Both Sides Now

by Jrade

Summary
A confusing run-in with Widowmaker one night leaves Tracer a little shaken, and she'll need some help from her friends to get over it - but life goes on for the plucky young British superhero. The sun still rises and the bad guys still need beating back.

Luckily for innocents everywhere, the cavalry's here - and she's bringing some company.

However, they all have their own problems: Jack and Winston are at each other's throats, Lena and Emily are trying to have a life that's at least pleasant if not exactly normal, Widowmaker herself starts to take matters of her life into her own hands. Sombra's always digging for info or a good new friend, Ana feels like nobody listens to her, and Reaper? Well, Reaper has a knife in his back and he's looking for a new place to plant it.

Throw in a mysterious computer virus, blend until smooth, enjoy hot or cold.

(An ensemble cast, multi-ship story that follows a few paths but winds them in together. Ultimately, it's a story about the many forms love and relationships can take, and how they fit in with people's lives. Oh, as well as omnic zombies, high-speed chases, bank heists, betrayal, chemical warfare, and stealing a hospital. It's also a story about those.)

Notes

Hello, folks! Note: this is both a work in progress, and my first work of fanfiction (both generally, and on this site) so please leave feedback! I'm trying to learn the way of things here, but if I do something wrong, please let me know. I wrote this in honour of Overwatch's first anniversary (and because I generally love it!)

Tags are approximate at the moment, and will be added as things go along, in order to try to avoid too many spoilers. If you think I'm missing one I should have, though, please let me know! I particularly don't know how the relationship tags work or uh... any of the rest of it. Sorry.

Also, note, author is Canadian: some spellings may differ from what you're used to! Prepare yourselves for many letters 'u'. Also, many apologies. Sorry.

[EDIT: 19NOV2017: So! This is now very long, and I want a little disclaimer here at the start for anyone who's new to the story! The main ship is arguably Tracer/Widow/Emily and explorations there but it diverges pretty widely, and there are a lot of background ones. Lots and lots! There's Ana/S:76, Ana/Rein, and at least some leanings for Rein/76 as well, there's some hints of McGenji atm, Spiderbyte, Symbra, Symmercy, Junkhog, McSombra, Lucio/Reinhardt, and loads and loads of friendships and stuff (any of which may develop into something more at any given moment). So, if there's something in particular you're looking for, feel free to give me a shout in the comments and I'll direct you to the appropriate chapter(s). Thanks!]

See the end of the work for more notes.
Another Clash

Chapter Summary

For serious summary: Tracer and Ana need to create an opening for their teammate - and the only way to do it is to distract Widowmaker. A.K.A playing bait. It leads to a little bit of chiding, a fair bit of conversation - and more than a few chills and fears on Tracer's part when it ends up as a one-on-one confrontation, and not for the first time. In the end she is left with many questions, and more than a little doubt...

JFL summary: Ana and Tracer shoot the breeze while getting shot at. Widowmaker hangs out for a bit and it totally isn't predatory, and then Tracer goes to see Soldier Dad about a box.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tracer flinched as the sharp crack of a gunshot rang out, not because she wasn’t used to the noise, but because she was. Although it had only been thirty seconds or so that she’d been pinned down here, it felt like so much longer, and it had her legitimately doubting that her timeframe was correct.

She checked her watch.

Twenty-three seconds.

With a heavy sigh, Tracer rolled her eyes, blinked out from behind the low wall, emptied her clips while sailing through the air, and then rewound right back into her hiding place while giggling gleefully.

“You were supposed to stay put,” Ana mumbled as she dropped into a crouch next to Tracer, the younger woman looking back a little abashedly as another rifle-shot snapped the air.

“I know,” Tracer sighed, rolling one shoulder back against the stone, “but I figured if I popped out there, I’d draw even more attention, right?” She grinned brightly, hopefully, as she looked over to Ana’s weathered face.

“No,” the older woman’s words were measured but not blunt, and a seemingly ever-present hint of a smirk played at the corner of her lips, “you just got restless and now you’re justifying yourself.”

Tracer started to blush a little and cleared her throat, but Ana made her position on the matter clear when she popped up - swiftly, and spry for a woman of her age - and took a quick potshot back at the other sniper’s position. There was a difference between staying put, and staying hidden - and they needed to make it clear that they were still there, in place.

Three rounds answered hers: one over Ana’s head, one right beside Tracer’s position, sending a chip of brick flying off of the edge of the low wall, and one more that Tracer could feel slamming into the other side of the bricks.

“Good job, team,” a gravelly voice came over the radio, familiar yet still a little bit oddly unsettling to the young brit, “I’ve nearly flanked her position. Keep her eyes on you.”
“You got it, boss!” Tracer chirped, dashing out before Ana could say anything, the chronal accelerator whirring as it unleashed whatever science-y magic Winston had put into it, and Tracer was sailing through the air. The wind ruffled her hair, almost in slow motion - timeless, really, in a way that she didn’t think she could ever explain. She’d tried, a few times, at Winston’s behest, with him hoping he could come to a deeper understanding about chronotemporal physics, but in the end she’d just become a little frustrated. It was like trying to explain flight to a bus. Frustrating, and unlikely to succeed, that is.

To any outside observer, Tracer would be little more than a swoop of bluish light, an ephemeral swirl through the night air - no hint of her hair that clumped thickly and wildly, her freckles, nor even the machine itself which granted her those abilities to speed or slow her own timeframe at a whim, side effects of a cure for an accidental ailment.

She could see a bullet coming toward her, all but standing still, and she arched her back to twist around it, the motion sending her spiralling a little to the side, reactively. It had taken her a long time to map out how movements worked in the odd little time-warp she went on, but she’d pretty much nailed it down, Maverick that she was. Sure, sometimes she still ended up upside down… but that was just part of the fun of it, wasn’t it?

A burst of fire as the sniper shot again, Tracer returned herself to the normal timestream and unleashed her twin machine pistols in response - then another rifle shot, and with a gasp, Tracer reflexively spun back time, until she was right next to Ana once more, panting slightly.

“She get you?” Ana raised an eyebrow over her patch, and Tracer nodded, frowning a little. “She’s good,” Ana murmured, pulling an old pistol out of a thigh-holster and blindly firing it up over the wall in roughly the right direction.

Tracer only half-nodded again, her frown deepening and her mind clouding as memories started to flit past. They were so hard to discern, sometimes, and she almost felt like she was back there again, back then, unstuck from time and all that it carried - when her memories and predictions and thoughts and dreams had all been one, future and past and present all jumbled and tangled. It didn’t really happen anymore, not with the accelerator, but… it still felt reminiscent sometimes.

Back in the sky, above King’s square, another bullet - just like the one a moment ago - spiralling through the air toward her. She moved, did move, will move, does move - got out of the way of it, but the bullet found another target in Tekhartha Mondatta. Tracer still wondered whether it had been meant for her, that bullet - whether she, in getting out of the way, had caused the great man to be killed.

“Why is she…” Tracer sighed, frowning deeply. “Why is she like this?” She turned beseeching eyes, wide behind her goggles, to the war- and world-wearied sniper beside her, who sighed slightly and settled back against the stone of the wall.

“Let me…” Ana began, pulling her rifle out from its resting position to point over the wall, and squeezing the trigger, the machine leaping back with recoil, but her practiced hand spun it around to come to rest across her lap. “…tell you a story,” Ana continued, as if there’d been no interruption at all, “about Amélie Lacroix…”

Tracer hadn’t heard the name before, but she had heard the next one Ana mentioned - Gerard Lacroix, a member of Overwatch before the young brit had ever joined, and one instrumental in the early fight against Talon. Ana reiterated that, peppering the story with brief retorts from her rifle or her pistol, or pauses for Tracer to leap out and draw the sniper’s fire, keeping attention on them, and more importantly away from their teammate.
Amélie had been his wife, apparently, which Tracer wasn’t overly surprised to discover. She began to wonder where the story was going, in fact, as Ana went on - talking about the wife’s disappearance, Gerard’s death. There may have been a few words she’d missed, sure (there usually were), but she didn’t see how it could be related - particularly once Ana started talking about some other mission, later on, saving hostage scientists who Talon had taken captive.

“They were like… lightning,” the older woman murmured darkly, shaking her head. “There had been stories told of a new Talon sniper, and now they’d taken down half of my team… but I got the drop on them.”

“Great!” Tracer chirped, popping her head around the side of the wall, but raising her gun over the top to fire up at the belltower that was the focus of their attention. Ana, however, didn’t mirror her enthusiasm. She was rarely exactly an excitable woman, but it was evident to Tracer that right now the long-standing sniper was at a particularly unemphatic point, and the younger woman looked over with curious concern in her eyes.

“Not so great,” Ana shook her head sadly, a stray few strands of pale hair falling across her face. “I got a good shot in, took them off-guard, and took off their helmet. Lined up the final shot, the killing blow,” the older woman’s smooth voice was dark, tired, as she raised her rifle to her shoulder, the tip not wavering in the slightest. A little chill went up Tracer’s spine. Ana was a good teammate, and a good friend - of sorts - but still, sometimes, she got a little bit… scary.

“There, glaring back at me through my scope,” Ana’s hand tightened at her rifle’s stock, “was Amélie Lacroix. Widowmaker,” another chill for Tracer, “in the flesh. We didn’t know, up until that point…”

With a long sigh, Ana let her rifle droop, then drop back into her lap. “I hesitated. I paused, I gave her an opportunity, and she took it - I’d failed my team, failed in my mission, and I paid for it.” She raised a hand, half-gesturing to her eyepatch. Tracer tried to offer her what she hoped was a comforting smile, and then glanced back, over her shoulder, to the bare tip of the belltower - all she could see from here, for fear of opening herself up to another one of the sniper’s shots.

“No,” Ana countered, and Tracer’s eyes flew to her. The older woman may only have one eye, but it held enough pain for a dozen. “I- I thought so too, at first, but now…” she sighed. "No, Amélie was a dear girl. She didn’t defect , saghir - she was stolen. Brainwashed, tortured and twisted, of that I have no doubt. No," she sighed again, turning to take a knee and prop her rifle in a crack in the stone, “Amélie Lacroix was killed. Widowmaker took her place - and if you ever come face to face with her, let my patch serve as a lesson.” Ana faced Tracer fully, almost devoid of expression save for a hint of concern. “Give her no opportunity whatsoever , and if she gives you one? You take it. She would do the same.”

It was a tense moment, a solemn moment; one that was interrupted by another rifle-crack, but this shot wasn’t accompanied by the sound of a bullet striking the stone or brick nearby. It was, however, shortly followed by a grunt from the telecom device. “Damnit,” that gravelly voice spoke up once
Technically speaking, he wasn’t her commander anymore - technically speaking, he couldn’t be. Overwatch didn’t exist anymore, it had been taken apart, disassembled and scattered, and they were just… fragments. Bits and bobs and pieces, pulled back together again, but his voice - even if he didn’t carry the title “Commander” anymore, and even if he didn’t go by “Jack Morrison” - still carried the notes of urgency, of leadership. He was… different, he’d changed - they all had - but there was still, within him, Tracer’s old Commander.

Or at least, bits and bobs and pieces of him.

She didn’t wait, when he asked for help - or ordered it, whichever - Tracer just leapt into action. “Cheers, love,” she chirped, escaping their hiding place in a bright blue swirl of chronal energy, before Ana could say a thing. Of course. The older woman just sighed, slung her rifle over her shoulder, and slunk back into the alleyway she’d emerged from.

“One of these days,” she murmured below her breath, “somebody will listen to me...”

Tracer delighted in the night air as she sailed from rooftop to rooftop. No bullets flew her way, Widowmaker’s attention presumably drawn in the direction of Tracer’s teammate instead. Not a good situation, at all - Tracer knew that if Jack didn’t get to their destination, bad things would happen.

At the very least, he’d get pretty grumpy. That was bad enough.

“Whee!” Tracer giggled, doing a barrel roll as she launched herself through the sky, a million times more free than in any jet - and a trillion times more free than she’d been a minute ago.

...and whatever her girlfriend Emily said, Tracer never exaggerated. Not at all.

She also never got overexcited or leapt into things without thinking them through, which was why she definitely didn’t arrive at the belltower out of breath, and with her chronal accelerator whirring down as it went into a recharge cycle.

No, definitely not - no, that whirring noise was just the wind, and the harness’ light was only dimming because of that cloud that was moving in front of the moon, and-

“Oh, crum,” Tracer sighed softly to herself, shaking her head, “you’ve gone and done it again, haven’t you?” She kept her voice soft, hands gripping her pistols tightly as she looked around, becoming quickly aware of just where she was.

That being, of course, in a belltower which had been - up until, it seemed, moments ago - occupied by an enemy sniper who had been taking potshots at Tracer and her friends. Now, though, it seemed as if Widowmaker was nowhere to be seen.

Stroke of luck, that, the young brit thought to herself as she stepped softly forward, caution instilled by the knowledge that, for another moment at least, she was anchored to this timestream, unable to alter things the way she normally would.

At least, though, there wasn’t an irate blue frenchwoman pointing a rifle at her. Tracer nodded a little as she took another step, looking around. The window, there - that was where Widowmaker had been set up firing down. Empty shells littered the area, some of them still smoking, and more than one of Ana’s darts were in the area as well. A wet splash on the stone there showed where one had struck and shattered, splattering its contents - and in the wooden framing of the belltower’s open window, one was stuck whole, needle jammed deeply into the wood. Tracer looked at it for a
second, the stars and clouds on the far side twisting and warping through the curvature of the glass cylinder and the fluid inside.

_Not here._ Tracer turned around, away from the window, and let out a breath that she hadn’t noticed she’d been holding. The moon shone over her shoulder, casting shadows into the room - her wild hair, her own at-the-ready machine pistols, her frame silhouetted against the floor. A cloud shifted in the skies above and all of the moonlight was cut off, the whole interior of the small room - if it could even be called that - filled with darkness.

No shadows, anymore - or rather, nothing _but_ shadows - so there was nothing to betray Widowmaker’s presence as she slowly let herself down on her line, long hair hanging below her, rifle pulled in against her shoulder as she dangled down into the open window. From this range, she hardly needed to aim - from _this_ range, even those inept so-called ‘teammates’ of hers would have no chance of missing a shot. Her lips twitched slightly into a smirk, the red eyes of her helmet glowing as she let herself descend a little further, stretching out the barrel of her rifle… just enough to place the cold, steel tip against the back of Tracer’s neck.

Tracer’s heart couldn’t decide whether it wanted to leap and race, or stop cold, so it alternated frantically between the two as she caught her breath between her teeth, Ana’s warning ringing through her mind. _Give her no opportunity whatsoever…_

If this wasn’t an opportunity, Tracer didn’t know what was. She’d messed up, jumped in too fast - as usual - overreached, and now…

...now what?

_“Bonjour, chérie,”_ Widowmaker purred, barely swaying left and right in the wind, the slight movements telegraphed directly into Tracer’s vertebrae. “Having fun jumping around, are we?” She chuckled a little, a sound that wormed into Tracer’s ears and through her mind, down her spine in cold shards and shivers, and the young brit swallowed heavily.

A few moments, just a few more _love_, then you’ll be back up and running! Just...just...hold on a little longer…

“I…” Tracer started, trying to come up with… anything. A question, a taunt, a response, anything at all to string the conversation along. Normally, she wasn’t short of words. Normally she didn’t have a sniper rifle pressed against her neck. All she wanted were some words - something to delay the inevitable, to distract the ruthless killer who’d she’d made the mistake of opening herself up to.

She didn’t find any words; barely managed another breath, in fact..

“Jumped a little too far, did you?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, upside down - not that Tracer or anyone else would be able to see. She tilted her head to the side, though - no need for a scope, certainly - and chuckled again. “I see you out there, you know. Little mouse, _petite souris_, you leap and hop with such little… regard. So little planning. Foolish little mouse.”

Her voice was rich and smooth, silken with her french accent, and it teased as well. Every syllable tinged with a tone that just underlined to Tracer how very dumb she’d been. Again. She winced, scrunching her eyes shut and gripping her pistols tightly, but there was nothing she could do about it right now. Completely at the sniper’s mercy… and trapped, again.

“Step into my parlour, hmm?” Widowmaker chuckled again, smirking, pleased in the game of it all. Not really... _enjoying_ it, per se - that was beyond her - but amused, at least. It was about all she could manage these days: occasional amusements, interspersed by long periods of disappointment and irritation. Watching the action down below, that tended to bring the irritation; seeing her often-hapless teammates scuttle around like so many insects, or their even more inept counters, whoever
they happened to be. Helix security, local police forces, these dregs of what had once been
Overwatch. So little of it held any interest to her of late.

This one, though - this little mouse, with her leaps and her bright laugh, she was odd. Widowmaker
couldn’t begin to fathom it, such a total lack of forethought, but not in the same way that the others
seemed to have it. They were dense and oafish as they went about their ways, but this little mouse,
she was so… enthusiastic. So hopeful, too. Widowmaker couldn’t understand it.

“You intrigue me, ma souris ,” Widowmaker grinned at her pun, quite content with the effects she
could see herself having on the young woman - the goosebumps on her neck, hairs standing on end,
the hammering heart, the washes of colour through the infrared cameras, the hot blood that flowed
through her…prey.

Prey? Toy? Something like that - an amusement, that was what the little mouse was.

Tracer felt very much like prey, certainly; caught, and at the mercy of a woman who seemed, by all
accounts, to have none at all. Merciless. “In...intrigue?” she swallowed, dry-mouthed. “You frighten
me.”

She always had had a sometimes-inconvenient habit of telling the truth. It had been a bane and a
benefit throughout her life - sometimes both at once - but she just didn’t know any other way to be.
Biting her tongue felt wrong, when she even managed to consider it… which was rare enough to
begin with. She bit it now, though - after the words were already out.

Widowmaker, though, actually laughed. It wasn’t exactly a delighted sound, nor really even a
humoured one, not in Tracer’s ears at least. Unbeknownst to her, however, it was as much
amusement as Widowmaker could recall ever having felt.

“ Good ,” she hummed, her voice high enough to sound almost delighted. “Perhaps you are less
foolish than you seem, ma souris .” Tracer’s brows furrowed as she ground her teeth a little. How
long had she been here? Hours now? Why hadn’t her accelerator finished its recharge cycle yet?

“I saved your life, you know,” Widowmaker hummed, seemingly apropos of nothing, swaying
gently in the wind. She held her rifle against Tracer’s neck with a single hand, holding the other out
to check her nails idly. “That night, on the rooftop. Tell me, ma souris ,” she leaned forward, her
blue, oxygen-starved lips nearly brushing Tracer’s ear, “did you think that Talon’s ships were
unarmed transports?” She let the question hang for a moment, sending a shiver down Tracer’s spine,
before she chuckled softly. “No, they are gunships, cherie. Another second and you would have
been dead.” Widowmaker half-pouted, in both expression and tone. “No more little mouse.”

Tracer’s eyes had been screwed thoroughly shut as she tried to stop herself from pissing off an
assassin, but they now spread wide in the soft moonlight. What? Could it have been the truth? Of
course it could be, she told herself, but why? Why would she save me - what, because I intrigue her?

“You- I-” Tracer spluttered, but Widowmaker grinned unseen behind her. Who didn’t like having an
effect on other people? Sometimes she thought that was half of what got under some of her
teammates’ skin: that people didn’t seem to fear them as much as they thought they deserved.

The wind was practically absent, causing only the slightest creaks as it blew through the bell tower,
the tiniest shifts in Widowmaker’s position, but each one was a huge reminder as it nudged the steel
barrel of her rifle against Tracer’s neck. The rifle that took Ana’s eye, Mondatta’s life, and a hundred
others as well, or more. Yet, Tracer was supposed to believe that she’d not only spared her life, but
actively saved it?
“Why did—” Tracer started, but the question diverged. *You save me? You kill Mondatta?* Widowmaker had done so much that night, so much that Tracer *already* hadn’t understood, the confusion waking her from frantic dreams and clouding her thoughts sometimes. Guilt over not saving the life of one of the greatest men she’d ever met, over saving her own life instead. If she’d just *not* rewound, if she’d taken the bullet instead…

Now, though, there was more confusion piled atop. Was it just lies? Just more of Widowmaker toying with her, that made more sense.

The assassin, dangling, shifted her head to Tracer’s other side, raising an eyebrow. She knew plenty, could tell the other woman’s heartrate and temperature among a dozen other things, but she couldn’t (sadly, if you asked her) read minds. “Why did I… what? Save you?” With a dismissive laugh, Widowmaker tossed her head. “Why not? The mission was complete, the target achieved… and you surprised me that night, little mouse. So few pay any attention to anything further away than their own nose in front of their face,” she scoffed, frowning slightly. “I had no reason to kill you, once you could no longer interfere. As it is now. Entirely at my mercy…”

With that, Widowmaker let her rifle drop - not entirely to the side, but no longer pressed against Tracer’s spine. It might take a whole quarter of a second, now, to raise it and end the young woman’s life - but it was something.

An opportunity.

*If she gives you one? You take it. She would do the same.* Ana’s voice rang through Tracer’s mind again, quickening her heartbeat even more. At this rate, she felt as if it might burst, as if *she* might. Her hands tightened around her pulse pistols. An opportunity… to escape? To strike back?

“Why did you kill him?” The words were soft in the fairly still night air, and they were past Tracer’s lips before she really knew she was saying them. Widowmaker frowned slightly, at first, tipping her head to one side.

“The Omnic? Mondatta? It was the job, the mission. No different from a hundred others.” *Except for your intervention, little mouse.*

“But...but why?” Tracer huffed, simply unable to get it through her mind. There were hordes that would take to the streets with signs or baseball bats out of hatred for the Omnics, and she knew that and could understand it even if she didn’t agree in the slightest, but this… this… passive, cold kind of cruelty. Widowmaker didn’t seem to hate Omnics, or Mondatta - or her. Or anything.

Widowmaker frowned. Silence and incomprehension hung in the air as she dangled from her cable, wrapped around an ankle and anchored up on the roof of the little tower. “Was it so different from anything else? How many have your Amari killed, or Morrison - or yourself, hmm? Enemy soldiers, you might tell yourself - bad men - but the truth is simply that they are on the other side of the conflict. They have a different uniform, a different banner,” Widowmaker sighed as Tracer ground her teeth, sounding (and, in fact, being) quite bored with it all. “Evil is subjective, little mouse. You think we are so different? We are simply different sides of the same coin.” She chuckled a little, suspecting (and rightly so) that Tracer remained unconvinced. “You think us *evil* because we kill? Because we steal to support our cause, break and enter?” Widowmaker laughed, softly. “You do all the same. It is simply a matter of *perspective* … all of life is.”

Tracer told herself that there was more to it than that, that there *was* an ultimate right and wrong, but it was difficult to come up with anything to counter those specific points, at least. Everything that Ex-commander Morrison wore, he’d stole, right up to and including his gun. Ana’s rifle, too - on top of which, she’d be the first to tell anyone how many lives had ended through her scope. That each one
of them was a person, with friends. Family.

It was different, though - they were fighting to protect people. It was different.

Wasn’t it?

Widowmaker could feel the young brit’s indecision, she could practically taste it. Yet again, that pleasant feeling of accomplishment, of having an effect. “Tell me, anyway, is he really gone, souris?” she chuckled. “Perhaps you should ask your friend the monk what he feels about the matter…”

Unheard to anyone save the dangling frenchwoman, a dark, seething voice came over the radio. Widowmaker didn’t respond to the man, who considered himself to be in charge - but it was good to know they’d achieved what they came for. The mission was accomplished. What else mattered?

“So many feelings,” Widowmaker murmured as waves of heat rolled through Tracer - anger, confusion, fear - easily tracked with the thermal cameras. “So many emotions, ma souris - I can see them in you as clear as day, your heart and heat. You are clever not to deny the effects I have on you…” She let herself hang closer, intentionally brushing the short hairs on the nape of Tracer’s neck, appreciating the instilled goosebumps and shiver that were her reward.

“Adieu, souris,” Widowmaker chuckled, and then twisted, sending herself backward out of the window and detaching the hook that held her aloft. As she fell, soaring through the air, she retracted it and fired it off once more, catching neatly on a chimney stack and swinging away through the dark, empty streets.

Tracer, now alone again in the tower, shook with a combination of adrenaline, anger, and confusion, finally taking all of the breaths she’d been too afraid to take a moment ago. Her mind whirled, a chaotic, tightly wound bundle of thoughts, emotion, memories, and for several seconds, that was all there was. For a few moments, she simply stood, rooted in place by the sheer volume of the world as it was, until a soft beep notified her that her machinery was back in working order. The chronal accelerator had recharged to a power level sufficient to give her control over her timestream again, and without another thought, she swirled through the skies toward the rendezvous point. While she was flying, there wasn’t any room in her mind for anything else. No space to be confused. No spare resources, nothing but the wind and her instincts.

Tracer still looked a little shaken when she showed up where they’d agreed to meet, and their mask-clad leader noticed immediately. “Oxton. You alright?” She looked to him in surprise, but it wasn’t as if she could meet his eyes behind the glowing red stripe of his tactical visor.

“I’m…” She cleared her throat, shaking her head slightly, her hair bouncing a bit atop her head above her goggles. “I’m alright, sir - just had a bit of a… run-in.” Her eyes flicked toward Ana, uncertainly, and the older woman looked back with concern lined into her face.

“Came out unscathed, though!” Tracer chirped as brightly as she could manage, even if it didn’t really align with the odd turmoil she felt inside. Whether the disconnect came across, she didn’t know - Morrison nodded with a grunt, and Ana did the same in silence.

“Good to see you made it out alright. Well done with the distraction,” he tipped his head once, “we made the target.” His pulse rifle was slung over one shoulder, and under his other arm, he clutched a metal briefcase which he patted. Tracer’s eyes fell to it intently - their target, the whole reason they’d come out here tonight. The thing over which they’d risked their lives…

It looked pretty standard, so far as briefcases went - it wasn’t particularly large, nor gaudy, nor did it seem to have anything special about it. A pretty normal combination-lock, four digits for the combo,
and a fingerprint scanner as well. Just about the only thing out of the ordinary was the symbol engraved across the front; the crest of the United Nations.

Tracer had a confused-at-best relationship with the U.N., as she suspected all former Overwatch members would, ever since they’d been disbanded. The organization was responsible for Overwatch’s founding in the first place, and support, but also for their dissolution… but Tracer really did believe that they had the world’s best interest in heart, just that they sometimes got their hands a little tied up in red tape.

And now... they were stealing from the U.N.?

“What is it?” Tracer asked, looking from the box up to Morrison’s face again.

“Intel,” he nodded, glancing down to it. “Classified information that could be devastating in the wrong hands. Talon hands.”

Once more, the young brit’s eyes came to rest on the briefcase. It wasn’t in Talon hands... it was in Jack’s. Tracer just couldn’t decide if she actually thought those were better than the U.N. itself - on the one hand, it clearly hadn’t been that well-guarded, because they’d managed to get it, and if they could get it, Talon could as well.

...But on the other hand... she couldn’t help but think of Widowmaker’s words, derisive and teasing. You think us evil because we kill? Because we steal to support our cause, break and enter? You do all the same. It is simply a matter of perspective... all of life is.

“Good job, team,” Morrison’s words interrupted Tracer’s muddled thoughts. “Dropship’s incoming, dust-off in two. I’ll be in touch.” It was odd to see how he’d changed, and changed back again - when they’d first been recalled, after their forced dissolution, he’d been so very distant and solitary. Working with others really hadn’t been something he’d been open to, but a couple of failures and near misses had reminded him of what it meant to have a team’s support, and it had seemed that he’d made some efforts to change. To shift from Soldier:76, a lone wolf, back to the old Commander Jack Morrison, leader of Overwatch to whom everyone looked up.

In some ways, he’d succeeded. In others?

Tracer couldn’t take her eyes off of that briefcase, nor her thoughts. Stealing from the U.N.? Never thought I’d see the day...

She didn’t speak again until the dropship came, the repulsion engines blowing dust from the old and tired cobblestone streets. There were too many thoughts to talk.

Chapter End Notes

First chapter yay! I have many things in mind, let's see how they go!

Translations! (Sorry for not adding these earlier, heh, oops >.>)

*Bonsoir* == "Good night", in the sense of hello or goodbye
*cherie* == "dear". I think that one's pretty well-known but might as well include it.
*petite souris* == "little mouse". Worth noting that, in French, a girlfriend is "une petite amie" (or simply "une petite" for short), so this is doubly teasing. Not that Tracer notices. "Souris" is "mouse"
ma == "My". Ergo, "ma souris" is "My mouse."
Adieu == "Goodbye"

Come back next time for Tracer trying to figure some of it out, along with the help of a friend - a big, furry friend by the name of Winston. A large yellow lady provides a bit of a distraction for the troubled brit and some much-needed laughs as well.
Chapter Summary

Serious summary: In the aftermath of a confusing conflict, Tracer decompresses a little with her friend Winston - and urges him on to overcome some obstacles of his own (if you can call having a crush on an omnic centaur an "obstacle").

JFL summary: A fast lady hugs a nervous gorilla and then teases him about having a crush on a robot horse. The robot horse is oblivious, being mostly buried inside an airplane at the time. Soldier dad and Sniper grandma disappear for the whole chapter, probably banging. Emily can't sleep and reads a book.

Chapter Notes

Previous chapter Summary: Tracer had a run-in with Widowmaker which left her chilled in a couple of ways, and filled her mind with dark question. Good and bad, right and wrong - and the fact that she was surprised to find out that her mission had been allowing Jack Morrison to steal information from the U.N. didn't help.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Winston was waiting, somewhat anxiously, in the rear bay of the dropship. He did most things somewhat anxiously, really - but tonight, particularly so. He worried about all of them, yes, but there was a particular place in his heart for Tracer. His dearest friend (along with Athena, of course), and here she was gallivanting through the night in order to… something. Save the world.

It was what they were all there for, to help the world be a better place, and Winston wouldn’t have asked her to stop for anything at all - any more than he would’ve thought about stopping, himself. Still though, sometimes it was difficult to look at the screens and the readouts, hear the communications channel, and not worry. Sometimes… or all the time.

He preferred it when he was down there as well, but other duties had called him away to a different place, a different mission. It felt like breathing again, fully, after so many year of getting his air through a straw - with every passing day, he was more and more sure that he’d done the right thing in initiating the recall. For them, and for the world as well.

Still, though, sometimes… he worried.

Tonight however, that worry was in vain - mission accomplished, and Winston sighed in relief, settling down to sit on the floor near the bay doors as the dropship came in on its final approach. Athena was in control of all of that, and Winston trusted her entirely.

The doors opened before the ship actually even touched the ground, and Winston smiled broadly as he saw the three waiting for them - but mostly, Tracer. Ana was nice, but they’d never had particularly close interactions, and Jack… Winston didn’t really know what to make of him anymore. He’d become darker since his return - since Overwatch’s downfall, really, probably. More
suspicious, more cynical.

All in all, Winston thought to himself with half of a smirk, albeit a bit of a dark one, more like Gabriel became. I do love irony.

Tracer jogged over, deciding (for once) to not tax the chronal accelerator unnecessarily, and Winston was glad to see that. He’d urged caution - of course, about a hundred times - but it never seemed to stick. Not that his friend didn’t listen; she did, she just got excited and forgot. A lot. She always felt bad about it later.

...in fact, she looked right now as if she felt a little bad about something, a slightly abashed expression on her face which somehow still managed to fit in with her cheery orange-and-white outfit.

“What did you do?” Winston asked, his deep voice coloured with faux-weary amusement.


“You ran it dry again, didn’t you?” Winston peered at her over the top of his glasses, raising his eyebrows high. Tracer laughed at first, rubbing at her neck with a hand, and in lieu of actual response she just fixed her friend with a wide grin and wide eyes, nervous and a little apologetic. Winston half-sighed a chuckle, shaking his head and gesturing her into the dropship. “It’s alright, it’s still working - you’ve just got to be careful, you know.”

Yeah,” she sighed, rolling a shoulder in a resigned shrug, “I know…”

They all boarded and the bay door closed up, Ana and Jack going straight to the command deck. Not that it would mean anything - Athena was still in charge, but sometimes Jack liked to take over. What a metaphor that is, Winston thought, a small chuckle rumbling deep in his chest. He moved to one side of the rear bay, swinging off of one of the support poles a little and sprawling himself out over three seats before pulling his legs back to make room for his friend.

A friend who didn’t join him as quickly as he’d expected. Winston looked over, slightly surprised to see Tracer at the closed bay doors, peering out through the glass at the city they were leaving behind.

“What do you alright?” The genetically-enhanced gorilla pulled himself a little more upright, hesitantly starting to get off of the seats and join her at the window. “Did something happen down there?”

Tracer, lost in thoughts and worries, was shaken out of it when the city dropped away swiftly. Without its lights outside of the window, the only thing to see was her own face reflected in the glass. Her eyebrows were knit tightly together, mouth in a frown, brow creased with worry. Do my eyes always look like that?

“I- no, yeah,” she laughed briefly but it sounded a little hollow, even to her. “I uh…” Tracer trailed off, dropping her eyes to the ground and rubbing at her forearm nervously. “It’s, um…Winston? Do you know much about Talon’s dropships?”

Winston’s eyebrows rose to a level somewhere between ‘confusion’ and ‘skepticism’. “Well...define ‘much’.” He chuckled a little and rolled one of his shoulders smoothly in a shrug. “Their exact specifications are, of course, a highly-guarded secret. Things like top speed, service ceiling, electronics complement or precise thrust figures, or alter.”

“Are they armed?” Tracer blurted, cutting him off mid-word, and Winston looked to her, confused. “Sorry love, sorry Winston, I-” she sighed as she stepped closer, laying a hand on the gorilla’s massive shoulder. “It was a rough night. Confusing. I just…”
Winston could see the confusion and hurt on his friend’s face, and even if he didn’t know its source, he wanted to help her with it. His father had always said (with a chuckle) that he had a big heart - and not just literally. “I’m sorry, Tracer,” he laid a hand on her shoulder as well, though it was almost the size of her head and he didn’t let the weight of it rest too heavily upon her. “I worry about you, you know.”

“Yeah,” she smiled, meeting his eyes. Her own were glistening a little bit. “I know. Thank you, Winston. You’re a really good friend - I just… need a little support right now, I think.” She chuckled softly. And answers. A lot of answers.

Tracer stepped forward, Winston wrapping his humongous arms around her. He could’ve hugged ten of her at once, and of course he had to be careful not to squeeze too hard - hardly squeezed at all, really, but she collapsed entirely in his arms, letting out some of her frustration and all of her breath in a long, heavy, sigh.

“They are armed,” Winston murmured, nodding idly as he did. “Talon dropships - every one we’ve encountered, at least, has been outfitted for hostile engagements.”

The answer didn’t help as much as she’d hoped it would. It only steepened her confusion: why would Widowmaker kill a wondrous man like Mondatta, but then save silly little her? She wasn’t anyone but an enemy to the sniper, an annoyance, surely. Intriguing, she’d said, but… they kept facing off against each other, trading blows, trading victories, but only ever fighting.

“Not… the answer you were hoping for?” Winston inquired, and Tracer straightened up a little, taking her weight onto her own feet again.

She shifted her goggles up, wiping a tear away from her cheek. “No, it’s… it’s a good answer. I’m just confused about something.” Her head dropped, and her voice as well, the next words coming out as little more than a croaked whisper as she shrugged. “King’s Row.”

Winston nodded, frowning deeply. He knew how much that night had hurt his friend. She still held herself accountable for the death of one of her icons - a man she’d never met, but still very much cared for. The gorilla’s huge arms pulled a little tighter around his friend as she let out a heavy sigh.

“Winston, love?” Tracer whispered a few seconds later. “Little too tight. Can’t breathe.”

He immediately let go of her, raising a hand to rub at the back of his neck with a hesitant chuckle. “Sorry about that.” Tracer just patted him on the arm, managing a smile that was actually genuine, if a little on the small side.

“S’alright, love - good to know you care.” Good to know that some things haven’t changed, at least. That some things make sense.

“Just a rough night,” she reiterated to her big friend, and he nodded. “Mind if we talk about something else?” Winston shook his head a little, shrugged a shoulder, and turned that motion into a loping walk. This time, Tracer followed, away from the window and over to the seats. She just needed to let things settle for a bit. Stop thinking so much.

“Was it just you in here?” Tracer raised an eyebrow, settling into a seat next to her friend and glancing around curiously. It certainly didn’t look like there was anybody else in the dropship, but she knew that he’d been on a mission of some sort. Rarely were those single-person.

“Well, no,” Winston chuckled slightly, “I mean, after all, Athena’s always around, and she’s good
conversation - but uh, one of the newer um, members, came along as well. Had to go by an area she was familiar with - and it turned out to be a good thing, really, because we ran into a bit of trouble with the aft gyro-stabilizer, but luckily, she had the tools required to-

“Winston,” a distant and slightly echoing voice, tinny and mechanical, came from an open panel about ten feet away. “What is the purpose of this device?” An arm shot out from the panel, tan-painted metal, gripping the twisted and smoking remnants of… something.

“I-I uh, I don’t know, Orisa, um-” Winston hopped out of his seat, loping closer to her outstretched arm almost hesitantly. “What, um… is it? Was it?” He berated himself a little as he realized that it was essentially a restatement of her question, and Orisa’s arm drooped a little. “I don’t know. Hmm. The ship’s function appears unimpeded without it. Very well.”

Unceremoniously, Orisa dropped the lump on the floor where it fell with a clang, Winston scrambling briefly to catch it and failing. He picked it up, though, and chuckled nervously, rubbing at his neck with his other hand. “Well uh, thank you for the uh, gift! Haha! I’ll just, um, go back…over here…” His voice trailed off into muttering as he swiftly returned to his seat, glad for the hundredth time over the past little while that gorillas couldn’t blush. His father had introduced a lot of higher functions - more advanced thought, capacity for greater speech, more refined precise motor skills - but thankfully, blushing wasn’t amongst them.

Still, Tracer could hear it in his tone - see it in the way he moved - that he was a little embarrassed as he returned. She realized, as she watched him slink back to his seat, that she had a grin on her face. “Winston,” she murmured, leaning in and nudging him with an elbow. “Who’s your little friend there, hmm?” A muffled crackling noise came from the panel, and flashes of blue light, as Orisa worked on fixing whatever issue had arisen.

“What?” Winston stammered, “I- I mean uh, I don’t know what you mean, she- Orisa’s just one of the newer members of the um, uh, the… team.” Winston cleared his throat, heavily, wondering if he actually couldn’t blush. It certainly felt like he was.

“You like her!” Tracer exclaimed, brightly, and Winston shushed her with a finger on his lips, looking panicked. Tracer giggled, muffling the gesture behind a hand - and it felt good to laugh, honestly.

“Oh, Winston love, that’s adorable!” Tracer did manage to keep her voice quiet, far quieter than the sound of whatever tool Orisa was using, surely - she wouldn’t even be heard over the engines, probably, from that far away. It let Winston relax.

A little bit.

“I- I just-” he stammered, glancing quickly back and forth. Still blue flashes. Still safe. “I just think she’s really great, is all. And smart, and caring, and compassionate, and…” …and big. Everyone in his life was so… tiny. They were great, his friends - all of them - but there were definite limitations to their interactions. He’d be lying if he didn’t consider the fact that, maybe, in Orisa, he might have someone he could truly hug. It had been a long, long time.

Tracer laughed brightly, kicking her feet in delight. “Winston, that’s great! Have you told her - are you gonna tell her - can I tell her?” The questions came so fast that they hardly seemed like separated statements, and as they spilled out, Tracer started to forget her melancholy of moments before.

As much as it warmed Winston’s heart to see that, he was still entirely nervous and felt quite awkward about the whole thing. “No, I- I can’t, can I? I mean, we work together, and I mean, even if-”
“Oh right like nobody else ever nips off behind a closed door for a little alone time,” Tracer snorted, interrupting her friend entirely with a wide grin on her face.

“Even if that weren’t an issue,” Winston continued, grumbling the words a little, “I couldn’t, because I- well, I mean…” he sighed.

“Winston, love,” Tracer giggled, grinning, her voice laden with faux shock. “Are you embarrassed? I couldn’t tell!” She laughed outright as Winston stammered, unable to cobble together a full response. “Oh, I’m sorry - I shouldn’t be mean,” Tracer relented, reaching a tiny hand up to pat at Winston’s upper arm. “I think that’s lovely, really - so...you haven’t told her, then?”


Tracer looked at her friend with a soft grin, leaning in to nudge him with her shoulder. He looked almost despondent in his confusion, and she didn’t want that, definitely. “You know what the first thing Emily said to me was?” She raised an eyebrow until it nudged the top of her goggles, and giggled. “She said I had a goofy smile, and a cute laugh. That’s all it took - because after that, I couldn’t help but smile and laugh, and it just... went from there.”

Winston relaxed a little, smiling with a huff of a sigh. He’d seen the two of them together, many a time - they were a lovely couple, a wonderful one, the sort that seemed like they’d just… always been. To know that they’d started out from something so small was oddly comforting.

“It’s as simple as that, big guy - just go up and tell her you like her, and tell her what you like! Doesn’t need to be anything more, I mean, I do that all the time with you! I like your big heart, your big brain - the way you sometimes chuckle at jokes you’ve thought of in your own head!” She giggled and Winston chuckled reluctantly at that, with a lopsided grin. He still felt uncertain about the whole thing.

“Go on,” Tracer gave him a little nudge in the arm. “If you never try, you’ll always wonder what might’ve happened. For better or worse… at least you’ll know, right?”

Winston did want to know, both generally and specifically. An inquiring mind, a yearning heart - he’d always had those. Now, they were both directed at her, at Orisa: the offspring of a young girl’s mind, and in some ways a little young herself, but with a stalwart soul that inspired Winston. At the least, she deserved to hear that - he would want to, after all, wouldn’t he? Admiration shouldn’t remain a secret. There was nothing to gain in it…

...except maybe saving himself a little embarrassment.

“Thanks, Tracer,” he nodded, smiling down to his small friend. “I think… that those are some very good points.” He almost started to walk away, put one set of knuckles to the ground, and then stopped. “I like your optimism,” he looked to Tracer with a smile, “and how much you care for people. You’ve got a big heart, friend.” He chuckled a little, grinning. “Big enough for me, even!”

Tracer giggled softly as her friend, the genetically engineered gorilla from the moon, went to confess his attraction to a robotic sort of centaur defender of the innocent made from spare parts by a little girl in a desert oasis city of humans and robots. Just another day, I guess? Haha! It was nice to hear his words, though they hadn’t been her intent, because right now she didn’t feel the most optimistic. She felt confused, she felt unsettled, but… Winston had faith in her. That meant a lot, really.

Optimistic and a big heart. I’d say that’s pretty good, myself! Emily always said she had a heart big
enough for two, often in a tone that was just a little bit teasing alongside the obvious care. Tracer got a little pang of homesickness, but she was on her way. Soon.

Winston trundled over toward the panel where Orisa was working, feeling anxiety rise in his gut and chest as he did. He’d never done anything like this before, and there was a certain fear to the unknown… but there was excitement, as well. Always had been for him, at least - and that was what inspired him now to raise his big fist and rap his knuckles on the wall of the dropship, as if knocking at Orisa’s door.

“Winston?” Her tinny voice came from through a hanging tangle of wires, “I believe I am almost finished. Wait one moment, please. Thank you.”

He did that, waiting as the sounds of electrical arcs crackling continued to echo slightly within the cavity between the ship’s inner walls and outer hull. The noise of the engines was a little louder here, given how close they were, but still mostly muffled by the soundproofing put in place. Winston actually wondered for a moment how Orisa had heard him knocking at all. *She must have very good ears. Uh-oh.*

It didn’t take long, only a few minutes (although it was enough for Winston to stew a little in his worry), before Orisa started to extricate herself from the position she’d taken up. “There. I believe functionality had been restored.” Pushing the panel back into place, she looked around, eyes narrowing momentarily before she moved quickly to the window. “Oh, and we are in flight. Good. Functionality restored.”

A moment later, her yellow eyes widened as she turned around to face Winston again. “Apologies, that was rude. How can I help you, Winston?”

She was so beautiful, Winston could hardly comprehend it - that look of open, apologetic concern across her face, only wanting to help, to make the world better and safer… and finally, somebody he could look in the eye. Then he realized he might be staring a little and dropped his gaze to the ground, rubbing at the back of his neck with a chuckle.

“Orisa, I uh,” he cleared his throat, forcing himself to look back to her face again. Her eyes had narrowed slightly, tilting to take on a concerned visage. “I just wanted to say, I-” he took another breath, and huffed it out in a sigh. *Come on, you’ve got this. Experiment, observe, modify, repeat. Got to take the first step sooner or later.*

“I just wanted to say that I really admire you. I think that you’re a very impressive person, and I’m honoured to have the chance to work alongside you - the level of concern you have for people, both those close to you and those you’ve never met, is… it’s an inspiration to me. I just, I- I guess what I’m trying to say is-” Winston gritted his teeth, sighing a little more before he met her eyes with his own, smiling softly. “I like you. A lot. I was uh… I was wondering if maybe… you’d want to get dinner sometime?”

Orisa didn’t move during his little speech, only watched and listened. As he carried on, her eyes shifted from concern to a more pleased angle, and back again as he seemed to grow more anxious. Then, when he said he liked her - when he invited her out to dinner - her eyes widened entirely. She blinked, twice, and then the little metal plates that made up her eyelids shifted, twirling over each other until her eyes took on the shape of little arrows, upward-pointed. An expression of delight and surprise.

“I find you inspiring and admirable as well, Winston!” Her voice may have been synthetic, but it still seemed excited to Winston. Or he was imagining it. Either way. “Dinner sounds quite enjoyable. I suspect we would have much to discuss!”
The relief that flowed through Winston washed over his face, and tumbled out of his lips as a laugh. Quietly, in the background, Tracer shook her arms in a little cheer. “That’s- that’s great, really great to hear, thank you, I was uh,” Winston chuckled, rubbing at his neck with a huge hand, “I was really nervous about this, actually.”

