his job to tell Jack when he's being an idiot or when something is a dumb idea. It technically ranks him above Jack, which helps keep their friendship healthy.

There's a mountain of petite-fours because Widow made a bunch of extra cake layers and then was like 'well fuck, now what do I do with them?'

The next year, Family Day included just about everyone Overwatch-related that could be called 'family' and it was a huge potluck of everyone's specialties. Pretty sure Genji dragged Hanzo along and there was awkward socialization.
Epilogue: April Fool's 2

Chapter Summary

I think you know where Gabriel stands on the importance of birthday traditions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Two weeks in Dorado with Gabriel Reyes is everything I ever daydreamed and more. Los Muertos are distinctly better off than they were when I left, which is only to be expected when I funneled a bunch of Talon's resources to them. Papi practically adopts the whole gang, claiming they're his kids by virtue of appreciating his aesthetic, and of course the whole "family" goes crazy at the fact that not only did their little shadow come back to them from the dead, but I brought Papi Gabriel back from the dead with me. We go to all the places, eat all the food, buy bags of clothes and souvenirs. He stares at the statues of the Overwatch Strike Force, each and every one of them arranged with himself dead center flanked by Jack and Ana, and tries to hide how choked up he is at having been so honored after how long he spent pushed out of the spotlight or swept under the rug. We startle the crap out of random people by listening for the phrase 'What would Papi Gabriel do?' and then having Papi burst into the conversation with what he would do. For some reason, no one actually expects Papi Gabriel to appear and offer his two cents and it amuses him to no end. We go to the memorial for all the ones who died during the New Year's Massacre, something I never had the courage to do before I left. I find my mother's name and then spend the next half hour or so crying into Papi's shoulder while he hugs me and rubs my back gently.

To cheer me up after that, we go to the church I was made to attend before Los Muertos adopted me, and find the priest who kept telling me that God had a very special plan for me, and that's why He killed my mother. He remembers me, surprisingly (or maybe not, because a 6-year-old calmly demanding an explanation for the senseless death of her mother is probably not something he encountered much), but he's less than pleased when I inform him brightly that he was right, God did have a very special plan for me! ...I had to save Reaper from the Devil and help him become Gabriel Reyes again. The news that Commander Reyes believes in the Devil but not God because he'd met (and I'd killed) the Devil is also less than welcome. "But then God sent this girl to you as an angel!" the priest protests.

Papi's having none of it. "Look, buddy," he snarls, "any god that would torture a small child to shape her into a weapon for killing the Devil is not a god I would describe as loving and kind so either you lose the fluffy love crap and admit that your god is a brutal motherfucker and I might acknowledge him..." He pauses for emphasis. "...or you can go fuck yourself because I know what my daughter's been through, and as her father, it makes me want to rip someone apart with my bare fucking hands so if your god truly sees us as his children, then he's a worse parent than my old man was, and that's saying something!"

He doesn't even wait for the priest to finish gaping like a dying fish. With a mutter of 'come on, we're out of here' he leads me out of the church and then hugs me when we're back in the sunlight.
"That may have been a little blasphemous," he says, not sounding sorry at all.

"And that’s why you were my role model when I was little," I inform him cheerfully.

He laughs. "You are a wicked girl, Alé."

"I take after you, Papi." I grin at him. "Let’s go get churros."

The flight back across the Atlantic is quiet. I spend it leaning against Papi, napping, the way I used to when he was Reaper and we were in Talon. He wakes me as we land, and suggests we shower and put on something nice before we do anything else. Considering breakfast was lost to time zones, I’m more than ready for lunch, but a hot shower and clean clothes followed by lunch sounds even better. Also, I’m not really awake yet.

As Jerome lowers the ramp, Papi hugs me and kisses the top of my head. "Happy birthday, Alé."

"Alé," Papi calls from the living room while I’m getting dressed, "the store’s having a sale on ice cream. Go get me some."

It’s a set-up for a prank, and I know it. I shout back, "Why am I getting it if you’re the one who wants it?"

"Are you giving me lip, girl?" He’s struggling to not laugh, I can hear it. "You don’t pay no bills to be giving me lip," he finishes, which is a lie because I pay all the bills.