“Really?” Orisa tilted her head to the side curiously. “Why is that, Winston?”

“Well, I, uh,” he mumbled, rolling one shoulder in an uneasy shrug. “I’ve never, uh, asked anybody out before. On a date, like this.”

Orisa blinked again, leaning back slightly. Date? A date? That… that is quite different. She tucked her elbows in, scuffing one of her legs slightly on the floor. Efi had given her a personality, and an emotional emulator, but it was still a little bit… confusing. Overwhelming, sometimes. She usually kept the chip’s functions turned down, particularly after the bus incident.

The bus driver had been quite understanding, though. Eventually. After much explanation.

Now she stood, fidgeting a little, thinking, processing. She didn’t have much experience at all to base things off of, and had to resort sometimes to the experience of others: stories and histories that had been made available to her. She dropped her head, scuffing at the floor again and humming idly: not a common gesture at all.

Winston was a good man, he was clever and kind, wanted to help those in need. He was very much a kindred spirit, in every way she could think of - and she definitely wanted to get to know him better. Did she like him? Yes, yes she did. She liked him and wanted to spend more time around him, and that seemed, logically, like a good alignment of desires for a date.

Beyond that… there was something more to it, too. Some little chirp from her emotional emulation unit came every time she looked at Winston’s face, nervous again. It was her heart, if not literally, and it was saying…

“I… I think I would like that,” Orisa nodded, eyes shifting into her closest approximation of a smile, and Winston’s own grin returned at that. He didn’t care if she didn’t have a mouth to show expressions, the joy in her eyes was more than enough.

“Really?” He rubbed at the back of his neck a little, chuckling. “Well, that sounds great! I uh… well, I’ll make some reservations somewhere! That’s- this is really uh, great!”

Orisa giggled a little at Winston’s stammering, wondering if this was how Efi felt sometimes, looking at her. It seemed pretty similar, every way she could think of, and that seemed to leave only one option for what to do - the same thing Efi always did.

Orisa stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Winston, and was surprised at how different it was from hugging Efi. Her creator was so small, so fragile - Orisa had to be so careful not to cause her any harm, so she mostly let Efi do the hugging as she just... stood there.

Much in the way Winston did right now, for a second at least, shocked by the suddenness of Orisa’s gesture. Then he cued in on what was happening, and hesitantly returned the hug, his arms meeting behind Orisa’s back but not overlapping ridiculously. She was just the perfect size, he could stand up and really hug her, the way he hadn’t been able to since he was a child - and a way that she’d never had the opportunity to.

Tracer thought she might just die looking at them, with how cute they were, holding each other. As nice as it was, it only reaffirmed her desire to get home, to Emily, and… decompress a little. She
needed to step out of the outfit for a minute, and just be Lena Oxton again. Save the world again some other night.

Orisa and Winston both slowly tightened their grips as they realized that they could, and then further, that they wanted to. For a few moments, they just stood there with him breathing and her simply enjoying the moment, before they disentangled themselves and stepped back. The ship’s engines were winding up again as it started its descent, and Athena came over the speakers to confirm that they were making their approach.

“Well, thanks!” Winston beamed. “I’ll get in touch to sort out all of the details, um - have a good night, Orisa. I’m really looking forward to seeing you again.”

“Thank you as well, Winston,” she nodded happily. “I look forward to the same!” She looked forward, as well, to telling Efi. Her creator was always urging her on to experience new things and develop - surely she would be surprised and excited by a date!

The dropship touched down and the bay door started to open, Orisa stepping down the ramp with a wave, eyes still joyfully slitted. Winston returned the gesture, and neither of them stopped until the ship had closed up and lifted off, making its way back to drop off the others.

Tracer squealed excitedly as Winston came back over to join her on the seats, and she leapt at him, wrapping her arms tightly around his neck. “Oh, Winston! I’m so excited for you - the two of you are the cutest giant couple I’ve ever seen!”

Winston laughed, ruffling his little friend’s hair. “Aw, thanks! And thank you, Tracer, for uh… making me do that.” She laughed, grinning widely and giving him a playful shove in the shoulder, standing on one of the dropship’s seats. “Sometimes everyone needs a little push.”

They talked for the whole trip back, Athena slipping the dropship neatly into a narrow alley to let Tracer off near her home - but not too near. Not near enough to make tracking likely. She waved to Winston with a giggle, and turned, blinking off into the night. It was getting late, she was in a hurry… and it was just more fun than walking.

---

Back at her apartment, Tracer unlocked the door and opened it slowly, softly. Just tiptoe in, and maybe I can-

“Lena? Is that you, love?”

She sighed a little, scratching at her head. “Yeah, it’s me! Sorry, Em - hey, why aren’t you asleep? It’s late!” Slipping off her shoes, she stepped further into the room, locking the door behind her. The chronal accelerator came off and went into its charging cradle, the aura of the machine keeping her tethered to the present. No more altering her timeline, just as if she’d overused it in the field, but with it off… she felt like Lena again.

It was nice to be Tracer, it was fun, and she enjoyed helping people and saving the world. Sometimes, though, it was really nice to not be Tracer - to just be Lena Oxton instead, with her girlfriend and her apartment and no confusion about why a french assassin had spared her life.

Saved her life. Both.
“How am I supposed to sleep without you to cuddle?” Emily asked teasingly from the other room where she’d been reading a book in bed. She came to the doorway and leaned against it, wearing a silky houserobe fastened loosely around her waist, and Lena smiled at the sight. *Home. Finally home.*

Dropping her jacket to the floor, the former soldier and occasional freedom fighter stepped over to her girlfriend with a happy but tired sigh, leaning into her arms. “How’s my hero?” Emily murmured, kissing her lover firmly on the lips.

Lena sighed again, this time lacking the weariness of a second ago. “Now? Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant, love.”

Emily laughed lightly, pulling Lena’s head in to rest against her shoulder, stroking at the back of her head for a moment before withdrawing with a chuckle and a raised eyebrow. “You’ve got dust in your hair, and bits of…” she raised a few crumbs of something pinched between her fingers, peering at them speculatively. “Brick?”

“Um,” Lena hummed, slipping her goggles up her forehead and smiling apologetically. “It was a really weird night.”

Emily just laughed again and gave her another quick kiss, dropping a hand to take hers and lead her on through the apartment. “C’mon love, let’s have a shower and get you all cleaned up. Then bed, yeah?”

“Yes, beautiful idea,” Lena groaned, ruffling her hair to try to dislodge most of the dirt from it, with limited success. “Oh, and by the way, Winston wants to have dinner with us… and his new girlfriend!”

Emily gasped and giggled. “New girlfriend? Ooh, do tell!”

It felt good to be home, to be herself again - to be somewhere safe, where she didn’t need to worry or question things. Her grin widening, Lena started to tug at the sash that held Emily’s robe closed as they headed for the shower. *A weird night, but at least it was one that’s ending well…*

Chapter End Notes

Seems to me to be the first fic for Winston/Orisa? At least here on Ao3 if I'm reading it right. FTW (for the Winrisa) >.>

Anyway, now that I'm done being a nerd like that - come on back next time for another instance of Widowmaker and Tracer rubbing elbows, this time at a factory which may or may not be about to explode. How will the cat taunt her little mouse this time, hmm? Tracer needs to talk to some people to try to sort this all out.
This Mission is the Bomb!

Chapter Summary

Serious summary: Talon is suspected to be up to something at a factory, and it's up to the remnants of Overwatch to investigate. It turns out to be not just another gunfight for Tracer and Widowmaker, as boredom and desperation lead to something else entirely. In the wake, Tracer heads to talk to another friend - a monk with a penchant for floating - in a bid to hopefully gain some perspective on the situation, some form of lasting calm.

JFL summary: Widow's on a mission and it's to ruin Tracer's day - or is that the other way around? Either way it's a whole different kind of high-speed chase. Excitement in factories! Yeah! Later, Tracer touches Zenyatta's balls.

Chapter Notes

The race scene is hereby dedicated to my wife, who thought it was (and I quote exactly: punctuation and capitalization included) "exciting". :P

Previous chapter Summary: Tracer and Winston talked a bit about a few things, and he confirmed that Talon dropships are armed. Tracer's not quite certain how to feel about finding out her life was saved by a woman she'd considered an enemy, and she sort of distracted herself by teasing Winston about his crush instead of really thoroughly addressing her own concerns.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Another day, another dollar.

Actually, I don’t get paid for this anymore... Tracer chuckled to herself as she looked down from the balcony of an abandoned apartment complex, soon following the path of her eyes in a swirl of blue light until she was on a low, flat rooftop. At least the royalties from things brought in a little money - along with Emily’s job, it was enough to pay for the apartment and then some.

“I’ve got the factory in my sight!” Tracer announced triumphantly. It was a large building, low and gray, and looked as unused as any of the others in the surrounding blocks. The whole place was mostly abandoned, but the factory had recently started up production again.

Why Talon was targeting it, Tracer didn’t know - but, then, she’d abandoned any hope of understanding them. Both generally and individually.

All she knew - all that *they* knew, really - was that this factory was a target. Or, at least, a likely one. It was what she was here to find out.

“Good,” Morrison’s voice came grating over the comm unit, “recon the area, and be careful.”

“On it, sir!” Tracer chirped, jogging to the edge of the roof she was on, and regretted the word
almost as soon as she said it.

Over the comm, a wearied sigh came, followed by the almost-familiar “I’m just a soldier now.”

Tracer actually rolled her eyes at that one, but she did it with a smirk. *Sure, boss - just a soldier!* It was legitimately tempting for her to say “sorry, sir.” Somehow, she managed to restrain herself.

It was three stories down to the streets below, but Tracer leapt without a second thought, swirling and spinning through time in order to pull out level with the alleyway, hitting the ground running. She jumped over a fallen trash can with a laugh, vaulted a low fence of sorts with a grin, and tripped over a chunk of wood with a shout.

Sometimes, being able to rewind time saved her life. Sometimes it just saved a little embarrassment. This was one of the latter times.

Tracer jumped over a fallen trash can with a laugh, vaulted a low fence of sorts with a grin, and came to a complete and total stop next to a chunk of wood, stepping gingerly over it before she took off running again. *Nailed it!*

A left, a right, through a long-empty street, and she found herself at the front gate to the facility. It hung open, looking as rusted and decrepit as anything else - as the factory itself, with its broken windows and dusty exterior. As she came close, though, Tracer noticed that the chain which had previously held the gate shut had been cut. The cut was still shiny and new.

In the distance, a rumbling noise drew Tracer’s attention and her eye: a large cargo door starting to roll up, opening into the factory. She was off in a flash, both literal and metaphorical, to investigate.

Normally, she wasn’t the quietest or subtlest of her little group. In fact, it had been suggested - only ever lightheartedly, of course - that the notorious criminal Junkrat himself caused less of a ruckus, but Tracer highly doubted that and knew that nobody really meant it. Today, though, was no normal day, and she blinked up to a window above the cargo door in hope.

Hope that, as it turned out, was well-founded. Inside the window, the floors were open grating which Tracer could peer down through, crouching and touching her goggles to the metal in order to decipher what was happening below. She couldn’t see much - a person, pushing a thing which she could hear rattling slightly on its wheels. A cart with something on it, maybe, but she couldn’t tell what. Or why. Or who. Or anything, really.

A soft chuckle drifted up from below. “No resistance, as expected.”

Even if the laugh hadn’t been unmistakeable (and it was, Tracer heard it sometimes in nightmares and dreams), the voice would’ve been. *Widowmaker! Talon really is here!* Tracer figured that the assassin must have been reporting on her own radio, and as much as she wanted to do the same, she couldn’t blow her cover. She was hidden, right now. Unknown.

Tracer followed along with the clattering noise below her, quietly, softly. It was agonizing, moving at this pace, but it would be worth it if it saved even one person. Up ahead, she could see the catwalk that she was on opening up into a large room with steel scaffolding - a freight elevator of some sort, maybe. She wasn’t exactly an expert on factories or heavy industry.

“Roger,” Tracer heard from below, presumably in response to something unheard, and that was far more worrisome. She’d always known that Talon probably had a very similar setup - someone who got the schematics and the printouts, like Winston; someone who put the plan together like Morrison. Somebody who… sighed in resignation, like Ana, and kept everybody from dying.
It was one thing to know something. It was another to be presented with it as fact, and the unshakeable knowledge that Widowmaker was in communication with people just the same way she was worried Tracer.

The fact that she knew the microphone of her comms unit wouldn’t pick up the woman’s voice below worried her even more. She did have one option, though, raising her hand to her head and clicking at a small button twice. The silent signal that she’d made the target.

“Yes,” Morrison’s voice came over the radio, followed by Winston’s.

“Tracer? Are you alright? Someone’s there, aren’t they?” She clicked the button twice again. *Wait, it’s… twice for yes, once for no, right?* She was pretty sure of it.

When she got through the doorway, Tracer moved swiftly to the bars at the edge of the catwalk, leaning down to see what was happening below. There was Widowmaker, alright, blue skin and an outfit that looked as if it had been moulded to her. Or just painted on. Tracer’s eyes lingered a little longer than she meant them to, legitimately curious about how it worked. That was all. Just curiosity.

Then, of course, her eyes flicked to the cart - or, rather, to the thing on top of it. It was large, made up of several big pieces all linked together with wires. On the top was what appeared to be a screen, and the whole thing was painted a series of clashing bright colours. There were little smiley faces with X-eyes dotted around it as well, and the word “BOOM!” in large red letter across the back.

She wasn’t an explosives expert any more than an industrial one, but she knew a bomb when she saw one. Widowmaker was pushing it forward, into the cargo lift - Tracer had to move now, and she knew it. Leaping off of the catwalk, she urged on the chronal accelerator, swirled down to ground level and forward and hit the closed grate of the cargo lift.

“What? No, no no!” Tracer gripped at the links as Widowmaker whirled to face her, narrow eyes quickly shifting to a grin.

“Ah, *ma souris* - didn’t move quickly enough, did we?” She chuckled softly, shaking her head and stepping closer to the closed grate. “Such a shame, that. So different from normal. Is the mouse feeling ill? Is she still shaken?” Widowmaker’s eyes were piercing, studious - even though she didn’t have her rig down, Tracer felt as if the other woman could see right through her.

“That’s a bomb.” Tracer frowned slightly, mostly at her own choice of words. *Really, Trace? Not your best opening salvo.*

Widowmaker laughed. “Oh, is that what it is? I thought it was a vacuum cleaner,” she grinned, rifle slung back across her shoulder.

“What are you doing with it?” Tracer’s fingers gripped a little tighter at the grate, and Widowmaker glanced back with a considerate almost-pout.

“Oh, I was thinking about detonating it, perhaps. What else does one do with a bomb, hmm?” she turned back with a sharklike grin, leaning forward until her face almost touched the grate, eyes glimmering. “Get hopping, mouse.”

Tracer didn’t see the other woman hit a button, but the lift started to raise. “No!” the young brit slammed a fist against the grate that held her back from doing anything - but, looking up, she could see the floor above that the elevator was heading to. She’d just need to find an alternate path. *Time to... get hopping, I guess.*
She blinked up to the catwalk where she’d been a minute ago, shouting out to Widowmaker. “What do you gain from this? You’re just hurting people for no reason!”

“Am I?” Widowmaker inspected her nails, leaning back against the bomb cart. “Ah, well, thank you for informing me.” She scoffed. So _naive_. So… _soft_. “And if I told you the company that owns this factory supported Null Sector, with resources and finance, what then, hmm? Would you still be so opposed to a little bit of _hurting_?”

Tracer paused for a second, looked up, and blinked to the next spot up she could find - holding on to a series of pipes, one leg hooked over them. “Null Sector’s gone! Wiped out, kaput.”

Widowmaker laughed. “Oh really? I’ve heard that one before, but Amari’s there, plain as day…”

A little chill shot through Tracer as she recalled the story Ana had told her, the story of her and Widowmaker. “What about the factory workers?” Tracer countered, and Widowmaker scoffed again.

“It is an _automated_ facility, little mouse. You’re not going to convince me any more than I could educate you.”

Again, Tracer rolled her eyes. Was the patronization really necessary? Another few blinks and she was on the floor that the elevator terminated at, pulse pistols out and at the ready, panting. Gradually, the elevator came up - first, the tip of Widowmaker’s rifle appeared, followed slowly by the rest. As it raised, she lowered her gun, until all was level. The lift ground to a halt and then there was silence save for the sound of Tracer’s heavier-than-normal breaths, as the two women faced each other, twenty feet apart. Weapons drawn, ready, and aimed. Nobody moved for several seconds.

“Another gunfight?” Widowmaker drawled, narrowing her eyes slightly. “So _boring_. Instead, let us do something a little more… unanticipated.” Slowly, she lowered her rifle - but only as she saw Tracer lower hers. She’d be damned if she’d let somebody get the drop on her again.

Her so-called teammates not able to listen unless she willed it, and that was the way she liked it. The idea that they might whine about any given thing they happened to overhear was so irritating. When their weapons were down, entirely, Widowmaker stepped back to the cart.

“This here,” she gestured at a large button, bright green, “is the control which begins the countdown. Here is the one which disarms it.” She pointed to another button, purple and square with a light inside. “Let us… have a race for it.” Widowmaker grinned toothily again, predatorily, and stepped forward toward her counterpart. “To the far end of the production floor and back.”

Tracer turned around, looking in the direction that race would take her. There was no floor up here - just open air overtop of the factory which moved below them, a machine-run assembly line. Catwalks criss-crossed the way, but none ran the length of the place, and several had sections that had been removed either by intent or by time. Tracer knew she could just blink across the empty space, and Widowmaker could easily swing from the ceiling overhead - the giant metal joists which ran across would be perfect anchor points.

What other choice did she have, though? She needed to stop this bomb.

“Alright,” she sighed, retracting her pulse pistols back into her bracers. “Count of three?”

Widowmaker chuckled and slung her rifle over her back, the barrel retracting as it reset itself to automatic-fire mode, and she moved to the edge of the platform as Tracer did the same. She held her arm aloft, ready to fire off her grappling hook, and began the countdown. “Trois, deux, un, _go_!”
Immediately, Tracer swirled forward off of the platform. She took an early lead, of course - almost instantly making it to the next section of steady floor - but Widowmaker was able to move a little more fluidly overall. Where Tracer transitioned from blinking to running and back again, Widowmaker moved like a cat on the hunt, grappling and leaping, swinging and sprinting, as if her feet could never fail to find purchase, as if her hands could never slip. As if she didn’t fear falling in the slightest. Didn’t fear death.

How could she fear something she was so close to?

Tracer had to be worried as well about her chronal accelerator running low and entering a recharge cycle. Particularly if it happened halfway across a gap. As a result, she didn’t twist time the whole length along - she saved it only for the leaps, and left the rest up to good old-fashioned ground pounding. Or catwalk pounding, as the case was. Her heart pounded in her chest, her blood rushing in her ears - she made it to the far end of the factory moving faster than she’d intended and slammed into the wall, briefly winding herself but not letting herself pause. She pushed off and started on her return trip. *Halfway done, Trace, c’mon, you’ve got this.*

Widowmaker kept half an eye on the other woman, taking less of a direct route and letting herself down toward the factory floor just a little more - more momentum for her swings. She twirled through the air at the ends of her arcs, spinning and repositioning to launch her hook again - she’d done this a thousand times, this was hardly any different. It was less different than she’d been hoping that it might be. Her heartrate increased, a little. Six percent. It was something.

As she swirled forward, the world seeming to move in slow motion, Tracer looked over. She didn’t see Widowmaker at first, but she *did* see the line, the cable the stretched down from the girders above to the sniper below. The other woman was a little ahead, but Tracer regained her lead as the assassin had to swing up, against gravity.

The frenchwoman saw it too, that her counterpart was leading as they came to the third-to-last platform before their impromptu finish line. She sprang forward off of the next railing, going for a higher arc and pushing herself through the swing. Nine percent. Almost ten. About as fast as her heart had beat for as long as she could remember. She caught up, evening out with Tracer, much to the young brit’s dismay.

She wasn’t fast enough. For the first time in a very, very long time (or at least since Christmas) she was worried that she wouldn’t be fast enough, as she realigned with the standard timestream at one end of the next platform, sprinted to the far end, and leapt off again, slowing her own frame of reference. People didn’t realize how soft time was, or what you could do if you twisted it.

Widowmaker’s grapple, though, was speeding toward the finish - Tracer could see it, out of her peripheral vision. If it got there first, if it latched on- no, she couldn’t let the bomb get armed. *Oi, this is going to sting.*

Tracer reached out a hand, the motion sending her swirling in the other direction, straight in front of the path of Widowmaker’s grappling hook. For a second, she let herself realign with the rest of the world, and the hook dug into her thigh. Tracer cried out as it bit at her flesh, maybe even down as far as the bone, before she spun back time until she was on the edge of the previous platform. Her leg was unharmed, but Widowmaker’s grapple had been stopped in mid-air, and now fell limply downward. The frenchwoman had barely enough time to reach back and grab at the railing she’d just leapt from, fingers locking around it painfully as she grunted. *Twelve percent.*

“Cheers, love,” Tracer chirped, blinking forward again and onto the final platform where the cart lay. It only took Widowmaker a second or two to retract her hook, launch it again, swing across the gap - but it was enough. Tracer waited for her to make it back, standing next to the bomb and grinning.
victoriously. Then, as Widowmaker’s feet touched the platform, Tracer hit the button.

Widowmaker didn’t pause, though - didn’t let Tracer relish in her victory - she stalked forward quickly, closing the distance between them. Tracer took a panicked step backward, but the other woman didn’t have her weapon in hand, and didn’t really look… angry.

“There’s my little mouse,” Widowmaker growled, eyes narrow, stepping forward until there was scarcely an inch between the two of them. “Quite clever when your back is up against the wall, hmm?” She took a deep breath. Thirteen percent - thirteen percent faster, her heart was beating. Her skin, normally a pale blue, had a purplish tinge as blood which had been oxygen-starved almost to the point of cell death for so long practically coursed through the membranes of her lungs.

Tracer didn’t know what to do, couldn’t quite wrap her head around it. Was Widowmaker angry? Pleased? Impressed, maybe? That seemed the most apt if also maybe the most confusing. The young woman panted far more quickly and far more deeply than her french counterpart, eyes locked. Tracer’s were full of confusion, shock, almost fear, and Widowmakers? Those golden, otherworldly eyes… Tracer couldn’t quite decipher what they held. They looked like the eyes of a panther on the prowl, intense and almost hungry.

Widowmaker’s smirk widened just a tiny bit - the only hint of anything before she acted, a cat tensing up just before it pounced. She leaned in, grabbed the front of Tracer’s jacket with one hand, and pulled her forward. The chronal accelerator complained and refused as Tracer tried, again, for the fourth time in a couple of seconds, to twist time to her favour. Widowmaker’s eyes were wide and practically wild, and for a moment, Tracer was scared and unsure of what the other woman might do.

For what it was worth, at that particular instant, neither was Widowmaker. Two possibilities existed in her mind, but only one could happen. She pulled Tracer forward, leaning forward until her lips almost brushed the young woman’s ear. Her breaths came smoothly and heavily. Tracer’s skin was so... warm ...

“Do you hear that?” Her voice was soft, half an inch away from Tracer’s ear. A shiver ran down the brit’s spine. “Do you know what that sound is?”

“What?” Tracer managed, a second later, practically breathless. Her heart was pounding even harder than it had been a moment ago, and she felt almost as if there was ice in her veins. She was glad the rest of the team couldn’t hear her - how would she explain it? She couldn’t. She couldn’t even understand it.

“It is the timer… counting down.” Widowmaker chuckled, pushing back and away from Tracer, letting go of her jacket and spinning. “Looks like you hit the wrong button, cherie - shall we adjourn to the rooftop?” She grinned wide and turned, launching her hook up next to one of the giant glass skylights and pulling herself up toward it. As she flew, she twisted around, pointing feet-first at the glass and driving one of her metal heels through it, shattering a large hole. The tempered glass rained off of her skin in pebbles, and the sun felt almost warm. Almost.

Was this was happy felt like? She couldn’t quite recall… but it seemed about right.

As she touched down on the corrugated tin roof, Widowmaker spun, taking a knee and pulling her rifle tight against her shoulder, breath whistling through her nostrils. Such excitement she hadn’t felt in ages. It might have paled to any other person, but to her it was a peak without equal. She looked forward to more as soon as Tracer launched herself through that window - guns blazing, no doubt, with no regard for her safety. They would fight up here for a few minutes and then- then maybe an adjacent rooftop, or through the alleyways, yes, that could be almost... fun. With so little
opportunity for amusement, Widowmaker really felt as if she had to jump on every chance that presented itself.

For a moment, she just waited. The moment grew longer, seconds ticking on, and a frown started to replace her grin as her heart swiftly quietened, dropping down toward its normal low rate. Her skin lost that faint purple tinge as her breath slowed as well, and she lost the sensation of the sun upon her as that rush of a moment ago slipped through her fingers.

Was Tracer not coming? That seemed unlikely. Widowmaker stood and stepped back toward the skylight, rifle still tucked into her shoulder. When she made it to the glass, she peered through the scope to the platform below her. There was Tracer. Next to the bomb.

“Winston, love?” Tracer’s voice was breathlessly desperate as she keyed the comm unit, switching it to open mic mode. “Any chance you could walk me through disarming a bomb?” The screen on top was blinking down, one number lower every second. A little under five minutes, and counting. She’d considered going after the assassin, for a moment, but this was more important. This was what she was here for.

“I, uh- well, it, it depends on the model I suppose, and-” Winston started to answer, but cut himself off. “Why do you ask?”

“Well, because, there’s a bomb here, and I’d really rather it be disarmed.” There was a moment of silence.

“A- a bomb? I- okay, well, how many wires are there? What colour? Can you see any maker’s marks on the detonator or the-” there was a scuffling noise on the other end of the comm that cut Winston off, and his voice was replaced by Morrison’s.

“Oxton. Does the bomb look completely and totally ridiculous?”

She leaned back a little. It was almost splattered with paint in every bright colour she could think of, and a few which she doubted would’ve come to mind. Covered in doodles and slogans, and seemed to have far more wires than necessary. Spikes had been welded to one side for seemingly no reason.

“Yes. Definitely.”

He laughed, briefly, over the radio. “Excellent. It’s one of Junkrat’s. Forget the wires and modules - look for access panels and open them. Underneath one there’ll be a button labeled ‘do not push’.

Push it.”

Tracer looked for a minute, before finding a panel tucked underneath a section that jutted out from the main body of the device. Prying it open, there was a button inside. It was lit up, bright red, and a little sign hung down from it. It read “Do not push under ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. Yes I mean you.”

“I… found it. Are you sure about this?” Tracer looked hesitantly at the button.

“Yes. Push the button, Oxton.”

She did.

The bomb beeped, then began to beep very rapidly, the pace increasing. Tracer stood up and stepped back - the timer was dropping quickly. “Tracer?” Winston’s voice came over the radio again, “Tracer, what’s-”
The number was just about to reach zero, and Tracer felt as if she was falling out of time again. Fragments of her life flashed through her mind, before her eyes - playing in her youth, piloting her first jet, the accident, the recovery, Overwatch, Emily. A rooftop on King’s Row. Widowmaker.

The timer hit zero. Tracer triggered the chronal accelerator, but she knew it would have been too heavily taxed by the race a minute ago - she was done for, she was…

...she was still alive. The bomb hadn’t exploded. The accelerator beeped softly as it returned her to the normal timestream, and Tracer stepped closer to the bomb hesitantly.

It laughed. A recording, of that crazy Australian’s laugh. “Boom! Good job, mate - you’re either very stupid, or me! Either way, you don’t deserve to die today. Go out and get yourself some ice cream!”

Tracer sighed in relief, slumping to the floor and chuckling. Two close calls in two missions. You’ve got to be more careful.

“Tracer?” Winston’s voice came over the radio, coloured with concern. “Tracer, are you alright?”

“Yeah love,” she laughed breathlessly, “the bomb’s done for. Mission successful, I’m heading back for pickup.”

---

Widowmaker couldn’t take her eyes off of the scene below. Her scope was as steady as any building, and fixed solidly on the bomb’s control chip. She released the trigger as the countdown reached zero. Disarmed. Still, she couldn’t quite seem to pull her eyes away yet. Why had Tracer stayed? Risked her life? So foolish. Such a foolish girl.

Below her, Tracer stood and walked over toward the elevator platform’s edge, hitting the button to send it back down. Railings raised around the hole it left as it sank down from the platform, taking the now-useless bomb with it. With her.

“Mission failed,” Widowmaker sent through the comm unit, standing and slinging her rifle behind her back. “The thunder from down under should make his bombs more difficult to disarm.”

“What?!?” Junkrat’s thickly-accented voice came over the radio, “who’re you calling thunder, eh?” His compatriot, the huge one, could be heard in the background grunting. “Oh, right. That makes sense.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes. The fool spoke as if he could understand the lumbering oaf, but all he ever did was grunt. Sometimes she felt like that was all any of the others did. At least the pig was open and honest about it, rather than trying to disguise himself as intellectual.

“Anyway, how’s it my fault that you couldn’t keep them from disarming the bomb?”

She never took kindly to accusations. Particularly not when they were true. “What, would you have me stand next to it until it detonated?” she half-sneered, grappling her way up a nearby apartment tower to where a dropship would pick her up. “I was here to escort it in. I did so. What happens afterward is due to your handiwork. Perhaps next time I’ll bring you along, hmm? We’ll see how well you can outrun an explosion on that peg of yours.”
Again, Roadhog grunted in the background, but this time the sound was swiftly met by a smack. “Oi!” Junkrat exclaimed, “you can’t use language like that! She may be a mean blue lady, but she’s still a lady!”

“Knock it off, all of you.” Reaper practically groaned over the radio, and Widowmaker rolled her eyes. As if he had any power to command them, really. She pulled the comm unit from her ear and dropped it as she walked toward the dropship, grinding it into pieces under her heel as voices bickered.

Stepping up into the dropship, she ground her teeth together and looked out over the rooftops. Did’nt chase me. Not even after the bomb was…

Her eyes narrowed at the unfamiliar city as the dropship lifted off. She hated failure, which was fair enough - it had been instilled in her throughout her life. The more concerning thing was that, at the moment, Widowmaker wasn’t entirely sure what she considered the greatest failure of the day.

There were very few moments which she looked back on, very few shots that she questioned herself over whether she should’ve taken, but with an irritated grunt, Widowmaker realized that the events of the day had added one more to that list.

---

Tracer, on the other hand, made her way back to her ship with a skip in her step. She sighed happily as she leaned up against the window, looking out over the city - the safe city, albeit a mostly abandoned one (at least officially), thanks to her - with a smile. There wasn’t an uncertain thought in her mind, which was a welcome change from the last mission.

Engines whirring, the dropship lifted off to return her home, and there was nothing but bliss in her heart and her mind… until she saw a shadow flitting away toward the sun. A Talon dropship - no doubt, the one with Widowmaker inside.

The sight brought back all the confusion, all the doubt, and it was no less after today. On the one hand, she felt as if she needed to sit down and have a serious think about some things… on the other, Tracer highly doubted that any amount of thought would explain things.

“Gunships,” she murmured to herself, shaking her head and frowning.

It wasn’t even that, though - or not that alone, at least. Tracer could understand sparing a life. Just… she felt like a blender of emotions. She needed to find some calm, some that wouldn’t bleed away the moment she saw that blue face again. The sort of calm that only one person she knew of might know how to find.

---

Zenyatta considered the rock before him from a new angle. Not physically, of course, but rather, from the perspective of an ant. To an ant, this was an easy obstacle - but an obvious difference. To a man, something so small as to go unnoticed, but caught in the shoe could cause discomfort for days.
To an elephant, it would mean nothing at all.

Unless it were, perhaps, to be fired at great speed. Then it might mean something to an elephant.

The omnic sighed contentedly, slightly, floating a few inches from the ground. There were dozens of rocks, maybe hundreds, within this courtyard. He could wait here for years and never consider them all.

It was a comforting thought.

“Greetings,” he hummed, his voice ringing melodically as he heard footsteps approaching: soft but unmistakable. “Is there something with which I can help you, Tracer?”

She walked up a little nervously and sat down next to him, cross-legged. Then she second-guessed herself and wondered whether that might be offensive, and fidgeted a little as she considered repositioning.

“Sit however you please,” Zenyatta hummed with a hint of laughter in his smooth, synthetic voice, and Tracer offered him an apologetic smile and a hesitant chuckle.

“Thanks. I, um… I’ve been feeling a little… uneasy, lately.”

The robotic monk didn’t turn to face her - she’d chosen to sit alongside him, to face the same direction. He wouldn’t alter their arrangement. “That’s unfortunate. Is there some way I can help you find harmony?”

Tracer nodded a little, frowning still. “I… I don’t know, exactly. I was wondering if maybe… we could talk about, um…” she swallowed heavily. It felt as if her guts were writhing and on fire, her throat closed up tightly. She tried to speak, but didn’t manage anything other than a little squeaked noise.

A few tears ran down her cheeks. Zenyatta kept looking at the rock in front of him. It didn’t know what was happening, what had happened - it simply was.

There were times that, though he knew he shouldn’t, he envied that rock.

“Mondatta was a good man, a good teacher, a good friend.” Tracer gasped at Zenyatta’s words, staring at him wide-eyed.

“How did you… know?” Her own words were strained whispers, all she could force through her choked-up throat.

“Your turmoil is… unsubtle,” Zenyatta offered, and Tracer actually laughed at that, wiping at her cheek.

“Oh really? I thought I was really sweeping it under the rug here, ha!”

The floating omnic chuckled softly, then was silent for a moment. “Was I correct, then? Is this about Mondatta?” Tracer nodded, the tears returning, and Zenyatta reached out a hand to lay on her shoulder. She didn’t know what to do, what to ask.

“I miss my friend dearly,” Zenyatta dipped his head, and Tracer looked over, shoulders shaking. “At first, I refused to accept it. I was angry, bitter, sad, scared… but I’ve come to realize that this is simply the way things are. Do you know what they call this process?”

“Um,” Tracer muttered, wiping at her cheek with the back of one hand. At least she felt like she
could kind of talk a little. Crying seemed to have helped. “Is it… um… achieving a… state of zen?”

Her omnic friend chuckled softly again, shaking his head gently. “No, but that is a good guess. They call it grieving. They call it life. There is no shame in emotion, in feeling, in confusion - sometimes, they are bricks on the road to harmony. Sometimes they are not. Regardless, they simply are.”

At least this was replacing a sad confusion with a more blank one, so that was something. Tracer trusted Zenyatta, implicitly, but she didn’t really know how to carry on a conversation with him. She always felt like she would mess up somehow, say the wrong thing - even though she knew he’d never judge her for any missteps, and never hold it against her.

“When I first heard about him, I refused to accept it. I grew angry, bitter, sad. In time, I have come to realize that this is simply the way things are - Mondatta has moved on from what he was. One day, I will join him in the Iris, as will we all.”

A sigh shuddered out of Tracer as she hung her head. It was supposed to be reassuring, she knew - and in a way, it was, but still… if she’d taken that bullet. If Widowmaker hadn’t shot. If Tracer had been a little faster, if the guards had taken a different route, if, if, if.

“I still see him, you know,” Zenyatta murmured and Tracer lifted her head, looking to her friend in confusion. “I see him every day - signs on the streets, people speaking at conferences and on the news. I see him in the words and the voices and actions of people, every single day. His body is dead, but a spirit cannot be lost or killed. I know that now - we are all one within the Iris, as is Mondatta.”

She felt a little better, she guessed, at that idea - she’d seen the same as well. He’d always had support, and a following, but in the wake of his assassination… it had unified people in a way, and their message was peace. Humans and Omnis, living in harmony, all in Mondatta’s name. A martyr.

“I see him in you as well,” Zenyatta dipped his head, looking over a bit toward his friend. “I think he would be saddened to know that his passing has brought you such pain, but that is the way of things. Loss often hurts.”

Tracer sighed heavily. “I know. I know I shouldn’t beat myself up about it, but- but I just keep thinking… what if, you know?” A huff and a shrug as she shook her head.

Zenyatta couldn’t smile, but he thought of it as he nodded. “I know. I thought the same. I asked myself if something could have been done differently - as, I think, did most of the Shambali. We stumbled in the aftermath, but…” he gestured at his legs, crossed in front of himself - unused, entirely, as he hovered above the ground. “In the right circumstances, one cannot stumble.”

Unfortunately, Tracer didn’t know how to just float.

He raised a hand and swirled his fingers, causing an orb to hover there, a purple aura surrounding it. The other hand he lifted as well, and another orb came to follow it, bobbing lightly. This one glowed a pale yellow.

“Harmony. Discord. Different aspects of the same thing - different sides of a similar matter.” Zenyatta bowed his head as he spoke, bringing his hands together in front of himself. The orbs began to twirl slowly, circling around each other in a complicated pattern to which he paid little attention.

Tracer had seen them before, these orbs, and she knew what they did. Healed allies, harmed enemies - she didn’t know how, or anything of the like.

“Do you know what these orbs actually are?” Zenyatta looked more directly to Tracer, and she
shook her head, watching raptly as the glowing auras swirled around each other. They left eddies in the air that hung and danced, reflecting in the brit’s glistening eyes.

“They are concentrations of emotion.” The omnic nodded his head once, slowly. He sounded solemn, even for a monk. “I think of my teacher for both of them.” Tracer’s eyes widened as Zenyatta held out a hand, palm flat. The yellow Harmony orb floated above it.

“This: love and hope and unity, joy and protection and trust - this orb is Tekhartha Mondatta. This one,” he outstretched his other hand, the other orb floating, tendrils of its purple aura reaching down toward his palm. “Anger and sadness and pain, bitterness and despair and regret - this orb is Tekhartha Mondatta.”

Tracer’s eyes widened, one side of her face lit with yellow; the other, purple. She reached out, slowly, as if to touch the orbs. “I… may I?” Zenyatta nodded, and Tracer laid a hand on the purple orb.

A rush of things hit her, feelings - her heart clenched up tight in her chest and she choked another sob, unable to manage any breath after that. Her mind dwelt on the pain: seeing Mondatta’s corpse slumped into his limousine, the fear when the Slipstream fighter started to malfunction. Tears ran freely down her cheeks as her shoulders shook, and she pulled her hand away.

She didn’t wait before touching the other orb. Maybe couldn’t. A warm flood of emotions flowed through her, breath shuddering from her lips. The tears continued, but they were different now - her mind flickering to the first time she told Emily she loved her, waiting for the results of her flight test, pulling on the chronal accelerator for the first time.

“Fear and joy, life and death, love and hate… all are one within the Iris.” Zenyatta’s voice hummed in the air, as if surrounding them.

Tracer dropped her hands into her lap, crying gently. She wasn’t sure if she was less confused, she wasn’t even sure if she was less sad… but she knew she was more okay. Somehow. It was what she’d been hoping for anyway.

“Thank you,” she whispered, sighing heavily. “I think… I think I still have a lot to think about. I think I’m a little better though.”

“Good,” Zenyatta nodded, letting the aura slip away from the orbs and interlacing his fingers once more. “Better… is better.”

From him, it didn’t just feel like a platitude or empty reassurance - it felt a lot more solid than that. Tracer wasn’t sure what it all meant, really, but… maybe it meant things would be okay.

At the very least, things would be. They would be what they would be.

There was a surprising amount of comfort in that.

Chapter End Notes

...why yes, yes I did start writing the JFL summaries just so I could write the phrase "Tracer touches Zenyatta's balls", why do you ask? :D

Hopefully I can stick with at least a chapter a week, maybe more than that, we'll see.
I've got several written at the moment, but of course, editing is a thing (and also I'm nervous to expose them to the light of day). So we've got high-speed chases down (or at least one of them). Now we've just gotta nail bank heists, zomnics, and stealing a hospital. Easy, right?

Translations:
*Trois, deux, un* == "Three, two, one"

Think everything else had already been covered?

Tune in next time for fun adventures with Ana and Jack in a warzone! Also, more Winrisa and Emilena cuteness on a double date (no clue about actual ship names I'm kinda oblivious, heh, oops)!
Stormless Night

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: It's a very special mission for Lena "Tracer" Oxton... a double date with one of her friends. While Emily, Lena, Winston and Orisa meet in a restaurant, other plans are afoot. Elsewhere in the world it's go-time for Ana and Jack, who run into more than one stumbling block - but it's nothing a pair of old soldiers like them can't handle, right?

JFL summary: Tracer burns her mouth on soup, Emily is gorgeous, Orisa can't eat and Winston's a gorilla - the perfect combo for a romantic night out. Meanwhile, Jack is a drama queen and Ana is aromantic and saves his butt even though nobody ever listens to her. The maître d’ is a multiclass barbarian-rogue, but that isn't relevant anyway. Tracer and Emily totally have plans which are definitely real plans.

Chapter Notes

Warning: descriptions of wounds and treatment in the Jack/A Ana section, but I don't think it's too graphic or gory. Also there are a few terrible lines.

Previous chapter Summary: Tracer spoiled Talon's plan to blow up a factory when she disarmed the bomb that Widowmaker had delivered - giving up a chase in the process, and risking her own life. It left Widowmaker a little confused, and actually did quite the same for Tracer. Luckily, Zenyatta was available to talk a little bit. It would be hard not to feel better after that.

The young brit stepped out of the vehicle with a bit of a shiver, looking up at the sky above. Dark and cloudless, with stars glittering across it - beautiful, but she was still a little nervous. She always was, being out here and exposed like this.

“Pretty night,” Emily murmured, interweaving her fingers with Lena’s as she stepped out of the cab. “Good night for a double date!”

Lena laughed lightly, squeezing her girlfriend’s hand. It was a force of habit, really, being worried - she wasn’t wearing the accelerator at the moment. She actually couldn’t, without everybody recognizing her as Tracer and surrounding her - either wanting autographs or maybe to yell accusations. She tended to get a lot of both.

No, tonight she was just Lena again, out in the world - and while that was a little relieving, it brought its own concerns. With the accelerator stuffed into her (very) oversized purse, she wouldn’t risk losing her hold on time… but she also couldn’t bend it at will. If something did happen…

Nothing’s gonna happen. Calm down, it’s fine - you’re just… you’re just nervous for Winston, that’s all! Still, her eyes flicked to the rooftops for a second, looking for little glowing red dots. She didn’t
“Yeah, it really is,” Lena grinned, turning to give Emily a kiss on the cheek. “Thanks for coming along, love - the big guy’s really nervous about this, you know? I think it’ll mean a lot to him to have a few friends there.”

Emily laughed gleefully. “When I found out he’d managed reservations to this place, how could I say no? Did you know that the Michelin guide considered adding another star, just so they could award it to this restaurant? It’s true!”

Lena giggled, shaking her head a little. Hair that normally stood up in semi-spiked clumps now lay a little flatter (the result of twenty minutes and two tubes of products), and bounced lightly as she laughed. She didn’t know or care if the story really was true; she had a cute girlfriend, and that was the important part. All thoughts of spiders left her head as they made their way inside.

The maître d’ raised an eyebrow at them briefly when they announced they were here for Winston, party of four. At first, Lena wondered whether it might be because of them, two women, or maybe their outfits - she didn’t really own a lot of fancy clothes, and her white blouse and black slacks stood out a little against the dresses of every other woman here. Particularly against Emily’s; green, long, flowing and lightly sequined in golden patterns, slit up to a little above the knee on one side - Lena loved how the colour brought out Emily’s freckles, her long red hair pulled into a braid, and accented her eyes as well.

Also how it showed off her legs. That was definitely good, and Lena found her eyes falling back down whenever they had nowhere more pressing to focus.

As they were led into the restaurant, though, she realized that the looks probably had nothing at all to do with them, because while she could pull off her accelerator, slip her goggles away, throw on a different outfit and suddenly cease to be Tracer (at least recognizably), her friend definitely couldn’t.

Winston looked (and indeed, felt) almost impossibly awkward in a suit and bowtie that had been custom-made from scratch for him, sitting on the floor because no chair in the house could hold his weight or size. Even at that, the table was a little low for comfort - and Orisa, roughly beside him (though they took up half of the table between the two of them) didn’t exactly fit in any better.

The tall, four-legged omnic towered over the table even though she was kneeling on the ground. She looked exactly the same as always, with the exception of a necklace with an intricate metal pendant hanging from it. Every table immediately near them was empty, and the people nearest-by were doing a very bad job of making it seem like they weren’t staring.

Neither of them seemed to be talking.

“Winston!” Emily announced loudly, throwing her arms wide and somehow managing to trot swiftly over to the big gorilla despite her heels. She practically jumped into a hug, Winston catching her with his huge arms and a soft chuckle, and Lena grinned at the sight. Emily really didn’t care if other people were being judgemental, and sometimes that was exactly what a situation needed - she was more than capable of fitting in and acting the part where required, but Lena knew there was a bit of a flame of rebellion inside the woman and she loved it.

“Hi, Orisa,” Lena smiled, walking over and taking the chair next to her. “How’ve you been?”

“Oh, quite well, Tracer - I appreciate your inquiry.” Orisa looked almost relieved, despite the relative lack of expressive features on her face. With the exception of her eyes, nothing moved - but that was really all that was needed.
Lena giggled softly, shaking her head a little. “Oh, tonight I’m just Lena, Lena Oxton. That’s a beautiful necklace, where’d you get it?” She leaned in closer to take a look as Orisa began to explain. It had been a gift, apparently, from Efi’s father. The intricate metalwork depicted a pair of hands, linked: one organic, one mechanical. A symbol of Orisa’s home city, omnic and human living together happily. “It sounds like a beautiful place,” the brit murmured, flashing Orisa a wide smile. “I hope I’ll get to see it some day!”

With the ice broken, it was hard to tell if the other tables were looking - and Lena didn’t care, regardless. She was here with friends to have a good time and some good food, and it didn’t matter whether some stuffy rich people thought they belonged. Of course, she knew that Emily could’ve fit in perfectly if she’d wanted to - she was probably the only one of the three of them who could. She reached over and took her lover’s hand, offering a grateful smile and getting a kiss on the cheek in return.