I walk out of my room and give him his own are you fucking shitting me?? look and we both laugh. "Okay, okay. What flavor you want, Papi?" I ask, playing along. Whatever he has planned, I trust that it won’t be a cruel prank. Especially after last year.

"I can’t decide," he says, and that’s bullshit because we both know his taste in ice cream is ’chocolate and as much other stuff as you can cram into it’. "Get chocolate, but also vanilla. And strawberry. And whatever flavor you want."

The store is actually having a sale on ice cream, which is a surprise. Just to be a brat, I grab Papi’s Rocky Road and a carton of coffee ice cream with espresso chocolate chips as well as the chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, and some unholy birthday cake/bubble gum combo just because it’s my birthday and it amuses me. Fran drives me back and Solen gets the door, since I’m carrying two bags full of ice cream. March up the curving stairway to the second floor, kick the door, and when it opens-

A corner of my mind registers that ’Rienne was the one to open the door for me, but Jesse’s on my right and he puts an actual vintage cone-shaped party hat on my head to match the one he’s wearing, and Adrienne is wearing, and...
...and...

The living room is crammed full of people, Uncle Jack and Tia Ana and Tante Angela and Linkbrother Genji and Winston and Tracer and Reinhardt towering the back throwing a handful of confetti and they're all yelling SURPRISE!! Jesse has a vintage noisemaker clenched in his teeth and it goes *fwee* as he blows it and I think everyone's wearing Jesse's dumb party hats but I can't see because I'm crying because oh my god Papi organized me a surprise party. Bright blurs have to be balloons clustered in the corners of the ceiling and I think I can see a HAPPY BIRTHDAY banner on the wall behind Reinhardt. There's presents in everyone's hands and piled up on the coffee table and somehow I'm sitting on Jesse's ottoman and Tracer's got the bags of ice cream and is pulling cartons out to stack up next to the presents. Then Papi comes out of the kitchen with a two-tier cake in his hands, my tears making the flames on the candles blur into a halo of flame encircling the second tier, and everyone starts singing Happy Birthday.

"...happy birthday, dear Alé, happy birthday to yooooou!"

Papi sets the cake on the table in front of me but I'm crying too hard to blow the candles out. Then he turns to Jesse and growls, "You didn't sing!" like he's going to kick his cowboy son's ass for this insult to his daughter on her birthday.

Unperturbed, Jesse takes the noisemaker from between his teeth, clears his throat, and sings:

"Happy birthday to you. You live in a zoo. You look like a monkey, and you smell like one too!"

Silence reigns for three beats while Jesse beams, and then Papi snorts and he's laughing and I'm laughing and everyone's laughing. Jesse offers me a birthday-themed napkin like it was a handkerchief, and I wipe my eyes and get my breathing under control and blow the candles out with my eyes closed while everyone cheers and applauds.

I don't make a wish. I already have everything I want.

Chapter End Notes

Gabe was the sort of kid who would stand up in the middle of the sermon and yell, "You're full of shit, Padre!"

Gabriel spent the year secretly buying and wrapping presents and either hiding them or giving them to people to hold after securing their promise that they'd come to the safehouse for April Fool's because he was going to play the best prank ever on his daughter. So everyone sneaks in on March 31st and is hiding in the west wing until he sends Sombra out for ice cream, and then everyone hurries over with the presents and the balloons and things. And then Gabriel comes out with the cake, and the candles are lit, and he starts singing Happy Birthday and everyone joins in because they realize THIS is the surprise, none of them knew this was her birthday, so he pranked pretty much everyone like that.

The "you look like a monkey, and you smell like one too" parody is totally part of the Authentic American Birthday Tradition experience.
This is effectively the end; although there is one more epilogue, it's written from McCree's POV and is more like bonus Familia Reyes fluff than an actual part of the main story.
*Bonus epilogue: Taco Soup*

Chapter Summary

Jesse caught a bug. Naturally, his family's going to fuss over him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was close to one in the morning when Jesse McCree pressed his hand to the scanner on the gate of the Zurich safehouse - or, as he thought of it, home. Sombra, bless her evil little heart, had made the upgrade way back when so that on the now-rare occasions when he stumbled home too drunk to see straight, he could get in just by slapping his hand against the scanner's surface. He was damn grateful for that consideration now, although he hadn't touched a drop. Whatever bug he'd caught apparently thrived at thirty thousand feet because he'd had a throat tickle and felt vaguely lousy before getting on the plane, but when he woke up as they landed...