The waiter came, they placed their orders, and continued to chat. Orisa regaled them all with anecdotes about growing up, which for her was still somewhat an ongoing process. It was easy to forget, given her size and often stoic nature, that she wasn’t even a year old yet in some ways. At first she was a little shy, but began to open up when her stories brought laughter - and understanding, as well. She was a little embarrassed, for instance, to relate the tale of the first time she ever saw a plunger and ended up wearing it on her head for a few hours before Efi noticed - but Winston was quick to offer up solace in a similar story of his own.

“The first time I saw a pair of glasses,” he admitted, grinning a little sheepishly, “I just used them to pick my nose. They seemed so perfectly designed for it! Of course, now I know that that little hook is supposed to go behind the ear.” He laughed, and the others joined in as well. It all felt very comfortable, once it got going.

“We should do this more often,” Lena murmured into Emily’s ear at one point, as the appetizers came and were getting set about the table.

Emily quirked an eyebrow. “What, go on dates?” She giggled and nodded happily, “Sounds great! Dates with a cute girl,” she tapped Lena on the nose and gave her a quick kiss. “Excellent plan, love.”

The three of them - Lena, Emily, and Winston - all reached for their spoons and started in on their soup. Lena moaned slightly around her first mouthful: french onion, hot enough to almost burn her mouth, and with a deliciously browned cheesy layer on top. Emily’d ordered the same but blew on hers first, and as a result, didn’t burn her mouth.

Winston’s gazpacho was already gone. The spoon was almost too small for him even to pick up, so he just lifted the whole bowl and tipped it back. It was almost a mouthful - but at least it was a tasty almost-mouthful.

Orisa, in contrast, just looked down at her bowl and spoon blankly. After a moment, she picked up the utensil - but without a mouth, or any reason to eat, she really had nothing to do from there.

“I…” she started, then trailed off, glancing between the others - Lena, who seemed to be trying to dredge up the hottest soup possible from the bottom of her ramequin; Emily who giggled as her girlfriend burned her tongue (again) and had to drink from her ice water hastily and wide-eyes; and then finally, over to Winston, with his empty bowl. He was the only one to be looking back, and offered her a grin that seemed both apologetic and reassuring.

“Winston,” she tipped her head a bit to one side, “would you care for another bowl of soup? I suppose I have little use for mine. I had not considered it beforehand.”
The large gorilla nodded with a chuckle and reached out for the bowl she pushed over. His hands briefly closing over hers. The bowl was only so large, after all - either one of them could easily have held it in one palm. “Thanks,” he nodded, “and uh… sorry, I didn’t really think about the food.”

She dropped her eyes to the bowl, regarding it speculatively. The lights behind her eyes flickered as she shifted interpretation modes, taking an analysis of the soup’s contents by laser spectrography. “It would appear to be a very tasty and wholesome soup. My interpretation of the emulation of its flavour is quite pleasant.”

Winston chuckled a little, picking up the bowl in one hand. “Well uh, I’m glad you like it.” He tipped the bowl back and Orisa recoiled a tiny bit - just a hint - and her head drooped a little.

“I apologize. I was overly analytical.” Her voice was soft, and sounded a little sad. Winston set the bowl quickly back down on the table, shuffling a little closer to his date.

“What? No- no, I really meant that,” he reassured. “I didn’t mean-” His shoulders drooped as he sighed. “Please don’t be sad?”

Orisa blinked a few times and looked over to him, moving a little closer on four knees. In preparation for the night, she’d dialed up her emotional emulator unit, as it seemed appropriate. Unfortunately it was a little bit… unrefined. Or perhaps my interpretations of it are. Hmm. An interesting possibility that warrants further inspection.

“I realize that I am not the same as other people,” Orisa nodded, but didn’t know what came next in that sentence and just let it trail off into silence.

Winston let that hang for a second - enough to know that he wouldn’t be interrupting - and then snorted lightly. “What, and I am?” He raised an eyebrow and Orisa looked back at him, slightly startled, but the gorilla laid a hand on her forearm and kept explaining. “There’s a reason I invited you on a date rather than other people,” he nodded with a smile. He didn’t actually say the reason, partly because he couldn’t really put it into words. Sometimes the heart wanted things that the mind couldn’t interpret, that language couldn’t capture. “The only reason I said anything was because, well… I really hope you’re having a good time. I don’t want you to feel left out.”

Orisa understood, or at least thought she did. Though she couldn’t have put it into words any more than he had, a little ping from her emotional emulator, her mechanical heart, told her that everything was alright. “Thank you, Winston,” she nodded with a smile - or at least, her closest interpretation, all in the eyes and the tilt of her head, the set of her shoulders. Relief washed through her and she leaned in, wrapping her arms around her friend, her date. “I feel very… left in.”

“Awwwww they’re hugging again,” Lena nudged Emily, her voice an almost-squealed whisper. “Didn’t I tell you? It’s so cute!”

“So cute!” Emily whispered in agreement with a little giggle, then evidently decided that quietness was too much. “You two are really cute!” She announced brightly with a grin.

Winston and Orisa parted with a variety of chuckles and muttered half-words, Emily and Lena both giggling, but the large pair flashed each other wide smiles. This was all just fun amongst friends.

When the next round came, conversation drew to a bit of a halt again. This time, without hunger gnawing at her stomach, Lena actually noticed when Orisa didn’t start eating. “Oh,” she frowned slightly. “Didn’t think about that. Um… what do you eat, anyway?”

Orisa shrugged slightly. It was a newer expression for her, but one she was trying to get nailed down
- it seemed like a common response. “I do not eat. Or at least, not in the same way you do, Lena Oxton - I can interpret the flavours of the food through a spectrographic analysis by laser, but I would gain nothing through its ingestion.” She slid her plate - rotisserie beef sliced thin and piled over a bed of roast vegetables, with a horseradish-and-mustard drizzle overtop and a side of risotto - over to Winston with a nod. “Thank you, it was delicious. I could not eat another bite.”

The other three laughed at the wry joke, intentional or not, and Winston took the plate with a grin. His own steak was only about two bites for him, and he was glad he’d eaten before he came out tonight. He’d probably have more when he got home, too.

“That’s so cool, though,” Lena grinned, eyes wide with delight. “So you can just taste everything and you never need to worry about getting full?”

“You could do that too if you could keep yourself from diving in face-first,” Emily teased, nudging her arm, and Winston snorted a laugh as Lena looked shocked.

Orisa hummed a slight giggle. “Yes, I can taste whatever I can see. As for sustenance, that is provided by my internal reactor.”

This time it was Emily’s turn to look over, wide-eyed. “Wait, anything you can see?” Her eyes narrowed and she glanced around conspiratorially, smirking, and leaned forward across the table. “What does that guy taste like?” she whispered, hitching a thumb over her shoulder to a man sitting at a distant table.

The group erupted into raucous laughter as the maître d’ considered for the fourth time that night whether it would be worth the hassle to try to have them removed, but the monkey had tipped generously, up-front, and he figured that for that he could put up with it for a little while longer. In a few hours he’d be home, anyway, so this hardly mattered - so long as he wouldn’t lose his job over it, he didn’t really care.

---

Elsewhere, in a different city, the sun beat down on what little of the self-styled Soldier: 76’s skin was left uncovered. For a second, he regretted the combination of full-length pants, combat boots, and leather jacket, even in the Middle-Eastern heat, but there was a mission and that was more important than a little heat-stroke.

Also, he’d been shot.

With a grunt, he struggled to pull himself along, out of the line of fire. He managed drag himself through a doorway, in what was probably a cafe when the surrounding streets weren’t full of gunfire and explosions. For a moment, 76 wondered what it would’ve been like while it was running. A sure sign that he was suffering from some fairly serious bloodloss. Normally he could keep his head in the game better than this.

Reaching down to his belt, his fingers wrapped around the metal cylinder that emanated his biotic field, and even before he deployed it he was already sighing in relief.

Soldier: 76 groaned though, with the knowledge of what he’d need to do first. It wouldn’t help to have a wound heal over the bullet that had caused it, so he needed to make sure that they were clear. Three shots, through the edge of his abdomen - but at least one of them was a deeper wound than his
finger was long.

“Time to get creative,” he muttered through gritted teeth, managing to pull himself upright and stumble, with the aid of tables, behind the cafe’s front counter. Wooden spoon. That’ll do. He grabbed the impromptu implement and started to probe around in his own bullet-holes, poking loose the fragments of shrapnel and bits of his own jacket - and one whole bullet that was still lodged in there where he could feel it burning. His eyes blurred and his head spun, and he felt as if his teeth might shatter from how tightly he was clenching them, but it only took a moment. He could only afford a moment. Even just having the debris cleared out felt a thousand times better.

Still not good, though.

With a heavy, pained sigh, he fell to the floor and dropped the biotic field generator beside himself. It made a sharp clink as little feet deployed from the bottom, gripping into the brick floor next to him, and began to send out its healing in waves, pulsing gently.

Ah, that’s better. The pain was gone almost immediately, fading into dull remnants and aches, and 76 reached up to key his comm unit. “Some days I think I’m getting too old for this.”

Ana Amari snorted back at him over the radio. “Nonsense, Jack… you already are. You’ve been too old for decades. Time to retire to a little beach house somewhere.”

The white-haired soldier chuckled darkly, shaking his head. “Yeah, sure - and you too. Soon as this battle’s over.” And the next one, and the next one, and…

Normally he would’ve raised more of an issue over the name. With anybody else, he would have. He couldn’t think of himself as Jack Morrison anymore - that man had died when Overwatch had crumbled around him, literally and figuratively. 76 had visited the gravestone once or twice. It was nice. Little bit excessive. Fine, maybe there was no body interred there, but the stone still marked the final resting place of Jack Morrison, Commander of Overwatch.

He was just a soldier, now - one of hundreds from a secret program undertaken by the U.S. government. Maybe the last one, he wasn’t sure.

Technically, there was at least one other… but he’d died years ago as well.

And many times since.

He just leaned his head back against the wall, resting for a few seconds while the biotic field did its work and patched up the gunshots, the scrapes from stone and brick, the bruises and muscular tears from carrying on close-quarters combat at his age, and muttered to himself. “Getting way too old for this…”

---

Ana took another shot down the long sightline that the road presented. It wasn’t ideal to carry on a retrieval op in the middle of an active combat zone… but then, nobody seemed to care when she lodged a complaint about that sort of thing. For some reason it seemed as if the others would prefer to dive in, get shot, and come to her for a quick fix-up, rather than just avoid the bullets in the first place.
Not as if I’m any different, she thought to herself with a hint of a smirk, her almost-silent rifle kicking back into her shoulder again. It was a thing of beauty, really, the biotic rifle - one of these days maybe she’d send Lindholm a thank-you letter.

Not Zeigler, though. That felt like it would just be rubbing salt in a wound.

Another round downrange and another enemy soldier crumpling. At least she had the option now to not kill - to incapacitate, instead. It was marvellous, the things one could do with what essentially amounted to a high-powered dart gun.

She slid the bolt-action back, and forward again, keeping still as she watched out through the scope. Jack was around the corner, as as soon as he was patched up, he’d get a nice clear path. As long as he was willing to step over the dozen catatonic forms through the street - combatants from both sides of a conflict she had no place in.

Hell, she barely had a place in any of them, these days. There were times she considered the life that Zeigler had taken - that kind of passive devotion to the innocent, helping out in the aftermath. It wasn’t a terrible idea.

Still, if her rifle could stop even one person from entering Mercy’s tent in the first place…

With a huff, Ana released another shot, taking down a man in a uniform who sprinted across a rooftop nearby, trying to reach a gun emplacement. He didn’t make it - but he’d survive. She didn’t particularly care if any of them lived or died, but given the option, she’d go for the former.

So long as it still eliminated the threat.

A familiar tuft of white hair poked around one corner and dodged back again, and Ana’s smirk redoubled. “You’re clear, Jack,” she spoke over the radio, “I’ve got you covered.”

Soldier: 76 turned the corner with a nod, and began to dash down the street, moving with a speed that would’ve been impressive on a twenty-year-old athlete. On him? It looked outright surreal, yet strangely fitting. Ana couldn’t picture him any other way, really - sure, she could remember what he’d been like when he was younger: blonde hair and gleaming eyes, looking like a superhero as he leaped into battle. He still moved the same, fluid and fast, but it was in a whole different set of circumstances now. That face held a lot more pain than idealism now - even if he wouldn’t talk about it, she could still recall the way they used to look.

She could remember plenty. Didn’t mean it coloured her view of the present - now was now. No sense getting lost in the past.

It had been a painful lesson to learn, but worthwhile in the long run.

He shouldered his way into a boarded-off building, and there was a brief scuffle, a sound of gunfire. An explosion, a second’s pause, and a grunt over the radio. “Need eyes out back,” he added, and there was a shout and the sound of a collision. It sounded suspiciously like a rifle-but being applied, heavily, to a cheek - and was followed by what very much seemed to be the sound of an unconscious body falling to the floor. His radio kept transmitting as long as it detected noises above a certain threshold - to avoid cutting off mid-word, but sometimes it caught a few extra things along the side.

Ana smirked a little wider as she broke her position and retreated outside, climbing up a radio tower that was mounted on the roof of her building. It only took her a moment, though her aging joints did complain a little. She didn’t have the same advantages as him, the same genetic engineering or
training, nor the little micro-injectors dotted about her outfit for a quick top-up of adrenaline as needed. There was no way she’d be sprinting down a street any time soon.

Besides, she was just happier up in a tower.

From here, she could see far more of the city below - though she was more exposed in turn. Sandblown streets and buildings, walls that predated everything else by several centuries at least. Walls that had once saved its inhabitants from invading armies, surely - but stopping a threat from within was so much harder, and the symptoms of the city’s internal clash lay dotted around as scorch marks and explosion craters, turret emplacements and hollowed-out hulks of military vehicles.

It all seemed quite familiar to Ana.

The building that Jack had entered had quite a large area behind it, fenced in with barbed wire atop. Several men crouched, ready for the intruder, guns loaded and aimed. They’d taken up good positions, good cover and sight-lines…

...at least, for somebody coming out of the back door. Ana even took a second to say a silent congratulations to the combatants for choosing such good places to set up their ambush, before she rained down darts upon them. Two fell, clutching at their necks, before the other four even noticed what was happening. Another one was hit as he looked around, the fourth as he shouted and pointed her way. Number five, in the thigh, as he scrambled for a new position.

The sixth actually managed to get secured. Against Ana. Jack, though, had other plans, and jumped out from the window on the second story, landing on top of the man solidly and striking him with his rifle.

“Good job,” he grunted, standing from his fallen foe and nodding up toward Ana’s position. “I’ll head out front in a minute. Meet me there and we can evac.”

Ana rolled her eye a little, and then scoped in, placing a dart right in Jack’s upper arm. He grunted and recoiled. “I wasn’t hurt that badly,” he complained, and Ana chuckled.

“Better safe than sorry.”

As he went about his business, searching the premises for their target, Ana made her way back down. She heard another scuffle after he’d gone back inside, presumably down into the basement. “Surprised me,” Jack explained over the radio and Ana could hear his biotic field whirring in the background. They must’ve managed to land a few good hits. “But I found it. Heading out.”

Ana made her way down to the streets, standing in a corner which shielded her from view in most directions. Old habits die hard. Jack came out from the doorway, clutching a duffel bag under one arm.

The flash in the distance drew her eye, and she lurched forward, but it was far too late - the bullets were supersonic, they reached Jack before the sound like a mechanical belch. Something aircraft-mounted, with an incredibly high rate of fire.

Jack cried out as he crumbled to the ground, dropping the bag beside him, and Ana ran out toward her slumped friend frantically, clutching at his jacket with one hand and the bag with the other, slinging them forward into the cafe. 76 grunted as he knocked a table out of the way and Ana dove in after him, avoiding a second strafing run that tore up the street. The grunt and his groans were good signs. At least he was alive.

“City’s getting a little crowded for my liking,” Ana muttered as she flipped Jack over on his back
amidst the refreshed sounds of fighting from outside. A large explosion knocked dust from the walls and ceiling, drifting through shafts of light that pierced the building’s bullet-holes.

“Ana!” Jack groaned, clutching at a bleeding wound in his side and trying to pull himself into a crouch.

She would have none of that, though, and pulled his arm out to the side, pushing his shoulder down to the ground. “Stay down, Jack. For once in your damned life, stay down.”

“Ana, it’s important.” His words came through heavily gritted teeth, lips dripping a little blood - not that Ana could see it, covered by his facemask. That wasn’t even mentioning the amount that ran down his hands. Not gushing, not exactly.

Not yet.

Ana glanced at his biotic field generator, but it was still recharging. Damn. Time to get old-fashioned. How appropriate. She pulled out a knife from her boot and cut his jacket back, revealing the wounds a little better. They were messy, ragged tears from massive-calibre rounds. Anybody without years of genetic tinkering probably would have been dead right away, but as luck would have it, Jack didn’t fit that bill.

“Ana, if I don’t make it—”

She cut him off with a quick sigh and a roll of her one good eye. “Oh please, Jack - you do this every time you’re dying.”

He coughed, grunting at the pain. “I’m being serious here, dammit. This is important - if I don’t make it, I need you to know. How I feel about-”

“I know how you feel about me, Jack,” she sighed, shaking her head as she wiped most of the blood away with a strip torn off of her cape. A biotic needle from her rifle was hopefully enough to keep him stabilized, at least for a minute, and she jabbed one in manually between two of his ribs.

“Ana,” he groaned, pressing his head back against the cold stone, “I love you. I’ve always loved you, and if I’m going to die—”

“Honestly, you are such a drama queen, Jack,” she half-hissed, cutting carefully at his wounds with her boot-knife. They needed to be opened, cleaned, debrided, before they could heal properly. Ana wasn’t a medic by trade, but she’d seen - and caused - more than enough wounds to know what needed to be done to survive them. Usually. “You’re not going to die. And I know you love me.” She paused for a second as she cut loose a section of still-sizzling skin that had no chance of recovery. “I just don’t care.”

Soldier: 76, as he liked to be called, coughed heavily. It wracked his ribs with pain, and more than a little blood came out, spattering his face and the inside of his mask lightly. On the one hand, he wanted to take the damn thing off as soon as possible. On the other hand, he wasn’t sure he’d be alive long enough anyway. “Don’t care? What are you—”

“We’ve had this conversation before.” Ana’s words and her movements were all business. Jack always got concerned with foolishness about heroism - some would say he had a complex, and Ana suspected that at least some of those who did would have been right to say so. Not that she was immune to it; she understood the appeal, and even fell prey from time to time, but these romantic notions? “I thought I put an end to all of this in Morocco.”

“Ha, Morocco,” 76 grunted, hand spasming toward the wound. Ana knocked it away as she
continued to work.

“If you don’t stop, I’ll put you to sleep.” She raised an eyebrow above her patch in warning, leveling a stern look at him. She continued to work, sparing no more than a second for the glance, and her dark voice muttered from her lips as she kept going. “You’re not going to die, and it’s nice that you love me. I guess. I just can’t return the favour and I respect you too much to lie to you about it.”

“After all these years?” He groaned, fingers scrabbling at the floor as he tried to deal with the pain, with limited success. Very limited. It felt like an elephant was standing on his ribs. An elephant in stiletto heels which impaled his flesh.

Ana sighed, heavily, tutting under her breath as she finished up cleaning. It wasn’t the most pretty - he might even have a scar from it - but he’d definitely live. She tried to tug the wound mostly closed, or at least somewhat. There was a fair bit of material missing from him… but the biotics could work wonders. Hopefully, with the help she’d given them, they would. “After all these years, yes. I respect you, Jack - I like you. You’re a good friend, an able commander,” she chuckled a little, lips quirking into a smirk. “A real whirlwind in the sack.”

He even managed a laugh at that, albeit one that trailed into a rough groan.

“But no, I don’t love you - not the way you love me. Not the way you mean it.” Ana shook her head, pulling a trio of darts from her rifle and holding them between her hands. “It’s just not for me, Jack, love like that. I don’t do it. Fareeha’s the closest anyone will ever come.” She plunged all three darts into his chest, right near the wound, watching as the flesh started to shift and change, sealing up from the edges inward.

Anyone else might not have been able to survive three biotic injections at once, but he wasn’t anyone else. He was quite singular, really, and Ana wasn’t sure what she’d do on the day he was finally brought to rest.

“I’m more than happy to be your sniper, your support, your emergency medic,” Ana sat back with a sigh, laying her rifle across her knees. “I’m happy to be your friend, Jack. To share your stories, your meals, your bed. But we’re not lovers - you are, yes,” she smiled a little, a genuine smile, then brushed dust off of one shoulder as the expression fell from her lips. “I’m not.”

At one time, it had been something she’d doubted about herself. When people told her she just hadn’t met the right person - that one day, she’d find someone she wanted to spend her life with, someone for all of the cuddling and… all the rest of it. She believed them when they said it, she tried to feel it, the love that everyone talked about. Tried to be in relationships, to be happy in them...

Everyone did silly things when they were younger. Ana had long since realized that love just wasn’t something she did - it didn’t make her any less good, or any less capable of anything than anybody else. She wasn’t broken or damaged or going through a phase. She just wasn’t a lover, not that way.

When Fareeha had been born, had started to grow… that whole thing had terrified the living hell out of Ana with how deeply she suddenly cared about another person, but motherly love was a different sort of thing. Ana hadn’t thought she would be much of a mother. Sometimes, she still doubted that she was… but she was trying.

The pain was starting to recede, if slowly, but it was enough for Soldier: 76 to manage a full laugh at her words, on the floor and laying in a little pool of his own cooling blood. “No, I guess you’re not. Anybody ever tell you your bedside manner could use a little work?” He reached up and detached his facemask, setting it down on the floor. He knew that he could breathe fully with it on, but it still occasionally felt like he couldn’t. With it removed, he was able to take a full, deep lungful of air -
dusty, cordite- and blood-scented air. Ah. Much better.

There was a crash from outside as the gunfire grew even more intense, and the baked clay tile sunshade which had hung over the cafe’s entrance collapsed, filling the front door with rubble. Ana covered Jack with her cloak as debris fell from the ceiling, and then drew back with a smirk on her face. “You never complain.”

“I don’t, do I?” 76 struggled to pull himself a little more upright, ending up half-sitting slumped back against the wall. He was stabilized, but still not nearly healed - his arms felt like they were made of stone, and heavier than he could imagine possible. “Thanks. And sorry.”

“Don’t apologize,” Ana sighed, stepping over to the rubble that blocked the doorway. “We both know you’ll do the same thing next time you’re dying. Probably next Tuesday.”

Jack barked a laugh, shaking his head. Love or not, Ana was a damn fine soldier and one hell of a comrade-in-arms. And, as she put it, also a real whirlwind in the sack. He’d shoot himself if he ever managed to fuck things up with her irrevocably.

“Looks like we should be able to dig ourselves out, but it will take a while.” Ana recoiled a little as a fresh spattering of gunfire made its way down the streets. “Honestly? I’d just as soon wait here. You?”

He grunted, trying to pull himself up further, wanting to sit rather than laying out on his back.

“Don’t bother,” Ana chuckled, making her way through the broken tables and chunks of rubble toward him. “I’ll be on top anyway.”

Jack had just enough time to raise an eyebrow, and almost enough time to speak up and ask what she meant - got as far as opening his mouth, in fact, before Ana silenced him with a deep and sudden kiss.

“Oh, is that how we’re going to pass the time?” 76 chuckled and raised an eyebrow. “I take it back - your bedside manner’s excellent.”

Ana smirked, standing above him and setting a foot on his shoulder, pushing him down flat to the ground. She chuckled as she leaned her rifle up against the wall and started to undo her belt. “Shut up Jack, and take your medicine…”

---

Halfway across the world, in a restaurant in London, dessert was being served. Lena and Emily shared a crème brûlée, feeding each other tiny mouthfuls with tiny spoons, giggling and grinning and managing to get most of it in each other’s mouths. Lena did lament, momentarily, the fact that they were somewhere so public - Emily’s collarbone looked like a perfect place to put some of the tasty sweet dessert, but that probably wouldn’t go over well with the rest of the people here.

For Winston, almost any spoon was a tiny spoon, and his stomach grumbled slightly as he ate his dessert, which in his opinion amounted essentially to a tiny bit of vanilla ice cream with a few brownie crumbles. They named it something much fancier, of course. Though he’d had two appetizers, two entrees - and the remnants of Emily’s, as well - he was still quite hungry.
Orisa slid her slice of cake over to him. “The extract of chili that they have introduced into the chocolate substrate of the cake is quite interesting.”

He chuckled a little at her phrasing, taking the small plate and beginning to eat. It was interesting - really good, actually, the spice complementing the dark chocolate very well. “Thanks for the cake!”

“Thank you for the date,” she replied with a little nod, reaching over to take his hand. It was the sort of thing she thought would happen on dates, and on top of that... it felt right. She was trying to follow her heart a little more and her brain a little less. Metaphorically at least

“Okay, well-” Emily started and was cut off by another spoonful of dessert being pushed at her, which she gulped down with a giggle. “Well, it’s been grand, all - but we really must be going. Early start in the morning an all.”

Lena raised an eyebrow, tilting her head. “What? I thought you got tomorrow off- hey!” she cut off as Emily kicked her foot, then her eyes went wide in comprehension. “Ohhh, right. I um, forgot about the… plans! Yeah, plans,” she chuckled, gesturing widely and grinning to the other two. “You know how those are!”

Emily looked back at her with an amused smirk, and Winston, a disbelievingly raised eyebrow. Lena chuckled again, half nervous and half embarrassed.

“Really though, thank you so much for inviting us out,” Emily took over again - standing to make her rounds of the table. She gave Winston a hug, stretching to get her arms even vaguely across the wide span of his shoulders, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Winston, it’s always lovely to catch up with you! Pop ‘round if you ever need, yeah?”

She moved on to Orisa, then, holding out her arms somewhat questioningly for a hug as well. The omnic didn’t seem to pause to consider, she leaned in and wrapped her arms around the relatively tiny woman quite gently, and tilted her head in an attempt to give easy access to her cheek as well. With the large metal tusks, it was a little more difficult - but Emily found a way, standing on her toes and tilting over to make it work. She’d always been very affectionate that way, with friends and all - big on contact, and Lena loved that about her. She gave really great cuddles.

“And Orisa, it was wonderful to meet you - let us know if you’re ever in the area? We’d love to get together again, maybe see some of the sights?” Emily raised an eyebrow, leaving a hand resting on Orisa’s shoulder.

Orisa nodded, eyes bright and happy. “If you ever journey to Numbani, please let me be your escort. There are many beautiful gardens and impressive museums!”

Emily giggled softly, grinning. “I love gardens - that sounds absolutely lovely Orisa, thank you!”

By this point, Lena had finished off the last few remnants of dessert, and managed to restrain herself from licking the dish clean. It was a really good crème brûlée. She stood and made her way around the table as well, hugging each of them before going to Emily’s side and joining her arm-in-arm.

“Brilliant night, thank you both!” Lena grinned brightly, widely, as if she didn’t have a care in the world - and, for the moment at least, she didn’t. She loved her friends for that, so much; for being able and willing to help her find that kind of happiness. “It was really nice to get out, thanks.”

There were murmurs of agreement from around the table, and smiles; nods and waves, and one couple departed while the larger one stayed.

The maître d’ only sighed slightly, wishing for a moment that it had been the other pair that was
leaving, but the monkey was tipping well. The man nodded and offered a small smile to the two women who walked past, arm-in-arm, and wondered which dungeon he’d be delving into that night with his guild. The monkey didn’t matter, the job didn’t matter - in a few hours, he’d be playing the part of Arnsjërm the Dark Blade again, and he could finally relax. Who cared if he was getting paid by a monkey?

...well, he did, a little bit. But at least he was being paid well by a monkey.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading! Things are starting to get into the actual story - so that'll be fun, I hope. Big developments in the wings (spoilers)!

Come on back next time for an EmiLena date, and Widowmaker being so *very* frustrated because she’s forced to undertake a mission with Junkrat and Roadhog. Mostly the frustrating part is Junkrat. Sombra oversees.
Just Another Day

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Emily and Lena go on a date in the park, and Emily has something she wants to discuss. Meanwhile, Widowmaker, Junkrat, and Roadhog go on a retrieval mission; it works out as expected, and Widowmaker manages to refrain from shooting the annoying Aussie.

JFL summary: Lena's lazy and doesn't want to get up, but Emily's a tickle-monster. The two gals in London break a law or two over the course of the day, but luckily no bones. Widowmaker hates Junkrat, Junkrat loves boomsplosions, and Roadhog grunts - and all get to have a fun little road trip together. Sombra gets a root beer float which is delicious.

Chapter Notes

Note: accidentally my longest chapter, sorry - I try to stick to around six thousand, give or take, but this one's almost 10,000 words. Whoops. I got carried away with Junkrat. Hopefully it's not too much of a pain, though!

Previous chapter Summary: A double-date for Winston and Orisa, and Emily and Lena - along with a mission in a warzone (that isn't technically a warzone quite yet) for Jack and Ana.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Come on - Lena, love, you’ve got to leave bed sooner or later!”

Lena grunted and pulled the blankets back over her head, where they could block out the sun which had been unveiled when the curtains had been so rudely ripped away from the windows. “Not if you don’t make me, I don’t.”

Emily giggled and hopped onto the edge of the mattress, already in a loose-fitting and substantially oversized T-shirt. Sausages sizzled distantly in the kitchen. “Come on! We’re going out, remember?”

“Remember what?” Lena complained, rolling over and clutching a pillow to her face. With her feet unprotected, Emily saw an opportunity and - after a brief pause - pounced.

“AAH!” Lena yelped, giggling and convulsing as she was tickled. “No fair! If you don’t play nice I’ll-”

In lieu of actually finishing the sentence, she hurled the pillow. A pillow which her girlfriend expertly dodged, narrowing her hazel eyes playfully.

“See, you’ve gone and disarmed yourself now,” she purred, stretching out her fingers like a cat’s claws. “A serious mistake!”
With no pillow (and with blankets being a very poor defence against tickles), Lena’s time was limited. It really was a foregone conclusion - a battle she was only ever going to lose.

“Okay, okay, I yield!” She laughed, breathlessly, her ribs aching from it all.

Emily collapsed on top of her. “Oh good! I was running out of steam - I think it might be naptime now…”

With a heave Lena pushed up on her girlfriend, who jumped to the floor with a laugh. “No! You made me get up so you’re not allowed to nap!” She extricated herself from the blankets and got out of the bed herself, stretching onto her toes just a little to give Emily a nice, thorough, good-morning kiss.

“Why’d you wake me up, anyway?” Lena withdrew a little, raising an eyebrow and trying to sort out some of the mess that was Emily’s tangle of hair. Her own was beyond helping and she knew it. In the middle of a torrential downpour she’d still look like an anime teenage rebel high school student.

Or so Emily always said.

“It’s the anniversary of our first kiss!” Emily announced happily, grabbing the other woman’s hand and tugging her toward the kitchen. “C’mon, I made breakfast - bangers, biscuits and tea, just like you like - and then I thought maybe we’d go for a stroll in the park?”

Lena’s face fell as her heart did. “Anniversary?” Oh, n- Em, I’m sorry, I completely forg-”

Emily didn’t even let her finish the apology. It wasn’t as if she would’ve accepted it anyway, so she pressed her lips to Lena’s briefly and withdrew, shaking her head. “Don’t apologize, really - you’ve got enough stuff going on in your life, I don’t expect you to remember all this too.” She shrugged a shoulder, grinning lightly. “That’s why I remember it for you. C’mon, silly - don’t let ‘em get cold!”

Lena slowed down the “getting to the kitchen” process pretty dramatically by trying to give Emily hugs and nuzzle at her shoulder, feeling a little bad despite the assurances. Sure, maybe it wasn’t much - but she should be able to set an alarm. Write a note on a calendar. Something.

Still, she was here, and determined not to let anything else fall flat. Being in a funk would only wreck the day!

It was sunny out, and fairly warm. Tracer opted to bring the accelerator along in a backpack - bit more secure than a purse - and donned a sporty two-colour t-shirt and a pair of calf-length cargos in dark green. She’d never really gone in much for “fashion” in that kind of way. The clothes were comfy, and pretty practical - and lately, had the added upside of being a little distant from the “Tracer” outfit. Her identity wasn’t exactly a national secret, or anything, but particularly since they were all technically outlawed now she felt like more distance would be better.

Emily, on the other hand, opted for a fancier option as she almost always did: a very loose-knit pale blue sweater over a tight white top that didn’t even make it to the bottom of her ribs, and a blue-green skirt which swirled around her knees. Lena was pretty much stunned when Emily came into the bathroom to do her hair in the mirror. It took her a while to be able to do anything except stare in wonder.

“How’d a dork like me manage a beauty like you?” she asked when she managed to pull together the presence of mind to wrangle words into decipherable sentences.

Emily giggled a little and kissed her on the cheek. “Because a dork like you is sweet, and wonderful - because you try so hard to make the world a better place. Because you see the best in people, even
when they can’t see it in themselves. Because you’ve got a heart big enough for two and I knew from the start that I wanted to get in it.” She leaned in, touching her forehead to her lover’s, smiling softly.

A sweet, quite sentimental moment that was interrupted by a slight yelp from Lena as her bottom was pinched, and Emily grinned wickedly. “Plus you’ve got such a nice bum!”

Lena giggled and pushed playfully at Emily’s shoulder, a grin fixed solidly on her face as she tried in vain to wrangle her hair. After a while she abandoned that entirely and just went for eyeliner and lipstick. It still took her a few minutes longer to do just that than it took Emily to braid her hair, get her lip stain, mascara, eyeliner, and a variety of other powders and pigments all applied, and finally, help Lena finish subduing her bedhead.

“No, but really,” she chuckled a little, grinning, “how?”

Emily just laughed and pushed her out toward the door. “Oh you know you’re lovely, now let’s go out and have some fun!”

---

The pair walked along arm-in-arm beneath the gently warm and shining sun, leaving it for a minute when they descended down into the tube station and re-emerged a while later, elsewhere. It was a bit like magic, that - or at least, it seemed that way to Lena. Sure, she’d grown up with it her whole life, and most of the time it was pretty mundane, but sometimes the idea of just being able to end up elsewhere in the city without needing to really go there was pretty cool.

Not quite as cool as jetpacks would’ve been, but baby steps. She wasn’t sure she’d trust most people with a jetpack anyway.

Herself, though? Definitely.

Arm in arm they walked along the sidewalk toward Hyde park, which wasn’t too crowded - at least, not for London. Lena marveled at the beauty of it all - not just the park, its trees and flowers and winding paths, but the city beyond as well. Glimpses of buildings from between the trees and leaves, occasional hums of a bypassing bus. For the most part, though, the park was quiet and tranquil. A little bubble of serenity within a busy city.

Lena dipped her head over to rest gently on Emily’s shoulder, at least a little bit. She was at just the perfect height for this - one more thing Lena loved about her. Sure, maybe it was a little bit of a silly one, but then maybe that just meant she was silly (Emily certainly said it often enough). Sunlight dappled her skin through the intermittent cover of the foliage, Emily was close, the world was peaceful. Everything seemed perfect.

“Thanks for pulling me out of bed,” Lena giggled softly and gave her girlfriend a kiss on the cheek. “Definitely worth it!”

Emily snickered and squeezed her hand. “Glad you agree! I know things have been pretty rough lately. I figured you could use a solid day off.”

It had been a while since Winston had hit that button. Emily still remembered it, getting the news that Lena would be back to it - back to being Tracer and saving the world. At first it had just been her
callsign, back when she was a pilot... but after joining Overwatch? It had become a whole personality, and it wasn’t even necessarily all hers. The persona had definitely been largely inspired by the Lena herself, but taken to new heights - almost a caricature, but not a mocking one. “Tracer” had been up on posters and all over the news, alone or with the others. Another unconventional card in Overwatch’s deck, another hope against all the ills of the world.

For a while, it had worked - and Lena really had loved it. Not in a grandstanding way, or showing off for the crowds (though she did do that a little, sometimes) but it was about the people behind those crowds. Children, particularly. Every time she’d come home from an event or just from a trip, going all starry-eyed when she talked about some little kid who asked for an autograph or gave her a drawing; Emily had loved that so much.

Then everything went to pot. She sighed a little, glancing over at the woman who stared in delight at a bird overhead - the woman she wanted to spend her life with. Overwatch had come under fire not long after Lena had been rebranded as “Tracer”, and for a while they were able to shrug off the allegations. Anybody can put up with anything for a while, but how long depends on a lot of things, and Overwatch’s days were numbered after that. The flowers that used to be thrown started to get mixed in with rotten fruit and veg, the drawings in the mail supplemented by threats or insults. Lena didn’t know what to do about it, she just sat and frowned and chewed at her fingernails. It got so bad that eventually Emily went to the mail office and requested they not deliver anything addressed to “Tracer”.

Then Overwatch had ended, in a way as absolute as it was sudden. An accident, the official word was - just one of those explosions that happen sometimes. Sure, and I’m Winston’s uncle. Emily chuckled a little, nuzzling down at Lena’s head. Overnight, “Tracer” had gone to mostly a thing of the past - she still went out sometimes, around the neighborhood, dissuading hoodies and interrupting the occasional hold-up or mugging in her outfit. She’d seemed to like that a lot, too - one-on-one hero stuff, in a way. To be able to help somebody out, right then and there, with no real moral grey area to it.

The fact that she never needed to hurt anybody (or at least, not permanently) probably helped too.

Lena stepped off of the path for a minute, leaning in close to watch a bee wander over a flower, and Emily was so glad to see her this carefree. Yes, Tracer was back now - sometimes, at least - but at other times, she didn’t need to worry over that much.

Carrying the whole world on your back can do a number to you.

“You’re so cute,” Emily murmured, walking up to take a look as well.

“I’m cute?” Lena glanced up to her incredulously. “Have you seen this bee? Talk about cute!”

Emily laughed, pulling Lena into a hug which she gleefully (if a little awkwardly, given her arms being pinned tightly to the sides) returned.

“I’m so glad to have you in my life - you know that?” Emily stroked a stray bit of hair behind her ear after they’d found a bench to sit on for a moment, Lena tucking the backpack underneath it and hooking a leg through one of the straps. “You’re just absolutely lovely. You try so hard and care so much - too much, sometimes.” She smirked a little to show that she was joking. At least, mostly - she did occasionally worry about it a little.

Lena chuckled and grinned. “Thanks, love! I feel the same about you, you know - any girl would be lucky to have you!”
Emily laughed briefly, her stomach doing an odd kind of knot. “You think so?” Lena nodded enthusiastically and Emily chuckled a little with a grin. “Well, thanks, love. That really means a lot - I uh,” she chuckled a little, glancing off to the trees and the sky

Sometimes, things seemed important to say… right up until it came time to say them. Such was the case with Emily right now, and repeatedly over the past few months. Right when she thought she’d gathered together the guts to have this conversation - for the first time with Lena, if not for her own first time ever - the recall had gone out to those who remained of what was once Overwatch. A good thing overall, and Emily was so happy they could be in touch and that Lena could be helping out, but she’d also felt like it wouldn’t be the best time to go piling anything else on top.

A few more times, she felt like she was just about ready to say it, and every time something else would come up. A bad mission, a bad night, the stove breaking unexpectedly. It always seemed to be something.

...or maybe she was just looking for excuses. It had historically been an awkward conversation at best, and had been really rough a couple of times. More than once it had ended a relationship, either directly or indirectly.

Lena was different, of course, and Emily couldn’t imagine saying anything that would upset her… but she also loved her to bits. Didn’t know what she’d do without her goofy smile, or her cheery laugh. Those beautiful eyes and pinchable cheeks and huggable waist. Didn’t think she could manage knowing that she’d never hear that voice again, or hold that hand, or kiss those lips. Wasn’t sure it was worth the risk.

In fact, right then, she was quite sure of the opposite. She had a good thing going here, and it hadn’t been a problem since they’d got together. Clearly, this worked, and she wasn’t going to risk it for something that would only likely make things worse anyway. At least, if history was anything to go off of.

Now, though, she realized it had been too long since she’d said anything; too long of looking over at Lena, silently, partway into a sentence, and a little worry was starting to crease her girlfriend’s’s eyebrows.

“It- it’s nothing, actually,” Emily half-laughed. “I just love you, so much. Probably more than I can ever say…” ...and almost definitely more than I ever will.

Lena, relieved, leaned over for a kiss before resting her head on Emily’s shoulder, her hand on Emily’s knee. “I love you too, more than I can say.” Her hand squeezed at Emily’s knee for a moment as she let go with most of the rest of her muscles, slumping over and leaning heavily on her.

“Oh, but you’re surprisingly heavy though,” Emily strained, chuckling, and Lena pulled herself upright again with a laugh. That was better, this was better - far better than a serious and risky conversation that didn’t even need to happen, anyway. She was happy here, like this - she didn’t want anything to change. Definitely didn’t need it to. Certainly not enough to risk it changing for the worse.

Maybe, one day, an opportunity would present itself, but until then?

Emily interlaced her fingers with Lena’s, and wrapped her other arm around the smaller woman’s shoulders. “This is just brilliant,” she murmured.
“This is bloody awful!”

Elsewhere in the world, a thickly-accented Australian voice shouted out overtop of an odd sound: consistent tapping, heavy thumps of footfalls, and an irregular solid clank, like a pipe being struck with a wrench.

Widowmaker sighed heavily, pinching at the bridge of her nose. “What exactly is so awful about it? Is it so hard to restrain yourself from total rampancy? Just once?”

Jamison “Junkrat” Fawkes looked shocked and aghast at that. Generally, in fact, he either looked shocked and aghast, or he was laughing maniacally. There wasn’t a lot of middle ground. “Once?” He clapped a hand to his chest clumsily amidst a cluster of dangling grenades. “Madam, I’ll have you know-”

“Mademoiselle,” Widowmaker hissed in correction, and Junkrat rolled his eyes.

“Fine. Mademoiselle.” His words came out in the most over-the-top imitation of her accent that he could manage. “I’ll have you know that I often restrain myself. This morning a bird crapped on me and I didn’t even swear!”

From behind him, his massive, four-hundred-pound, gas-mask-wearing shadow and bodyguard, grunted.

“What?” Junkrat spun around. “No I didn’t!” Roadhog grunted again and Junkrat’s jaw dropped. “I never! I wouldn’t say that word anyway, not ever!”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes again, taking a turn swiftly and reaching out, clutching at one of Junkrat’s harness straps in order to pull him along before he missed the turn. Honestly. Am I the only competent person in the world?

“I’m just saying,” Junkrat brushed at the strap where Widowmaker had grabbed it, trying to return to his previous point. “It’s ridiculous that I’m even coming along on this mission when I’m not allowed to blow hardly anything up. That’s all.”

Widowmaker groaned. “You insisted on coming along after your bomb got defused on the last mission, remember? Despite the fact that you are only a contractor and were never even expected here.” And Reaper just let you. Fools, all of you. She shook her head, long hair waving behind her as she muttered in French under her breath.

Roadhog grunted and stepped closer to her. Junkrat scoffed. “Oh yeah right,” he rolled his eyes. “As if she’d say that about me while I’m standing right here. Do you really expect me to believe you know French all of a sudden?” The massive man grunted again and Widowmaker smirked. She could appreciate a clever dog… and a well-trained one, too.

“Anyway, I don’t remember insisting on any such thing.” Junkrat’s words were clipped, and he turned his pointed nose up at the whole idea - literally. For what it was worth, Widowmaker did have to admire his balance - to be able to simply walk with his joke of a prosthetic leg would be an impressive feat, and this man-child managed not only to walk, but to run, to jump, and to do absolutely absurd dances. Given her history, Widowmaker had to respect that along with the fact that he managed his way without looking at anything at all, eyes closed and head tilted sharply back.
He was also a top-notch provider of explosives… but if she could never, ever, ever speak to him or see his face again, she would’ve been a happy woman.

Well, not happy. Contented. Slightly, at least.

Another sigh. She couldn’t even manage to be properly frustrated about this, not anymore. There had been a time that the mere sight of this powder-hound had been more than enough to set ire bubbling within her gut, but now? Now it was just an expected thing.

She was becoming number with time. It definitely didn’t seem like a good thing, but she could hardly be upset about it either.

“Don’t think it happened,” Junkrat reiterated, eyeing her from the side with his face still absurdly upturned.

“Regardless,” Widowmaker groaned, “you are here now, so let us just get this done so we can be finished, tout de suite, oui?”

Roadhog grunted and Junkrat’s face screwed up. “Don’t know what sweets have got to do with it,” he grumbled below his breath and then spoke up louder. “Fine though, yeah, sure. Who doesn’t want to spend a day not exploding things?”

He actually whined. Whimpered. Widowmaker wondered for a moment how much trouble she’d get in for just shooting him.

“It shouldn’t be too complicated,” she explained after she decided not to end his assuredly miserable life. “The warehouse has a shipment of materials which we need to retrieve. It should be unguarded, but I never count on that…” she reached back, unslinging her rifle in a flash and holding it ready to fire without breaking her stride, then dropping it down to her side. The barrel was retracted enough that it didn’t even risk touching the ground.

“Oh, I do like you sometimes, blue-y,” Junkrat confessed at her readiness, half-giggling. “And I’ve brought a few toys of my own! Just in the case of the most extreme and severe dire circumstances, of course…”

The frenchwoman groaned. Wonderful. Now I’ve gone and encouraged him. She did her best not to shoot Junkrat while he slowly, and in a frankly surprising amount of technical detail given his general attention span, outlined every single explosive he’d brought with him.

Roadhog grunted.

“Oh yeah, and he’s got his gun or whatever - but anyway, this little one here is loaded with a slow-burn petro, like napalm. You know napalm, right?” He laughed to himself. “Why bother asking? Everyone know napalm! Anyway, it’s loaded with this stuff so when it goes off, you really know things are about to…”

Widowmaker tried to just tune him out. The mission couldn’t end soon enough… or, for that matter, start.

By the time they made it to the warehouse, Widowmaker would’ve sworn that Junkrat had started repeating himself, making things up, or simply naming random explosives. There was no way he could possibly be carrying all of that on him. Wordlessly, she launched her grappling hook at an overhead crane gantry so she could get a better view of the yard.

“Well that was rude,” Junkrat nudged Roadhog in his substantial gut. “I was right in the middle of a
word! To think I even bothered trying to educate her!"

Roadhog grunted.

Widowmaker, high above, held her rifle aloft and leaned her head alongside it. Compressing the stock, it snapped into configuration - barrel extending, scope aligning, the whole thing all but molded itself to her and she felt whole again. *Ahh. Better.*

Below, there were indeed a few guards, but nothing they couldn’t deal with - or avoid entirely. Even with how loudly (and how *much*) the Australian talked, Widowmaker was sure that they could make it through undetected. The door to the warehouse currently stood open, a massive metal shipping crate being moved inside slowly, escorted by a half-dozen personnel in hard-hats. *Just workers, perhaps… but not worth ignoring.*

She looked around for another way in, and found several. Glancing down, she was somewhat surprised to find that Junkrat and Roadhog were still standing in the same place. She’d half-expected that they would’ve got bored and wandered off.

Half-expected… and half-hoped.

“Alright,” she sighed after she’d descended back down to the pair again, “there are three guards, patrolling a pattern in- you’re not listening.”

Junkrat stood with his arms crossed, eyes closed, face turned to the side. “Nope. Not listening to anyone that rude - lady or not.”

Widowmaker growled. “*Ecoutez,*” she hissed as she moved to grab his arm, but made it no further - didn’t even get to the point of actually getting a hold on him. With a speed that didn’t even vaguely match the size of his frame, Roadhog snatched her wrist and squeezed it. Hard. Hard enough that her hand flexed open involuntarily.

For a second, nobody moved. Widowmaker was sure she could break loose, but less sure that she could do so in a way that wouldn’t end up with at least one of them dead, and she really didn’t feel like dealing with the rants she would undoubtedly need to put up with upon her return to headquarters.

“*Laissez-moi,*” Widowmaker demanded through clenched teeth, and Roadhog grunted, looking toward Junkrat. A second later, he let go of her arm. He didn’t back up, though. He wouldn’t risk anything hurting Junkrat.

“Oh, it’s just a bit of fun, blue-y,” Junkrat giggled. He always did like watching Roadhog work - the way people were surprised and scared, it was pretty funny. “So three guards - you’re thinking I blow up two, you take care of the other with some kind of… shooting or kicks or something, right?”

Widowmaker sighed. “No. We sneak around them. No alarms.”

Again, it was time for Junkrat to looked shocked and aghast. “*No alarms?*” He turned to Roadhog. “First no explosions, now no *alarms?* This is bloody awful!”

“If something goes wrong,” the frenchwoman managed through gritted teeth. “And *only* if, you may use your bombs.”

“What about my grenades?”

She clenched her jaw even tighter. He had to work for it, but he was managing to succeed - there
was a nice little bubble of frustration growing inside her. If he was lucky, it wouldn’t pop. “Bomb. Grenades. Explosives of any kind. I shoot first - until I shoot, nobody else does. Understood?”

Junkrat kicked at the ground. “Aw, nuts. Fine. Understood.” She led the way through a hole in the fence as, behind her, the Aussie grumbled to his compatriot. “Don’t know why she gets to be in charge anyway…”

All went well enough getting into the warehouse. Either Junkrat listened when she told him to be quiet, or Roadhog did and simply clamped a hand over his mouth. She didn’t care. The guards didn’t notice them, that was the important part.

With her hood (of sorts) down, she could see straight through the walls with her cameras. Switching between thermal, and EM - just in case of any robotic sentries - she ensured that everything was nicely clear before she stepped away from a door and gestured toward it with a bow.

Roadhog kicked it. It caved easily, despite being made entirely of metal as far as Widowmaker could tell. She clutched at her wrist instinctively as they stepped over the crumpled scrap, considering herself a bit lucky after that display of strength. It didn’t actually hurt, though. So little did.

They moved through the corridors with various assortments of quickness, silence, and the annoying and irregular clanking of Junkrat’s prosthetic. Widowmaker pulled a module from her belt, scanning at crates as they passed. Sombra had assured her that it would provide her with the right crate - as soon as Widow found a computer terminal, the device would even hack in and direct her to it. *Better than scanning them all one by one*. She turned abruptly, heading for a small room off to one side which she could see display screens in.

The guard was easy. One flip and a strike to the head, and he was out - for at least a little while. Losing consciousness due to blunt-force head trauma was rarely a good thing. Widowmaker held the little handheld machine near the computer, while the bar filled on the screen.

“#42-B6” the screen blinked, and then “Loading bay 7-A”. Widowmaker glanced up at a map posted on the wall. 7-A was there, and a little symbol denoted camera number twelve as being directed that way. Widowmaker keyed in number twelve to be displayed on the screen, and looked.

“*Merde*.” She spun, gesturing to the other two. “Quickly. It’s being loaded.”

The schedule must have been moved ahead, but Junkrat had just enough time to see a crate emblazoned with #42-B6 being shoved into the back of a semi trailer. Then Roadhog grabbed at his arm and yanked him along, and he had no more time to inspect it.

“Does this mean we’re done being quiet?” He couldn’t suppress the excitement in his voice - not that he wanted to. He sounded practically giddy, and Widowmaker sighed at that as well, sprinting along toward the loading bay where their target was about to escape.

“... so it would seem,” she admitted. “Stop the truck if possible. Board it if not.”

Junkrat cackled. “Oh, please ‘not’, I’m so hoping for ‘not’!”

Oddly enough, Widowmaker found that she was too.

Alarms started as they dashed through the warehouse, hardly subtle anymore. Whether it was them being spotted, or the unconscious guard being noticed, was unknown - and hardly mattered anyway. Widowmaker started to grin as she saw daylight ahead, heard shouts and an engine starting. The truck was moving slowly when she rounded a stack of crates, and she launched off her grappling
hook, catching on the trailer’s body and pulling herself neatly on top of it.

The other two were a little less graceful, though, she had to admit, no less effective. The rat dropped some kind of mine at his feet and jumped, thumbing a detonator that he’d produced from seemingly nowhere and sending himself flying on a wave as the mine detonated - but not in fire and shrapnel as she expected. Apparently there was more to him than simply blowing things up.

The other one, Roadhog, flung a massive steel hook overhand which embedded itself into the roof of the truck. Then, he simply started to haul himself forward, hand over hand, along the hook’s chain. The truck accelerated, but he didn’t seem to care - just kept pulling himself along, even as sparks started to fly from his boots as they skidded over the concrete. Steel plates in the soles, it seemed.

When he got to the truck and grabbed onto it, lifting his substantial bulk up onto the rear gate, Widowmaker heard other noises from inside. A hatch opened, forward, and a helmeted head popped out.

“Intruders!” The guard shouted, turning his head to call down. “We’ve got intru-”

He never got to finish the word - or at least, not audibly - because a grenade Junkrat had launched exploded past the hatch, flinging it closed on the guard’s head. “We’re not intruders, ya drongo!” Junkrat shouted, then giggled. “We’re hijackers!”

Widowmaker chuckled. *That was surprisingly witty.*

Not that she’d admit it to him.

Shortly, the hatch came open again, and this time no head popped out but rather, a gun. Firing. Widowmaker threw herself to the side, avoiding the bullets, and saw another guard climbing up a ladder on the side of the truck. Fixing her hook in place, she swung her legs around and dropped, dangling alongside the semi which was moving at quite a pace and still accelerating. She fired her rifle in short bursts of automatic fire, dropping the guard neatly. The body tumbled off to the side of the road as she laid her head along the rifle’s stock and it reconfigured into sniper mode. The next guard to poke his head out got his helmet removed. Along with a fair amount of the helmet’s contents.

With the wind whipping through her hair and the vibrations of the powerful engine thrumming through her, this was almost exciting. Her heart rate had raised six percent already. Not bad.

Roadhog wasn’t exactly tactical. He mostly just did what he was told, these days - it was easier that way - and he’d been told to board the truck. He’d done that. He knew they were looking for a crate, too, and that could only be inside.

He could get inside.

A guard yelped and flung himself away from the rear door of the trailer as some kind of cannon went off just on the other side, peppering the metal near one of the hinges with holes. Again, and again - until there was no metal left there - and then to another hinge. Two of four, and the guard was calling over reinforcements from the dozen who’d been assigned to the truck. The third hinge went and four guards trained their rifles on the door. The fourth, and they opened fire as the doors flew right off of the back and clattered angrily to the road, skidding and sparking in the semi’s dusty wake.

There was nobody there, though.

“Good to see ya, mate!” Junkrat chirped back to Roadhog, who’d been leaning back over the roof to
fire down at the door below. A guard coming out of the roof hatch yelped as a grenade launched him back, off of his feet, and sent him tumbling along the roadside. “Now, shall we, a-cab-wards, head?”

Roadhog grunted.

“Yes of course we’re gonna steal the truck! Isn’t that why we’re here? We need this truck!”

The massive man grunted again, head tipping toward Widowmaker’s line which was pulled taught over the side of the trailer’s roof.

Junkrat’s eyebrow raised incredibly high. “Crate? Who said anything about a crate? C’mon, let’s get this truck under control - tick-tock, tick-tock!”

His pegleg prosthetic made a lot of noise on the roof, a noise conspicuous enough that the guards inside fired up at it. Roadhog saw bullet holes opening in the floor around Junkrat and leapt forward, catching the much smaller man and turning around so that when he fell, Junkrat was on top. The roof caved in a little under Roadhog’s weight as he landed with a grunt.

“Yeah! We musta got the big one!” One of the guards cheered inside, but the one standing beside elbowed him.

“Keep it down, Stakowsky - there’s still the other two, the Aussie and the-”

Widowmaker chuckled in the darkness behind them. “And me. Bonjour, les gars ...”

The two guards whirled, trying to ready their weapons, but there was no time. Widowmaker grabbed one by the helmet and jumped off of the wall, slamming his head against it as she propelled herself into the other. A few stray shots happened to go off, but harmlessly through the side of the trailer. She spun and kicked, grabbed one of them and flipped him over her shoulder, and then clutched her rifle in tight at the ready. Neither of the two moved. She tossed them out of the side door she’d entered through, sending them tumbling limply along the road.

The two drivers were panicked. They’d heard the radio channel get quieter as one by one the guards were picked off and silenced. Now, nobody spoke. The secondary driver grasped tightly at an emergency handgun. He’d asked for a shotgun, but they told him it would be too dangerous in such a tight space.

At least the cab was armoured. They both felt pretty secure in that - they’d seen a video where the company demonstrated how powerful their protection was. Drills, cutting saws, abrasive discs, everything struggled to get through the doors. The only thing that had even come close was-

“Shit.” The driver’s word was soft, but filled with panic. “Shit, Mark - look!” He pointed out of his side window, and the secondary driver - handgun still clutched in shaking fists - pushed himself up in the seat to look out.

Junkrat waved back cheerily, having just set a third explosive charge on the door. “G’day, cobber! Mind if we… drop in?” He tossed his head back, cackling, then looked through the window in confusion. “No wait, that only works if there’s a sunroof. They don’t even give you guys a sunroof? What kind of terrible conditions-” he shook his head, sticking a fourth charge and scampering over the hood. “Sorry, guys. I didn’t realize things were so rough off for ya! Well, if it makes it any better, they won’t be rough for much longer.”

Junkrat paused, thoughtfully, hand still on the charge he was sticking on the other door. “...’course you might be dead.”
In a frenzied instant of panic, one of the drivers slammed his foot down on the brakes. Dust flew and Junkrat yelped as momentum started to launch him off of the cab’s sidestep, but Roadhog reached down and grabbed him by the harness, securely anchored with his hook jabbed through the trailer’s roof.

“Oi!” Junkrat slammed his fist against the window. “That’s not nice!”

He stretched to slap another charge into place, not breaking his eye contact with the driver as Roadhog pulled him up. “Bloody idiots,” he muttered, pulling out a detonator and giving it a few smacks on the bottom. “They coulda really hurt me! I coulda lost a leg.” He flicked the switch and there was a rapid-fire series of explosions as all seven charges went off, and Junkrat turned onto his side, facing Roadhog. “Lost a leg! Can you imagine? That’d be pretty serious.”

Roadhog grunted.

“Well exactly,” Junkrat rolled his eyes, “I’m already missing one, that’s why it’d be so devastating to lose another!”

Roadhog grunted again, and Junkrat pulled a hand to his mouth, stroking at his chin. “Oh, that’s a good point. Wouldn’t be so bad if I lost the same leg again. Anyway, thanks for the save - onward!”

Inside the truck’s cab was smoke and pain, swearing and ringing ears. If the explosion hadn’t been bad enough, the gunshots definitely were, and the truck swerved as the driver cursed at the loud noise in such a small space. Even with one of the doors blown clean off, it was still an agonizing sound. He swore and tried to focus on the road, gritting his teeth - the little emergency alarm button blinked softly on the dashboard. Help would be here soon. Help would be here so soon. Not soon enough, as it turned out - Roadhog’s hand swung down, grabbing the secondary driver by his head and tossing him out onto the road. Shortly, his hook followed, cutting through the driver’s seatbelt where it was sharpened at the tip, and yanking him out as well. Junkrat leaped down and swung into his place.

“Ah, cushy,” he sighed, wiggling a little in the seat. “Whoever thinks this is a bad job is an idiot.”

Roadhog managed to shove himself into the other seat, and grunted.

“Well they can’t get exploded every day,” Junkrat pointed out. “And besides - any job with explosions is a good job to me!”

He cackled, slamming his pegleg down on the accelerator pedal.

In the back, Widowmaker felt the erratic movements - the braking, the swerving, speeding up again. Something was happening up in the cab, certainly. “What’s going on up there?” she wondered, keying the radio. The first response was just laughter from the small one and a grunt from the big one, but she waited, impatiently, until a few seconds later Junkrat gave an actual response.

“Don’t worry, blue-y,” he cackled. “You’re in good hands now! We’re in control!”

Widowmaker sighed. I’m going to die, aren’t I? She opened another channel, to report in to base.

“Sombra. Target secured. We are in control of the transport. Time for evac.”

“Heyyyy friend,” Sombra grinned, reclining in her chair and spinning just for fun. “Good to hear
from you! From the camera feeds it looks like you’re having some fun there, eh?” She chuckled and Widowmaker shrugged.

“Not so sure I would be calling it ‘fun’, but it’s been… something.” Seven percent worth of ‘something’. Might’ve been an impressive figure, once, but now it seemed fairly paltry.

“Oh come on,” Sombra chided, picking at a bit of dirt under one of her nails. “You’ve got to learn to lighten up! Look on the bright side - you’re doing better than all those guards, am I right?”

Widowmaker chuckled. “Perhaps. I’d love to chat, but first: where is our evac?”

Sombra sighed, rolling her eyes. Nobody ever just wanted to talk to her - some days, her friends could be real weird that way. Hell, half the time it seemed like Reaper didn’t even like her, but she knew that was just how he was.

“Already in the air, should be on you in a few minutes.” A notification spurred her neural network and her fingers twitched, bringing up a holographic display in front of her. Sombra frowned a little. “Hmm, bad news, *chica*. Looks like you’ll have a little company sooner than that - chopper incoming for you. Not friendly.”

“Any chance you can deal with it?” Widowmaker asked, standing and stepping toward the rear of the cargo truck.

“No can do.” Sombra sighed. Being back here at base was so boring sometimes - she wanted to be out there with her friends, doing things! Getting her hands dirty, up close and personal… but this had its upsides, too. She had a root beer float. “If I was there, sure,” she suggested idly, taking a deep slurp from her straw, brows furrowing appreciatively. *Damn, that’s good.* “But from here? *Nada*, amiga. Sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Widowmaker assured. Sombra was the least annoying one, by far - downright pleasant sometimes, in fact. Besides, it had been a while since Widowmaker had seen that shocked look of horror that came from enemy soldiers seeing her do something totally unexpected. She was starting to miss it.

“I can suppress their comms and their target tracking,” Sombra rolled a shoulder, munching on a chocolate bar as she idly hacked the incoming helicopter. “It’s something at least.”

“Yes, and something is better than nothing, *non*?” Widowmaker stalked toward the door as, in the distance, a regular thrumming beat of rotor blades churning the air grew louder and louder. From the sounds of things, they were coming quickly. She wasn’t surprised.

In the cab, Junkrat was trying to get the radio tuned. Unfortunately, somebody had recently subjected it to a nearby explosion, and at the moment all it could manage was static. Or, at best, fuzzy and distant semi-musical static.

“What kinda bloody joke is this?” Junkrat smacked at the machine with an open hand, turning to Roadhog in disgust. “They don’t even have a good radio! Don’t they know we’re trying to work here?”

The giant who’d crammed himself into the other seat started to grunt, but the sound was cut off by a hail of large-calibre gunfire spattering against the one still-attached door.

“Come on!” Junkrat exclaimed, throwing up an arm toward the cracked window which still managed to block the bullets - though it was a little worse for wear afterwards, more cracks splitting across it. “That’s a terrible beat! Amateurs.” Grumbling, he reached down and hit the button on his walkie-
talkie, clipped amidst a cluster of grenades to his harness. Earpieces were no good for him.

“Oh, blue-y,” he crooned over the radio. “I believe we have something up here which may be… of interest to you?”

Widowmaker smirked as she vaulted up onto the trailer’s roof. “I see it.”

Coming in from the side was an attack helicopter, guns blazing again as it unleashed another salvo at the truck’s cab. Flipping her hood down, Widowmaker grinned as she raised her rifle. There were the pilots, neatly outlined in her thermal vision, and eight others in the back as well. The engines and moving parts were white-hot with strain, but Widowmaker didn’t care about those.

They thought they were so safe - she had no doubt the company that sold it would’ve bragged about redundant fuel tanks or armour plating, reinforced controls and backup systems so that the machine could survive any combat scenario.

Luckily for her, it wasn’t the machine’s survival she was intending to end. At least, not directly.

After all, why waste fifty shots when one will do?

Her heart beat, her grin widened, and in the substantial pause between beats she fired. A single round screamed through the air toward the helicopter - or, more accurately, toward the pilot. Armoured glass or no, armoured helmet or no, there was little in the world that could resist the Widow’s Kiss, and this was no exception. In her thermal cameras, the pilot jerked and the helicopter twisted onto its side, dipping wildly toward the nearby ground.

Widowmaker had enough time to chuckle before it hit… but somehow, it managed not to. The co-pilot had snatched up the controls and kept the chopper from hammering into the dirt. Now the machine darted around erratically as the co-pilot attempted to dodge whatever it was that had killed the pilot.

Standing on the trailer, wind blowing her hair back, Widowmaker narrowed her eyes. Nobody denied her. If she had to get her hands dirty, she didn’t mind.

“HEY! BLUE-Y!” The words drifted over the wind from the cab, and Widowmaker tapped her earpiece.

“What?”

There was a fumbling noise on the other end of the radio and a laugh. “Oh right, the radio! Anyhow, I’ve got a gift for you up here - if you wouldn’t mind collecting it from my ample companion…”

Roadhog grunted over the comm line. Widowmaker still didn’t know why they’d bothered giving him a radio - he hardly used it, and when he did? Pointless.

Her eyes darted to the helicopter, which continued to swerve wildly across the sky - higher up, now, but still growing quickly closer. Shaking her head, Widowmaker dashed along the trailer’s roof until she reached the cab, where one of Roadhog’s massive fists was clutching something and holding it up toward her.

Unsurprisingly, that “something” was a bomb. A ridiculously comical, cartoon-esque bomb. It had an actual watch on it, and was made of what appeared to be sticks of dynamite.

“Are you serious?” Widowmaker groaned across the radio as she crouched between the cab and the trailer, the helicopter opening fire once more briefly.
“I’M ALWAYS SERIOUS!” Junkrat shouted, forgetting the radio again, brushing chips of glass from his lap. If he didn’t know better, he’d think that chopper was trying to kill them! “NOW GO BLOW SOMETHING UP!”

Tipping her head to the side, Widowmaker set off, clipping the bomb to her belt. The aircraft was very close now, the pounding beat of its rotors ever-present, and she could see what they intended to do. One door was off entirely, and a burst of fire like that last one would absolutely fill the cab, shredding those two sad excuses for compatriots to bits.

So at least it wouldn’t be all bad.

Still, a successful mission was preferable, and wasn’t all but impossible if the truck lost control and exploded into flames. It was why, despite the annoyances, Widowmaker knew she needed to stop the helicopter from taking out Junkrat.

As it swooped over, she could see it silhouetted against the bright sky, in the slot of vision between the top of the trailer and the shaking roof of the cab. It was almost too easy.

Her grapple plunged smoothly into the metal of the aircraft’s belly, pulling her skyward. She twisted as she flew, narrowly avoiding the huge, glowing-hot exhaust stacks that lifted from the truck’s top. She slung her rifle neatly over a shoulder, reached down, and unclipped the bomb from her belt as her momentum pulled her out to the side. A perfect opportunity. She flicked the switch and tossed the bomb, wedging it deep underneath one of the seats.

“Adieu,” she whispered, detaching her grapple and turning in midair. The guards in the back opened fire on her, and at least one bullet found its mark, but she could hardly feel the pain and didn’t need to worry about bleeding out. As she fell, she launched her hook out once more, embedding it into the roof of the truck’s cab.

For a moment, Widowmaker wondered if the co-pilot even knew what had happened. What would happen next. She took a knee and watched as the helicopter swung around to get its guns on target, which prevented any of the guards from firing at her further. It never had a chance to let off another salvo, though - the rat’s bomb went off and tore the chopper into pieces.

Widowmaker shielded her eyes against the sun, watching the rotor blades sail off into the distance.

“Neutralized,” was all she said over the radio link.

Back at base, Sombra grinned. “Nicely done, amiga! I saw that one on the satellites - one for the picture album, eh?”

Widowmaker chuckled slightly, shaking her head. An odd one, that Sombra, but not wholly objectionable. “If it’s pictures you want, I could provide for a few…”

Sombra, unseen, quirked an eyebrow reflexively and grinned. “Evac’s about a minute out… but let’s chat about that after you get back.”

Widowmaker actually laughed at that. For all her supposed street-wise temper, there was still a naivete in Sombra. As she crouched on the speeding trailer, eyes scanning the horizon for the dropship that would take them away, Widowmaker thought for a moment about the parallels there. In some ways, at least, that was the intrigue she saw in Tracer as well - there was more to it than just that, though.

Tracer was so… unexpected. A breath of fresh air in a world going slowly dull and stale. Foolish, yes, but with such fervor. She believed so strongly that the world and people were good.
Maybe that was it. Maybe Widowmaker just wanted to be close by when the world inevitably proved Tracer wrong. She suspected that that was at least part of it, too.

Everybody had to learn, sooner or later. The world doesn’t care. Everyone will die. Nothing will save you other than yourself.

_Eight percent._ Widowmaker sighed, settling down to sit on the roof as a black dot on the horizon grew. That whole fight, and she’d only managed an eight percent increase in heart rate at the peak. Now it was falling rapidly back to baseline. Disappointing.

It just… wasn’t quite the same without that plucky, brash brit shouting and pouting at her. Maybe the next mission, but- but then, last time…

Widowmaker’s face darkened a little as she remembered standing up at a window, _not_ being chased by the woman who apparently put some empty factory first, before her own life even. _Foolish. Stupid._

She didn’t wait for the dropship to touch down. Her grapple found purchase near the door and she swung in, sliding into one of the seats and smoldering quietly as the ship clamped down onto the truck and trailer, lifting them all off into the sky.

Down in the cab, Junkrat laughed over the radio as the wheels left the ground. “Drop us off in the Outback - Junkertown could use a rig like this.” Roadhog grunted and Junkrat turned to him suddenly. “Cargo! Who said anything about cargo?”

It was silent for a moment - or, at least, as silent as one could expect a still-running truck, missing a door and being flown through the air by a repulsor-jet craft to be. Then Junkrat looked Roadhog over, slowly and curiously.

“D’you really speak French?”

Roadhog grunted, twice, and then chuckled. The sound was muffled by both his gas mask and his bulk, but Junkrat grinned at it anyway. “Well call me a Koala’s aunty - you’ve got some surprises packed away in there, dontcha?” He poked at the other man’s ample belly with a metal finger, both of them giggling and chuckling. It was nice to be alone, away from prying eyes or cameras.

---

Sombra rolled her eyes, swiping clawed fingers across a floating screen, scattering it to the winds. “Nobody wants to see that,” she murmured as the camera feed dispersed, frozen on a frame of Junkrat turned around in the seat and laying back against Roadhog, wrapped up in his huge arms. After a moment of tapping her fingers on her forearm, Sombra’s eyebrow slowly began to raise. She waved her hand and brought the screen back again with a laugh.

“Oh, who am I kidding?” She pulled over a bowl of fruit-flavoured chewy candies and started to munch as she watched the two men cuddle, in a combination of awe and horror.

---
A world away and back in London, the sun was setting on Lena and Emily - literally, if not metaphorically in the slightest. They sighed in each other’s arms, sitting on a small hillock near a tree, and just held each other as the bright yellow gave way to orange, and then brilliant pinks and purples streaking out across the sky, painting the clouds.

“Totally worth waking up early,” Lena murmured, closing her eyes and nuzzling her head back against Emily’s chest.

She laughed. “Early? Lena, it was noon.”

“Yeah,” she hummed, eyes still closed. “Soooo early…”

Emily snickered, petting at Lena’s hair as she slumped lower until she was essentially just lying on the ground with her head in Emily’s lap. She had such a cute face, and Emily smiled as she looked down at it, fingers running through that unruly mess that the other woman called a haircut.

“You’re gorgeous, you know,” Emily murmured and Lena opened her eyes with a grin. “Inside and out, you really are. Mind, body and soul.”

“Glad you think so, love,” Lena sighed, nodding as she closed her eyes again. “So’re you!” This had been a beautiful day - sure, maybe not much had happened, but that was good. It had been a while since she’d had a day to just sit around and be with Emily like this.

“I think,” Lena nodded, sitting up fairly suddenly. Emily raised an eyebrow as her hand fell free of her girlfriend’s hair. “I think, we should have a little celebration.” Lena grinned, eyes sparkling as she met Emily’s gaze.

She laughed lightly, quirking her head to the side, her copper braid shifting on her shoulder. “Well, what do you think this all was, silly?”

Lena’s grin widened. “Well, I just mean, it’s the anniversary of our first kiss, right? Sooooo…” She trailed the word out, as if thoughtfully. It was all part of her devious and complex plan - she cut off abruptly, leaping forward and tackling Emily softly back to the grass, wrapping a hand behind her head and pulling her in close for a deep and passionate kiss. She sighed out every bit of breath in her lungs as a moan, couldn’t have held onto it if she’d wanted to as she swirled her tongue against Emily’s and slid a hand up her lover’s ribs, and she didn’t stop until her lungs ached in complaint.

When the kiss broke, they were both panting lightly, and Emily’s eyes were a little wider and held a bit of fire that sent a shiver down Lena’s spine. “Well, that was much better than our first kiss,” Emily murmured, reaching out a finger to trace down Lena’s jaw.

Lena giggled softly, blushing a little. “Yeah, well that’s because I’m not nervous this time! Well, not as nervous,” she admitted, blushing a little more.

Emily’s grin widened. “Are you nervous? Well that’s silly - what, do you think I’m going to pull you behind those bushes over there for some risky public friskiness, posing a threat to your reputation and good name?” She leaned up, whispering against Lena’s cheek. “Because that sounds like an excellent idea…”

A shiver jolted through Lena’s body, bringing goosebumps in its wake. “I-I… I…”

The knowledge that she’d robbed her the woman of the power of speech was utterly delightful to Emily as she gathered her legs under herself, getting ready to stand. “Tell you what,” she murmured,
“I’m going into the bushes… and you can join me if you want. Coming?”

“Practically,” Lena sighed, shivering as if it were a Russian winter. Emily laughed as she stood, grabbing Lena’s hand and pulling her along. She had just enough time to grab the backpack with her accelerator in it. Of all the times to desynchronize and lose her hold on time and her ability to make contact with the world, this had to be one of the worst she could think of.

Their hands and mouths were frantic on each other, Lena biting her lips together to stop from crying out. They didn’t want to gather too much attention. Emily wasted no time at all popping the button on Lena’s cargo pants and slipping a hand in, bringing a sharp gasp from her lover’s lips. Lena bit down gently on the other woman’s collarbone, mostly stifling a large moan.

Emily’s skirt of course offered nice and easy access, and Lena was even able to spend a moment tickling up her thighs, teasing with light touches. A moment, at least. She couldn’t stand any more than a moment, that much was certain. Emily pulled her into a deep kiss, each of them pouring all of the lust and ecstasy they couldn’t give voice to into their lips, their tongues, their hands.

It was kind of fun, trying to keep things quiet, and neither of them felt anything but a satisfied glow when they disentangled themselves from first each other and then the bush about fifteen minutes later. It was dark as Emily tried to straighten out her hair and skirt a little - but just a little - and Lena’s goofy grin didn’t leave her face the whole trip home.

When they were riding on the tube, Lena turned to Emily and whispered in her ear. “I can still taste you on my lips, and it’s driving me crazy…” Then it was Emily’s turn to shiver for once, and Lena grinned with intense satisfaction at the soft, wanton whine that came from those delicious lips. Cargo pants didn’t offer the same easy opportunities as skirts, definitely, and Lena couldn’t help but tease her girlfriend about it a little. Is this what it’s like to be on the other side of teasing like that? Brilliant.

At their apartment, Lena barely had time to lock the door before Emily was yanking her over to the couch with a growl. The park was fun, a bit of excitement, and trying to keep quiet had been interesting - but here, at home, was so much better. Here, where Lena could moan out Emily’s name, fingers clenching on thick clumps of coppery hair; where Emily could gasp and whine and shout as she locked burning eyes with her lover. Where the two could be themselves without fear of interruption or anything to spoil it.

It wasn’t quite an hour later when they finally decided they were either sated, or simply too tired to continue, and collapsed back against the couch in each other’s arms, panting and sweaty.

“Oh, we never had dinner,” Emily pointed out breathlessly, and Lena huffed a laugh.

“Well, sometimes you’ve just gotta get dessert first.”

Emily slapped gently at her shoulder with a giggle and Lena laughed again, sighing and snuggling in closer to her girlfriend. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.”

There was a moment of calm silence, save for the panting of the two women. It was broken by a loud grumbling noise. Lena’s stomach. They both laughed. “Alright, fine, food,” Lena sighed. “I just don’t wanna get up.”

Emily giggled, pinching her cheek. “You never wanna get up…”

Chapter End Notes
I love how eloquent Roadhog is. I would listen to him all day.

Translations:
Mademoiselle == Specifically, and unmarried woman.
Toute de suite, oui? == "Right away, yes?"
Ecoutez == "Listen up", in the imperative form - it's a command or a demand to do as told
Laissez-moi == "Drop me" or "Let me go", again imperative.
Merde == "Shit"
Bonjour, les gars... == "Hello, boys..."
Chica == "girl"
Nada, amiga. == "Nothing, friend."

Hope you enjoyed the new chapter, folks! C'mon back next time when we'll throw a new person into the mix as Talon undertakes a mission for Vishkar. Get ready for some fun Symbra times, some Creepy Reaper (Creaper?), and also Widowmaker gets to taunt Tracer a little more. Or a lot.

...the second one, definitely.
Diamonds are a Shady Corporation's Best Friend...

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Vishkar has employed Talon to help out with a retrieval mission, and they've sent an operative of their own along to help: Symmetra. She and Reaper are directed to breach a bank's vault with Sombra assisting from a distance, but the plan doesn't go off precisely without a hitch. Meanwhile, Widowmaker - charged with providing support for entrance and exit - gets confronted by Tracer who's on a mission of her own. Their clash takes on a different turn, as seems to be the norm for them these days, and it leaves a few questions hanging in the balance.

JFL Summary: Symmetra's going on a field trip! She gets to go to a bank and steal some stuff - isn't Sanjay so great? He sends her to such nice places, and in such wonderful company - after all, nothing could possibly be bothersome or irritating about Reaper. Sombra eats a peanut butter cup. Reaper gets hungry and decides to grab a snack or twelve. Widowmaker just watches, bored, from a rooftop, until a mouse shows up and provides a little distraction. Their interactions get a little more up-close and personal than Tracer expects - or do they? Everyone hangs off a cliff - or at least, the chapter does.

Chapter Notes

Note: this one hasn't gone through my normal, full editing process, but I wanted to stick to my at-least-once-a-week update schedule. Please feel free to point out errors if you see them! (That goes for the other chapters too, actually)
Edit: Okay now it's all edited, but you can still point out problems! Thank you :)

Also, this chapter and the next chapter are both dedicated to Anjali Bhimani and Carolina Ravassa (the voice actresses for Symmetra and Sombra, respectively) who are - hands down - the biggest Symbra shippers I have ever heard of. They're wonderful and fun and they deserve good things.

Previous chapter Summary: Widowmaker had a mildly disappointing - if successful - mission with Junkrat. Somehow it ended up being less satisfying than the factory had been, despite the fact that the latter ended in failure. It doesn't make sense to her. Emily almost confessed something to Lena, but pulled up short at the last minute and let it go unsaid.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Widowmaker wasn’t happy. She wasn’t exactly unhappy, but she definitely wasn’t happy. She probably wouldn’t even get to fight today, and that was about the only thing life held for her anymore.

*If it can even be called life,* she thought with a sigh. Through her scope, she could see the other two below - Reaper with his absurd cape billowing behind him, and the other, the loaned agent.
Symmetra was her moniker, apparently - some sort of engineer or something. Architec, Widowmaker thought she’d said. From the looks of things, the Vishkar Corporation outfitted their architechs the same way that Talon outfitted their assassins - at least, the female ones. Distractingly.

There was no real hope of this being a quiet mission, which would normally be a boon. A quiet mission was a boring mission, and while there was satisfaction in success, that was only one little injection of adrenaline. If she fought right, she could draw that high out for minutes or even longer. Infiltration, now, that was a little different - but this wasn’t even strictly her op. She was only here for support.

Everything today would be happening down in that bank. A bank whose vaults supposedly held something of great value to Vishkar - great enough that they’d sent Symmetra along to assist in retrieval. They said they suspected that there might be security measures which only she could subvert, but Widowmaker doubted that. She thought it was a simple matter of trust: why give your valuables to a middleman who might leverage the situation, if you didn’t need to?

It didn’t take long for people to notice Reaper. It never did, and every time they started screaming or running away Widowmaker had to sigh a little. She knew just how smug it would make him. Much of the time he wasn’t too bad, but when he got on a roll - in either direction - it was insufferable, really.

…yet, she had to suffer it anyway.

People below screamed. They ran away. Widowmaker sighed. Two guards at the bank’s entrance pulled out their handguns, but Reaper was far faster. He dispatched one easily with a shotgun blast to the chest and grabbed the other, flinging him against the wall. The stone cracked where the man hit, and Widowmaker actually winced a little. Insufferable or not, he was strong.

As the two of them, Symmetra and Reaper both went into the bank, Widowmaker sighed yet again and took a knee. Now she had nothing to do but wait until they were done inside. Hurry up and wait. 

*Idiotic.*

---

Symmetra’s lips curled in disgust as she stepped around the limp, bleeding figure near the doorway. He should not have been foolish enough to oppose them so brashly, but still, seeing life so wasted was… unpleasant.

She’d been instructed to cooperate on this mission, whatever form that took - repeatedly assured that their target would permit such powers for change, for good, for *betterment* of the world on the part of the Vishkar Corporation, that any short-term losses sustained here today would be insignificant by comparison.

Insignificant suffering. *Insignificant* death.

Symmetra knew there were concepts that were simply intangible to her - she’d been repeatedly, and often forcefully, informed. Perhaps that inability to see death as insignificant was merely one of them, but if so… she couldn’t help but feel that it was not *she* who had any underlying problems.

Whenever possible, she avoided death and destruction. For something to be *unmade* was a different
matter, and was beautiful, but deconstruction was not destruction. One was ordered. The other, chaotic.

Good and bad were so simple. She didn’t understand how others couldn’t see it.

Reaper swirled ahead of her like a maelstrom through the bank’s main lobby. People screamed and shouted, cowering before him, and for a moment Symmetra closed her eyes. She didn’t want to see what was about to come - she didn’t want to permit it, but she’d been instructed to cooperate, whatever form that took.

There were no gunshots.

Relieved, she opened her eyes. Reaper was holding a guard by the throat, yes, but he only tossed him aside. The man slid for twelve metres - almost exactly, less three centimetres - before coming to a halt, still conscious but clearly shaken enough to stay down. Good.

Four gunshots, in rapid succession - small-calibre, a handgun, and Reaper staggered. Symmetra saw black smoke leaking from holes in his jacket, heard his growl of hatred. Like cinder-blocks sliding across stone, like metal scraping across brick. Fingernails down a chalkboard. A voice that got inside of her and unsettled her, completely.

He dissolved entirely into smoke, a thick black cloud which swept along the ground and up to the balcony where the guard had just fired. He emptied his clip at the cloud but the bullets passed harmlessly through, embedding themselves into the ceiling - eight more shots.

With a growled shout, Reaper rematerialized behind the guard and grabbed him by the throat, lifting him up from the ground. The man gasped and clutched at Reaper’s armoured gauntlet, but there was no denying him. He was practically a force of nature.

There was something in that at least.

As she watched, the guard’s hair turned white. His skin withered and tightened until he seemed to be an embalmed corpse, a mummified remnant of some long-ago civilization in a blue jacket and tie. Reaper dropped the husk to the ground where it collapsed into pieces and powder.

“Any other heroes here today?” Reaper shouted as if in challenge to the room. His voice was thick with sarcasm and distaste. Nobody responded. He leapt down from his perch, landing heavily on what remained of the dead man below him. The skull gasped and clutched at Reaper’s armoured gauntlet, but there was no denying him. He was practically a force of nature.

There was something in that at least.

As she watched, the guard’s hair turned white. His skin withered and tightened until he seemed to be an embalmed corpse, a mummified remnant of some long-ago civilization in a blue jacket and tie. Reaper dropped the husk to the ground where it collapsed into pieces and powder.

“Any other heroes here today?” Reaper shouted as if in challenge to the room. His voice was thick with sarcasm and distaste. Nobody responded. He leapt down from his perch, landing heavily on what remained of the dead man below him. The skull gasped and clutched at Reaper’s armoured gauntlet, but there was no denying him. He was practically a force of nature.

“Symmetra,” Reaper growled, stepping closer. Every word he spoke was a groan through gritted teeth. Symmetra wondered if he even had teeth. It made her uncomfortable to think he might not.

“You have the floorplan. Where’s the vault?”

She swallowed briefly, pulling up the bank’s floor schematics on the inside of her visor. “Through that archway,” she gestured. “Down two flights of stairs. A locked door and then a corridor, turrets and other security countermeasures. Another locked door - unbreachable, must be opened non-destructively - and then the vault.”

Reaper nodded. He wasn’t going to say it, but he appreciated Symmetra’s down-to-earth style. That and the little glint of fear in her eyes. He led the way as she’d said, moving down the stairs swiftly.

At the bottom, the facility looked entirely different. The tile and warm-coloured paint of the lobby gave way to concrete walls and harsh white lights. It looked sterile and deliberate. Symmetra sighed slightly in relief.
The first door had only a standard lock on it. She opened her mouth to say so, when Reaper’s shotgun rang out a deafening shout and blasted a hole clear through where the knob had been. He nudged it with a foot and it swung open easily.

The ceiling of the corridor reacted swiftly to their presence, dropping out sentry turrets and small floating drones which whirred toward them, alarms blaring. Symmetra swirled her hands, constructing a barrier from pure light and unleashing it. It drifted slowly forward and blocked the incoming bullets of the turrets.

That was when Reaper sprung into action. With a laugh that was equal parts amused and disdainful, he cracked his neck and began to walk. Shielded by the barrier, the turrets posed no threat as long as the thin blue ellipse remained between himself and them. The drones dodged around the shield, unleashing electrical discharges at the black-cloaked figure, but he seemed hardly to notice - even as they burned holes in his cloak, unleashing small puffs of black mist.

His shotguns belched fire, smoke, and lead in a regular beat that matched his footfalls precisely. Every pace was exact, one meter, and Symmetra watched with momentary awe. His right-hand gun flared on his left step, and vice-versa, every shot bringing a spray of electronic components as a drone was scattered into scrap. The whole time, he chuckled to himself, the sound barely audible, even between the gunshots.

Symmetra was entranced by it, this display of… chaotic precision. She had not considered it vaguely a possibility. The pieces of the drones somehow managed to scatter and coat the floor in a way that was regular, if not necessarily even.

When his ammunition ran out, Reaper simply tossed his weapons aside. New ones appeared from dark smoke and he renewed his assault only an instant later.

Symmetra’s eyes fell to his discarded shotguns as the new ones rang out their song of death and destruction. His left one fell twelve centimetres ahead of the right, and carved an ugly path where it disturbed the scraps of fallen drones. She felt a tremor in her gut and tried to pull her eyes away, but couldn’t.

Luckily the guns soon disappeared, disintegrating into dust and no longer subjecting Symmetra to their disturbing presence.

The final turret at the end of the room was armoured. Reaper’s shots bounced off of its hull, and as the barrier passed it, he grunted and shifted into smoke. “Symmetra!” His shout echoed off of the walls as the turret sent streams of bullets through his insubstantial form.

She exhaled slowly, and then began to sprint. Pieces of drones crunched under her feet in a way that made her shudder, but there was no time for that now. She couldn’t let herself slip, not here, not now. Bringing her photon projector up, she charged and unleashed an orb of pure energy. It melted two smaller turrets - already disabled, but now made to drip from the ceiling - on its way to the final one.

Sparks flew and smoke billowed from the machine, and a moment later it exploded entirely.

Symmetra sighed as she approached the door and the once-more corporeal Reaper. She hummed as she swirled her hands, raising them to the ceiling and creating a small sentry turret, centred on the smoking remnants of the one she’d just destroyed. Unfortunate destruction, but at least something new could rise from the ashes.

*I’ll call you Indra,* she thought with a smile, patting the little orb, tracing a finger in a circle along its seamless shell. *From disorder, order.*
Two more turrets - which she named Agni and Savitr - she placed hidden in small alcoves partway along the corridor. Reaper watched her pet each one after materializing it, and sighed.

“Sombra,” he growled over the radio. “The door.” It had a keypad on it, and she had it hacked almost before he could finish the sentence despite it only being a few words. She might be annoying, but he had to admit that she was skilled.

 Didn’t need to admit it to her, though. Or to anyone.

“Got you, amigo,” Sombra chuckled a little. “Hey, nice job with those drones, by the way. I could’ve stopped them if I’d known beforehand, but, you know, you looked like you had it under control.”

“Yeah.” He didn’t know quite what to do with the little latina. She got under his skin and seemed to enjoy it, and the fact that he couldn’t keep her out infuriated him. Or, for that matter, anyone else - there had been a time when jokes didn’t get to him.

Now, though? All anyone needed to do was poke long enough and it was all but a guarantee that he’d snap at their finger. He hated it. He absolutely hated it, and that only made it all the worse.

“Symmetra,” he growled, turning his head to glance over his shoulder. She was just standing there. “The vault.”

“One moment.” It wasn’t a request, nor really a demand. Simply a statement. Symmetra stood back and observed the corridor, the three turrets she’d placed. A perfect, equilateral triangle - her visor confirmed it, measuring the space. She felt a small ripple run down her spine as she hummed happily to herself before moving to the door and stepping through it.

He watched her as she went. Angrily. She didn’t seem to notice.

The front of the vault down here comprised of a huge wall of polished metal, seemingly perfectly smooth save for three small holes in the middle.

“Why’d they go for an analog lock anyway?” Sombra scoffed, the building’s camera feeds displaying across her screens. She was scrubbing the data from the bank’s drives as she went.

“You are why, I suspect.” Symmetra’s response, like most of what she did, was simple and matter-of-fact as she knelt before the holes.

Sombra laughed. “Hey I guess I should be flattered, eh?”

Reaper grunted and refrain from comment. That burning itch up his spine had spread to his jaw and kept it clenched down tight.

Symmetra began to hum lightly as she weaved her hands, eyes closed. The lock was complex, multi-stage, and might require more than just three keys. There were unknown components on the periphery of her sensation, feeling the feedback as she threaded lines of semi-realized hard light through the chamber’s interior, probing out all that it had to offer.

Sombra sat up a little straighter in her chair, unwrapping a peanut butter cup. “Hey,” her words were muffled around the candy. “You’re about to have some company and they don’t look friendly. Looks like three trucks, maybe ten to fifteen each?”

Reaper grinned behind his mask as satisfaction - or at least, the promise of it - rippled through his nerves. “Good. Widowmaker?”
On the rooftop opposite the bank’s entrance, she tapped at her headset. “Oui?”

“Let them in. I’m… hungry.”

Symmetra shivered a little. “Keep them off of my back while I finish my work.”

Reaper stepped closer. “How long will it take you?”

She turned her head, regarding him with a sort of disbelieving scrutiny. After a few seconds she decided that he wasn’t just trying to irritate her - he legitimately did not know. Well, she could educate him.

“I am mapping out the functional operations of an unknown lock of unique design, simultaneously operating in three axes for three separate sets of tumblers along with ancillary security. Feeling blindly with threads of hard light and with no sensory input save for the slight feedback of resistance when a thread meets up against an obstacle.” She turned her face back to the vault. “It will take time and concentration. Close the door behind you on your way out. Sombra, lock it.”

The more separation she could have between herself and his insane chaos, the better. She’d been instructed to cooperate on this mission, whatever form that took - but that didn’t mean exposing herself unnecessarily. She wouldn’t be able to function if she did.

Reaper growled but left, and Sombra laughed over the comm link. “Damn, chica - you’ve got some crazy stuff going on, you know?”

Symmetra’s lips tugged into a smirk. The words didn’t sound teasing, the way they so often did. The woman sounded legitimately impressed. “I know.”