Jesse coughed as he stumbled through the open gate. He hadn't made it out of the terminal without needing to find a bathroom, and only years of hung-over puking had let him get into the stall in time. His head hadn't stopped pounding since, and he didn't want to know how high his fever was but he could barely hold himself upright and forget seeing straight. There were always omnic-driven taxis available no matter how busy an airport was, dumb human prejudices, but he'd been grateful for that because a human wouldn't have let him into their cab looking like he did, much less take him across town on the vague promise of being paid later because he was kind of completely broke. But omnics...he tells an omnic anywhere that he's Sombra's brother, and that's better than cash because shadow-sis tips absurdly heavy when people do nice things for her family. So he'd gotten to the gate of the safehouse okay, now all he had to do was get inside.

"Lean on me," an accented omnic voice said at his side, and fuck, he wasn't going to question it. Taxi driver must've told the gardener on the way or something.

The trip upstairs was mostly a blur of accented narration - 'we're at the front door', 'we're at the foot of the stairs', 'one more step' - and then he was lying down and fuck it, that was good enough.

When he woke up, he immediately regretted it. He ached all over, something the shivering didn't help, and his mouth felt and tasted like something had died in it. Then he forced his hot, sandy eyes open a crack and had to swallow a lump. He was on a couch, that wasn't a surprise. But the coffee table had been moved so that he could reach it easily and there was a glass of water, a dose of liquid medicine, a big metal bowl, a bell, and his girly bear all lined up waiting for him. He swallowed the medicine, chased it with half the water, and then pulled the white bear over to cuddle it. Someone - probably shadow-sis - had taken the time to set up all this stuff. Someone cared.
"You cold, mijo?"

It was Gabe's voice, Jesse realized. It was Gabe's voice, it was coming from the chair, and it sounded tired. "Dad?"

A rustle, and Gabriel Reyes stepped into his field of vision wearing a pair of pajama bottoms. He crossed his arms over his chest, a teasing smirk making his lips twitch. "Well, you're not hallucinating, so that's good, but you're shivering. Are you cold?"

"Yeah," Jesse sighed, feeling like the biggest little kid in history as Gabriel took a blanket from somewhere and spread it over him.

It was warm. Was this Gabe's blanket? Had he been asleep in the chair, warming this blanket with his own body heat, waiting for Jesse to wake up? Something told him the answer was yes.

"Thanks, Dad," he whispered, closing his eyes because he was sure he was gonna cry.

A pair of warm lips pressed against his temple. "You need anything," Gabriel said softly, "you ring that bell. I'll be right here. Got it, mijo?"

Jesse couldn't say anything past the lump in his throat, but he nodded.

"Okay. Goodnight, Jesse."

The next time Jesse clawed his way out of sleep, he was too hot but the blanket was tangled and he couldn't get it off.

"Jesse!" a cool voice said, followed by no, no, no, and a garble of French. Quiet-sis. Adrienne. She plucked at the blanket and peeled it off of him. "Better?"

"Yeah," he panted. "Thanks."

"Your bear fell to the floor."

"That's fine. Too hot."

Adrienne lifted the glass of water to his lips. He sucked it down and then coughed before leaning back. "More?" she asked.

Shaking his head did not seem like a good idea, not with how it was spinning. "Nah," he said instead.

"Mijo," Gabe called from the kitchen, "you okay in there?" A mutter and some footsteps followed.

"Too hot," Jesse repeated. He was whining, he could hear it in his voice, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

"Usually that's my problem," Gabe joked as he came over to kneel by the couch, a bowl in one
hand. He'd changed into jeans and a black tee with some sort of logo on it in white - oh. Reaper's mask. The hand he laid on Jesse's forehead felt like ice. "You're burning up. Get your brother some more of that medicine," he said to Adrienne. The bowl held water and a cloth, it turned out, and Gabriel started wiping the sweat off his son's face. "That's one hell of a bug you caught, chulo. Gonna need to smoke it out."

That meant... "Taco soup?" he asked hopefully.