The door swung shut with a click, and a whirr a moment later as Sombra re-locked it with a different code, one that Reaper knew. He wasn’t planning on turning back, though. He was getting too close to losing himself to that itch up his spine, the one that accentuated the ever-present gnawing in his core. That urge to devour as only he could, to drain the life until there was nothing left but a husk.

Along with good old-fashioned bloodlust. Reaper took a deep breath as he stood in the corridor, cracking his neck to one side.

“Bring it on,” he growled to the air.

---

Outside and across the rooftop, Widowmaker had taken to her feet again when the armoured trucks had pulled up. Three of them, screeching around the corner - but as she sighted in, Reaper gave her a command to stand down. She did, but didn’t stop looking just yet. A dozen armed and armoured soldiers jumped out of the back of each truck, and started to rush inside.

Widowmaker heard a familiar whirr and her eyes flicked to the side. For a moment, it was silent.

“Well?” Her soft, accented voice split the silence. “Are you here to fight me?”

Tracer gripped her pulse pistols tightly, but only held them at the ready - they weren’t trained on the assassin. Yet. Neither was her rifle aimed at the brit.
Opportunities abounded. They always had, between the two of them - Widowmaker could’ve killed her a dozen times. Tracer could have as well, but she knew that if she started shooting, so would the other woman. She didn’t need to fight, she needed answers. Talking with the others had helped, but only Widowmaker held what she needed.

“...no.” Tracer sighed slightly, not certain what her answer would be until it came out of her. “I’m here to distract you.”

Widowmaker scoffed and looked down her scope once more. *Foolish girl. To think you have any power over me.* “Very well. Consider me distracted.”

Tracer’s brow furrowed beneath her goggles. The assassin didn’t back down, didn’t lower her weapon.

…but she also didn’t fire. Didn’t seem to be aiming at anyone in particular, just looking away.

“You tried to blow me up.” She winced a little as the words tumbled out of her mouth. *Good job, Trace.*

Again, Widowmaker scoffed, not taking her eyes away from the scene below. The drivers had emerged from the trucks and donned armour as well, following their comrades in. Four guards stayed posted at the doors. “Don’t be stupid. I tried to blow up a factory.” Her eyes flicked to the often-annoying young brit. “An attempt which you foiled. Without even needing to give chase. So… *bravo.*” She bit her tongue, mildly bitter and irritated - both at Tracer, and at herself.

“I-” the young brit started, her frown deepening a little. “I had to do something, I couldn’t just let the bomb go off.” Her brows drew tighter together as the assassin stayed focused on whatever was through her scope. It didn’t feel like the distraction was working. “Are you gonna look at me?”

Another scoff. It seemed like every bit of breath that left Widowmaker had been a scoff, and her eyes didn’t leave the scope. No worded response was given to Tracer’s question, but the answer was quite clearly “no”. She did, however, respond to the other things the young brit had said. “No? And what if it *had* gone off, with you there? You would have been destroyed along with the factory, a pointless loss.”

“So you *did* try to blow me up.”

Another scoff. “I was still nearby, watching.”

“You what?” Tracer took a step forward not really believing what she was hearing. “Since when do you care whether I survive? What, you would’ve saved my life if the bomb went off?”

Widowmaker was silent for a long time, eyes not moving, not blinking.

“I could have done something.”

Tracer felt it all coming back, all that unrest and confusion - King’s Row, the factory, everything - but it wasn’t as dark this time, it seemed. Somehow. It roiled in her gut, but was frankly secondary to the frustration that was rising. Widowmaker still hadn’t looked at her for more than half a second.

“Why?” It seemed like the most common question she asked the assassin, yet somehow carried so much. Tracer’s face held that same etching of confusion - almost pained - as it always seemed to when she asked.

The blue woman’s eyes narrowed slightly, flickering to meet Tracer’s just for an instant before
returning to her scope. That instant, though, sent a jolt through Tracer’s core - Widowmaker had looked almost shocked, almost offended by the question, and maybe a little hurt as well. “A dead mouse is boring,” she muttered simply.

“What, so you would’ve saved me?” The brit’s brow pulled tight, furrowed with confusion. The first time she’d heard it, she hadn’t wanted to believe it - gunships. “Like on King’s Row?

Now the assassin was saying the same thing again, and Tracer still hadn’t made her peace with the first. She felt like everything just kept piling on over itself - like every time she got some clarity or some answers, a breath of fresh air, a new wave of confusion would come plowing over and bowl her under again.

“I would have done something.”

Tracer hesitated for a long moment, an eternity it almost felt like. She could feel the frown drawn across her face and running so much deeper than that - an uncertainty that stretched right down to her core. Time stretched on endlessly as they stood on the rooftop.

“...alright.” The young brit sighed a little with a nod, expression dropping from her face. “I believe you.”

“Believe?” Widowmaker chuckled disdainfully. “Don’t be foolish, there is no ‘belief’ to it - believe or do not believe, it is a fact.”

“W- alright, well, I accept it then.” Tracer frowned at the response, eyebrows knotting, but Widowmaker practically cut her off.

“Accept or not, fact is fact.” Widowmaker’s words carried none of their common teasing lilt. They were blatant, empty, flat - not edged in sarcasm or anger, or anything else. Just words.

“Are- do you not want to talk?” Tracer half-gasped, exasperated. “Because these last few times it seems like you haven’t wanted anything else and I-”

“I am not solving your puzzle for you, little mouse.”

“Would you at least look at me???” Tracer snapped, taking a step forward. She instantly regretted it and gripped her pistols tighter as Widowmaker’s cheek left the stock of her rifle. The barrel retracted - short-range, close-combat mode - and Tracer felt her heart sink within her chest.

She’d gone and poked the bloody bear.

Good. Widowmaker’s lips curled into a smirk as she looked over, eyes narrowed at the little mouse looking scared before her, her own eyes wide behind her orange goggles. She cannot deny that.

“It is not pleasant being ignored, is it?” Widowmaker’s words were whispers, but they carried an edge that was a little deeper than she’d intended.

“S-sorry,” Tracer stammered, keying the accelerator up from idle, just in case. She wished she could spin back time to take back words, but she couldn’t. Everybody else just moved forward. Only she could jump around at will. “I- I was just frustrated and I-”

“Sorry?” Widowmaker cut her off with a smirk, dropping her rifle to hang by her side and gesturing dismissively with her other hand. “Sorry what - what for? A pot of water is boring. A pot boiling over?” She grinned, her teeth gleaming in the sun. “Intéressante. So.” She took a step to the side, leaning her rifle up against a wall and dropping herself fluidly into a sitting position, legs in front of
her and crossed at the knees. “Sit. Let us… talk.”

---

Deep in the bank’s belly, laughter ripped out from deep in Reaper’s chest as another trooper fell to his shotguns. He threw one of the guns to the side, hitting a soldier in the face as he fired and causing the man’s bullets to fly wide, then grabbed the gasping one he’d just shot. Raising him up, Reaper sighed as he drained what life remained from the dying man, and threw his withered corpse off to the side.

Cracking his neck, he turned to face another. She opened fire, short controlled bursts - good training, he noted as he swirled into mist, letting the bullets pass harmlessly through. He grabbed the woman as he resolidified and flung her against the ceiling heavily. Almost a pity. She fell limply to the floor. Almost.

Reaper knelt beside her, his metal claws digging in as he absorbed everything he could, but it still didn’t scratch that itch. She was still alive - or at least, had been when he’d touched her - and he was still so hungry.

They stopped coming down the stairs after he dispatched the first six they’d sent. “Come on, you cowards,” he growled up the stairwell. “You can’t escape the Reaper!”

There was a metallic clunk as a cylinder was dropped down, and then another. Gas flew from them, quickly filling the small space, but Reaper just sighed. How uncreative.

He dissolved, letting his gasses mix in with those the soldiers had introduced. It stung as he intermingled with the caustic substance - he was beyond harm, but not beyond perception. Reaching out his amorphous self, he swirled, gathering all of the gas into a central spot and then launched himself - and it - up the stairwell.

The soldiers were smart enough to be wearing masks, so the caustic chemicals did little to them. The others in the lobby were not so lucky, and those few who hadn’t evacuated yet were sent running from the building, coughing and spluttering and clutching at their eyes and throats.

Reaper resolidified and pulled out a new shotgun, emptying it into a soldier’s mask. The others surrounded him, shouted at him in Spanish to drop his weapons, to lay down on the ground.

He let them yell for a moment, relishing in the rising frantic tones of their voices. Then he held his shotguns out to the side and - after a momentary pause - let them fall to the floor.

Then, Reaper’s shoulders began to shake. A small chuckle built to a laugh, and then to a shrieking cackle that chilled the blood of everyone who could hear it. New weapons materialized in his hands as he spun, black smoke gathering around him and billowing through his cape.

“Die, die, DIE!” His voice rose in pitch and fervor, almost cracking with intensity as he reached the end. In two seconds, another eight had fallen.

He still wasn’t sated. His hands gripped tighter on his shotguns of their own volition, and he reached out to steady himself on a statue that flanked the beginning of the stairway. It crumbled instantly in his grip, carved marble giving way to his metal-gauntleted fist.
He cracked his neck again, trying to ignore that void that gnawed at his soul. Maybe if he killed a few more. Maybe then.

Maybe then.

With a grunt, Reaper tossed a few corpses back down the stairs and swirled after them to await the next idiotic push. Three dozen had come. Maybe that would be enough. Maybe… maybe he wouldn’t be hungry anymore. He drained the still-warm bodies of what little they still held. Hardly anything.

He holstered his shotguns with an audible sneer. It was time to get up-close and personal.

---

Tracer let go of her pistols. They retracted back into her arm-bracers as she hesitantly took a seat, cross-legged, a few feet away from Widowmaker. The frenchwoman watched her with hawk-like intensity, yellow-gold eyes narrowed to almost a squint.

“I…” Tracer started, then swallowed, dry-mouthed, and dropped her eyes to the side. She couldn’t watch the way the other woman stared at her anymore. “I’ve been… talking. Thinking.”

Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, leaning forward a little. “Sometimes you seem to do nothing but talk. Thinking?” She laughed lightly, derisively. “Now that, I doubt.”

Tracer’s eyes flicked back to Widowmaker’s in annoyance, but the triumphant smirk on those blue lips told the brit that she’d just given the assassin exactly what she wanted. Tracer sighed a little. “Yeah, fine, I jump into things a little quickly sometimes.” She rolled her eyes. “Honestly, you sound just like-” she bit her lip, stopping herself from saying ‘Morrison’. “…other members of the team.”

“Ah yes,” Widowmaker purred, “your little team. A group of vigilantes operating in secret and outside of the law - and tell me again,” she grinned smugly, “what makes you so superior to us?”

Tracer frowned. “Well we don’t shoot up banks in broad daylight. There’s point number one.”

It felt disconcertingly comfortable to just be talking. Of course, that could’ve been just because last time they’d met, Tracer had been worried about getting exploded. And every time before that she’d had a gun trained on her.

Widowmaker rolled a shoulder in an easy shrug. Even in little movements and expressions, Tracer could see the strength and fluidity that came out when she fought. That outfit definitely needed to be glued in place. She hadn’t seen it this clearly before, but it was definitely, definitely-

Tracer cut off the thought as her eyes snapped back up to Widowmaker’s face only to see the woman grinning widely, one eyebrow raised high.

“Like what you see, chérie?” she stroked a blue finger up the armour on one of her calves, twirling a little circle on her knee.

“Wh- I-” Tracer stammered, blushing furiously. “I was just- I didn’t know how the armour… worked. That’s all.”
Widowmaker snorted, tapping at her helm. Panels slid over her eyes and red lights illuminated, and her grin widened. “Oh, cherie,” her voice came out as a velvety purr that sent shivers down Tracer’s spine. “That fire in your nethers begs otherwise…”

Tracer gasped, clutching her knees to her chest. “Stop that! I don’t- I don’t know what you mean. Shut up.”

Widowmaker laughed lightly, a surprisingly bright and musical sound. Ten percent, already. They hadn’t fought, hadn’t done hardly anything - they were just sitting and talking. Ten percent increase. Marveilleux.

Tracer swallowed heavily, trying to push away the heat that had risen from her gut all the way to her cheeks, and trying not to think about just what Widowmaker had seen on her thermal cameras. Or whether those cameras could see through her clothes. It’s a simple physiological reaction, that’s all. Okay, now you sound like Angela. Don’t say that.

Widowmaker tapped the button to raise her visor again, eyeing the abashed brit across from her levelly. “Do not deny my effects, souris. That would be foolish, even for you.”

Tracer looked back at her almost angrily, cheeks mottled with pink and red, but quickly dropped her eyes from Widow’s golden ones. She was, as in every conflict with the assassin, outclassed and at the frenchwoman’s mercy. “O- okay,” she sighed. “Alright, it- yes. You’re very attractive. I noticed. There.”

Widowmaker laughed again, moving forward into a crouch and pulling Tracer’s chin up gently with one finger to face her. “Good. Perhaps you are not as foolish as you seem. And here, I didn’t even know the great Tracer appreciated les femmes…”

Tracer’s gut squirmed as she looked into those yellow eyes, so… so calm. So impossibly calm. Were they ever anything else? She thought she’d seen emotion in them before, but now she wondered whether it was only the brows, the cheeks, moving like a mask with the eyes still empty. She forgot to breathe for a moment as she became almost hypnotized staring into them. Like she could just look at them forever...

“Your skin’s cold.” The words fell out, as they so often did, before Tracer even really realized she was speaking. Widowmaker snatched her hand away with a glance at it, and a spot of chill was left where her finger had rested on the young brit’s chin.


“…of your conditioning?” Tracer prompted, raising an eyebrow. Widowmaker simply nodded once a second later. “How… how does…”? She wasn’t able to put the question into words, really. Maybe ‘why are you like this’ was as close as she’d ever come.

Widowmaker glanced away, out to the sky which was like a mirror of her own skin tone, only more vibrant. “My heart,” she responded a moment later. “It is… very slowed. Strong, but slow. Easier for the shooting. My breaths are slowed as well, and I have been given… treatments.” She held out an arm steadily, studying it. “Normal cells would die with as little sustenance as mine receive. Normal muscles would be incapable of moving.”

Tracer’s eyes followed her gaze, and then that blue hand as she trailed idle patterns up one forearm with her fingers. That tattoo, there - what does it say? Words on a cracked background of some sort, a spiderweb maybe, but Tracer couldn’t read them. Not from here, at least. She started to lean in a little bit, squinting.
Then, she noticed that Widowmaker wasn’t looking at her own arm anymore. She was looking back at her. Again.

“I wasn’t staring!” Tracer protested, sitting heavily back against the wall. “Or, I mean- okay, I was, but only because you wanted me to!”

Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow. “And who is to say I did not want you inspecting my armour, hmm?” She chuckled and Tracer blinked, slackjawed.

“W-well I, I mean…” she frowned, then her eyes narrowed and a smirk came to her lips. Finally, the kind of opportunity I could make use of! Can’t let all those teasings at Em’s hands go to waste, after all...

“Hold on.” Tracer smirked coyly across the space to the sniper. “Why were you lookin’ at my knickers with your thermals, anyway? Just what did you hope to see, huh?” Tracer giggled, raising an eyebrow. “Does the infamous Widowmaker have a crush?”

Widowmaker scoffed derisively. “You wish. You are a passing interest to me, nothing more.”

“Oh really?” Tracer asked deliberately, eyeing the other woman with a soft and disbelieving smile. There we go. Contact. Now it’s time to push the advantage! “Is that why you tossed me off of that rooftop, saving me from the gunship? Because I’m a… passing interest?” She did her best to mimic the other woman’s accent, and got a tiny quirk of blue lips as the only response. Tracer kept going, spurred on by the adrenaline of success - standing and stepping forward, one finger extended as if in accusation.

“Is that why you never pull the trigger on me? Because I’m more interesting alive than dead - that’s why you hung around after the bomb was delivered, just to make sure I’d get out okay!” She laughed openly, slapping at her knees. “I can’t believe I’m hearing this! The cold, heartless Widowmaker has a crush on Tracer!”

In a flash, the other woman was on her - before Tracer could react to think to block or blink away, Widowmaker had grabbed the front of her jacket and shoved her back against the wall. Her usually placid golden-yellow eyes looked almost wild at first from a few inches away, and Tracer didn’t know whether she was about to get kissed or killed.

As it turns out, neither. At least not yet. Holding her firmly back against the wall, Widowmaker leaned in past the young brit’s cheek and whispered in her ear, so softly she could barely be heard about the sound of Tracer’s own hammering heart.

“…and what if I do? What then?” Widowmaker’s cheek brushed up against Tracer’s as she hummed a laugh, and Tracer felt like there was ice and fire spreading through her veins in equal amounts. She’d definitely leapt in too deep. Widowmaker’s skin was cold where it touched her - not like metal but like marble, smooth and cool to the touch, the temperature of the air. Tracer’s breaths came ragged and quick, frantic.

Letting out a slow, cool breath - intentionally down Tracer’s neck, where it brought shivers and goosebumps - Widowmaker withdrew slowly. Her eyes still burned with that gold fire. Twenty percent. Twenty. The assassin leaned in deliberately, pushing Tracer more firmly to the wall.

Just as their lips touched, Tracer twisted time and swirled away, leaving nothing but a blue swirl, a frightened squeak, and a hint of warmth on Widowmaker’s lips from her own. The french woman laughed, full and bright, grinning out at the day. “Au revoir, chérie souris!” She called to the world and swept her arms wide, her as voice clear and ringing as her laugh. “Until we meet again!”
On a different rooftop, Tracer clutched her pulse pistols to the side of her head. “What the- what the hell was that?” Her words were soft and disbelieving, her heart hammering, her breaths heavy. Her hands shook a little as she raised one to her face, touching at her lips with a finger. Was there a ghost of a chill on them? She murmured to herself as she crouched. “What- c’mon Trace, c’mon, pull it together. It was just… it was just mind games.”

She licked her lips. They tasted normal, felt normal. Maybe… maybe it hadn’t happened. At least then I wouldn’t need to explain it to Emily. “Both of you, just playing mind games. Mental dogfight.” She took a steadier breath, frowning slightly. “Which you lost. It’s alright, alright, just… you kept her distracted. That was the mission.”

Tracer keyed her headset, shivering a little. “Sir, I hope you’re in.”

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Intéressante == "Interesting"
Marveilleux == "Marvelous"
les femmes == "women"
Au revoir == "Until we meet again", or literally "until we see again"

That's that! Part one of two, pretty much (sorry) - tune in next time for some Symbra fun, Reaper's Tragic Backstory (tm), and Jack and Ana showing up for counter initiative. Tracer did a good job opening the window - will they be able to make use of it? Will Reaper be able to sate himself? Only one way to find out! Thanks for reading, folks :)
...and Shady Corporations are Sombra's Best Friend.

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer may have run aground of a confusing rock or two in her interaction with Widowmaker, but she's not the only member of the team at the bank today. She's opened up a hole for Soldier: 76 to get through, and he clashes with Reaper in a painful way. Symmetra and Sombra work together to get the vault open, but the latter is a little shocked by what happens afterwards. Reaper's hunger threatens to get the better of him, and after it's all done, Jack takes the opportunity to decompress a little with Tracer.

JFL Summary: Reaper's suffering, and decides to take it out on everyone else. Sombra gets into Symmetra's head a little, and later, accepts her proposal of marriage. Tracer doesn't know what to call Jack, but she *does* recognize the smell of tear gas. She poses some dubious scientific postulates while chatting, and gets demoted from New Strike Commander to Motivational Speaker. Kind of.

Chapter Notes

Dedicated once again to Anjali Bhimani and Carolina Ravassa (the voice actresses for Symmetra and Sombra, respectively)! Big gigantic cute Symbra fans that they are (not that I expect they'll ever see this. Except for maybe Sombra, she sees everything...)

Warning: Symmetra has a bit of an incipient problem here but I don't think it should be a problem for anyone. It wasn't an issue for me to write, but I was hoping to maybe provide a little bit of understanding with it - can't say what it's like for anyone else, of course. Anyway, if you're prone to the same, you may want to be on guard so it doesn't throw you off.

Previous chapter Summary: Reaper and Symmetra breached the bank and fought their way down to the vault - she almost even saw positives in him. Almost. Sombra and her bonded a little, but not nearly as much as Widowmaker and Tracer: up on the rooftops, Widowmaker tricked and trapped Tracer into admitting some attraction, culminating in what may or may not have been a kiss. They would disagree on that point.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the bowels of the bank, Soldier: 76 tapped at his headset twice. Silent confirmation to Tracer that he’d made it in, two blinks across the comm channel. She’d done a good job, distracting Widowmaker for a while to create an opportunity.

“Good,” he heard the young brit come back over the radio. “I’m… I’ll be ready if you need another window. Just… give me a minute if you can.”

Oxton sounded really shaken. 76 wasn’t surprised - he hadn’t faced down the Widowmaker in person, not face to face like that, but one confrontation had been enough for Ana to abandon
everything for a decade. Him, the fight, her own daughter. The fact that Tracer could have had so many run-ins, and the fact that she was still willing to undertake more - it meant a lot. He was proud to be fighting alongside somebody so brave.

He knew he should tell her that. He would. This just wasn’t the time.

76 heard a grunt from above him as he slowly climbed a ladder, doing his best to not make any noise. For an old man in steel-toes, he did a good job. A thump as he reached the top of the access tunnel, right on top of the hatch, didn’t bode well. 76 gave it a cautious shove. It didn’t move.

Then there was a noise like… like he imagined machinery sighing. Tired, grinding, groaning. It followed through into a bone-chilling laugh as 76 heard something being lifted from the hatch above him. A scream that trailed off into a gurgle. Another thump… but a lighter one.

Reyes. His teeth gritted as he gripped the ladder’s metal rungs. He should’ve known that he’d run into his former friend here - it was a Talon op, after all. The man seemed to damn near run the place. A thorn in his side. A reminder of his failures. One more drop in the bucket.

With a grunt, 76 threw the hatch open and flung himself out of the tunnel, readying his pulse rifle and loosing off a trio of helix rockets. Reaper had just enough time to turn to smoke, the rockets streaking through him and blowing a large chunk out of the wall on the other side.

“Aw, Jack,” Reaper sneered, tilting his head. “Think of the collateral damage.”

Soldier: 76 growled and jumped forward, swinging the butt of the rifle up. Reaper dissolved and swirled around him to rematerialize on the other side, but 76 expected that and spun, firing the pulse rifle as he did. Several shots hit Reaper’s chest. A few even made it through his armour.

“You always were a dumbass, Jack,” Reaper chuckled as he swirled into smoke again, moving up the stairs.

76 followed, boots pounding the ground as his eyes flicked to the dessicated corpses lying around. More than a dozen of them, loose in their body armour, skin pulling tight to the bones beneath like they’d been left out in the desert for years.

“You bastard, Reyes,” 76 growled as he chased the other man up the stairs. “What did you do to them?”

“Reyes is dead, Jack,” Reaper spat back. “You killed him.”

Soldier: 76 dropped to a knee as a shotgun blast chewed plaster above his head, and fired a burst from his pulse rifle. “Jack’s dead too. Maybe you should visit his grave some time. Get some closure.”

“And why would I want to see one more statue to a man who never deserved the first?” Reaper’s voice echoed angrily off of the ceilings and walls, and 76’s eyes tracked around the room, trying to find him.

They didn’t know why Talon was here, only that they were stealing something. Money, possessions, intel, it didn’t matter - if Talon wanted it, 76 wanted to stop them from getting it.

“What, and you do? Would you let them have stone capes or would you insist on real fabric so it can billow in the wind?”

Reaper chuckled darkly from somewhere unknown. “If you think you can get under my skin and
goad me into making a stupid mistake, you can’t.” All of the lights went dark with a hum as Reaper slammed his clawed fist through a breaker panel, destroying it. The electricity hurt as it seared his flesh. *Good.*

Soldier: 76 looked around slowly. With so many shadows, there were many places Reaper could hide. Many he could strike from.

---

Humming idly to herself, one might think that Symmetra hadn’t heard any hint of the battle outside. In reality, she hardly had - she’d always been good at concentrating, on focusing on the things which truly *mattered.*

It wasn’t her fault that other people disagreed on what exactly those things were.

The lights flickered slightly as the vault room disconnected itself from the power grid. Locks and failsafes and safety nets, a big delightful puzzle that she got to figure out. Some days, life was just wonderful!

The first lock, she knew now, intrinsically. She couldn’t have drawn it if asked, but she could have *made* it, whole, from light itself - and any lock one can make, one can make a key for. She did so, the key materializing in place, in the keyhole - but she didn’t release it from her control quite yet to let it be nothing more than a physical construct. Where would be the purpose in that? Better to keep it semi-real, on the fuzzy borderline between design and manufacture, and still under her control.

Turning three keys at once, by hand, would be difficult. Rotating three pieces of a larger construct, which happened to have the outward appearance of a trio keys? Simple.

Symmetra smiled as she worked, knowing that Indra, Agni, and Savitr had her protected. None could sneak past her turrets. She was safe. She was in control. She was calm.

She came to understand the second lock, and materialized a key in place for that one too with a light laugh. “Honestly,” she hummed. “It’s almost too easy…”

---

Soldier: 76 staggered as a shotgun blast hit him from the side, but at enough of a distance that it didn’t get through his jacket. Reyes must have known that. He was just trying to pester him.

*Trying to keep me here.*

“Where are you going, Jack?” Reaper’s voice whispered through the empty bank as the man turned and started down the stairs again. 76 didn’t stop.

When he made it to the bottom, Reaper rematerialized above him, falling with a heavy boot and an armoured knee down to the ground - intended to inflict some serious damage to the old soldier 76 was just a little too quick to get caught off-guard, though, and rolled to one side, firing his pulse rifle
at the cloaked man. Reaper returned a shotgun blast that ate a chunk out of the ground near Jack’s head as he scrambled away to crouch around a corner.

“Damnit Reyes!” 76’s voice was strained. “We were like brothers!”

“Oh, brothers,” Reaper sneered back, slowly advancing on the corner, shotgun drawn. “Well in that case… I’ll just call you Hanzo then, shall I?” He spun around the corner and opened fire, but Soldier: 76 had disappeared. Reaper growled and tossed his shotguns to the ground.

He heard the familiar whirr of helix rockets incoming and let himself drift into smoke, the explosion taking out a large chunk of the ceiling near him. His boots crunched rubble as he came back into solidity.

“I never killed you, Reyes! You killed yourself when you killed Overwatch! You blew that place to hell and it brought you right along with it.”

76 didn’t expect the gauntlet that clamped around his throat, cutting himself off from any further comments. Reaper ripped the rifle from his hands and slammed him back against a wall which splintered a little behind him. At least one of his ribs was cracked, he could tell, but he couldn’t deal with that right now. A psychopath was holding him by the throat.

Priorities.

“You want to talk about HELL?” Reaper shouted, the sound echoing all around him - hardly even seeming to come from underneath the mask, really. Jack winced behind the metal that covered his own face, but outward he looked as stoic as ever. “I loved you, Jack. I loved you and you treated me like GARBAGE!”

Reaper shot the ceiling, spattering them both with debris and dust, and pushed Jack back harder against the wall. He choked and groaned, Reaper ripped the mask off of his face, and Jack gasped in the dusty air, coughing.

“You- you…” he struggled for breath. “You looked… pretty content, with your tongue in Jesse’s mouth.” Reaper punched him in the face, his metal gauntlet leaving tears in Jack’s skin.

“One mistake.” He growled, lifting Jack away from the wall - but it gave the old soldier a chance to breathe a little better, at least. “I made one mistake and you threw me away. Treated me like a monster. Like you never did the same. I saw you an Ana, Jack. But no, I was the evil one.” Reaper couldn’t help the fire that burned in him, the hatred, the way he felt sick. He was sick. He was hatred. In that much, at least, Jack was right and always had been.

That was what he’d realized that day. When everyone treats you like a monster, you have two choices. Roll over or prove them right, and Gabriel Reyes was done rolling over.

“You treated me like dirt, Jack,” his fingers tightened around the other man’s throat, his tone teasing and almost sing-songy but with a frantic urgency behind the words. He could feel that itch clawing its way up his spine again, that urge, that vitriol.

“You stood on top of my shoulders for everything you did. Oh there are statues of me, alright - every pedestal that supports a statue of you.” The words were spat and hateful, and accompanied by squeezes that threatened to puncture Jack’s throat with clawed metal fingers. “I deserved better than you. Better than someone who would hide me away in the shadows, sweep me under the rug - deny me to the world.”

“We were in the same unit!” Jack grunted. “Damnit Reyes, we- we would’ve been court-martialed.
We would’ve been killed.” His blue eyes, clenched shut to deal with the pain, opened and sought out some remnant of the man he’d once known - somewhere, behind that mask, buried under all that pain. Gabe had to be in there somewhere. “You would’ve been killed. Gabriel, I… I couldn’t bear that.”

“Don’t you dare try to pretend like you cared about me.” Reaper seethed, his hand tightening dangerously. “And now, Jack…”

The tension in Reaper’s hand slacked a little, and Jack gasped another breath as the other man pressed a shotgun to his forehead. “…and now I’m gonna kill you. It’s a shame, really - this is a paltry repayment for everything you did to me, but if you think anyone will save you, you’re even stupider than I was all those years ago.”

No, he couldn’t leave it at that. Couldn’t resist a final jab, twisting the knife the way it always wrenched within his own gut. “Your precious Overwatch…” Reaper teased, “there never was room for anyone else in your life.” He chuckled. “And you never even stopped to think what your one true love was really like…”

“What are you-” 76 grunted, “-talking about?”

Reaper chuckled, drawing the other man in until his face was only a few inches away from the mask. “Ask Jesse sometime. If you meet him in hell, that is.”

“You’re not gonna- shoot me, Reyes,” Jack strained, barely holding on to consciousness, and Reaper tilted his head.

“Oh really?” he chuckled, shaking his head. “And why’s that?”

“Because she’s gonna shoot you first.”

As he spoke, Ana fired from the far end of the hall where she’d managed to get into position for a clear shot. Reaper had just enough time to turn to smoke with a shout, hatred and rage stirring him into angry vortices. He barreled down the hallway toward Ana, rematerializing before he hit her and tackling her into the room behind, but she was ready for it.

She raised her arm and fired off her tranquilizer dart - and at point-blank range, nobody needed forty years of experience to make a shot.

Reaper grunted as the dart hit him in the gut and he brought his gauntlet down heavily across Ana’s face, tearing her patch free. “What if I take the other one, huh?” he growled, but Jack fired a burst from his pulse rifle and Reaper had to dematerialize again. He disappeared into the darkness, seething.

“Ana! You alright?” Soldier: 76 ran down the hallway and crouched next to his friend, rifle at the ready and trained on the shadows. Ana retrieved her eyepatch and tied it hastily back in place.

“I’m fine Jack, stop worrying,” she shook her head, pushing herself back to her feet and reloading the sleep-dart. “I don’t know how this will affect him when he’s… like that.”

Jack grunted.

“You know, you always deserved better than him. And I don’t just mean in a military sense.”

Jack actually chuckled a little at that, though it was admittedly strained and ended in a coughing fit. “Yeah. I guess some guys just aren’t boyfriend material. But then…” he sighed. “I don’t think I was
either.” He dropped his biotic canister on the ground where it whirred happily, unaware of any of the conflict around it, and soothed the wounds of two old soldiers.

---

On the upper floor, Reaper stumbled as his legs refused to cooperate. “Widowmaker!” He demanded, hitting the button. “I’ve… been tranquilized. Get- get in…” he slumped to the ground, his vision spinning. He needed to wake up. He needed to-

Without even realizing it, he slashed a hand downward at himself, burying his metal claws into his own leg with a scream. It clarified his vision, brought him back to himself, and as he gouged the gauntlet deeper into his flesh, the scream grew into a laugh.

Floors below him, Ana and Jack both shivered.

Outside, Widowmaker raised an eyebrow passively at the bank across the street. “Do you need backup?”

“Negative,” Reaper grated, wiping his own dark blood off of his gauntlets. The pain drove the tranquilizer’s effects into submission. “Sombra. Status report.”

---

Sombra spun around slowly in her chair, making little purple snowflakes dance around her. She pulled up a screen amid them and glanced it over. “I see two little keys in two little keyholes- oh, and a third! Lady got her job done, looks like.”

She grinned, waiting for the vault to slide back so she could see what goodies were inside… but it didn’t. She swapped to a private channel to investigate - no point letting the others listen in. “Hey. What gives? Symmetra, you there? What’s happening, chica?”

Symmetra frowned at the vault in front of her. It wasn’t working. She needed three keys. She had three keys. She twisted her wrist, rotating the trio in unison as could only be done by hard light constructs under an architech’s control, and… nothing. It wasn’t working. It was supposed to be working but it wasn’t.

She heard a name that she knew was supposed to be her, but that didn’t matter as much as this right now. It wasn’t working and it was supposed to be. Making a little noise in frustration, Symmetra tried again. Nothing. Nothing. She could feel heat rising behind her face, prickling her scalp, and it was entirely unpleasant. It wasn’t working.

“S-some other security facet,” she choked out, forcing herself to take a step out of things for a second. Sometimes it was possible. Sometimes. “Unforeseen. Additional. Unexpected.”

Sombra snorted a laugh. “You sound a bit like a broken record there, chica! Can you get it or not? Things are getting a little-”
“There is nothing at which I cannot succeed!” Symmetra snapped, fist clenching. The hot prickles roamed freely over her now, face and scalp, arms and legs, all of her skin, leaving chilled clamminess in their wake. She hated when things didn’t work. She hated being told she couldn’t. She hated being told she was broken.

“Alright, alright,” Sombra murmured, raising her hands open-palmed. “I get it, geeze. No need to bite my head off.”

Symmetra took several deep breaths, forcing herself to think things through. There must be another facet to it - not a physical one. Something electronic, radio frequency perhaps or electromagnetic. She couldn’t decipher it alone. She’d been instructed to cooperate on this mission, whatever form that took - and they would do the same. It was only fair.

“Apologies.” Her words were a little clipped, but not openly hostile anymore. “I became... frustrated. The secondary layer of security must be non-physical in nature - can you access my visor? Its scanners should be able to aid in detection.”

Sombra grinned a little. “Don’t mind if I do, chica - just give me a sec to warm up the old fingers before I slip on inside…” she chuckled, deep in her chest.

Symmetra didn’t place the joke, not even a little. She simply stood, waiting, watching the vault. Nothing seemed to happen.

“Are you in yet?”

“Gah! Chica, you can’t ask a girl that!” Sombra laughed, fingers dancing with purple light as she worked her way through what Vishkar doubtlessly considered to be an impenetrable system. “Don’t worry, I’ll have it in a second.”

She did, too - not exactly a second, but shortly. Within a few. The sounds of battle outside were absent. Symmetra noticed an alert on her visor, which she at first mistakenly took to be some sign from Sombra. It wasn’t.

It was one of her turrets activating.

---

“Damnit,” Jack grunted, spinning back around the corner out of the corridor and holding his arm which felt numb from the beam. “Some kind of defense system. I’ll clear it out.” He waited a second, before sensation and responsiveness returned to his numbed limb. Then he ducked around just briefly, only long enough to unleash his helix rockets.

---

Symmetra gasped slightly as Savitr and Agni were extinguished, unmade. Her eyes were a little wide until she forced composure back onto her face. They were only things. She just didn’t expect them to be gone so quickly. That was all. She didn’t care about things any more than people. She couldn’t.
It was what they all told her.

Sombra chuckled as she made it through the last shell of security that Vishkar had put in place, and saw the world through Symmetra’s eyes. Or at least, through her visor.

“Hey, nice equipment,” Sombra murmured appreciatively, the floating screen in front of her enlarging and curving to give her a view of the world that matched the visor exactly. “Okay chica, get up close and personal with that lock. Let’s see what I can see…”

---

The one turret that was left activated automatically when Ana came within range of it. She stumbled with a cry, and Jack pulled her backward by the tail of her cape, training his pulse rifle on the little orb. It ceased firing once she was out of range.

“Always thought wearing that thing was a little ridiculous,” he chuckled, dispatching the sentry as Ana pressed at the wound. There didn’t seem to be any physical injury, which she was surprised by. “Guess there are some upsides after all.”

“Ha ha, Jack,” Ana rolled her eye. “Now can we move along? There is no telling how long we will have before-”

She didn’t get a chance to say his name before Reaper tackled Jack to the ground, dripping something blackish on the ground. Blood. Or whatever he had that was closest. He grabbed the soldier by the jacket, but Ana fired at him from close quarters with her rifle. Distracted to her, he lashed out with a kick which she dodged - giving 76 an opportunity to knock the other man’s hand free of himself with his rifle. He rolled into a crouch and opened fire, no bursts, full bore. Reaper turned to smoke and clouded their vision, surrounding them with angry laughter.

---

Symmetra tried to suppress the urge to whimper. She really did, but it was too much and the little noise escaped her as she began to rub her thumb nervously along her forefinger - from the second knuckle to third, and back, and back again. And again, and again, and again. “Any progress?” Her words were soft, flat. Anybody not looking at her hand might think her totally still, completely calm.

“Yeah yeah - I don’t like being poked any more than you do chica, just lemme work,” Symmetra grumbled as she continued to study the vault. Little lines flicked across the display, lighting up electromagnetic signatures - wires that ran through the door’s interior. “Okay so there’s- and that’s a… oh, I got it! Okay you need to introduce a magnetic field in the centre of the keys, with a field strength of…” her fingers tapped, running some calculations on another screen. Her bowl of snacks lay entirely forgotten as she leaned forward in her chair, grinning like a shark. “One point seven five Teslas. Any chance you can manage that, chica?”

Symmetra swallowed, and nodded, ceasing her thumb’s idle movements. “One point seven five T, centralized triangularly.” She whispered to herself under her breath. “All things by design.”
She was not an electrical engineer, but her visor was more than capable of the calculations. It occurred to her as well that Sombra may have been providing aid, helping the visor along to determine the optimal design for such a device. Simpler than her sentry turrets, certainly.

Symmetra whirled her hands in a pattern in front of her, unable to keep her hips from swaying gently as well. Sombra quirked an eyebrow at the screen which still showed her camera feeds into the vault room. *Looks like she’s dancing. One weird chica, that’s for sure… but I think I like her.*

The magnet, when it was deployed, looked like nothing impressive. A small white hemisphere, attached to the metal. Symmetra exhaled smoothly and twisted the keys, still tethered to her own reality. They moved.

With a joyous laugh - if only a single one - Symmetra pulled her arms in tight, grabbing at her own elbows as relief shivered through her. An uncharacteristically emotional display, and one that was followed shortly by another.

“Thank you, my friend,” she called to the ceiling. “You made it work!”

Sombra chuckled, grinning widely. “Hey, don’t mention it *amiga* - we weird gals gotta stick together, you know?”

Symmetra chuckled as she stepped forward through the opening vault door, and then, with a twist of her wrists and a snap of her fingers, her constructs dissipated in a flash of light. All three keys and the magnet as well, gone in an instant, and the vault door slammed shut smoothly and almost instantly as Sombra gasped.

“What are you, *crazy?* Now you’re trapped in there!” Her brow furrowed as she watched the visor feed, the only visual link to Symmetra now. She heard a chuckle over the radio as the screen shifted left and right. Symmetra was shaking her head.

“When prepared, one is never trapped,” she responded simply, waving her hands in front of herself again. “And I am never unprepared.”

With no onlookers, here alone in this silent and sterile place, the floor and ceiling blending into the walls, all bright white and glorious, she felt so *free*. All it took was several feet of alloyed metals with thousands of pounds of hydraulic pressure holding them closed; all that was required for her freedom was being sequestered from the rest of the world by one of the most complex and secure vaults in existence. She wasn’t sure why she hadn’t thought to try it sooner.

She actually danced, spinning as the teleporter took shape and working the movements into her masterpiece. She’d always been inspired by the same. The machine was exquisite, even for one of hers, and she smiled at it for a long time.

Sombra didn’t recognize the thing, but she did recognize a few of the circuits. A good thief steals a design, a great thief steals one and makes it their own, but an *exceptional* thief stole several and improved on them all. It had taken bits and pieces from a few different places, and Sombra actually wondered whether any of the progenitors of her Translocator would even recognize the finished device. She hummed a laugh. “A teleporter. Clever, *amiga*. I think I underestimated you.”

“What are you, *crazy?* Now you’re trapped in there!” Her brow furrowed as she watched the visor feed, the only visual link to Symmetra now. She heard a chuckle over the radio as the screen shifted left and right. Symmetra was shaking her head.

“When prepared, one is never trapped,” she responded simply, waving her hands in front of herself again. “And I am never unprepared.”

With no onlookers, here alone in this silent and sterile place, the floor and ceiling blending into the walls, all bright white and glorious, she felt so *free*. All it took was several feet of alloyed metals with thousands of pounds of hydraulic pressure holding them closed; all that was required for her freedom was being sequestered from the rest of the world by one of the most complex and secure vaults in existence. She wasn’t sure why she hadn’t thought to try it sooner.

She actually danced, spinning as the teleporter took shape and working the movements into her masterpiece. She’d always been inspired by the same. The machine was exquisite, even for one of hers, and she smiled at it for a long time.

Sombra didn’t recognize the thing, but she did recognize a few of the circuits. A good thief steals a design, a great thief steals one and makes it their own, but an *exceptional* thief stole several and improved on them all. It had taken bits and pieces from a few different places, and Sombra actually wondered whether any of the progenitors of her Translocator would even recognize the finished device. She hummed a laugh. “A teleporter. Clever, *amiga*. I think I underestimated you.”

“What are you, *crazy?* Now you’re trapped in there!” Her brow furrowed as she watched the visor feed, the only visual link to Symmetra now. She heard a chuckle over the radio as the screen shifted left and right. Symmetra was shaking her head.

“When prepared, one is never trapped,” she responded simply, waving her hands in front of herself again. “And I am never unprepared.”

With no onlookers, here alone in this silent and sterile place, the floor and ceiling blending into the walls, all bright white and glorious, she felt so *free*. All it took was several feet of alloyed metals with thousands of pounds of hydraulic pressure holding them closed; all that was required for her freedom was being sequestered from the rest of the world by one of the most complex and secure vaults in existence. She wasn’t sure why she hadn’t thought to try it sooner.
amiga. I get it, you take pride in your work - me too. I’ve got you plenty of pictures.”

Symmetra nodded, once. “Thank you, Sombra. I appreciate that.”

With that, she went to find what Vishkar needed to continue improving the world.

“Oh, oh! Oh, what’s in that one?” Sombra clambered, trying to tilt her head to see the crates off to the side that Symmetra was simply walking past. “Slow down, amiga! There’s some primo stuff here!”

“Vishkar is interested only in the diamonds,” Symmetra answered plainly.

Sombra gasped, long and slow, her eyes sparkling in the dim purple light thrown off by the screens. Her voice was soft and reverent when she spoke, “Diamonds?”

Symmetra nodded, out of habit. “Yes. They are required for an additional array on one of Vishkar’s satellite platforms.”

“YOU’RE GONNA LAUNCH THEM INTO SPACE!?” Sombra shouted loudly enough that the radio link fuzzed out a little and Symmetra winced. “No, no no no - I thought we were friends, chica! You can’t just do that to diamonds!”

“And why not?”

“Because they’re diamonds! Are you- no, you’re not serious, right?” Sombra laughed, a little bit forced, but Symmetra didn’t respond. “Oh damn it you’re always serious aren’t you - no, listen to me, amiga, we gotta-”

“No, you listen.” Symmetra bristled a little. “Favours or no, friends or no, I work for the Vishkar Corporation. We are improving the world, building it anew from the ashes of the old, and we will not have our progress impeded by- by one woman’s lust for gemstones!”

Sombra sat heavily back into her chair and didn’t respond.

After a few moments, her heavy breathing returning slowly to normal, Symmetra looked off to the side.

“I will try to see if there are any others down here. Vishkar will have no use for them.”

“You’re my favourite chica in the whole world right now,” Sombra laughed. “All I can say is ‘I do’.”

She waited for the laughter that was sure to come in the wake of a joke like that.

Symmetra didn’t place the reference. She rarely did. However, she did find the crate that was their target - and elsewhere, locked where such a simple key opened it, a small leather pouch. It was filled with diamonds. They were far too small for satellite use, obviously. Maybe her new friend would like them.

“Mission complete,” Symmetra nodded as she stepped onto the teleporter’s base, and in an instant was sent very far away. Home. Utopaea. She sighed as she handed off the crate to waiting technicians. Sanjay raised an eyebrow when he saw the small leather bag, but Symmetra simply shook her head. He didn’t care and shrugged before smiling, that same smile he always had. For the cameras, for the news feeds, for her.
“Another mission well done, Satya,” he nodded encouragingly. “I only hope those scoundrels didn’t make things too uncomfortable, but you understand that we need to take certain precautions - particularly when the company is undergoing scrutiny such as this.”

Symmetra simply nodded with a hum. “Of course. I am tired; I will be returning to quarters now.” She removed her visor and held it out to one of the technicians. “Destroy this, it has become compromised.”

Clutching a bag of diamonds, she went quickly to her room and laid on the bed. A moment later, her phone buzzed in its cradle and she looked at the screen. A message.

“You get it? Like a proposal. I do? Diamonds? Oh whatever never mind - good working with you amiga! Hey gimme a call sometime, you know? Later. -Sombra”

Symmetra actually chuckled, leaning her head back against the pillow. “A proposal,” she muttered under her breath. “I get it.” They were the last words before sleep took her.

---

Nobody else, nobody at the bank, knew of what was happening behind the locked doors. Reaper continued to trade blows with Jack and Ana - unable to make progress but also not stepping down - until he heard Symmetra’s announcement over the radio. With a furious growl he flung his shotguns and dissolved, swirling up the stairs to the lobby.

He glanced up and saw Widowmaker kneeling up above, covering his retreat. Possibly the only truly competent person on the team, if a little full of herself. He smashed in the window of a car he passed as that thought stuck in his mind like a thorn, twisting like a traitor’s knife. They all thought they were so great - Jack with his statues, Ana with her stoicism. Widowmaker with her placidity.

She thought she was so unflappable, so calm. He paused for a moment after rounding the corner of the building, tearing a chunk out of the masonry as he went. He’d show her. Nobody could-

He threw his fist into the wall with a shout, sending a small cascade of rubble and powder down. Heavy breaths, ragged breaths, filled the inside of the mask. If he weren’t so damn hungry he wouldn’t have to think that way. If he could just get another one, just another bite before they went back to base, it would all be fine. Something to take the edge off of it, to quell that ever-present itch in his spine that wormed its way into his thoughts and-

“What is that, some kind of carnival mask or something?” Some young punk, all shaved hair and tattoos, swaggered out of a nearby alley, eyes flicking around. He spoke in Spanish, but Reaper had no problem understanding.

“...something.” Reaper grunted in response, in Spanish, and the punk laughed.

“Yo, whatever man - I want it.”

Reaper turned to face him slowly, and the kid pulled a gun.

“You deaf in there, man? Take that shit off. I said, I want it.”

Raising his hands to his mask, Reaper chuckled. “Perfect...”
When the mask came off, the kid started screaming. He didn’t stop until there was nothing left to scream, nothing except a husk which Reaper tossed back into the alley he’d come from. He stretched and cracked his joints with a chorus of sighs - such a young one, so much fire in his veins, so vital…

“Rendezvous at the drop point, as normal,” Reaper grated over the radio. “Well done.”

Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, already sitting inside the Talon dropship. Normally, he wasn’t so cordial. He must have had a good meal. Widowmaker hit the button on her visor. “D’accord.”

---

Tracer entered the bank to find devastation and mayhem. Bodies and bullets, and remnants of… she sniffed and wrinkled her nose. *Is that tear gas?* She’d been to a protest-turned-riot or two (or ten), and it smelled disturbingly familiar.

“Ana?” She called out, pulse pistols in hand. “Ja- err…. Mister… Soldier 76?”

“Down here,” he grunted, and Tracer blinked down a set of stairs, two flights, and found them in a corridor surrounded by scrap and bullet casings.

“Wow,” she breathed, taking in the aftermath with wide eyes as Ana quietly cursed in Arabic in the background. She held a small module, one that was linked in with Athena, and presumably had something to do with the locked doors at the end of the hallway.

“I am sorry, Captain Amari, but-”

“I’m no Captain anymore, Athena, but thank you. It’s alright. I know it takes time.”

“Yes.” The quiet machine voice came from her hand. “Of course. It will just be another moment, I am sure.”

Tracer jogged up to Morrison and looked at him with concern. He didn’t seem to have any injuries, but she knew that looks were deceiving there - his jacket was torn through in a few spots, and she wondered how many of those he’d gone through or if he simply kept patching them up.

His mask was gone, too, and she had a sinking suspicion it wasn’t by choice - but the solemnity of that kept her from laughing at the image of him at the end of the day, stitching up the bullet-holes in his jacket.

“So… no luck, then?” She tried to keep her voice cautiously optimistic, and Morrison sighed.

“Not so much,” was his gravelly reply. His eyes were intense as they roved the corridor. “There were turrets set up - Vishkar tech. Reaper was here, too.”

“Vishkar?” Tracer frowned a little. “Aren’t they a development company? In buildings or something, aren’t they? Architecture? Why would they be robbing a bank?”

Morrison rolled one shoulder in a shrug, along with a noncommittal grunt. “Don’t know. Probably not actually them - we all know Talon’s good at taking credit for other people’s work, and apparently a thief made off with some of Vishkar’s technology a while back. Call her the ‘Hard Light Bandit’, whatever the hell that’s supposed to mean.”
Tracer’s eyes flicked to him at the swear - not that she really minded, she’d heard a million times worse down the pub, but she wasn’t used to hearing it from him. Not in a situation like this - maybe that meant it was worse than it actually seemed. What happened in here anyway?

Soldier: 76 noticed the look on her face and sighed, meeting Tracer’s eyes for the first time. “Sorry, Oxton, it just- it was a long day. Not a great one.”

“Sorry, sir,” Tracer half-mumbled, glancing over to Ana again. “It’s fine, I just… wish I could’ve been more help.”

His eyes flicked back over his shoulder, and he gestured Tracer out of the corridor with a grunt. When they were out, and in a room around a corner, he took a seat and patted the ground next to him. She went, confused, and sat on the floor as well.

“Look, I-” he cleared his throat a little bit. “You did a good job today, Oxton.” He forced his shoulders to relax a little. Soldier was one thing, but that didn’t mean everything needed to be brusque. “Tracer.”

She noticed the softening in his voice and looked over to him - and his face, though weathered and lined… looked a lot more like the Jack Morrison she used to know. The wrinkles didn’t just look like age anymore, they were remnants of laughs up around his eyes, mischievous smirks at the corners of his lips.

He glanced over and noticed her looking back, and chuckled softly. “Look, you did a really good job today. Recently, too - that factory, sticking around like that, and the retrieval op. You’ve been pulling double duty, and I just wanted you to know that it’s both noticed and appreciated.”

He winced a little as he heard his own words, trending formal again. You sound like a damn debriefing report, old man. He chuckled a little at his own thoughts. “Look, I know I’ve been kind of… on edge lately…”

“I may have noticed a hint of grumpiness, sir,” Tracer grinned a little, and Jack let out half a chuckle at that.

“Yeah, okay - I’ve been grumpy lately, and I know it.”

Tracer glanced over and ventured into the slightly uneasy if short silence that followed. “Yeah, I was kind of wondering what had your knickers in a twist.”

Jack laughed, outright, and clapped her gently on the shoulder - Tracer joined in with a few giggles of her own. It was like seeing him breathe again. “Alright, I deserved that. You’re a good kid, Tracer - a damn good kid, and you deserve to hear it every now and then. I uh…” he trailed off for a second, his eyes slipping to the ground as his hand fell from her shoulder. “It’s getting toward anniversary time.”

“The explosion,” she nodded, and his eyes snapped to her. She raised her eyebrows. “Don’t think you’re the only one who marked it on a calendar, sir - losing Overwatch hit us all. Sure, there was the Petras Act and all that came later, but…”

“...but the loss of HQ was the real fall, wasn’t it?” Jack sighed and Tracer nodded, glumly, as he continued to speak. “I- I used to get so angry about it. The first few years. Furious about the way the world turned its back on us, but now… lately…”

Jack’s head tipped forward until his chin rested on his chest and he shook it gently back and forth. Now I don’t know what to think. “I’ve found out so many things since. Find out more every day, and
now… now I think I’m just getting despondent because I think they might’ve been right to.”

Tracer’s head turned over quickly, her brow etched with concern. Maybe a little betrayal. Jack sighed. “Look, I- I just mean… damn it.” He hung his head, rubbing at the back of his neck. “I think you believed in Overwatch more than anyone. Maybe… maybe not me, not at the time, but now?” He sighed again. “Maybe I’m just getting cynical in my old age,” he managed half a chuckle and Tracer giggled softly.

With a heavy sigh, the old soldier’s shoulders fell. “I think if you’d been in charge, maybe things would’ve been different. But…”

There wasn’t really anything more to say. Not for him, at least. Tracer, on the other hand, couldn’t let it go. “…but they weren’t. Different, that is. Is that about the size of it?”

Jack sighed a chuckle and nodded. “Yeah. That’s about the size of it. Look, I don’t want to dash all your hopes and dreams or anything-”

“I’m not some little girl, Sir. 76, Morrison, whatever.” Tracer sighed, shaking her head. “I know if you get a thousand people in a room, one of ‘em’s gonna be a twat. It’s just science.”

Jack chuckled. “I dare you to say that near Winston.”

Tracer laughed lightly, briefly, but it was good to keep some levity in things. She looked over with a smile. “I don’t know what all went into Overwatch, but I know it was well more than a thousand people in a room. There’ll always be some bad apples, but that doesn’t mean we give up.”

Jack sighed and leaned back, smiling softly and directing his eyes toward the bullet-pocked ceiling. “Yeah. I bet the phrase ‘acceptable losses’ doesn’t even register to you, huh?”

Tracer screwed up her face as if in confusion, humming. “Mmmnnope. Doesn’t make any sense.” She chuckled and nudged the older man with her elbow cheerily. “Really though, it’s… it’s in the past. It just us, now - we can keep things straight between us. No thousand people in a room, just us. What, a dozen or so? If you count all the little ancillary friends?”

Jack chuckled, nodding. “Yeah. Guess so.” He shook his head a little, unable to quite wipe the grin from his face. Something about her was just so inspiring to him. “Null Sector on King’s Row, and now again today. I’m thinkin’ I should make you my official inspirational speech-giver. Something like that.”

Tracer shoved his shoulder with a shocked laugh. “Hey hold on! Two seconds ago I was gonna be the new commander of Overwatch and now I’m a speech-writer? Talk about demotions!”

Jack laughed, raising his hands with a grin. “Alright, alright, I fold. Really though, Tracer, it… it means a lot to me to have someone who cares so much. Someone who always sees the good, even when other people might swear…” he sighed. “That there isn’t any.” He looked over and set a hand on Tracer’s shoulder again. “You’re the heart of us, I think.” his eyes twinkled a bit as he leaned in. “Don’t tell Lucio I said that, I couldn’t stand to watch him pout.”

Tracer laughed brightly, the sound echoing down the halls and corridors to Ana, who stood in an empty room looking at a solid metal wall with nothing but three little holes. Athena confirmed quietly that there were no signs of movement or vitals, in here or inside the vault. She asked whether Ana wanted her to convey the information to Tracer and Morrison.

Ana listened to the laughter of the other two, and shook her head with a sigh. “Don’t bother. Not every mission can be a success, but we can let them enjoy themselves for the moment at least - thank
you, Athena.”

“Thank you as well, Miss Amari.”

Ana smirked slightly. A shade better than ‘Captain’, maybe, but it could still use a little work. Ah, well. There is time.

Chapter End Notes

*panics gently about the Reaper stuff sorry*

Sorry, Widowracer (I know the commonly used one is "Widowtracer" but I like the fluidity without the ‘t’ a little better?) fans, but they didn't have any moments here. Things are gonna get big, quick, though - I promise you'll either love or hate me next chapter. Or both.

...probably both?

But hey, Symbra is great and fun (and they're totally married now except not), so hopefully you enjoyed that at least.

Join us next chapter, when Winston and Jack butt heads (but not literally), with the latter heading off to meet an old friend and the former leaving to participate in a mission. Tracer and Widowmaker meet up again, and this time the sniper swings hard. Can Tracer keep her feet under her, or is she about to be swept away? Find out next time, and thanks for reading!
A Close Shave

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: In the aftermath of the team's unsuccessful efforts at the bank, Jack has a couple of run-ins. An escort mission takes a drastic turn when Tracer ends up alone in an alleyway with Widowmaker - again - and has to run off home.

There's always another shoe to drop.

JFL Summary: Jack talks to a monkey and a dwarf. Torbjorn totally doesn't care about his machines more than his own kids, definitely not. Ana and Winston hatch a plan to kick some bad-guy butt while Tracer chases after Widowmaker in an alleyway. After a bit of a... development... Tracer has to go home and have some ice cream with Emily. It does not work out as planned. At all.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Threats and just like... a lot of emotional shit, sorry. Uh... just trust me? We'll get through it.

Previous chapter Summary: The attempt to foil Talon's bank heist failed: Jack and Ana fought Reaper off well enough, but they were unable to stop Symmetra from breaching the vault and obtaining the target. Everyone made it out alive but in various levels of rough shape, and retreated to lick their wounds a little.

So they’d failed a mission. It happened, it wasn’t the end of the world.

Except for the part where it might’ve been. They really didn’t know.

Athena had been crunching numbers, trying to figure out what might’ve been taken and why. As it turns out, big corporations that hide things in secret vaults aren’t exactly forthcoming with when they’ve had burgled.

Go figure , 76 thought to himself as he hung up his jacket. They didn’t have a unified headquarters anymore, but there were safehouses scattered around. Since Gibraltar had been compromised just before Winston initiated the recall, he’d decided to move. A smaller base, located a little more centrally to the existing team members - in the Netherlands - had been chosen. It was laid out pretty similarly all-in-all, but it didn’t have any orbital launch capacities. Winston had moved in right away.

Neither of them had exactly been happy when Soldier: 76 had joined him in Apeldoorn, but with the recall he felt a renewed purpose and his nomadic ways had to come to a close.

...or at least, to a lessening.
“I heard it didn’t go so well.” The gorilla’s deep voice rumbled from another room and 76 sighed, leaning his head forward against the wall.

“Not the best, no,” he sighed. He heard some shuffling, and soon felt a huge hand closing gently over his shoulder.

“I know we’ve had our differences, but I’m sorry. I know how frustrating a failed situation can be.”

He wasn’t sure how to feel about the mission being called an ‘situation’, and he wasn’t a fan of being reminded that it had failed, but he chuckled anyway and patted at Winston’s huge shoulder. “Thanks. It… yeah, we’ve sometimes not seen eye to eye.” He flashed the gorilla a smirk, “but that’s probably mostly geometry.”

Winston chuckled with a nod, dropping his hand to the floor, knuckles down.

“I had a talk with Tracer,” the soldier nodded. “She’s a good kid. I see why you two are so close, I see a lot of you in each other.”

Winston nodded slowly, with a faint smile. He wasn’t sure if it was because he was a scientist, a man, a gorilla… but for some reason (or, more likely, more than one), he’d often thought that things he said would’ve gone over better from someone else’s lips. “Well, I appreciate your compliment by proxy.”

The old soldier gritted his teeth momentarily. Why couldn’t the damn gorilla just take a compliment? Why did he always need to make it a fight?

Winston just watched placidly. Re-integration had been difficult. Their old commander was now calling himself Soldier: 76 - a name that still had Winston rolling his eyes and questioning Jack’s grammatical judgement. When he’d first contacted them after the recall, it had been frosty. Winston hadn’t approved of the slew of thefts and assaults on good people - it was the problem Overwatch had run into in the first place. Acceptable losses. Collateral Damage. Sure, none of them had died, but that wasn’t the point: it was a slippery slope and one Winston was determined not to start down.

Things only got worse when Winston had firmly stated he was in charge. Jack had actually stormed out at first, and nothing got better quickly. Or possibly at all. Most of the team, such as they were, respected and liked both of the men to various degrees. That was most of what held them together, now.

Winston felt like Jack didn’t respect him as a man, as a leader - felt like Jack saw him as a science experiment. Ironic, given his own background. I do love irony.

On the flip side of things, the soldier saw a distinct lack of trust in Winston’s eyes, and felt no give, no slack. Like every moment would just be judgement for the ones before. Some scientists just didn’t accept certain things, and he felt like some of them considered themselves superior to soldiers.

As a result, things were fairly tense. Both generally, and specifically.

76 sighed, shaking his head. “Sure. Well, you deserve it by proxy.” Winston’s lips curled back a little but Jack walked away as if he hadn’t noticed. He had. “I’m heading out. Taking a ship. I’ve got to see the swede.”

Winston clenched his jaw as he watched the other man go. He considered trying to stop him, telling him he didn’t have permission to take a dropship. Even considered telling Athena to ground them all - but Jack would just steal it, Winston knew.
If you didn’t let him get his way, he just took it.

“Welcome home,” Winston rumbled, turning to lope back into the room which served as his main office, full of screens and readouts and empty peanut butter jars. “Pompous ass.”

---

Torbjörn Lindholm was happy at home, happy in life - he had a beautiful wife, a plethora of kids, and a massive garage and workshop in which to tinker to his heart’s content. Right now he sat in that workshop, a grin shifting his beard as he read a letter from an old friend.

He’d thought her to be a dead friend, but sometimes it was hard to tell, he supposed. He didn’t know; he wasn’t a doctor.

Promptly, he took up a pen and paper to draft a response - technology was great, but he wasn’t one for these holograms and touchscreens. Sometimes a situation needed a good old-fashioned wrench.

Or pen.

Amari,

It’s good to hear you’re alive and kicking! I’d ask why the long silence, but I’m sure you’re tired of the question by now. Still, I hope one day you might treat me to the tale.

Thanks for asking about the wife and kids! They’re all doing well, skittering around like they do.

I notice you didn’t ask about my other projects, heheh, but I figured I should fill you in on them anyway! I’ve been working on some new refinements for the turrets. I had a hope for a while that I could integrate the biotic technology with them, and make a sort of stationary field medic of sorts but it didn’t work out so well. As a side note, kevlar doesn’t protect from those darts at all. I’ve been putting some thought as well into the problem of mobility - I know how much you and the others always used to complain about that, heheh, but there’s a definite trade-off with stability and it’s an issue that needs some tweaking, to be sure. I’ve got a few new tricks up my sleeves though, if you ever end up needing a wrench on one of your little escapades. Even if the mobile turrets don’t become a reliable reality, you know I can always lock down your flanks.

Don’t go reading anything dirty into that statement, there, heheh.

It’s good to hear that the biotic rifle’s treating you well! She was one of my babies. Good to know she’s grown into a good strong girl. You treat her right and she’ll do the same for you. I’d wondered where she ended up and it’s good to know that she’s in good hands. There’s nobody I’d trust with her more than yourself - except for maybe me, of course!

Drop by some time if you’re in the area. We’ll throw a meal together and chat if you like! I’m sure you’ve got lots of great stories to fill me in on.

After all, it’s not every day you come back from the dead!
Thanks for writing.

“Torby”

P.S. Have you talked to Reinhardt yet? You really should. You know he took it hard. I know it’s none of my business to get involved, but you really should send him a letter as well, or just drop by and see him.

It was strange how time could change things.

Speak of the devil, Torbjörn thought to himself as he glanced over at a camera that showed him the front walk. After being surprised once, he thought he deserved to keep an extra eye on the place. “He’s a friend,” the engineer muttered to his turret as he stood from the stool.

Standing, he was actually shorter than when he’d been sitting down. Old Jack Morrison probably could have vaulted him in a single leap.

“Jack.” The word was flat, if harshly accented. The engineer just looked at the soldier.

“Torbjorn.” Jack pronounced it wrong. Everyone always pronounced it wrong.

There was a tense moment of silence, each man looking at the other with a stern expression on his face.

It broke into laughter, starting as a deep grumbling chuckle in Torbjörn’s massive lungs and spurring the same in Morrison, until they were each doubled over. It brought them to about the same height.

“You old bastard,” Torbjörn said - but he said it with love. “I knew you’d come by sooner or later! Got tired of waiting for yer old friend Torbjörn to pay you a visit, eh?”

Jack shook his head, chuckling. “Something like that. It’s been good bumping into you again.”

The engineer sighed, leading Jack further into the shop. “I still wish you’d said something, Jack. You wouldn’t have needed to steal the gear, to start with! I could’ve made some up nice and fresh, just for you.”

Jack chuckled a little, reaching into his jacket - not the iconic leather of Soldier: 76. Rather, just a simple leather jacket. Out of the lining, he pulled something he’d had tucked there since leaving Apeldoorn, and dropped it down on the workbench.

Torbjörn gasped as the crumpled faceplate of Soldier: 76 rocked slightly back and forth on the wooden surface. A fragment of glass fell from it, and the engineer’s face creased heavily as he reached out.

“That’s a serious heavy duty alloy, Jack. What did ya go and do to cause this, then?”

Jack just sighed. “Reyes.”

The short man nodded silently. Torbjörn had seen the bastard that bastard had become, had watched his babies fill him with lead only for black smoke to laugh back at them. He gave one of them a
“Connipition once, right in her targeting module. Bastard.”

“Repair or replace?” Torbjörn kept things simple when it counted. Jack had always appreciated that.

“Repair, if you can. Guess you could say it has… sentimental value.”

Torbjörn chuckled. “Oh, now I couldn’t possibly guess what that’s like.” He was silent for a moment, considering. “You’re not coming in to say hello, are you.” It wasn’t really a question. The engineer already knew the answer.

“Nah,” Morrison shook his head. “Just dropped by to ask. Sometime soon, though.”

Torbjörn laughed. “Oh right, after the battle’s over?”

Jack chuckled as he stepped toward the garage’s main door. “Yeah. Exactly. Thanks, Torby - see you around.” He had another stop to make. If he looked in enough bars, he knew he’d find the cowboy…

---

This mission, Jack wasn’t coming on. If he wanted to prance about as he chose while the rest of them had things to do, that was fine by Winston. He didn’t care if Jack was off in Sweden.

Except he did. As many problems as he had with the man, Winston did care about him, did respect him. They used to get along so much better. He still got nostalgic for that - for all of it.

He’d done the right thing, though, and he knew it - looking over to Tracer’s smiling face, and then to Ana who was… there - he knew that he’d done the right thing. Sure, the gang wasn’t all back together again. Alright, maybe they didn’t exactly come back together to the same way they’d been before parting.

There were new members, though - helping along the sides at least. Orisa, Lucio, D.va - Overwatch wasn’t run out of hangars and watchpoints anymore. It had gone to ground, and while they had a series of safehouses and bases still, they were mostly for preparation. Although all the members knew they were welcome to stay whenever they needed - and most of them took up on that opportunity from time to time - it was only Winston who treated the places as anything other than temporary living space.

Then again, the trials of property ownership as a genetically engineered gorilla from the moon were both many and sizeable.

It was a simple enough mission, though, tonight. An armoured vehicle needed to get to its destination safely - in the wake of what information had leaked on the bank heist Talon had pulled, many companies were feeling a bit paranoid. Winston was too, which was why he’d called the other two up and asked if they’d mind accompanying.

Just in case Talon showed up.

Tracer glanced over to her big gorilla buddy, really wanting to go over and ask how things were going with his new girlfriend. They were just so cute and big and she couldn’t stop grinning when she thought about them.
“What?” Winston asked, quirking an eyebrow.

Tracer giggled. “Oh, nothing love. Just ponderin’."

A noise drew her ear, a tin can being knocked over, and her head snapped around to look at an alleyway. There was a swish of dark, long, purple hair.

Widowmaker. Tracer’s heart instinctively quickened a beat.

“What is it?” Winston saw the reaction on his friend’s face, and Tracer looked back almost panicked. “Did you see something?”

“I- yeah, I think-” Tracer glanced back at the alley. “Sorry, I’ve got to- I think it might’ve been one of them. Got to check our flanks, back in a flash!”

Gone in a flash, too - a nice, long, blue one as she spun the accelerator up to speed. Winston waved as she went, knowing full well that it would look like a photograph of himself to her. Already, possible Talon activity. Great. Just great.

“Okay, Ana,” Winston sighed. “Guess it’s just the two of us for a while.”

Ana huffed a laugh, walking slowly alongside the vehicle. With the load it was carrying, it wouldn’t move much faster than crawling - and after an apparent theft of a whole vehicle in Australia, no driver felt safe with just on-board guards anyway. Winston and Ana stood amongst more than a dozen hired guns - but they were given a fair bit of space.

She turned her one good eye to regard Winston shrewdly. “Alright, how’s this. You hold them, I punch.”

Winston laughed, hiking his Tesla cannon onto his shoulder and patting at the shield generator on his hip, just to double-check that it was there. He’d far rather use the latter than the former. “Yeah, heh. Sounds like a plan.”

---

Tracer zipped, realigned, looked around, and blinked forward again. No Widowmaker.

_Huh. I was so sure that I-

“Did you miss me, _chérie_?” The thick but smooth voice, like velvet, came from right behind her and a little above. Tracer shivered a bit, half expecting another gun barrel to her spine as had happened in the past, but that wasn’t the case. She turned around to be face-to-face with Widowmaker, whose golden eyes studied the brit curiously - and seemingly without care that they were upside down.

Her hair was so long that it hung almost down to the ground. Her rifle was still across her back, so Tracer sighed and retracted her pulse pistols into her bracers. “Oi, what gives? Darting around in alleyways?” she frowned a little, as confused as she’d ever been.

Widowmaker chuckled, reaching out to stroke her cheek. Tracer leaned away from the gesture a little, but not quite drastically enough to stop it entirely. “Why, I thought you might want to have another _chat_ , of course…” she swung forward a little, bringing her mouth dangerously close to the
other woman’s.

“N- no nonono,” Tracer mumbled, shaking her head and leaning away, holding a finger against the frenchwoman’s lips. “No, you- we- I- I don’t understand!”

Again, the blue woman chuckled, eyes wide with excitement, twisting away from Tracer’s gloved finger. “I know. That is what makes it so… delightful.” It surprised her a little - or a lot, in fact - to find that they weren’t just words. Somewhere along the way, the teasing had gone from just pleasant to a genuine joy. She wasn’t even sure she was capable of that anymore, but this thrill was…

She didn’t need to look further than her heart rate to know that it was unparalleled.

Tracer whined slightly, eyebrows pulling together. Shivers ran up her back and she wished they would stop, along with the heat she felt rising in her gut again - thinking about looking into those eyes, her mind flashing back to a kiss that may or may not have actually happened. She didn’t want to think about those things. How could she?

“I- I have a girlfriend.” Tracer stated the fact with no ambiguity, and no uncertainty. Except for her stutter, of course, and the look of utter confusion on her face.

Widowmaker laughed, swaying gently left and right. “Oh, really?” She adopted a look of false confusion, eyebrows knotted and almost pouting. “I don’t remember that on any of the posters, any of the commercials. The great and formidable Tracer has a girlfriend? And one I don’t know of?” She hummed a laugh and her lips split into a grin. “I think not.”

“I-” Tracer started, stepping back as Widowmaker swayed toward her, hanging on the end of her line. Whether it was intentional, she couldn’t have judged, but it sent something creeping up her spine and over her shoulders, little waves of cold and hot. “I do!” she insisted, “I do. I have a girlfriend. I love her.”

Widowmaker looked back at her, unimpressed with an eyebrow raised. Well, lowered from Tracer’s point of view, but she could understand the expression regardless. Disbelief. “Do you want to know what I think?”

“I-” Tracer laughed. “What you think? It - what was it you said last time? Belief or no belief, it’s a fact?”

Widowmaker laughed, shaking her head. “Oh you foolish girl, that’s not what it means. But what I think, is this…”

She reached out with a hand and gave the brick wall a gentle shove, propelling her out and away at an angle which resolved as a slow, circular, pendulous swing. She encompassed Tracer, swirling all around her - not quickly, not too fast to follow. Just fast enough for her own purposes.

“I think,” Widowmaker murmured, stretching out so that her lips just touched her prey’s ear as she swung past - barely brushed it. “That Lena Oxton has a girlfriend.” The name was stated deliberately, slowly, as the french woman swooped behind her head, and Tracer’s eyes widened a little. “Tracer does not. Could not. What sort of thing could that be?”

She chuckled softly as she swung close to the nape of Tracer’s neck on the next rotation, and the brit clenched her jaw to fight down the shiver that it brought. She wasn’t going to do this, she couldn’t just be teased into cheating on Emily. She was in control of her body, not the other way around.

“I think that Tracer knows she is a different person on a mission. They all have their masks,” Widowmaker gestured dismissively with one hand. It was entirely lost on Tracer, who had her eyes
clenched shut. “Tell me. Quite a simple question, really, that will sort it all out…” Widowmaker paused for long enough to grin before she reached out and stopped herself, dead-centre behind Tracer, and exhaled on the back of the young woman’s neck.

Tracer thought she might melt, might just collapse, and had to fight to keep her knees from knocking. She almost missed the question, so soft it was that it practically disappeared as the frenchwoman breathed it, cool and slow across her skin.

“How Lena Oxton ever killed a man?”

Tracer’s eyes flew open and she gasped a breath which she held in tightly. The world seemed to spin around her, the bricks of the alleyway shifting on top of one another. She lost track of the sounds of the city, there was nothing here except the beat of her heart.

And Widowmaker. The soft, smooth, slow chuckle that seemed to come from impossibly deep in her chest and drip right down Tracer’s spine. She couldn’t stop the shiver that came then, but she wasn’t even thinking about it.

“Has…” Tracer’s lips formed the words idly in some attempt to make sense of what her brain was trying to process. It was hardly a new question, to her or any soldier - and it predated her Overwatch days as well. Back when she was a pilot with the good old RAF, it had haunted her a little. She’d made the decision that most soldiers do: when the helmet goes on, it’s a different thing.

She felt light. As if she were about to come unstuck from time again, that awful eternity in an instant that had followed the accident. Living flashes of memories that were and weren’t hers, moments from past and present and future all piling atop one another.

Right now it felt like the opposite. Like the whole world was still, and nothing moved. Nothing except for the tip of Widowmaker’s nose, tracing a tiny figure eight through the short hairs on the back of her neck. She couldn’t keep this breath held in much longer. Things were just impossible to hold in after a while.

“So,” Widowmaker breathed, softer than humanly possible. Anyone with normal lungs, a normal heart, could never have achieved a teasing tone that was so very soft and quiet. “I am thinking, you have two options, souris. You can run off, hop away like a frightened little mouse, or…” she reached out and trailed a fingernail up the side of Tracer’s neck, simultaneously letting out a cool breath onto her nape, and Tracer’s eyes rolled back instinctively.

It was unfair, it was entirely unfair.

“Or you can turn around.”

Tracer shivered, willing her legs to stay still - to hold her upright, and forward as well.

“Face me like a woman. Embrace the things you so obviously feel.” Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed as she saw the brit shifting, uneasily on her feet. So close, so close now to falling in the web…

“I- I… I…” Tracer tried to speak. Tried to deny it. Tried to breathe, tried to run, tried to anything, but she couldn’t. She couldn’t manage a thing.

She didn’t remember turning around. There, though, was a grinning blue face, so she must have. At that sight, at looking into those golden eyes once more, Tracer lost the last lingering shreds of her own resolve and leaned forward with a whimper.

Widowmaker welcomed her with gently curved and parted lips, and a throaty chuckle as their
m outskirts met in a fascinating intermingling of heat and cool. She wrapped a hand around the back of the other woman’s head, fingers running along the strap of the goggles before tucking underneath and intertwining in hair.

Tracer lost herself entirely in that moment, as if it were the only moment in the world. Widowmaker’s lips were cool (and upside-down) which was odd enough, but her tongue was even more distinct and it sent a wave of shivers thrilling down Tracer’s spine and through her limbs. She moaned, gasping breath through her nose as she tilted her head, reached forward and grabbed at silken, smooth hair. She wanted more, she needed more, she never wanted this moment to end.

It was just about then that her brain caught up. Just about then that panic kicked in and she hit her eject, except she wasn’t flying a jet anymore and her eject was through time. She spun it back, as fast and as long as she could, tears starting to stream down her cheeks until she was on the ground, hunched and gasping, somewhere she didn’t even know. She fell into the street, crumpling to the cold stones.

“God!” She cried out, tossing her head back to look at the sky. “God, what- what did I-” she cut off the question in a sob, grabbing at her knees and clutching them tight to her chest, sobbing openly in the street. She didn’t know where she was. The chronal accelerator dimmed and flickered, threatening to send her back to her own personal hell of a prison, and at that moment? At that moment, Tracer thought she just might deserve it.

---

Widowmaker was stunned. Entirely stunned, at the sudden absence of a person. The sudden lack of warmth. She’d been so smooth, so warm, so… there. Twenty-five percent but starting to drop rapidly. Widowmaker’s skin was more purple than it had been for years, not that anyone was around to see it - or even could have, in the moonlight.

Her lips were still parted, expectantly, but as she realized what had happened - that she’d been denied, again , rejected by this foolish little girl - they curled back from her teeth in an angry growl. Widowmaker spun as she retracted her grapple, flying to the rooftops. There was no mission here, tonight - not from Talon.

But now, she had one of her own.

---

Tracer didn’t know how long she sobbed there. When she came back to herself, there was a pack of tissues nearby. Someone must have stopped off and dropped it but Tracer couldn’t find it in herself to be grateful for that right now. Or for anything. She just felt a sort of cold horror.

“Tracer?” Winston’s voice came deeply over the radio. “Any word?”

She choked a sob, reaching up tap at the button, but she knew she couldn’t speak. She clicked it twice.
“Do you need backup?”

One click. No.

“Okay, well… let me know if anything changes.” Two clicks, yes. “Good luck. I know you’ve got it in you.”

She broke out into a fresh wave of sobs at that, angry ones at herself, at Widowmaker, pounding her fists on the cobblestone streets. She accidentally hit the pack of tissues and sent it skittering away across the paving stones. It was enough to pull her out of it, enough to catch her attention, and she stumbled over toward it and pulled a few loose, blowing her nose and pushing up her goggles to wipe at her eyes.

It took a moment to get herself mostly under control. She wasn’t sure that she’d be able to manage anything more than ‘mostly’ for a long time.

“Winston, love?” Her voice croaked and cracked but she managed not to sob. Kept it down to just streaming tears, and wondered when her eyes would ever run out. “I… I think it’s clear. Listen, I’ve- I’ve got to get ho-“ she couldn’t finish the word, it squeaked off at the end, but Winston understood and just chalked it up to a patchy radio line.

“Of course, Tracer. Get on home, we’ve got this - no other action so far.” Winston shook his head a little, glancing around at the buildings. Everything was going well. With the exception of Tracer’s sighting, whatever it had been, there were no other indications of hostile activity - it was as if Talon wasn’t even in the area. Huh. I guess I really am an optimist.

Tracer nodded gratefully, but said nothing else over the radio. She must have been crying for a while, because the accelerator was fully charged again. Immediately, she started whirling off toward home - to a rooftop first, to get her bearings, and then home.

To her girlfriend.

Who she’d just cheated on.

The only trail Tracer left was one of tears and tissues, and quiet sobs for the few who were in the right places to hear them as she realigned briefly with time to get her bearings.

When she got to the door she was all but frozen with horror, but her hand knocked for her. Her body seemed to be doing a lot of things tonight, regardless of whether she told it to. Just her luck.

Emily opened the door with confusion at first, that quickly shifted to delight at seeing it was Lena - and then worry as she took note of the state of her. Dishevelled, pink eyes and nose, cheeks glistening with tears.

“Lena, love - are you alright?”

Tracer opened her mouth. She really tried to speak, but all that came out was a squeak and a cough as Emily urged her through the door and locked it behind her.

The accelerator was flickering in a way that Emily didn’t like the look of one bit, and she started trying to undo the straps so she could get it into the charging station. Tracer started to sob again at the gesture of kindness and Emily just wrapped her arms around her, worried and confused. “You’re okay. You’re okay, you’re home now. You’re safe. I love you.”

A particularly rough cry ripped out of Tracer’s throat at that last bit.
It took half an hour, but eventually her eyes were mostly dry of tears. She ended up in bed, without really knowing how, with all of her gear stripped off. Her shoulders still shook with sobs, but her cheeks were dry at least. It was something.

Emily watched for a moment from the doorway. She’d just made sure the accelerator was nicely plugged in, but this? She didn’t know what had happened. It was really worrying her. Lena hadn’t even managed a whole word since she got back - the closest she got was ‘Em’ once.

“Lena?” Emily asked softly, from a distance. The figure on the bed whimpered. “Can I come over and cuddle you, please?”

With a whimper, Lena nodded. *Lena. Tracer.* She couldn’t keep track anymore, of herself, of who she was. She was coming undone again, losing track of the now and the then. All she knew was that Emily deserved better.

Emily slipped her robe off and slid into bed alongside, wrapping her up in a gentle embrace. Lena’s skin was a little cold, and Emily stroked at her arms and her shoulders, murmuring softly. “It’s alright love, it’s alright.”

“No,” Lena whimpered, “no it’s not…”

Encouraged by the actual words, Emily kept it up - skin contact and presence. Whatever Lena was going through, she’d know that Emily was there for her. “It is, love. It is. You’re here, you’re home, you’re safe. Did… did something happen on the mission?” She didn’t know what Lena had been called off to do, just that it was probably dangerous and definitely illegal. Not that she cared. So was sex in a public park.

Lena nodded, whining, and tried to bury her head in her arms. Emily let her hide away, and stroked at her wild hair. “Was…” Emily swallowed, preparing herself for possible backlash. “Was it her again?”

A harsh sob launched from Lena’s throat and that was all the confirmation that Emily needed. She wasn’t sure why this ‘Widowmaker’ or whoever she was kept toying with Lena - if Emily ever met the woman, she was going to get such a slap. World-feared assassin or not.

“It’s okay love, you’re here, she’s not. You’re safe. You’re safe.”

“Do…” Tracer croaked, raising a hand to rub at her own raw throat. She was starting to feel a little numb. She couldn’t remember when she’d last eaten. “Do you ever… worry about me? Out there on my own?” It was all she could do to speak the words. The actual confession might kill her.

“Of course,’ love,” Emily sighed, hugging her girlfriend close. “Of course I do. But you’re saving the world. I would never ask you to give it up for my silly worries.”

“N-no,” Lena coughed, clearing her throat. “I… I mean the ‘alone’ part.”

“Oh love, you’re never alone,” she chuckled softly, stroking a stray hair back behind Lena’s ear. “Winston or one of the others are there with you, aren’t they? You’re not alone.”
Tracer just sighed. This felt… lovely. She couldn’t ruin this. Couldn’t admit to what she’d done, and break Emily’s heart like that - she could just bury it. Never let it out to see the light of day. Never speak of it, never think of it, just...

Yeah. That won’t work. But it can wait until morning.

Lena managed a weak smile, turning to look into those hazel eyes. She almost wanted to turn away, with how much concern was there on the fuzzy borderline between green and brown - she didn’t feel like she deserved it.

Emily’s heart fluttered in relief at seeing Lena’s face. Even if it wasn’t as bright as normal, it was something, and she leaned down with a sigh. “Oh love, you had me so worried. I didn’t know what to do.” She pressed a gentle kiss to her girlfriend’s lips, and then to her forehead as well.

“You… you did perfect,” Lena sighed, snuggling back into her. “I… I think I need to talk in the morning. I’ve got some things to say, but… but they can wait.”

“Anything can wait, anything,” Emily agreed with a soft smile, stroking Lena’s cheek. “Are you tired now? Do you want to go to bed or do you want some tea?”

Lena sighed a slight laugh. Tea. You beautiful stereotype. She was perfect, she really was, and Lena didn’t have the slightest question or doubt about it. “I love you so much,” she murmured, running a hand through Emily’s copper locks. “So much. I… maybe a spot of ice cream?” She smirked a little. “Goes well with tears, doesn’t it?”

Emily giggled. “I think that’s supposed to be for breakups, silly - but I’ll go get the tub. I got some just yesterday.”

Lena’s smile slowly slid as Emily stood and walked out of the room. For breakups. God. Maybe it is.

As she neared the kitchen, Emily’s hands went to her own arms, rubbing them slightly against the chill. There hadn’t seemed to be much point in throwing anything on to cover up - the apartment was high enough nobody would see, and normally they didn’t have any problems with heating, but tonight was an exception. Emily wondered if the thermostat was on the fritz again.

She pulled the freezer open and grabbed out a small tub of orange sorbet, then turned to the cutlery drawer. Her eyes flicked idly through the doorway into the living room - and there, she noticed the source of the chill. Somehow, one of the glass doors that led out onto the deck was open.

Frowning a little, ice cream and spoons in hand - and naked - Emily stepped through the doorway out of the kitchen. She’d just laid a hand on the deck door’s handle when she heard a voice from somewhere, unseen. Smooth and dark with a french accent.

“I would not do that, were I you.”

Emily froze, wide-eyed in the moonlight. She didn’t quite touch the handle - stopped her hand half an inch short. She didn’t move a muscle.

A faint chuckle could be heard. “Good. Clever girl. Back away from the window. Move toward the hall.”

“Please,” Emily begged as she stepped, slowly, as directed. “Please, just don’t do anything drastic. I don’t know who you are and I don’t care - anything you want, we’ll give you. Just-”
“I am the one giving the directions here.” The voice was still soft, but held an edge to it. A firmness that drove a spike of ice into Emily’s gut as she stepped nearer to the hall.

...and heard blankets shuffling from the other room.

“Em?” A voice drifted down the short hallway that led to the bedroom. “Hey, I’ll come out there - we can just eat it on the couch, yeah?”

“It’s alright, love!” Emily called back, as cheerily as she could manage, her eyes as wide as a doe in the headlights of an oncoming truck. “It’s alright - you stay in bed there, love! I’ve got the sorbet already, I-I’m coming in, just-”

“Ah,” Lena shrugged, rubbing at her neck as she stepped into the hallway. “I’m already up. Couch is better for this anyway - don’t need to stain the sheets unnecessarily, right?” She started to chuckle and looked up the hallway to see her girlfriend, who looked absolutely horrified.

Over her shoulder, clustered deep within a shadow, were eight red-glowing lights.

Tracer’s blood ran cold.

“Widowmaker.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, are you happy now, WidowRacer fans? (Just kidding, I know you are :P)

Don't worry, things will be fine. Ish. Uh, after a while. I feel really bad for how much Tracer cries here, because she's great, and I'm being *so mean* to her right now (and for much of the next few chapters) - and Emily too! And honestly pretty much everyone. Especially you folks. Sorry. You're all really nice and I'm being mean >.>

So... that's that. Developments? Well, we've got 'em. More in the wings.

The latter half of the chapter I consider to be soundtracked by Maximo Park’s "The Night I Lost My Head" (Youtube Link for those who are interested). Not sure why I like assigning songs to things so much but I really do. Reaper's anthem in my head is SOAD's Revenga, as a side note.

That scene right there at the end is what popped into my head and formed the nucleus of the story one night - originally it was going to be a graphic novel, and that panel right there: Emily, moonlit and terrified with Widowmaker's visor peeking out of the shadows behind her, viewed over Tracer's shoulder - that's what inspired it all. I couldn't fall asleep until I'd come up with some more story around it, resolved it a little. I hope I did a decent enough job of realizing what I saw in my head, because the image still kind of gives me chills.

Next week: the exciting conclusion to this cliffhanger. Widowmaker makes many more threats - many. Lena tries to get her to back down. Which one do *you* think will win
in that particular battle? Yeah, probably the same one who always does.
Breakdown

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer finds Emily at the ends of Widowmaker's rifle, in her and Emily's apartment. No harness, no pistols, and no second chances. Widowmaker decides that the most amusing course of events for the night would be to force Tracer into confessing, coming clean with Emily, as she watches. Or at least, the most amusing events to start with, but there's always more to come...

JFL Summary: Tracer and Emily wear no clothes the whole chapter but nobody mentions it. Widowmaker is a literal cemetery ghost, kinda. Probably people survive the night? Widowmaker definitely does.

Chapter Notes

Warnings? Just general pain and angst, I think.

Previous chapter Summary: Jack butted heads with Winston and it's a good question as to whose head is bigger. The soldier went to visit an old friend while Winston went on a mission with Tracer and Ana. Widowmaker taunted Tracer away - not to open a door for Talon, but rather, to open one for herself. Tracer tried to protest, saying she had a girlfriend, but Widowmaker didn't care. A passionate kiss in an alleyway led to Tracer panicking and fleeing. Not a good plan as far as Widowmaker was concerned and she followed the brit back to her apartment, and now holds Emily at gunpoint.

There is no sense in pretending;
Your eyes give you away.
Something inside you is feeling like I do,
We've said all there is to say.

Baby! Breakdown, go ahead and give it to me...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Widowmaker, don’t!” Tracer pleaded, dashing forward along the hall. Entirely bare, entirely at the assassin’s mercy, but she didn’t care - she needed to protect Emily.

Emily wasn’t moving. She wasn’t stupid, she knew she’d have no chance in a fight - outside of a bar scrap or five (or more) and a bit of a rough early life, she had no experience. Some drunken berk at a pub, she could handle - a couple lads who decided to get too frisky, sure. She knew, though, that she definitely couldn’t beat a woman with a rifle. A trained assassin. A killer. The Widowmaker.

“Arrêt,” Widowmaker spat, then repeated it in English, soft and low and with no hint of leeway or compassion. “Stop.”
Tracer did, frozen in her tracks by the ice in her veins and in Widowmaker’s voice as well; the fear in Emily’s eyes.

“So, this is her.” Widowmaker stepped forward out of the shadow, retracting her visor from her face. Her lips were curled back in a smirking sneer that carried through into her voice, venom enveloped in velvet. “The famous Tracer’s infamous girlfriend...”

Emily shivered, her eyebrows drawing together. Tracer shook her head, meeting those hazel eyes. She didn’t have the accelerator, didn’t have her pistols, didn’t have anything. “What do you want?” She barely managed to get the words out, husky whispers as she looked at Emily’s terrified face.

Widowmaker chuckled. “Oh, now you don’t know?” She narrowed her eyes - not angrily. It looked more patronizing than that. “You think I care if you deny me? You think I care about anything?”

Standing, shivering, Lena was sure that ‘yes’ wasn’t the right answer. Was sure that ‘yes’ would get Emily, and probably herself as well, killed.

She was also sure that ‘yes’ was the truth.

The bitterness in Widowmaker’s voice - not just now but previously as well. “It is not pleasant being ignored, is it?” A chill rolled through her at the recollection as her eyes shifted from Emily’s hazel to Widowmaker’s gold.

They were cold. Cold gold and empty, and maybe it was only Tracer’s imagination but they looked hurt as well.

“No,” she lied, softly, the whisper almost getting lost in the wind as she dropped her head. “I know you’d kill us both if you wanted.” With a shiver she realized that those words weren’t a lie.

She only hoped that the assassin didn’t want to.

“Certainement.” Widowmaker hummed, yet still the word was clipped. Her heart refused to cooperate as it had for the whole hour since their little conflict - jumping wildly between five and nine percent above the baseline as she swirled the memory around and around in her head like wine in a glass until it soured into vinegar. Just thinking about it again her lips tugged back a little more, her trigger-finger tensing on the Widow’s Kiss. Eleven percent.

“Tell her.”

Twelve.

Lena’s eyes widened in shock and horror as Emily’s look was struck through with confusion at her command.

“You.” She nudged Emily in the back with the rifle’s tip. “Go to her. Take your amour by the hand, and ask her what happened tonight.”

Emily stepped forward, thinking only that if she were about to die, at least she’d be granted the opportunity to do it with Lena in her arms. If she could only have one more thing out of life, it would be a death like that.