"Si, taco soup. Your other sister's taking over for me right now. Should be ready by the time you're ready for food."

Other sister. "There's a taxi..."


Jesse laughed, but it was a dry, hacking laugh. "Had to. 'M broke, Dad."

He'd been afraid that would get some kind of angry (or worse, disappointed) look, but Gabriel smiled teasingly instead as he squeezed out the cloth and then laid it on Jesse's forehead. "Tell me you at least got the good booze this time."

"Wasn't drinking."

That got a silent eyebrow raise of surprised approval. "Was she cute, then?"

Another hacking laugh. "Like you wouldn't believe."

"That's my boy," Gabe said proudly.

Adrienne came back into the room with a bottle and a little plastic cup, and Gabriel slid one arm behind Jesse so he could sit up enough to drink the medicine. Quiet-sis took the opportunity to shove a pillow under his head before rescuing the bear from the floor and setting it on his lap. Jesse reached one finger out to touch the bear's nose.

"She was five," he said quietly, "and she was begging because her mom had a broken leg and couldn't work. I got the mom to a doctor, stayed around a few days cooking and cleaning, and then got myself the cheapest ticket to Zurich I could find and gave them everything I had left."

"That's my boy," Gabriel said again, but in a quieter, more sincere voice. Then he hugged Jesse and re-arranged the cloth on his forehead. "You hear that, Alé?"

"Si, Papi," shadow-sis called back from the kitchen. A few seconds later she came out to squeeze between their father and sister and perch on the edge of the couch. "You should have called, Jesse," she told him, taking his other hand in hers. Her skin felt pleasantly cool against his fevered flesh.

"Was going to on the flight, but I passed out as soon as we took off, and when I woke up..."

She nodded. "Taxi driver said you looked so bad they were surprised you could walk."

Jesse groaned. "I probably got everyone on that flight sick. I'll probably get you sick. I'm sorry, Alé. If I'd known it would be this bad, I woulda called for some money and holed up in a hotel for the week."
"You won't get me sick," his youngest sister said firmly. "My swarm is identifying what you're sick with right now. Papi's already has. Adrienne's got a swarm of her own from when she was being retro-conditioned. You *sure* you don't want to upgrade your immune system?" she teased.

That made him laugh tiredly. "I'm thinking about it," he said. "But right now, 's getting hard to think."

Gabriel grunted. "Good. Then the medicine's starting to work. Sleep, *mijo*. Taco soup will be ready when you wake up."

The grumbling of Jesse's stomach woke him up next, and once awake, the gnawing hunger and mouthwatering aroma of taco soup wouldn't let him go back to sleep. He rolled over, surprised that the motion didn't make anything worse, and discovered that the water glass had been refilled. In seconds, he'd drained it.

"Taco soup isn't done yet," quiet-sis said from her chair. "Papi said half an hour."

Jesse sat up and scratched at his scalp. "Sounds like I've got time to take a shower, then. If I can stay upright," he added as the dizziness came back.

"Shadow-sis to the rescue," Alessandra declared, emerging from his room in the purple two-piece he remembered from their first trip to the beach as a pseudo-family. "Come on," she said as he let her help him to his feet, "it won't be *nearly* the most embarrassing thing we've ever done."

Trying to forget her *waking his horse* kept him occupied until she put his hands on a towel rack in the bathroom and started removing his clothes. "You're the best sister," he said quietly, leaning against the nice, cool tile while she argued with his pants.

"Hey, my teenage self would have *killed* to be doing this," she joked. "Just...not in this exact circumstance."

He noticed, as she walked him into the shower stall, that there were extra towels layered on the floor. Considering the stall wasn't really big enough for two, though, that made sense.

"You want me to just steady you," she asked, "and let you do your thing? Or do you want to steady yourself and pretend you're in a spa?"

"I ain't pretty enough to go to a spa," he retorted. "But I wouldn't objected to being curried like a horse."

She laughed. "You said it, not me."

Jesse braced himself against the molding in the stall, grateful for the nonslip floor, as the water came on and his hacker sister started scrubbing him down. It would have been awkward and tense with anyone else, but she was right, they'd been through more embarrassing together. Instead, it was just relaxing and refreshing. When he was clean, she shut the water off and draped one towel over his shoulders before attacking his hair with another, her own hair slightly wet but braided and
"Clothes on your bed," she said as he wrapped the towel around his waist. "How you feeling?"