She didn’t quite make it all the way. One of her knees wobbled and she began to crumple, Tracer fell forward to catch her and they ended up together on the floor, staring at each other. Emily wore a smile and tear-streaked cheeks and Lena looked as agonized as she ever had.
“Tell her.”

Lena’s eyes flicked up to Widowmaker’s past the rifle that was still trained on them. “Please,” she begged, shaking her head slightly.

Widowmaker grinned. Thirteen. On her knees, pleading, and thirteen percent.

…but still, so disappointing compared to twenty-five. She could work it up, though. A spider is nothing if not patient. A cat takes plenty of time playing with its mouse.

“I will not repeat myself another time,” Widowmaker purred, locking eyes with Emily who had turned to look in fear. “Ask her.”

“L-Lena, love,” Emily murmured immediately, swallowing heavily to coax her voice into working. She could feel the fear in Lena’s slim body, and pulled her close, stroking at her hair, turning to try to meet her eyes. “Hey, hey… look at me over here, yeah?”

Tracer tore her eyes away from blue and gold, back to Emily, with fear clawing its way through her gut. “Em, I- I can’t.”

“Shh, hey, it’s okay.” Emily kissed her forehead. “I love you. I will always love you. You can tell me anything - anything - you know that, right?”

Lena shuddered. “I- I don’t know if I can.” Her words were defeated and quiet, she couldn’t meet Emily’s eyes. Couldn’t look at her. Couldn’t bear to face up to what she’d done - half a second was all it had taken. All her life, lost in an instant. For the second time.

A hand cupped her chin, gently, pulling her back up until she stared into those hazel eyes again. “I love you.” The words were said without a hint of hesitation. Fearless. Uncompromising. “I’ll always love you. Please… do you think you could tell me what happened?”

Tracer’s mouth worked soundlessly for several seconds. She was beginning to tear up again as her brow knotted tightly.

Widowmaker’s grin grew as she watched - so much emotion between the two of them, she felt as if she could practically bathe in it. As if she could soak it in. Sixteen percent

“I- I… I kissed her.” Tracer swallowed, shaking her head as her face twisted in agony. “God, Em- I’m so sorry, I am so! Sorry! I- I was gonna tell you in the morning, I can’t even begin to-”

Emily shook her head almost frantically, stroked at her girlfriend’s cheek as she spoke, but she couldn’t hold back the tears or the pain. Lena began to sob again, unable to speak through the anguished cries which she muffled against the shoulder of the woman she thought she’d wronged.

Emily was momentarily in shock. Her mouth fell open as her hand stroked automatically, mechanically, at the back of Lena’s head. Widowmaker relished the prospect of watching that look develop into one of horror and betrayal. The amount of pure emotion that was about to break through onto that face, that blank canvas of shock soon to be splashed with angry reds and jealous greens in a way that Pollock could only dream of.

It didn’t, though.

It became a smile.

...unexpected.
As Widowmaker watched, Emily’s lip twitched, curled, as she let out a breath that sounded suspiciously like a laugh, and then the woman dropped her head to bury her face in Lena’s hair, laughing as she did. Both of the others were entirely confused.

“Lena, love,” Emily explained, murmuring against that wild hair, “I don’t- I am not upset. Thank you, for sharing that with me. I love that you didn’t want to lie to me, didn’t try to hide it from me. I love you. I still love you. I- it’s actually,” she laughed again, a tear slipping down her cheek. “This is actually pretty fortuitous. I- I just have one question.”

Lena looked back, worried, tears still running freely and Emily laughed lightly, stroking at her cheek. “Don’t worry. I promise it’s an easy one.”

Her voice was so soft, her touch was so warm on Lena’s face. So close, so here, so safe. Lena couldn’t deny her anything, and trusted her with everything - everything in the world. “Okay.”

Emily nodded, smiling, and asked. “Do you still love me?”

Tracer’s head shot up, her eyes and mouth wide with horror and pain. “Em! Of course I do, I love you more than anything, I just-” Emily cut her off with a quick kiss, quite effectively.

“Then that’s all that matters. You love me, and I love you. We’re all alright.”

Widowmaker wasn’t alright. Her lips tugged back, ever so slightly - the barest hint of a sneer or a snarl. “Alright.” The word was a mockery, sarcasm dripping from it like acid.

With a slight gasp, Emily glanced over - she’d forgotten for a moment, in confusion and comfort, that they weren’t alone. The world didn’t end at the edge of their embrace, it continued to spin.

“The warmth of her mouth? Alright?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow and her lips as Emily didn’t react to the words, but Tracer started to cry again, burying her face away from the world. “The way her tongue fought with mine, alright? Her hands clutching so desperately at my hair, that is… alright?”

Emily looked back at the assassin, the one who had spurred this all on. Standing there in a shaft of moonlight as if she hadn’t moved or breathed, except for to speak, since the whole thing began either a few minutes or a few eons ago.

Now, though, something had changed, in one way at least - Widowmaker could see it in Emily’s eyes, no fear anymore. Maybe not none, exactly, but it certainly wasn’t first, wasn’t driving her anymore.

“Yes.” Emily stated simply, eyes burning, jaw tight. “It’s alright. I don’t mind that she kissed you, I- I don’t mind anything she does. I love her. If she wants to kiss someone, kill them, shag them - hell, kill me, I don’t care! If she thinks they deserve it, whatever and whoever, then I do too and I will defend her to my death.” Her voice rose from a whisper in both volume and strength as she spoke, never becoming a shout but definitely unwavering, resolute, and determined.

“Will you now?” Widowmaker purred, grinning, stepping closer and taking a knee. She placed the barrel of the Widow’s Kiss gently between Emily’s eyes, meeting them with her own, unblinking the whole time. Daring the woman to make a move. To defy her.

“Earlier, you were kissing her.” Emily didn’t blink either, didn’t shiver at the feel of the cold steel on her skin or the night’s breeze through the open balcony door. There was too much fire in her veins. “She clearly thought it meant something.” Lena sobbed afresh, softly against Emily’s chest. “Don’t you? I’ve heard the way she talks about you, I can tell she cares. I don’t know why you feel the need
to be so cruel.”

Widowmaker’s eyes widened, just slightly, then narrowed past where they’d been. She didn’t speak, didn’t breathe. Her heart didn’t beat for a moment but that was hardly a surprise. It had slowed right down again. Five percent.

*Five.*

What a sad excuse for a diversion. What a disappointing way to *waste* her time. What a worthless venture.

“I am not cruel.” She stood from kneeling as she spoke, slinging the rifle behind her back in a fluid motion and turning to face the open glass door: “To be cruel requires care, and I don’t care.” She almost made it out entirely, stepped forward silently in her resolve to leave, but something else came just before she left. Two soft words as she launched her grappling hook to a high point across the street.

“I can’t.”

As the assassin was pulled through the night air, Emily stood with a huff and ran to the door, slamming it shut with a shout in Widowmaker’s wake. She stood there, listening to the soft sobs of Lena behind her, knuckles white against the handle of the door. Teeth clenched, heart pounding, breath coming in long ragged pulls; it was either the angriest she’d been in a long time, or the most afraid. Or both. She suspected both.

Glancing down, Emily realized that one hand was resting on the door’s lock. It was unlocked at the moment, had been this whole time - Lena usually entered this way when she was out being Tracer. They didn’t figure there was much risk of entry up on this floor, but apparently they’d been wrong. Spiders still managed to get inside. Maybe it would be best to lock it...

She kissed her. The thought flicked through Emily’s mind unbidden, bringing with it not jealousy - but still a bit of pause. She thought about it for a moment, what it meant. Lena had always been instinctive, even impulsive: it was part of what made her such a great pilot, and such a fun person as well, but it wasn’t untempered. An impulsive pilot was a dead pilot unless their judgement was sound. A spur-of-the-moment friend was a friend in the past unless they backed it up in the long run.

If Lena had kissed her, there were reasons. Reasons that Emily knew would be good ones. She had heard the way Lena talked about the woman - frustration, confusion, anger, at least little excitement. Too much emotion for there not to be care driving it, acting as a foundation for all the rest.

With a sigh that fogged up the night-chilled glass, Emily lifted her hand from the lock - leaving the door free to be opened again - and pressed her palm briefly flat against the glass. Her handprint remained for a moment in the fog of her breath as she spun to return to Lena, who would probably need more than a little bit of comfort and explanation before the night was through.

---

For Widowmaker, watching through her thermal lenses, the handprint remained much longer. The red and yellow tint to the glass hung around for almost a minute as she watched through the scope, focused not on anything far past the door, but rather on the lock itself.
The unlocked lock.

Her thoughts roamed freely and entirely unmonitored until she realized that the handprint was long gone, and the women, the lovers, the girlfriends, the apparently inseparable pair, had moved back to the bed.

Widowmaker slowly lowered her rifle, and even if she’d been asked by a Talon commander, she couldn’t have said just what she’d been thinking about. “Sadness,” would have been her only monotonous reply, even in an official debriefing - even if reconditioned and pressed to the point where she could not lie, could not withhold information and would have no choice but to answer. She simply didn’t understand it enough to be able to explain it any more than that.

---

Lena cried softly as Emily half-carried her down the hallway toward the bed. The ice cream lay on the floor and she knew it would probably be a big mess in the morning, but this mess was more important.

“I’m so sorry Em,” she whimpered, apologies flowing softly and constantly from her mouth. “Sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so so sorry…”

“Lena,” Emily strained. The other woman was pretty slight, but she wasn’t exactly a bodybuilder herself so carrying Lena wasn’t the easiest thing she’d done. Particularly given dead weight and being tired from working all day, and knees that still shook with fear and relief.

“I’m- can I ask you to gimme a hand here, love? Use- use those nice legs of yours, c’mon now, there we go…” she sighed in relief as Lena stood on her own, swaying a little and staring at the floor but at least standing enough that Emily could catch a breath.

She took Lena’s hand in both of her own and squeezed it. “C’mon now, love - she’s gone, it’s alright, we can just chat.”

Lena nodded sadly, sniffling and wiping at her cheeks. “I really buggered this up, didn’t I?”

Helping her into bed, Emily laughed a little and climbed in afterward. “What? Nah. Lots of girls bring french assassins into the apartment to threaten them and their girlfriend in the middle of the night.”

Tracer cried a laugh at that, then wiped at her cheek and looked up, hurt but also hopeful. “You mean that?” Emily glanced back with confusion, stroking at her hair, and Lena elaborated. “You sure you still want to be… girlfriend? Not ex?”

With a light laugh, Emily leaned forward, taking Lena’s face in both hands. “No, you daft thing, of course I don’t want to be your ex. I love you. I’m with you.”

Lena nodded a little awkwardly and smiled. Uncertain and soft but still a smile. It had occurred to her that it might have been for Widowmaker’s benefit - an act to deny the assassin what she wanted. Emily always had had a bit of a rebellious streak to her, and Lena had been a little worried that there might be another shoe to drop.
“Anyway, I um…” Emily swallowed, then cleared her throat a little, snuggling up tighter to the other woman. She’d been brave, coming clean - and Emily realized that probably standing up to Widowmaker like that had been either brave or stupid on her own part, as well. The night could hold one more brave, possibly stupid act. “I’ve- like I said, it was kind of fortuitous. I’ve kind of been meaning to talk to you for a while about something…”

Tracer gathered her strength and pulled herself a little more upright. Emily sounded worried now, and nervous, but definitely not mad. Wiping at her own tear-streaked cheeks, Lena didn’t really feel… well, much, really. She mostly just felt numb and a little tingly. Tired, too. “What is it, love? You- tonight of all nights,” she chuckled slightly, “you can tell me anything. You know I’ve got no right to get upset over anything at all.”

Emily rubbed at her forearm nervously and chuckled, tossing her copper hair a little. “I know, and I- I know you wouldn’t get mad anyway, but it just… this has caused a lot of problems for me over the years. It’s, um…” she swallowed heavily, wiping the start of a tear from her eye as her voice started to break. “It’s why I don’t talk to Dad anymore and it, just… it really hits close to home.”

She took a deep breath. C’mon, you can do this. For her. For both of you. You can do this. How much better might she feel? Don’t think about the bad, don’t - just… start at the beginning.

“Okay…” she breathed in a long, slow sigh, then nodded her head, looking off at a picture on the wall. The two of them on holiday. Lena was giving her bunny ears, and she was giving them right back. “I… I was going to tell you a while ago. But then, the recall, and all the… stuff since then. You’ve been so busy, and so lovely, and-” she chuckled slightly, shaking her head.

Her hair practically glowed in the moonlight, and Lena stroked it back behind her ear with a concerned but caring look on her face. Emily flashed her a smile. “Thanks, love. I- I was going to tell you when we went out for our little anniversary walk the other day, but instead I decided that… maybe I didn’t need to. And I- I don’t think I do, but I think it might help to say at least. Just… keep that in mind, okay? Please? That I will do whatever it takes to be with you. If you’ll let me.”

Lena chuckled a little. “Easy, love. Here I thought I was gonna be the one defending against breakups. Go on. I love you.”

Emily nodded, eyes closed, with a sigh. She took a moment to gather her resolve, squeezed Lena’s hand for reassurance and got a gentle squeeze in return. Then, she opened her eyes, and met Lena’s - wide and full of concern, but love as well.

“Lena, I’m… I am polyamorous. I- every relationship I’ve been in, before you, I’ve been in more than one at a time. Sometimes more than one person in a relationship. Less a couple of gaps, I guess, but it- it’s just who I am, so, no, I don’t mind that you kissed her. Not at all. It’s not even- if… if I had my way, I might be doing the same. B-but not without talking to you.”

Her expression turned serious as she squeezed Lena’s hand tight. “I promise you, I never cheated on you, and if you want me to just be with you, then I will be. But this is who I am . I’m never going to… lose the urges, lose the desire to be with other people too. But I don’t need to listen to them.”

Lena watched in confusion, and would love to have said that she let Emily say her piece uninterrupted out of love, and respect, and a desire for her girlfriend to be able to express herself. While all those things were definitely true, they weren’t the most central reason for her silence - that was simple surprise. She hadn’t expected anything like this, and definitely not right now.

She knew the term, of course - knew that several of Emily’s friends were, as well, or most of them. Maybe all of them. In hindsight, actually, she thought to herself with a slight chuckle, recalling the
look on Emily’s face when she’d point out a cute girl’s dress, or smile, or tattoo, to Lena. She just thought she had the best girlfriend - one who wasn’t only not jealous, but actively brought appreciation into situations. *Maybe shoulda seen it coming…*

“Em, I-” Lena swallowed, raising one hand to wipe at her cheek, and then stroke at the other woman’s long hair, encouraging her to lay back, to cuddle up against her. Emily did, eyes closed, fearing the worst but hoping, hoping so hard.

“I think I got my own lesson tonight in what denying urges can get you.” Lena’s voice was uncharacteristically solemn as she wrapped her arms tightly around Emily. “I’m so sorry I brought this on us, but… yeah. I mean, maybe we should talk about more in the morning, when we don’t still see guns behind our eyelids,” they both laughed slightly. “But yeah. If you want… whatever you want, I want you to have it.”

It was an odd thought, actually, but really only in this context. Lena would’ve been lying if she said she hadn’t considered what it might look like to see Emily kiss the cute girl at the coffee shop, or that one flower girl who always tossed her a rose with a wink, on the house. She thought they’d just been idle thoughts, the sorts of things that drift through your mind when you’re heading to sleep and you kind of latch on to, but, now - now she wasn’t so sure.

Emily craned her neck to look back at Lena’s face: she was silent, and looked like she was deep in thought. “Lena? Love, really, I- if there’s any chance this is gonna cause problems, it’s really not worth-”

“No, that’s,” Lena murmured, and then chuckled a little, shaking her head. Her lips split into a wide grin as she met Emily’s eyes, her own back to their normal excited brightness, and it made Emily’s heart soar to see. “That’s not what I was thinking about. I was just thinking… all this time, I always had these thoughts. You, other people I’d been with, they’d always pop into my head, and-” she laughed, stretching to kiss her girlfriend right on her cute, freckled nose. “I think I might… I dunno. But yeah, I’d definitely like to talk about it more in the morning.”

“No, that’s,” Lena murmured, and then chuckled a little, shaking her head. Her lips split into a wide grin as she met Emily’s eyes, her own back to their normal excited brightness, and it made Emily’s heart soar to see. “That’s not what I was thinking about. I was just thinking… all this time, I always had these thoughts. You, other people I’d been with, they’d always pop into my head, and-” she laughed, stretching to kiss her girlfriend right on her cute, freckled nose. “I think I might… I dunno. But yeah, I’d definitely like to talk about it more in the morning.”

“No, that’s,” Lena murmured, and then chuckled a little, shaking her head. Her lips split into a wide grin as she met Emily’s eyes, her own back to their normal excited brightness, and it made Emily’s heart soar to see. “That’s not what I was thinking about. I was just thinking… all this time, I always had these thoughts. You, other people I’d been with, they’d always pop into my head, and-” she laughed, stretching to kiss her girlfriend right on her cute, freckled nose. “I think I might… I dunno. But yeah, I’d definitely like to talk about it more in the morning.”

“Really?” Emily turned, a little awkwardly because Lena didn’t want to let up her embrace but Emily didn’t try to break it. She only twisted so she could wrap her arms around Lena in turn. “I love you so much. We can definitely talk about it more - are you alright? Do you feel a little better?”

Tracer grinned, stroking at Emily’s hair with a sigh. “I do, so much. I should’ve known it’d be you who did it - it always is. I love you. Let’s off to nod, yeah? Get some sleep.”

Emily nodded, but didn’t move. She was sleeping right here, with Lena as her pillow, and Lena had no problem with that. Emily made for an absolutely lovely blanket. An absolutely lovely *everything*, really.

---

It was still dark when Widowmaker reached the apartment that she used sometimes - one of several, dotted around throughout various countries. She might hesitate to call it “her” apartment, though. Mostly it was something that she’d arranged for when Talon had informed her she was not permitted to remain on base at all hours. Something about unnecessary risks and resource allocation. If you asked her - which nobody did - it was because none of the others really trusted her. They were afraid of her.
They should be. Her thoughts were dark but didn’t quite make it to her heart. Nothing really seemed to, nothing except for one stupid little mouse.

How vexing.

She watered her cacti idly; three of them aligned along the windowsill. It was practically the only hint that the seemingly one-room apartment even had a tenant. The walls were white, unadorned. No appliances, save for a microwave and fridge that had come included. There was no furniture save for a chair, and a small mattress pushed into the corner.

One of the Talon finance personnel had caught on to this at one point, and asked why she didn’t even have a proper bed. Widowmaker had had no option save for to smirk and quote one of her so-called colleagues. “Sleep is for the living.”

And she just wasn’t. Not really. Not anymore.

Cacti watered, she set the cup back down on the counter where it could gather more dust before the next time she returned. It was one of the very few things she’d brought into the apartment other than the cacti, and she’d stolen it from a hotel room after taking out a target. Something needed to hold some water for the plants.

The only thing in the apartment which looked properly cared for was a standing full-length mirror in an ornately carved frame. The surface was spotless, the frame dustless, the hinges well-oiled so they would never squeak. It looked so fantastically out of place that most eyes would just drift right over it as it were a hallucination.

Widowmaker returned to the window again, skin gleaming silvery in the moonlight, and sighed as she looked out over the city. So many memories and so many thoughts, with so few emotions tied to them. What did anything even feel like anymore?

She leapt out through the open glass and fired off her grapple as she fell. Successfully executing the manoeuvre awarded her a little boost of adrenaline, a tiny increase in heart rate. Half a percent. She could barely bring herself to monitor that right now, though - there were words rattling around in her brain and there was only one way she could expel them.

Maybe two, but she didn’t feel like wasting a bullet tonight.

Wasn’t certain it would work, anyway. Talon’s claws went deep and she didn’t want to test just how far.

---

The cemetery sat very still under the cold, clear night sky. Leaves fell idly from a tree, slowly - one every minute or so as the breeze rustled its branches. Soon though, they, too, settled, and all was still again.

It was into this stillness that Widowmaker intruded, suddenly - and, just as quickly, she joined in. Kneeling in front of a tombstone, she stilled as only she could. Like a pale blue marble statue in the moonlight, no breath or heart beating, not for long periods. Her eyes didn’t move, fixed upon the name.
Gérard Lacroix.

A dead man, one she’d killed - the deceased husband of a long-dead wife.

It was a long time before she spoke. Eight heart beats. It meant more for her than for most.

“Did you love like that?” She spoke in French, softly, knowing that he didn’t hear. She felt nothing, looking at his tombstone - but she could remember him. Knew that the woman she’d once been, had loved him.

She couldn’t remember the actual love, what it felt like. It didn’t really work that way.

“Would you have cared?” She frowned a little, lips tensing as her brow pulled together. “Did you? When she killed you, when your wife got up from the bed and murdered you… would it be love not to care, or something else, something… sick?”

Her frown deepened as she shook her head a little, long hair shifting down her back. “Would it be love to accept that? Or everything that she-” she closed her eyes. “That I … have done since…”

Widowmaker, the first widow who ever fell prey to her own talents, dropped her chin to her chest and simply knelt there. She oddly longed - cerebrally, at least - for her heart to feel something, but she knew from experience that it would be far too much. She knew one way she could feel, but it was impossible.

She just couldn’t remember what love was like.


She was gone almost as quickly as an eye could have followed, had one been watching - more quickly even, maybe - and nothing was left moving anymore save for the occasional leaf falling down to the cemetery grounds.

The groundskeepers here had stories of her. They called her Le Dame de la Nuit - The Lady of the Night. A ghost who visited their cemetery, only ever seen out of the corner of your eye. People laughed and said she must just be a griever, but they only shook their head with the grin they always wore for fools. She didn't arrive, she appeared, and no griever could look as ghastly, as unearthly, as she did. Le Dame was a ghost, through and through, and every one of the employees here knew it.

Had she known about the stories, she would have agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Soundtracked by Breakdown, by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, as well as R U Mine? by the Arctic Monkeys. I like the way several of the lyrics in there could relate to several aspects of the relationships here - Emily and Tracer or Widow/Tracer, too. There were a lot of lines I wrote in this that I quite liked, some for sappy reasons, some for technical reasons.

Those of you wondering back in chapter 5 what Emily was about to say - well, now you know at least! Points go to bzarcher for guessing correctly, and points as well to any
of the rest of you who'd figured it out (but they explicitly told me at one point)! I think there were several who had inklings at least.

Now, what does this all spell for the future, as far as Tracer and Widowmaker go (and/or Emily, for that matter)? Well, I could tell you, but I think I'll let you find out on your own :D

I like the idea that she spends much of her time in the cemetery. Not crying, not even really sad, just.. there.

Translations:
Arrêt == "Stop"
Certainement == "Certainly", "exactly", etc.
Amour == "Love"

Next time! Tracer talks to (a bunch of) people about polyamory - although she maybe makes a bit of a mistake when it comes to who she first chooses to confide in. A few new characters show up - Pharah, Mercy (yes yes Pharmercy fans I've got your back) and Reinhardt as well (Reinhardt fans, I definitely have your back because he's awesome).
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Emily and Tracer have a chat over breakfast about polyamory and what it means - generally and for the pair of them, as well. Afterward, Tracer has some calls to make, a few friends to touch base with and get advice from. Mercy and Pharah have a little run-in.

JFL summary: Tracer asks a million question (what else is new?). Emily is patient and wonderful, Ana's sarcastic, Mercy's very patient and tries really hard but ends up being surprisingly impish, and Pharah's shooting blanks. Reinhardt takes up half a bus and loves David Hasselhoff. Also, something happened in Berlin.

Chapter Notes

Previous chapter Summary: Widowmaker left, her threats unfulfilled, but Lena's come clean with Emily about the kiss. Emily's said that it's not a problem, and confessed to being polyamorous - something which Lena doesn't necessarily fully understand.

Warnings: none, I think? Fairly frank discussion of human sexuality, some painful memories. Not sure either is worth warning about but there it is :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lena awoke to find a hand in her hair, an arm draped across her chest and a person lying on her, and an instant of panic soon gave way to the pleasant realization that it was Emily’s. Her girlfriend’s - still girlfriend, even. Not ex or anything.

“Mmmmmorning, love,” the words came as hummed sighs from Emily’s beautiful lips and nose, sunlight dappling her face. She slowly opened her eyes and looked up to see Lena grinning back down at her.

“Morning!” Lena punctuated her words with a grin and a kiss, slow and soft on Emily’s lips. They both sighed, and when they parted Emily had a raised eyebrow.

“You still wanna have that talk?”

Lena, nodded, a little excitedly - surprised at her own excitement, in fact. She’d fallen asleep almost immediately last night, and hadn’t even had a chance to think about things, but dreams had a way of aligning thoughts. They certainly had for her.

Emily put the kettle on while Lena popped some bread in the toaster. A pretty standard morning routine, given the decidedly un-routine undercurrents. Lena found that she was almost a bit giddy, actually - to be finding something out about her girlfriend, who she thought she knew so well. Maybe about herself, too. The more she thought about it, the more she wondered.
When she was a kid, she’d just presumed she liked boys. Girls liked boys, that was just how it worked. Yes, she’d known that there were other options, gay men and lesbian women and bisexuals of all the various options but liking boys had just been presented as the standard, and so she figured it was the way for her. She hadn’t given a second thought to lingering glances or feelings in her gut, snippets of dreams or thoughts, but then? Then she’d realized how incredibly attractive and awesome girls were.

Now she couldn’t help but look at other thoughts she’d had, thoughts about Emily and of others - thoughts of others while she’d been with Emily. At the time it had just been a thing. Yeah, sometimes you think about what it might be like to go out with that girl with the cute smile who you bumped into on the tube, even though you loved your girlfriend.

Now, though, Tracer was wondering if there was something more to it.

If Emily noticed her practically buzzing with excitement, she didn’t let on. She calmly spread a thick layer of jam over her slice of toast, grabbed up a cup of tea, and headed into the other room. Setting her stuff down on the coffee table, Emily flashed Lena a grin.

“Come on, love - if you try to keep it in any harder you’re liable to spill tea all over yourself!” She giggled and Lena blushed a little, putting her breakfast on the table as well and sitting. “Go on, ask away!”

“Okay,” Lena nodded happily, but she wasn’t really sure how to start or where. “Um… I guess… how long have you known?”

Emily shrugged, taking a bite of toast. “Hmm, dunno, really. As long as I’ve been really dating, I guess - one of my first partners was poly, and I guess I just sort of,” she sighed, lips pursing as she tried to put it into words.

It was hard to define when and how you came to realize something you liked - you just thought about it and tried it and liked it. “-realized I was too. It’s- I mean, you’d be surprised how often it doesn’t come up,” she laughed slightly, brushing hair back out of her face. “I mean, I don’t think it’s as different as people make it out to be, really.”

“No?” Lena had jam on her nose and Emily swiped it off with a giggle, licking the tip of her finger clean. Lena was sure she didn’t mean it to be teasing - probably - but her eyes focused on the lick more than she meant them to. “I uh, I mean-” she cleared her throat. “How could it not be that different? I mean, dating multiple people…”

Emily shrugged with a sigh. “Well, I suppose I don’t exactly know. Never had a partner who wasn’t involved with other people. Like I said, you’re the first one I’ve ever dated alone, at least kind of...you know, intentionally - and that was just happenstance at first. When I met you, it just so happened that I didn’t have any other partners, and then…” she rolled a shoulder in her oversized sweater. “I just sort of went with it. I’m really crazy about you, you know - this doesn’t change that at all.”

Chuckling, Lena sipped at her tea. “Oh, believe me - after surviving a night like that, I think I know.” She dropped her eyes for a minute before raising them again with a hesitant smile. “Sorry again, about all that.”

Emily leaned over, laying her head back against Lena with a sigh. “It’s okay, love - really, stop apologizing. You sound like Winston.” They both chuckled at that, and Emily took one of Lena’s hands in hers.
“Here, let me tell you a bit of a story, alright? I think… I think it’ll help illustrate some things.” Lena nodded with a smile and returned to her toast as Emily looked off a bit into the distance, thinking back on years gone by.

“Before you, I was with two girls. They knew each other, yeah - it’s um, it’s called a metamour, by the way, that: someone who’s involved with somebody you’re also involved with, if that makes sense. Anyway, I was dating them both. We’d talked it all out, we were all open with it - I had the same agreement with each of them. Anything goes, as long as we talk it through. No hiding, no secrets.” She let out a sad chuckle, glancing up to Lena’s face again. “Sounds like a pretty easy bargain, doesn’t it?”

Lena nodded, somehow suspecting that it ended up not being that easy. It just sounded like - well, like dating. No hiding, no secrets. Simple.

“Well, I found out at one point that they were together. Walked in on them, and-” she laughed, “and at first I didn’t mind, at all. Then I found out they’d been hiding it from me for nine months because they were worried about how I’d react, afraid I’d be jealous. They’d been… they’d *each* been running around on me, lying, for nine *months* .”

She huffed, unable to keep a bit of a tear from rising to her eye. “I didn’t care that they’d shagged, but they weren’t willing to be honest. You can’t build a relationship on that, right?” Emily took a deep breath and sighed it out through her nose, eyebrows high above hooded eyes. “Sooo… I dumped them both. Little while later, I found you.”

The couch shook a little as Emily turned over on it, onto her side so she could lay her head across Lena’s lap. “It really hurt, a lot, that they never told me. You didn’t do that, love - you were gonna tell me in the morning, like you said, and,” she chuckled, “honestly, thinking back on what you’d been saying earlier, you were already trying to tell me, weren’t you?”

“I really was,” Lena nodded, fairly subdued. “I- I was just so scared. I knew I’d messed up but I just… I didn’t want to hurt you like that.”

Emily’s hand stroked at her knee, and she rolled forward a bit to give it a kiss. “You’re the most honest and caring person I think I’ve met, Lena love. I’m not worried you’ll ever hurt me.”

For a moment, she just laid there while her girlfriend stroked at her hair and sipped gently at the still-too-hot tea. It was a wonderful life, it was practically perfect - which wasn’t to say that it couldn’t also be perfect some other way. That was the point, really.

Emily realized that her eyes were fixed on the sliding glass door, out to the balcony. It was still unlocked. She wondered where the frenchwoman had gone, from here - did assassins have apartments? Did she end up with an ice-cream bucket of her own, and a spoon? Emily almost laughed, thinking about such a cliché of rejection being applied to the situation.

“So it’s…” Lena leaned forward to set her tea down before half-laying across the couch as well. At least lowering herself down a bit to get a little more contact with Em. “It’s multiple single things at once, yeah? Not like a big ol’… ball?”

Emily giggled, turning to face her inquisitive lover. “It’s whatever you *want* it to be, silly. I can’t say I’ve ever done a big ball, per se, but I’ve been in trios before. It was nice, but the separated ones have been nice too.” She lifted a finger, gently tapping it on the other woman’s nose with a grin. “None as nice as you, though.”

“Oh you can stop flattering me,” Lena laughed lightly, grinning and stroking at Emily’s cheek.
“It’s… honestly, it all sounds good. I’m not feeling jealous or worried at all, and I-” she laughed again. “I’ve been thinking, and I think it sounds right. I mean, I think back on times you’re… I dunno, you’re showing off your legs in public in your skirts or- or chatting with that flower girl who always winks at you!”

They both giggled and Lena continued with an insistent shake of her head. “I never felt jealous, not of any of it, and I don’t see why that’d change now. Anyone who took a shine to you, well that was just… they were just saying ‘well done, you’ to me, weren’t they? I never even thought about… I dunno. Holding you back or getting jealous or making demands or anything. I think-” she broke into an almost disbelieving laugh again, shaking her head a little.

“You feel like it’s the first time you thought a girl was cute?” Emily raised an eyebrow, her eyes shining hopefully and Lena’s widened slightly in return. “Like the first time you looked at someone’s skirt and realized it wasn’t the skirt you were looking at, like the first time you admired lipstick for something other than the shade - for the lips underneath it, like… like finding that out, all over again?”

Lena nodded, grinning, laughing breathlessly. Her heart soared within her chest, hearing her thoughts laid out from Emily’s lips, and she leaned her head in for a deep kiss. “I was thinking that exact same thing.”

Emily grinned with a triumphant squeal of a giggle. “Oh, welcome to the club, love! You’re gonna love it here, I promise!” She threw her arms around Lena’s neck and pulled her in tight, like she never wanted to let go - and she never, ever did.

It would make drinking tea a little awkward, though, holding on forever. Getting dressed, grocery shopping. Bathroom trips. Most things, really, would’ve been a lot harder if she never let go. She slackened up her grip a bit, at least, pressing a delighted kiss to Lena’s lips which she got back tenfold.

“I guess…” Emily smiled, stroking a bit of hair behind Lena’s ear - not that it would do anything. It sprung back immediately, but that just gave her an excuse to caress the same path again, and again, and again. “I guess there is still kind of one question to ask, but I don’t think it’s me that needs to know the answer. I think it’s just for you, and that question is, well…”

She looked away, to the fallen bucket of now-melted sorbet that neither of them had dealt with yet. It was still early, there was plenty of time. “Did you want to kiss her… and do you want to again? Honestly, she seemed pretty hurt last night - at least, for her, I think.”

“Yeah,” she murmured, nodding, memories of that night and before drifting through her mind. “I…” Lena’s brow furrowed a little. There was no point disbelieving obvious fact. Believe it or not, fact was fact, as someone once told her - give or take.

“I did. Want to kiss her, that is - I know I did, because it’s what happened, and… yeah, in that moment, at least, I really wanted it. As for the future?” Lena sighed, shaking her head a little. “I dunno. I think… I think I might need to think about it. Maybe have a chat with some folk.”

She sipped at her tea again. First? First she was going to spend a wonderful morning with the woman she loved, and then?

Then she had a sniper to find.

“Wait a second,” Lena murmured, setting her mug of tea down again and looking to Emily’s face with a grin and a teasing tone. “Is this why you always said I had a heart big enough for two?”
The other woman’s eyes widened a little, and a hint of a blush crept to her cheeks as she averted her gaze abashedly. “I- I might have been trying to test the waters a little…”

Tracer let out a bright, brief laugh, hugging her close and tight. “Oh, and you think I’m the silly one!”

---

“I don’t understand what it has to do with anything, saghir,” Ana sighed in resignation.

“Well I just-” Tracer caught the word between her teeth and sighed, leaning back up against the wall in the slim stone tower. “I was just wondering about your feedback, that’s all. What you thought.”

Raising her eyebrows, Ana rolled over onto her side, stretching out an arm that was beginning to cramp. “If I am honest saghir, I didn’t hear a word you said. You talk too fast and I am an old woman.”

Tracer snorted. “Yeah, right, and Jack’s got arthritis and a trick hip.”

Ana had to laugh at that, the sound deep and warm as if it had been toasted in the sun. “Alright, alright,” she waved a hand to the slight nagging. “Fair enough. So you have this friend who wants to date multiple people.”

It was silent for a moment before Tracer urged her on. “Yeah, and?”

“And what? There is no ‘and’ - it’s a statement, saghir. I don’t know what you expect me to do with it.”

Tracer rolled her eyes with a groan, tugging at clumps of hair for a moment as Ana resumed her prone position, scanning out of the tower through her scope. Sometimes the older woman’s stoicism was impressive and a real godsend. Sometimes it just made her want to tear her hair out. This was one of the latter times.

“Annnd,” Tracer prompted with a groan, “what do you think about that? I mean… do you think it’s a good idea, or what?”

“I’m not a psychiatrist, little one,” Ana sighed, “nor am I some expert on relationships. Not ones like that. I can’t even fathom the idea of something like that with one person let alone a handful - but I suppose, if one, why not more?”

Tracer started to nod, and then her eyebrows furrowed. “Hey, wait - did you just call me little one?”

Ana blinked, frowning slightly and glancing over to her young cohort briefly. “Oh. Did I say it in English that time?”

The tower exploded into Tracer’s shocked laughter as her eyes flew wide behind her goggles. “Oh my- is that what ‘saghir’ means? You’ve been calling me little all this time? You are such a-”

“-an old woman?” Ana picked up off of her words, cutting her off in the middle of one with a raised eyebrow and an expectant tone. Tracer recoiled a little.
“W- no, that’s not what I was gonna say, not even vaguely. Nope. Anyway, I like it, it’s cute.”

Ana chuckled. “So are you, saghir, so it is fitting.”

“Aww, now you’re gonna make me blush!” Tracer grinned, but thoughts kept rattling around in her head. “But what- I mean… how exactly woul-”

Once more, Ana cut her off mid-word, her eye fixed steadily through her scope for any sign of movement. She wasn’t even certain why Tracer was here, it was supposed to be a solo recon mission. However, she was sure that she knew the source of these questions. “I cannot help you understand this one. There is room in my heart for only one, and it is a very different kind of love - if it’s romance you wish to talk about, call Reinhardt. If it’s sexual health, maybe Zeigler.”

Tracer squirmed a little. “Aww, did you have to go and say ‘sexual health’? Way to suck all the fun out of it…” At that, Ana chuckled again; a knowing and mischievous sound, and Tracer giggled a little in return before leaning back against the tower’s old stone walls. “You meant Fareeha, didn’t you?”

The old sniper nodded once, not willing to sacrifice any more of a disturbance of her position and her work. “Yes. I love my daughter, deeply and fully - so much so that I didn’t know what to do with it, for many years. The others, the ones with whom I’ve shared my beds over the years? I liked them. Mostly. Some I cared for, many I respected. A few were simply attractive enough or conveniently located.”

A mildly shocked look flashed across Tracer’s face at the woman’s words. She’d never seen this side of her before - but then, she supposed the topic of conversation had never really come up. She knew Ana had been around, like way around, and for a fair while, but she never thought she’d get such frank information out of her.

The rifle barely moved as Ana’s lips quirked. Finally. An opportunity. “Over the years, saghir, I have shared my bed with so many, maybe hundreds - one at a time or multiple. One night in Berlin I even went down to the bar and found-”

“Alright, alright, alright, I get it!” Tracer protested, already halfway out of the room. “I’ll get out of your hair and go bother someone else, no need to chase me out with stories like that!” She giggled and Ana chuckled, still looking out over the surrounding terrain as Tracer waved in a little salute. “Sorry - and thanks, for the chat. It was fun.”

She hesitated, though, her mind snagging on something the other woman had said, just for a moment. “…multiple? What was that like?”

“Unless you want to hear explicitly I suggest you leave quickly, but…” Ana sighed a chuckle, “it can be quite fun if done right. Now go on, bother somebody else - and saghir?” Tracer turned back, one hand on the doorframe. “Good luck in your polyamory.”

“Thanks!” Tracer chirped, instinctively, and turned to leave. Then she heard the slight chuckle and replayed the words in her head, turning around and jumping back into the room. “My friend’s! My friend’s polyamory, I’ll- I’ll pass the luck along, thanks, is what I- what I meant to say, yeah.”

She chuckled nervously and threw in a finger-gun gesture as she left the room - for which she berated herself on the way down the stairs. I mean really Trace who does finger-guns anymore? C’mom, what’re you thinking? Good save though, I think you got it anyway.

“Oh, of course,” Ana murmured to herself, her one good eye glittering with mirth through her scope.
“Your friend.”

---

“No, I don’t think there would be anything wrong with that either - it’s really not a specialty of mine, you understand. Perhaps I can refer you?” Dr. Angela Zeigler’s voice raised hopefully, but then she sighed a little, pressing a hand to her forehead at the nervously cheery voice on the other end of the link.

“Ja, I know, and I appreciate that you trust me, Lena, I really do, I just don’t know what you expect me to tell you. Whatever you do with however many partners you choose to engage in it with - so long as it is open, honest, safe, and consensual - should be really no issue from the standpoints of medicine, psychology, or ethics; be it nipping off to the pub for a pint or finding a cuddle-mate for the night.”

The girl really was a good one - Angela, or Mercy as many called her, had been quite a fan from even their first meeting. She listened patiently to her friend over the phone, nodding idly.

“Professional opinion? Oh, I couldn’t possibly - again, it’s really not a specialty of mine. I can tell however that sexual health is a wide and varied landscape, and only you can guide yourself through it. Listen to your heart, to your body - but do it safely, and perhaps with some caution. I’d also urge honesty whenever possible, but,” she laughed lightly, “that is a general suggestion as much as a specific one.”

Unfortunately, Tracer seemed to be really quite caught up on something and Angela sighed again, softly, pressing fingers to the bridge of her nose. “No, really, Tracer, I- I can’t give you better advice than that. Only you can know what you need, just- you’re a pilot, Lena. I’m sure I don’t need to explain instincts to you.”

She took a breath, trying a new tactic. Something would have to work, sooner or later. “Do you remember the accelerator at first? None of us could help you learn how to deal with it, you just needed to take it slow, try things out and…” she shrugged idly. “See what works and what doesn’t. Keep doing the things that do, and the things that don’t, well, you try new ones!”

In science, they called it experimentation, and progress - but caution was key. Particularly in her field, in medicine: one couldn’t simply run around trying random procedures until they found one that worked. That would be barbaric! No, careful testing and cautious procession were vital.

Tracer kept urging her on and Angela smirked. Alright, well, you asked for it then. I tried to warn you! “There really are too many possibilities to discuss, Tracer - for instance, take ex-captain Amari. Did you know that one night in Berlin she went down to the bar and…”

“They’re not telling me that story again, are they?!” Tracer’s voice came loudly over the phone, full of exasperation.

Angela giggled, stifling the sound with a hand. “Bye now, Lena - and good luck with your ventures into polyamory.” She bit her lips together to suppress another giggle at the protest that followed. “Oh no, of course, your friend. This is what I meant. Goodbye, yes.”

It had been the first contact in a long time from Amari, actually, the little warning of sorts that Tracer might be calling. Angela had found that hearing from her was less unwelcome than she’d expected it
might be - they had their differences in opinion, but there was common ground there. Some, at least.

The doctor laughed brightly as she stepped out of the tent, slipping the phone into her pocket. It was certainly worth it all for the reaction it drew from Lena - Angela really did wish her all the best luck, but who to be involved with and how was a decision only she could make for herself.

The sun was shining down on the mud that the impromptu aid station had been set up on, and the doctor stepped swiftly over toward one of the stations. She took a stack of documents on a clipboard and began to walk, flipping through them as she went and checking. What to do today, what now, what first…

A wash of heat and a rush of wind ruffled her jacket and pulled her eyes away from the clipboard, toward a woman who descended gently from the sky in shining blue armour. The wings folded in as Pharah touched the ground, but that wasn’t the name Angela knew her by.

“Fareeha!” She half-shouted in delight, holding her arms wide to offer her friend a hug. It was only a little awkward with them each in armour - though Mercy’s was hidden beneath her jacket, it was no less unyielding. A little bit clanky. A bit of blood rose to her cheeks at the awkwardness of the hug. Why does this always need to happen these days?

They ran into each other occasionally - aid and security were often required at similar times in similar places - and when they didn’t have the ability to meet in person they swapped letters or messages, called back and forth, sent little trinkets or gifts or chocolates. Nothing as good as in the good doctor’s homeland, of course, but alas - such was the price of perfection.

“Angela,” Pharah grinned, her voice as warm as her smile. Her dark eyes flicked momentarily around, as if concerned, and she raised an eyebrow just a hint. “Could we speak somewhere a little more private?”

“Oh, of course,” Angela nodded, brow furrowing slightly. “Here, um - come this way, there’s an empty tent just over…” she trailed off in her focus, simply leading the way. Her feet seemed as if they floated across the top of the mud, but Pharah’s sank heavily. There was no hesitation as she stepped, though - mud would not hold her back. Nothing would.

Except, now, she was feeling admittedly less adamant than she had before landing. Coming in, it seemed like such a good plan. The ground always seems more solid from altitude. Down here? It could be a little rocky.

“Is something the matter?” Angela inquired as they went. “Have you been injured, or-”

“No, no,” Pharah responded, pulling her helmet off with a brief laugh. “Nothing like that, don’t worry. I just have a bit of a gift for you, actually. Something I hope you’ll like.”

The doctor flashed a smile over her shoulder, a stray wisp of blonde hair flashing in the sunlight. Pharah wasn’t sure how she hadn’t noticed anything before. “I look forward to it!”

The tent was quite nearby, and it gave Fareeha ‘Pharah’ Amari just enough time to work her slight anxiety into a nice proper knot, deep in her gut. She wasn’t sure if Angela would even remember confessing this, never mind be comfortable with the exchange that might follow, but Fareeha knew that she needed to know. If worst came to worst, she could pass it all off as a joke.

Probably. Hopefully.

As long as her laugh didn’t betray her by getting all squeaky like it did when she was nervous.
They made it to the tent and Angela held the flap back, dropping it when her friend stepped inside. It was semi-private, at least - nobody would bother them, and the tent was empty. She stood with a smile, hands clasped and hanging loosely in front of her.

For a moment, they just stood like that - Angela watching Fareeha, and Fareeha looking nervously at the far wall of the tent.

“So?” Angela prompted with a light laugh. It was so uncommon to see the soldier uncertain - or anything other than determined and stoic. Sarcastic, perhaps, sometimes. “What’s this gift?”

Pharah chuckled, shaking her head. Her helmet was tucked under one arm and she popped a rocket out of her wrist-launcher, seemingly idly, and started to play with it. “Oh, I- well, it’s a bit of a story, I guess. Do you remember when Helix was called out to help deal with that flooding near Ehrlinstadt? There was fear of civil unrest due to the strains on-”

“I remember,” Angela hummed, gently interrupting the explanation. She loved her friend, but Fareeha did have a tendency to get caught on technical details sometimes and needed to be given a little nudge. “I was there as well, setting up an aid station - and Reinhardt came out to help with the sandbags.” Angela started to laugh lightly, raising a hand to cover her mouth. “Do you- do you remember when he lifted that tree off of the jeep? All those soldiers - so shocked!”

She laughed brightly and Fareeha joined in, chuckling deep in her chest. It helped to dissuade her worries a little, sharing in laughter and stories.

Although that was what had started this whole mess to begin with.