"Human," he answered. Then he pulled her into a long hug. "Thanks, Alé," he murmured into her hair.

She hugged him just a little tighter. "If you're thanking me now, what will you do when the taco soup is ready?"

"Thank Dad," he teased.

"Ingrate," she retorted, or tried to, but she was laughing too hard. "You gonna be okay to get dressed by yourself?"

He hugged her again before letting go. "Yeah. I mean it, shadow-sis: thank you. You're always puttin' up with my dumb shit, and I'm grateful."

"You my brother, Jesse," she said in a small voice. "If this isn't what family's supposed to do, then don't tell me because if I'm doing it wrong, I don't want to be right."

That got her hugged again.

"Go put your clothes on," she joked as he let her go again, "and I'll do the same and then...taco soup."

Taco soup. Jesse's stomach growled again.

Each of the safehouse living areas had a full dining room, as well as the smaller table for four in the kitchen. But in all the time since Sombra had fled to Switzerland with Reaper and Widowmaker, leaving Talon in flames behind them, they'd barely used the dining room. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the kitchen was the heart of Casa Reyes. At first, it had been Sombra cooking food she couldn't enjoy for Reaper-the-dog and Jesse. Then, when Adrienne (before she had chosen the name) had come back from retro-conditioning, she and Sombra and occasionally Reaper would spend quiet hours learning or re-learning recipes. Once Reaper had transitioned to his old self, Gabriel Reyes took aggressive pleasure in cooking dinner for the little family. And then, finally, Sombra had followed her Papi into an organic body.

At that point, they'd all fought to cook for Alessandra.

Now, the kitchen was full of delicious scents, onions and peppers and chilies and spices over the heartier scents of meat and tomato. Jesse stood in the doorway a moment (leaning on the doorframe because that dizziness still hadn't completely gone away), eyes closed, breathing in the scents of comfort and intimacy. Adrienne was setting the table, bowls and spoons and tall glasses of water (and milk for herself, because she didn't have the tolerance for heat that the rest of them did), while Gabe stood at the counter, cleaver flashing as he cut tortillas into strips for the soup.

"Need a hand?" Alessandra asked from behind him.
"Nah. I'm good."

Putting lie to his words, though, he had one hand braced against the wall as he made his way over to the table. His sisters formed a chain with their father, linking table and stove, filling bowls with the savory soup that was traditionally hot enough to burn out any infection and topping them with strips of tortilla that sank slowly, absorbing the spiced liquid.

When they were all seated, Gabriel beamed around at his family and took the ceremonial first spoonful of taco soup. Rolled it around in his mouth, a look of contemplation on his face. Swallowed. Nodded as beads of sweat popped out on his shaved scalp. "Good job, Alé," he said with a calmness everyone knew was sheer, iron will. "You've learned well. 'Rienne, you might want to add some sour cream to this."

Jesse grinned at his hacker sister, who grinned back. With pure, masochistic anticipation, he lifted the spoon to his mouth and took a bite.

FIRE.

Delicious fire, but hoo boy he could feel himself sweat. Once he'd swallowed, he leaned over and took a good, long sniff to see if it would clear his sinuses. Then he leaned back and blinked until his eyes stopped watering.

"You okay, Jesse?"

"Yeah," he gasped, giving in and wiping his eyes on the collar of his shirt. "Good job, shadow-sis. I think I can feel that bug running for cover."

Gabe grinned at him. "Better flush it out, mijo. I want to see you eat that whole bowl of soup, or so help me, I will think of a threat!"

"Yessir," Jesse drawled, grinning so broadly that he almost couldn't get his mouth around the spoon.

Yeah, being sick sucked. But his family went out of their way to fuss over him, and he got taco soup, so really...he couldn't be too upset. Almost made him want to go out and get sick on purpose. Almost.

Chapter End Notes

This was originally written as a gift for a friend, hence the POV and tense change.

Aaaand that's it, we've reached the end! Is it as surreal for you as it is for me?
Works inspired by this one: *Trust goes AU* by *Ryxl*

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