The three of them together, friends all - despite the occasional differences in opinion - had met up for food and drinks. After three days straight of work with no real food except for some emergency rations, so there were high spirits and loose lips to begin with. On the second day, people were grumpy, but the third? With the prospect of rest ahead of them, too - they were walking on air, all of them. Or floating on it light-headed, either way.

The three, though, had found their way to a bar - one Reinhardt recommended, which was always high praise. Drinking was a common activity between himself and Pharah, had been for a long time, and this night the kind doctor followed them along. She did her country and lineage proud that night, keeping pace one for one as they swapped tales, jokes, and rounds throughout the night.

It was toward the end of these revelries that the story hat - for that was what they called the trodden and soggy felt cap they tossed around the triangle - came to her. Donning it with a grin, its little matted feather sticking askew, she cleared her throat and nodded.

“Ah, ja , hmm, let’s see…” she’d paused for a moment, eyes drifting off in thought, and started to lean a little to one side.

“Hah, look!” Pharah had nudged Reinhardt. “The good doctor’s about to check out on us - I knew I’d win, as always!”

Mercy had grinned, surprisingly devilishly, and laughed. “Oh nonsense, Fareehhee- Fahar- Fari.” She’d hiccuped. “I’ll do nothing of the sort. I was simply deciding on a story to tell, and I’m afraid... I seem to have run out.”

“Oh really?” Fareeha had giggled uncharacteristically, raising an eyebrow high. “A doctor for how many years, and you don’t have even one good emergency room tale left?”

She hadn’t expected the furious blush that overtook Angela’s usually porcelain features, but she had
quite enjoyed the reaction. “Oh she has!” she’d elbowed the huge soldier next to her, currently out of his armour (thankfully for the table they sat at, otherwise he wouldn’t have been able to fit). “She’s got one, look!”

Dr. Zeigler had cleared her throat, eyes pulling hard off to the side as she tried to suppress a smile, but good work, success, and the host of empty steins next to her had put her in a substantially different state of mind than normal. Risks seemed lesser that night than they normally did, and rewards inflated - the powers of ethanol in the human nervous system. “Sehr gut, alright then!” she announced, slapping her palm down on the table before affixing them each with a gaze and an almost accusatory finger, with that same devilish grin. “But you both asked for it…”

They laughed and egged her on, and it was then that the fair doctor proceeded to admit - slowly, mind you - to a bit of a strange personal fascination. Being in aid tents and hospitals in a variety of countries, she had many times run up against a common phenomenon for people in her line of work: the various foreign objects that people introduced to their own bodies.

From lightbulbs to dolls, hand tools to utensils, it seemed like there was nothing that someone, somewhere, hadn’t looked at and dreamed of penetrating themselves with - and when, inevitably, the item became lodged, the person in whom it was lodged would find themselves nervous in an emergency room. Apparently x-rays of such encounters were commonly passed around between staff members with giggles or awe, or both, when there were quiet moments in the long shifts.

“Maintaining strict patient confidentiality, of course,” Angela had assured. “I never knew who any of these people were, simply what they had done.” Reinhardt and Pharah had each laughed, as had she - after a while and a certain number of drinks, everything becomes funny.

Mercy had continued on then to confess that she’d developed somewhat of a fascination with the concept. She’d started to search out more scans, more stories of the like - books had even been published on the phenomenon and she sought them out ravenously. At first, she’d just chalked it up to a healthy desire for research, but after a while…

“After a while,” she’d giggled with a lopsided shrug. “I recognized it as an entirely different, but no less healthy, urge. I was alone in my apartment, scooping out a bowl of ice cream and then, well…” her head had dropped to look at her hand as she mimed doling out ice cream and she’d giggled again. Pharah hadn’t really noticed the sound before, but she’d found that she loved it. “The scoop’s handle just seemed so perfect for the purpose!”

Reinhardt had roared, covering his ears in mock offence, while both Fareeha and Angela had laughed - at first, just generally, and then pointing at the massive man’s furious blush. “Angela, my Angela!” he’d called, looking shocked across the table at her. “Mein gott but you seem so pure!”

She’d only giggled again and laid a hand on his huge forearm. “Oh, I am, Reinhardt! I just… like putting odd things inside me!” The words had trailed into a high laugh as he’d turned away, blushing again and swearing in German. Some of the words, Pharah hadn’t even known.

“Fareeha?” Angela reached out and laid a hand gently on the other woman’s armour. She hadn’t spoken in a minute or two, since they’d entered the tent. “Are you alright?”

She shook herself from her memories, dark eyes flitting around briefly before settling on Angela’s face, and she smiled. That had been the start of it, over a year ago - a night Fareeha Amari had woken from with an entirely different picture of her friend in her head. A picture which refused to budge. Now when she heard that laugh, felt those arms wrapped around her - it was so different. Still
good. Still most certainly good.

“Of course,” she laughed slightly, shaking her head. “Just thinking about that night - do you… remember it much?”

Angela cleared her throat, blushing a little as she dropped her eyes. “Oh, you know… bits and pieces.”

Truth be told, she remembered it all - in perfect clarity. Fareeha’s laughs and grin, the way her eyes had shone in the dim lights of the bar. The competitive but supportive way she did everything, even just drinking - urging on, but never past the point of no return, never to the point of harm. She remembered the openly amused shock in the woman’s dark eyes, on her face, during one story in particular. One that she wasn’t certain she really should’ve told, but…

Fareeha hummed a laugh. “Ah, well, I... I remember it fairly clearly, I think.” Her eyes, often inscrutable in their depths, met Angela’s. There was a hint of a smirk on her lips. “Then earlier today, I was out at the practice range and…” she held up the rocket in her hand and dropped her gaze to it. “This little fellow failed to explode. Out of curiosity, I disassembled it and removed the faulty detonator and then…”

Angela’s eyes had slowly widened as Fareeha spoke, and she reached out slowly to take the offered rocket in hand, turning it over. The other woman’s smirk grew into a grin as she saw the clear interest in the doctor’s eyes. Sometimes, the eye of fate smiled upon you, and Fareeha could definitely feel Hemsut’s warmth today.

The rocket - or rather, casing, as it now was with all of the propellant and explosive and everything removed - really wasn’t very large. A little thicker than a cigar, perhaps - easily encircled by a forefinger and thumb, with room to spare. Smooth, and rounded at the front, tapering at the rear to four small fins. It looked quite like a rocket, alright. In her life, Dr. Zeigler had never held one - and the knowledge that this one had not only started inert, but since been rendered as much even moreso, was immensely comforting. Even a little exciting.

“I just-” Pharah shrugged awkwardly in her armour, the shoulder plate clanking a bit as she did. “I wasn’t sure you’d actually want to use it. Just thought it might harken back to that day and the good times we had.” She steeled herself. “…I think about it often… friend.”

Angela’s eyes whipped up from the metal canister to the face before her. There had been something different about that word, some meaning behind it that wasn’t always there despite how many times it had been said, “friend” - and there it was too behind Fareeha’s dark eyes. She could see it there, as plain as the nose or the tattoo on the woman’s beautiful face.

“I-” the doctor began, swallowing heavily, dry-mouthed as she closed her hand around the canister. “Danke, it- I really appreciate you thinking of me. It’s good to know my stories haven’t gone forgotten, ha!”

Fareeha’s dark lips quirked, just barely, at one corner. Oh? Hemsut smiles on us all.

“One question, Angie, if you don’t mind…” the woman dropped her eyes, taking a step closer, and when she raised them again they were eager and practically burning as she stopped trying to hide what had taken her more than a year to understand. “Can I watch?”

Angela squeaked in a breath and held it, pink rising to her cheeks at how close Fareeha was. Or, as she’d thought of her since that night in Ehrlinstadt, Fari. She didn’t need to think for long. Particularly not after giving Tracer such a long explanation of healthy admission of one’s own
desires. Holding her breath, holding the gift clutched now to her chest, Doctor Angela Zeigler nodded once swiftly and then giggled, covering her mouth with a hand.

Fareeha’s grin was equal parts excited and triumphant. She’d been waiting, wanting, to hear that giggle again.

---

“Aha,” Reinhardt chuckled, the sound rumbling deep within his massive chest. “Tracer! My good friend - how have you been?” The kid sitting next to him on the bus, somewhere in his mid-twenties, leaned away at the strength of the man’s voice. Reinhardt took up three seats in his armour - it still would’ve been two even had he only been in shorts and a t-shirt. On the other side of him, an older woman continued to knit, seemingly without even hearing his booming voice.

“Oh, you know,” Tracer laughed a little, “same old, same old. Save the world, keep my girl happy…”

Reinhardt laughed abruptly, nodding. Someone almost tripped over his hammer and he shot them an apologetic smile before returning his attention to the phone which was comically small in his hand. “Good, good! You take care of her - beautiful people like yourselves deserve good things!”

Tracer giggled a little. He always was full of compliments like that - for all people said of her, Reinhardt was the one with the really big heart. It seemed like he loved the whole world at once, sometimes.

“The world will always need saving, but with people like you around?” He chuckled, “It is in good hands! So! Why have you called, my friend? Is it just to tell your old friend Reinhardt how much you miss him?”

She giggled at that, wondering for a moment if this was how other people felt around her. She’d been told she was bright and bubbly - insufferably so, even - and that it was hard to be glum around her. That was exactly how she felt about Reinhardt. Talking to him, everything just seemed to be sunshine and roses.

“Not exactly why, but I definitely do miss you - I really hope we get a chance to get together again, sometime soon! I was actually calling because I um… well, I was wondering - so, I’ve got this friend,” she let out a laugh. “And she’s um, thinking about getting into polyamory, and I was just wondering… what you thought about it?”

A slow grin blossomed across the German’s massive face as he chuckled once more, his eyes glittering within a face that almost seemed like it came off of a statue - carved, strong, and more than a little weathered by time, but still defined and gorgeous.

“Ah, love!” He sighed, leaning his head back against the window. “It’s such a wondrous thing! And there is so much of it to go around - you give it to one, and you always have more to give to another! The world is so beautiful, and filled with so many beautiful people - look at Hasselhoff’s eyes, shining like gemstones above that magnificent smile. How could you not want to pull him close and dance the night away? Or look at our own Captain Amari - how deep her eyes are, I could swim in them forever, and the fire that burns behind them?” Reinhardt let out a rough laugh. “One night in Berlin, she and I went down to the bar and-”
“I GET IT everybody talks to everybody and I can have no secrets, fine!” Tracer shouted with a laugh into the phone, and was rewarded with chuckles from the other end of the line.

“Tracer - truly, though,” he leaned forward in his seat, placing his elbows across his knees. “I have wandered this earth for decades, far and wide, searching for glory and fighting for freedom - I have loved thousands, from near and from far, and this heart shows no signs of stopping any time soon. Life can be short but it can be so filled with joy and wonder if we just open ourselves to it. Glory lasts forever, but love can be fleeting - doors close every day, so I say, burst through them while you can.” He smiled softly, nodding. “And Tracer? Good luck with all your polyamory.”

She sighed, hanging her head and shaking it. “It- I- I was asking for a friend…”

“Oh, right,” he chuckled. “Your friend. It is what I meant to say. Goodbye now, friend - and good luck.”

Tracer giggled softly. “Thanks. You too - stay safe, you big softie.” She hung up the phone and slipped it into the pocket of her jacket. Just one more call to make, then, it seemed. She had just one person left to track down, but they would definitely be the hardest of the bunch.

Back on the bus, Reinhardt struggled a little to try to slip the phone back into the little nook he’d been storing it in, but it was no use with the suit’s massive hands, and he decided to just drop it into his upturned helmet with a sigh.

The older woman sitting next to him was still knitting, the youth had disembarked at the last stop, and the two of them were now alone on the bus. Without looking up from her yarn and needles, the woman’s voice came thick and smooth in Hungarian. “So… about that night in Berlin?”

Reinhardt turned to face her with a laugh, a grin, and a glimmer in his eyes. “Ah my dear, but I will happily share this story - if you would grace me with the chance to leave a kiss on your fair hand…”

Slowly, deliberately, she grinned and tucked her knitting back into her bag. Swivelling in her seat to face the massive behemoth next to her, she held out a hand to be kissed and looked at him with the most beautiful eyes he’d ever seen as he lifted her hand gently to his lips.

They were all the most beautiful eyes he’d ever seen - he said it every time, and he meant it every time. Knights were all about love, in the end.

“Now, this night in Berlin,” he chuckled. “Where should I start? Captain Amari and I had been in the midst of the fighting for weeks…”

Chapter End Notes

I've got your backs, Pharmercy fans! For those interested, I actually wrote out their whole date in this fic here! (budgiebum mentioned it and I couldn't resist :D It's NSFW but not super-explicit, I think?)

Soundtracked by The Beatles - With a Little Help From My Friends. I mean, c'mon, that one was kind of obvious.

I like all of these characters, they're a lot of fun and I love letting them just play around. Sometimes I get a little caught-up on whether I should include something, whether it's
too much of a distraction from the main plot, but honestly half of this plot is about the characters anyway. If I never let them just interact then I'll be spoiling all of that.

...and yes I do have a plot, thank you >.> It's already partly started and it kicks up a lot in the next few chapters or so - remember those Omnic Zombies I mentioned in the story summary? Yeah, we'll get there. Basically there are kind of three main threads of plot - two character-based and one world/event-based, and then a bunch of little supporting arcs as well, but I do have it planned! So fear not, I guess.

Also I think I'm gonna go back and put the previous chapter summaries at the start of all my chapters, because I know sometimes I can miss a chapter or forget what's going on if it's been a while since an update, and I think this might help with that. Feedback's always welcome, of course!

Come back next time, when Jack has a run-in with McCree in a bar (after a lot of searching). Tracer manages to track Widowmaker down - but to what end? What will she say, and how will a somewhat spurned assassin react? You'll need to click back here and find out ;)
Bumping (Goods and Bads and) Uglies

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Jack finds McCree in a bar (unsurprisingly) and questions him about Overwatch's past. Tracer tracks down Widowmaker and tries to deal with everything - confessions are made and explanations requested - however, their interactions don't necessarily go entirely unnoticed.

JFL Summary: Jack and Jesse share some shots and old war-stories about torturing and shit. Tracer finds new appreciation for kisses in a warzone. Sombra finds some big, juicy bugs, and offers one to a friend. Talon soldiers buy Widowmaker a lot of wine. She drinks it.

Chapter Notes

Sure chapter titles are things, yeah, definitely, I'm uh... I can do those. Sure.

Previous Chapter Summary: After Lena and Emily talk about polyamory and what it entails, they pretty much decide to go forward with it. Tracer went and chatted with Ana a bit about it as well, and then followed it up with a few calls - to Mercy and Reinhardt. They all told her to follow her instincts, give or take. Pharah visited Mercy at her aid camp, and confessed to some feelings she'd been hiding for a long time - a nervous moment, but one which resolved with Mercy's admission of the same.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Twenty-six. Twenty-six of the sleaziest, scummiest, shittiest bars that Soldier: 76 had ever had the misfortune to step into.

Awful pretzels, too. Stale as all get-out, without fail, in every single bar.

In the twenty-seventh, though, he finally found just the oddball he was looking for, and not a moment too soon. If he had to sit through one more century-old recording of that damn ‘La Bamba’ song he was going to shoot something. Probably the jukebox.

Probably.

There he was, though - Jesse McCree. Or at least, what was left of him: slumped over the bar, cowboy hat covering his face, stains on his poncho. Probably unconscious, judging from the empty shot glasses and tumblers that surrounded him.

76 settled into the stool heavily with a sigh, rifle slung across his back. Not the pulse rifle, of course - too many people would be too eager to take a swing at the real Soldier, so he was in his incognito outfit. Still, it wasn’t exactly safe in these parts, so he’d brought some protection along - some nice, mid-calibre, high-fire-rate protection. With an underslung grenade launcher.
Although it did poke into his back pretty uncomfortably. He reached a hand back to adjust it.

“Don’t even think about it, hombre,” McCree’s warm voice came from below the hat, and 76 felt a poke on his leg. McCree’s Peacekeeper, peeking out from underneath the poncho.

“I thought you were drunk.”

“I am.” The cowboy pushed himself upright and gestured for another drink. “I thought you were dead.”

“I am.”

McCree just huffed a laugh and took the whiskey the barkeep poured him, slid it to Jack, and waved for another. Each of them knocked it back, hissing or coughing at the burn.

“What’s in that crap?” Jack strained. “Battery acid?” His eyes flicked to the bartender, an omnic. “No offense.”

The bartender simply slid away, with a hummed, “I’m sure.”

Jesse McCree coughed and wiped at his mouth with his mechanical hand. “Damn. Swear they keep slipping me the good stuff and tryin’ to up my tab - how many times has a guy got to say he don’t want nothin’ that wasn’t made to peel paint?” The cowboy’s voice raised toward the end, calling after the departing bartender. “Nah. Charl-E’s a good’un. So. Jack.”

The old soldier dipped his head with a sigh, rubbing at his forehead. He really didn’t feel like diving into that explanation right now. “Yeah. Me. Or at least close enough.”

McCree caught another glass of whiskey that came sliding down the bar, not spilling a drop. He took a moment to look at it in the glass. Such a thing of beauty. Then, he took a nice solid swig.

“Guessin’ ya didn’t come t’appreciate the sights?” McCree huffed a laugh and Jack glanced around toward a sea of hostile faces, angling, looking for an opportunity. Maybe they didn’t know who he was, but any with experience would be able to tell what he was. Straight-backed, broad-shouldered, rifle slung well. He was obviously a high-quality soldier or mercenary of some sort.

Maybe somebody would be stupid enough to try to gain some advantage.

“ Nope,” his voice was a little less rough without the mask. “I uh… I came because I’ve got a question or two. Ones which only you can answer.”

The cowboy just nodded, slowly, and didn’t speak. At first, neither did Jack - but it was he who broke the silence a moment (or half a glass of whiskey) later.

“You were in Blackwatch.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yep.” It wasn’t an answer.

Jack sighed, shaking his head a little and leaning forward on the bar. “Clandestine ops, intel gathering, creative resource attainment…”

“...assassinations, torture and theft, yep,” McCree translated. “That was us. Doin’ the things that needed doin’, that nobody else was willin’ to do.”

Thoughts swirled in Jack’s head. Fragments of documents and reports, things that had come out in the wake of Overwatch’s fall. Reyes’ words. Words of others. News reports. Speculation.
“Did you ever…” he sighed again, raising a hand and resting his forehead on it, elbow on the bar. “Were you ever involved in any internal investigations? Looking into the other branches of Overwatch?”

For a moment, the cowboy was quiet. Finished off his whiskey, then pulled out a cigar and lit it. This seemed like cigar talk to him. “Every now and then,” he rolled a shoulder easily, taking a puff, “man’s gotta look at himself in the mirror. See whether he likes what he sees, whether he wants to make a change…”

It was a yes. Just a yes from a man in a poncho and a cowboy hat. “And?” Jack prompted, turning to look at the other man. “What’d you find? When you looked in the mirror.”

Jesse McCree sighed, a sound laden with more weariness than most people might’ve thought possible given his age. Any people who didn’t know his background, at least. He considered how to phrase things for a moment.

“Nice face. Real nice. Good look, hopeful, but… bit of a salesman’s smile. Bright eyes with somethin’ cold in the middle.” He dropped the empty glass an inch onto the counter. “Stuff.”

It wasn’t a hard metaphor to parse. Idealism. Corruption. Soldier: 76 had come to see it himself, too, in the years following. Everything had looked like gleaming towers, but it seemed like there had been some cracks developing for some time. He just wished he could’ve known back when it maybe could’ve meant something.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

McCree laughed, shaking his head before pushing his hat back a little and meeting Jack’s eyes for the first time. “Because, Jack - it was you! Least, it was as far as we knew. It was a good place, lot of smart and idealistic people, but someone was tugging some strings and you were near the top. Seemed as fair a guess as any…”

Jack nodded a little as they both dropped their eyes back to the bar. Charl-E took McCree’s dropped glass with a cautionary gesture that seemed to communicate with nothing more than a flick of the hand, “You break it, you buy it.” McCree chuckled.

“Plus,” his shoulders shrugged uneasily beneath his poncho. “Y’know. We had a… strained history.”

Jack chuckled. “You could say that. Guess he didn’t trust me enough either, huh?”

McCree sighed. “That… that mighta been a little different. You remember Cairo?”

It took a moment before Jack nodded. A moment to clear the creeping chill out of his neck. Officers of Overwatch didn’t get murdered often. The fact that they’d never managed to track down the killer was even worse.

“We told him. Sent him some documents, supporting evidence - figured he was high enough up the chain to do something about it, not so high that he’d take it personal. Turns out we didn’t consider what might happen after he knew. When he tried to act on it.”

“Murdering our own?” Jack’s words were soft but furious as he clenched a fist. “Did we really turn to that?”

Jesse sat still for a moment, then shrugged. “Dunno. Can’t say for sure. All I know is, we sent him some things, he ended up dead. Petras called for an investigation, sure, but uh… can’t say’s anything
was ever discovered. Think… think Gabe may’ve been tryin’ to save you from that possibility. Or maybe he just didn’t want to admit to himself you might be part of it.”

It was a long moment as Jack tried to wedge the thoughts into his mind; hammering them in with a mallet he’d crafted himself, one of anguish and anger that would lead to justice. Truth. One day. For him, and for the world.

“What kinds of things? What did you find?”

McCree shot him a long look from the corner of his eye, thoughtfully chewing on the end of his cigar, just a little. It had been a long time, and it seemed like Morrison had gone the vigilante route - old habits die hard, and McCree liked keeping tabs on folks. He knew where most of ‘em were, what they were up to, and Jack didn’t seem to have fallen in with any bad sorts.

Even without knowing it was him, Jesse’d been keeping an eye on the adventures of Soldier: 76. Good to know who else is in the playground. Now, with the recall, the information had filtered back to him and he wasn’t that surprised to find out that the man who stole tech but never killed the guards was the old strike commander.

Old secrets were still secrets though, and sometimes they were the most powerful. People were still around who wanted to keep things hidden, and sometimes a man could get in trouble for letting the wrong thing slip.

The cowboy sighed, leaning in toward Jack who did the same in return. “I’ll tell you one, at least. You remember Jansen? Li’l scientist, dyed ‘er hair all kinda crazy colours, remember?” Jack nodded, and the former Blackwatch agent continued. “She’d come up with a code, after the crisis. Called it a failsafe. Supposed to spread itself over the infranet, like a disease - based off of some snatched segments of the God-codes’ own creations, but uh… hers killed. Everything, all the omnics - would’ve wiped them out if she’d uploaded it. Entirely.”

Jack’s brow furrowed. “All of them?”

“Every damn one, Jack - good, bad, or ugly.” He shook his head. “Left, right, and centre. Now, she… she said she was working on a shield-code. Something that coulda been given to the good ones to protect them - Mondatta and the like, you know - but…” the cowboy sighed again, his shoulders drooping.

“She meant well, I know she did. I trusted her. But with the rest of it all? Couldn’t risk that code gettin’ out. There were people slipping weapons and designs, resources - how do you think Talon ended up with the dropships they’ve got? The guns, the tech - hell, Jack, their moves are right outta my playbook!” He slammed his metal fist down with a growl, but gently. Emphatic, not impulsive. Despite outward appearances, there wasn’t much that was accidental about Jesse McCree, not these days. He was a cowboy by design, in more ways than one.

“What did you do?” 76’s voice was cold, and he didn’t look over at the other man.

“I convinced her to destroy the program. Then I convinced her to forget the whole thing and leave Overwatch.”

The old soldier spun, grabbing the poncho in a tight fist. “Convinced her with a knife? Or did you just use a few pictures of her kids, huh?”

The revolver jamming swiftly into the underside of his jaw did wonders to calm his hot blood. McCree regarded him with steely eyes under the wide brim of his hat, cigar smoldering as much as
his gaze. “Easy, **hombre**. Don’t go sayin’ nothing you can’t take back now. We’re all friends here.” He glanced around with a chuckle and gradually lowered the gun. “Well, we’re all here, at least.”

Slowly, Jack reached for a fresh tumbler of whiskey as it was set down. Charl-E, the bartender, seemed to either not notice or not care about the tension between the two men. It helped defuse it.

A little.

“I convinced her and as far as I know she’s happy and healthy and livin’ in Modesta.” Jack’s eyes flashed over to him and McCree tipped his hat. “I keep tabs on folks. Maybe old habits die hard.”

With a grunt, the soldier returned his attention to his whiskey. It burned nicely. They really were giving him the good stuff.

“There was a recall, you know.” 76 set down his now-empty glass on the counter again. “Winston.” Jesse sighed. “I heard.”

“You didn’t check in.”

“Not yet. Didn’t figure I’d be welcome.”

Soldier: 76 bit back the urge to say something to that. Instead, what he opted for was, “Neither did I.” There was a pause as he stood, but the old dog still had one bark left in him. “Apeldoorn.”

Then he left, dropping a few bills on the counter to cover his part of the tab plus a tip. In places like these, physical money was as good as gold. Sometimes better.

As he watched his former comrade stride out of the bar, McCree sighed again. Charl-E came over, gliding silently on his repulsion field.

“You need anything else?”

McCree rolled one shoulder in a chuckle, tossing the used-up stub of his cigar onto the ground. “Well…” he chuckled, giving his head a shake. “Figure I uh… might need a plane ticket. I’ll get back to ya on that. For now,” he cleared his throat, “I’ll have another round…”

---

The Widow’s Kiss twitched into her shoulder again - the rifle was so beautifully crafted and perfectly balanced that its movements could hardly be called recoil. Far away and below her, another soldier fell into a slump.

Widowmaker sighed. It felt like she was trying to keep a ship afloat by bailing it out with a spoon, and she couldn’t even bring herself to care that it was sinking. Four percent. A measly four. There was a time that she would have been as pleased with that as anything else, and considered it a success. Today, she was as pleased with it as anything else, but couldn’t avoid the thought that it was such a miniscule thing next to what she’d so briefly had.

She set the rifle down, not even able to get mad about it. Missions, she’d thrown herself into, and nothing close - in comparison, simply pale. She’d been granted one flash of light, one breath of air, and it reminded her of just how close to asphyxiation and how deep in the darkness she really was.
Not that she cared. She didn’t. Couldn’t.

Half-heartedly, she picked up the rifle again, but didn’t pull it into position, simply slung it over her shoulder and laid on her stomach, arms crossed under her chin while she watched the soldiers below skittering around like ants. Ants with bombs, guns, poison, and hate-filled slogans. So insignificant.

It had been a long time since she’d fired from laying upside down, and she tugged the Kiss around and rolled onto her back to take a few shots. The difference was something mildly interesting. It got her up to five and a half percent.

“W- what are you doing?”

The voice was familiar, one that had alternately incensed and thrilled her, but now she only felt flat and kept her eyes down the scope. “I am killing people, souris.” Another shot. “Shooting them.” Another. “I am a sniper, have you heard?”

Tracer stepped into the room, if it could be called that. Bombed-out shell of a former house would’ve been a more accurate descriptor. “Why?”

“When I make a kill, it feels… like something.” Widowmaker sighed slowly, silently. What was the point in not saying? There was none. “The more complex the better. These are…” she rolled onto her stomach and dropped the rifle to the floor next to her, laying her head flat down in her arms. “These are ants. I feel nothing.”

“What? That’s horrid!” The young brit took half a step back as Widowmaker snorted, letting her arms dangle off of the ledge, glancing back to her.

“Is it? Is not everyone pleased when they succeed at a task? I am a sniper. This is my task, my life. To kill is to succeed.” Tired words. Tired woman. The words were like a script. Not untrue, per se, but they didn’t really have a lot of force behind them.

It was hard for Tracer to think that she’d once believed Widowmaker simply delighted in killing, and now to see this. So very at odds with her earlier assessment.

...although she still was killing. Tracer wasn’t sure it was better that she didn’t care. Although she wasn’t sure how to feel about that in and of itself, either.

“Who even are these people?” her voice was still incredulously horrified.

How Tracer managed to feel was still so odd to Widowmaker, how she could manage to just… care. About everything, it seemed. “The ones on the left have been here for centuries, they believe the land is theirs and no-one else’s.” She gestured loosely with one hand toward troops far below.

“And the ones on the right…” the sniper sighed, sweeping a hand to that side, “…have been here for centuries, they believe the land is theirs and no-one else’s.” This side poisons the other’s water, that side slaughters this one’s livestock. It is a war, cherie. There are no good, no bad, pas bon ni mal, only soldiers. Dead ones and the ones who have not managed it yet. By the day’s end even my part in things here will be insignificant, there are thousands of them down there. Hundreds will not see the sun rise, at least.”

She said it with such empty fact, she sounded almost like Jack or Ana - but in their worst moments. PTSD, Tracer was sure that Dr. Zeigler might have said. She wondered whether Widowmaker might have it as well. She’d been through as much, at least, surely… and she never even got to choose it. She’d been stolen and pressed into this life.
It was a hard thing for Tracer to remind herself of. A horrifying thing, but…

“How many have you killed so far?”

Widowmaker sighed. “Do not ask, cherie, or I will tell you, and I think that you do not truly want to

She definitely sounds down in the dumps. It doesn’t make any sense - unless…

Cautiously, Tracer stepped closer. This felt like a trap, except for the fact that she’d already fallen

Except it still would have. Things happen, regardless of how hard you try. That was life.

Tracer could hear the hurt in Widowmaker’s voice. Or the desire to hurt - but she was beginning to

With a determined look in her eyes, Tracer threw her guns off to the side. One clattered off of the

“Thrill me in a way that-” she huffed a sigh.

A slow grin brought a curve to blue lips. The rifle didn’t waver in the slightest. “Oh really?” That

Teasing and Tracer shivered a little as Widowmaker stepped closer, golden eyes studying her

A slow grin brought a curve to blue lips. The rifle didn’t waver in the slightest. “Oh really?” That

voice which had been so recently empty, so flat, so devoid of anything, was once again full of teasing and Tracer shivered a little as Widowmaker stepped closer, golden eyes studying her intensely.
“Finally willing to surrender yourself to fact, hmm?” She quirked a dark eyebrow, grin widening, “And to moi?”

Tracer couldn’t pull her eyes away from Widowmaker’s. She was- she was a fly, caught in a web, but at least now she knew better than to struggle, because despite it all this spider didn’t want to kill her. She’d had a dozen opportunities by now and more than that, more than the logic she could reason out in her head, Tracer felt it in her gut.

Sometimes, you had to fly by the seat of your pants.

“Yes,” Tracer whispered breathlessly. The sound was almost lost in an explosion from below, but neither woman seemed to notice that. WIdowmaker continued her slow, slinking advance across the sloped floor of the former house. “Yes, I- I’m yours. I want you. I-”

“And your petite, Emily?” Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed as she ran out of space to draw nearer, the extended barrel of the Kiss taking up every whole inch between her and the young brit, but not quite touching her yet.

Fire and ice fought in Tracer’s veins, meeting in waves that flowed through her like water. “I- we talked.” She swallowed. “Ha- have you ever heard of polyamory?” Tracer felt like she’d said the word about a million times since waking up. Had all of this really happened in the past twelve or so hours?

Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes. “I am French, cherie. Have you heard of ménage à trois?” The woman chuckled, darkly, eyes scanning Tracer’s features. Was this some trap? Some mouse game? No - no, she could see it on Tracer’s face, in her eyes, as clearly as she ever had.

With a flick of her wrist, Widowmaker sent the Widow’s Kiss rolling back over her shoulder, twisting an arm to catch it, slung, on her back. She moved forward in the same motion, not grabbing at Tracer’s jacket this time but slipping an arm behind the small of her back instead, pulling their bodies close together, placing her lips right below Tracer’s ear. She had to sink down a bit but that only brought them closer still, almost intertwined.

“Now tell me, ma souris,” she breathed, feeling the heat and beat of the other woman’s blood through the vessels in her neck, warming her own cool skin. “Tell me what you want…”

Tracer’s eyes all but rolled back in her head, her lids sliding shut as she shivered a groan. “I- I’m done fighting this. Fighting you.” Words were so hard, with cool breath down the side of her neck and a strong arm wrapped around her, with an attractive woman this close, and this… this. This made things hard, this had always made things hard, the assassin and her, and she wondered how it had taken her so long to see it for what it was. What it could be, given the chance. “I- I want.” Oh screw talking!

One of her hands flew to the back of Widowmaker’s head, burying her fingers in her long ponytail, pulling the woman’s head in, her lips to her neck. With a chuckle, Widowmaker took the hint and parted her lips, scraping teeth delicately across the sensitive skin and marvelling at the goosebumps that trailed up in her wake - and the keening whine that it brought from Tracer’s lips.

Twenty-eight percent. Much more and systems would start to kick in and dampen it. She felt as if she were soaring, making her first kill all over again, and she threw herself into it with gusto, curling her fingers in against Tracer’s back and growling as she dropped her focus to the woman’s collarbone.

The brit bit her lips and let out a whimper through her nose, clutching at Widowmaker’s back - and gasping when the frenchwoman grabbed her hand and slid it lower, down to her derrière as she
might’ve said. Even just the thought of that word tumbling from the woman’s lips sent Tracer’s heart spiking a little more, peaks above its racing beat.

It was a freeing moment - she felt like she’d finally broken cloud cover and could see the sun again, nothing around but herself and the jet, and the whole sky as her playground. Her fingers curled in delight as her breath came in heavy pants, and she knew she needed those chilled lips on hers again. Withdrawing just barely enough to make the motion possible, she twisted her head, pulling Widowmaker’s mouth to hers and-

...and was met by a growl and a finger on her lips. Widowmaker’s eyes were narrow and met hers intensely, enough that it shook Tracer into total stillness. Widowmaker nodded, then raised a hand and tapped at the side of her visor.

“Oui?” She paused for a moment and Tracer’s eyes widened in realization. The frenchwoman nodded softly, once. “D’accord. Maintenant. Je vais.” The only words she ever said when receiving a mission. Her hand dropped from her visor to Tracer’s cheek, swooping a line down her jaw as Widowmaker grinned.

“I have an assignment, ma souris, so we must call this to a close until next time.” As irritating as that was, but the chase could be as thrilling as the capture, if done right. Both had their advantages, but there was a delight in anticipation.

As there was in risk, as well. Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow. “Unless… you would rather join me? The ship is automated and once there, I will remain unseen. It could be our little secret, non?” She leaned in, quickly swirling her tongue through Tracer’s mouth and relishing in the muffled moan that was her reward.

“I- I-” Tracer stammered, trying desperately to catch her breath and marvelling at her legs’ ability to keep her standing upright. “Come with you? On a Talon dropship? It’s- that’s-”

“Is danger not a little thrilling?” Widowmaker chuckled, murmuring in her ear once more. “Alors, you could not expect me to believe that one like you does not appreciate the stir of adrenaline, hmm?”

At that moment, it wasn’t even the fear of being on a Talon dropship - or even getting caught by the shifty organization - that worried Tracer. It was more that she just wanted to keep kissing, rather than needing to take breaks for anything, really.

The alternative, though, was just leaving, and that didn’t sound like very much fun at all.

“Okay,” Tracer groaned after hardly a second’s thought. Trust your instincts, Trace - they’ve never let you down before, right?

Well... you’re still alive, at least.

She blinked over to the wall and grabbed her pulse pistol there, calling back to Widowmaker over her shoulder. “Head to the ship, I’ll meet you there!” She blinked off of the shattered floor’s edge, searching for her other pistol in the muck, but not finding it quickly. Ah, crum, that’s-

“Come, cherie, we must not delay!” The voice drifted down to her and Tracer hesitated but- there! Letting out a triumphant laugh she grabbed up her second pistol where it had sunk half into a puddle and let it slip back into its bracer. Then, leaping, she twisted time to return to the floor above, and from there to the roof where she jumped right through the open door of the Talon dropship.

When the blue swirl resolved into a person, she was sitting in the seat across from Widowmaker, legs
crossed and eyebrow raised. “So. How were you planning on entertaining ourselves during our little taxi ride?”

Narrowing her eyes, the assassin leapt across the launch bay at her prey as the door closed shut and the dropship lifted noiselessly off. This one had no human pilot, nobody to interrupt - nobody to overhear or see and report back. The last sounds before the door sealed were a bright laugh and a smooth growl, and then it was off to the mission zone.

---

Sombra tossed a piece of gum high in the air, tracking its arc with her eyes and catching it deftly between her teeth as she flicked, idly, through various screens. “Heh. Nice job,” she congratulated herself, purple-glowing fingertips tapping and swiping at the floating holo-displays as if by their own mind as she began to chew.

She was just trawling, really - not looking for anything in particular so much as she was just *looking*. Seeing what there was out there to be seen, because if you spent your time and flipped over enough rocks, you found some really juicy-looking bugs - and if you had the right bugs, you could catch some good friends. Her nose wrinkled a little as she reconsidered that metaphor, but something caught her eye before she had a chance to craft a better one.

One of the many things to flit across the displays was a camera feed, from one of Talon’s automated ships - one that had been requisitioned that morning by one of the agents, nothing particularly peculiar about that. Some people were granted purview to use certain resources for their own purposes: those that had proven themselves worthy of it. It wasn’t a big deal at all, and she wasn’t surprised in the slightest to see the ship on course from the middle of a warzone that had only started four days earlier, to a site flagged as an op that was just beginning.

What *was* interesting about it, though, was that in the bay of the dropship wasn’t a Talon operative. Or, rather, wasn’t *just* a Talon operative. There, rolling around in the seats with one of her friends, was a woman she recognized from briefings and from posters.

“Oh, *mi french amiga*,” Sombra chuckled, grinning widely as she saw the two pulling at each other like teens in the back of a car. “What have you gone and got into this time?” Her fingers swirled over a series of controls that hadn’t existed seconds ago, peeling the video into her own databanks as she wiped it cleanly from anything Talon could access.

She always did love finding a nice juicy bug…

---

The dropship ride was sadly short, but Tracer couldn’t find it in herself to be frustrated when she was so giddy. Widowmaker left cool trails along her skin with fingers or with lips, her breath and her touch, and every one brought shivers and goosebumps afterward. When the ship touched down, Tracer didn’t want to get up from the seat - tried to hold the other woman there for a second, but the assassin stood and left swiftly. It took a few seconds for the brit to be able to follow, due to a sudden onset case of weak knees.
They’d landed on top of a parking structure, and Widowmaker stalked quickly to the edge where it overlooked a fenced-in facility of some sort. Tracer, as she followed the other woman, could just make out guards patrolling the grounds in the distance, both human and machine. Her eyes flicked to the frenchwoman’s face with concern and she shook her head a little, but Widowmaker was already on her radio.

“Sniper here,” she murmured with one finger pressed to the side of her helmet, unslinging her rifle and extending it. “Report.” She paused and Tracer laid a hand on the barrel but Widowmaker batted it idly away and shot the brit a warning glance. “Oui. Move in in two.”

She dropped her hand from her visor again and Tracer was quick to take advantage of the opportunity to speak without being overheard. “No, you can’t - please, don’t kill them, they’re just doing their job!”

“As am I, cherie,” she muttered, laying her cheek against the stock. It wasn’t nearly as satisfying as against Tracer’s skin, though. “I do what I must. I have no choice.”

“You always have a choice,” Tracer urged, but Widowmaker scoffed. The woman was so different, her whole demeanor - it was like a switch had been flipped.

“No, cherie - you have a choice. I do not.” She glanced over and saw the confusion in her mouse’s eyes, and sighed swiftly. “Ecoutez. When I receive a directive, I have no choice - I must comply.” One hand raised, gesturing idly at her head before taking a rest loosely on the low wall surrounding the parkade, next to the rifle which was propped on the concrete. “Conditioning.”

The tip of the barrel was as steady as the building itself as Widowmaker’s visor swung down and she started to check her shots. One minute forty-four seconds, fourteen targets. Child’s play. “Even if I managed to break it, there is a fall-back. They can stop my heart at the press of a button.”

Like a switch had been flipped. Tracer shook her head, frowning, a shiver entirely unlike any of the others of the past twenty minutes running down her spine - one of absolute and utter horror. She didn’t want to believe it, didn’t want to think that anyone would be capable of forcing things like that on another person, but…

Believe it or not, facts... “I don’t suppose I could… issue a directive telling you to stop?”

Widowmaker laughed, surprisingly brightly, at that. “Non, cherie. You are not a superior Talon operative, you do not have the codes and I cannot provide them to you, so you cannot - but it was a nice try.”

She hesitated for a moment, then laid a hand on Widowmaker’s shoulder, not wanting to do anything that might seem overly aggressive just in case the conditioning ran that deep. “Do you have to kill them?”

There was a beat of silence. One minute, thirty-two seconds. “No. I don’t.”

A minute and thirty seconds before the Talon troops huddled below were scheduled to start their rush, Widowmaker opened fire. The Widow’s Kiss blossomed and twitched back into her shoulder, and again and again - at each shot, she shifted slightly, waiting no more than a second or two before taking the next.

Seeing it from here, from this close and this angle, Tracer was simultaneously entranced and chilled. Widowmaker was like a machine, like one of Torbjörn’s turrets - not thinking, really, just reacting. Tracer recognized it, actually. It was how she moved in a dogfight, how any pilot did: when it came
down to life or death and there wasn’t time for thought, it was just muscle-memory, training, and instinct.

It shed some light on things, at least, and as Tracer looked out over the new battlefield instead of at her new… *partner*, even if it was still odd to think of her like that - but as Tracer looked away, she saw the guards who had been knocked down weren’t lying still. They were writhing or shifting, some tried to pick up scattered pieces of what had once been rifles, but they weren’t dead. None of them seemed to be dead. Scared, disoriented, blinded, incapacitated - definitely incapable of combat - but not *dead*.

Tracer let out a bright laugh, hopeful and joyous. Widowmaker, though, just sighed, as quietly as she could, and continued to fire. *Foolish girl. You think it will make a difference.*

“You are clear,” Widowmaker murmured over the radio link, thirty seconds before the assigned entry time. “Engage when prepared.”

With that, her job was done - at least until something else arose. She leaned back from her rifle with a sigh, slipping Tracer a glance but looking away at the delight on her face. “My orders were only to pave the way for the squad below and provide support as required. Until they need me, I am done…” her lips split into a grin and she quirked an eyebrow. “Shall we?”

Maybe if she could get herself and her mouse both occupied, distracted - maybe she could save her from a wound or two. It would be something. Futile in the long run, perhaps, but something, maybe. Below, she heard the troops’ sergeant issuing commands, and they spilled out of the parking structure. Widowmaker gritted her teeth and then grunted, lining her eye up to the scope again. She needed to cover them while they went in, in case there was resistance. Maybe if she’d been distracted enough, she wouldn’t have - but she wasn’t.

Two dozen Talon shock-troops - pretty standard when moderate resistance was expected. Even if they’d expected none, they would have sent six and an operative. That was what she was considered - now, at least. There had been a time she’d had a much lower position, when she’d only been a piece of equipment to be deployed.

Not that she necessarily considered it *that* different. Particularly not whilst on a mission.

The soldiers rushed to the fence in their dark armour, moving in formation. In seconds they cut a hole and widened it, two holding the edges back while the others moved through, then the pair followed. They made their way swiftly across the field in front of the facility, making it to the first guard in only a few seconds.

Widowmaker sighed as shots started to ring out from below, and she felt the woman next to her tense up, saw her grip at the low wall they leaned against.

“No, no no no,” Tracer shook her head, eyes wide, voice low and disbelieving as she watched the troopers slaughtered the downed guards, every single one of them. “No they- they’re *killing* them!”

“Yes, *chérie*. They are.” Her words were soft.

“Yes? Why are-”

Widowmaker held up a finger to silence her as the radio crackled to life. “Hey, what’s with all the incapacitations? Decided you didn’t need a kill-count today?”

The assassin hit the transmit button and chuckled darkly, rolling one shoulder in a shrug and standing from her post while, far away, they detonated explosive charges to breach the doors and moved into
the building. “Did not want you to get too bored down there, that is all.”

The voice on the other end laughed, joined faintly by others in the background. “Well alright! We get back to base, I’m buying you a drink, Frenchie - hell, every one of us’ll buy you a drink!”

Widowmaker tossed her head back for a laugh. “Bonne chance. Call if I am needed.” Then she turned and set her back to the low wall, slumping down and laying her rifle across her knees, every hint of joviality - every hint of life - draining from her. They were out of sight, inside the building: unless they called, her job was done.

Tracer joined her, sliding to sit in shock. Her eyes studied Widowmaker, whose face was blank now, her gaze solidly on the floor. “Is it all an act with you?” Those golden eyes flashed toward her in the sun, brows tugging a little tighter together, and Tracer instantly regretted the words. “Sorry, I didn’t mean-”

“Didn’t mean to what, chérie?” Widowmaker shook her head a little. “To insult me? Fact is not an insult. To hurt me? You can’t.”

The brit dropped her head a little. “Sorry. I just… I just don’t understand.”

Widowmaker pressed her thumb and forefinger to either side of the bridge of her nose, and squeezed. Muffled gunfire could be heard faintly, drifting out from inside of the building. “Understand what, chérie? It is simple.”

Tracer’s brow knit tighter, but not in the horrified way it had a moment ago, not in confusion or anger. Determination was what motivated her now as she leaned in and rested her forehead against the side of Widowmaker’s face. “What do you feel? Right now. Be honest.”

Dark blue lips parted, just barely, for a sigh. Widowmaker let her head lean over, resting against Tracer’s, as her eyes lifted to the sky. “I feel…” she paused for a second, not breathing, her heart not experiencing a full beat as she thought. Considered. Calculated.

Her words were soft but swift, low but not weak. “My heart rate was increased by eight percent, clearing the path for those troops. With you so close, it is nine.” She paused for another second. “And a half.”

For a moment, Tracer waited, but when no other words came her frown deepened a little more. “Is… is that it? Does she think a heartbeat is a feeling? Not joy or sadness or- or warmth or weight or sensations, just…”

Tracer lifted her head and kissed at the other woman’s jaw, gently, just in front of and below her ear, before resting her chin on Widowmaker’s shoulder. “And now?”

“…eleven percent.” Widowmaker took a breath and held it for a moment before letting it out in a sigh. “And warmth from your lips. I know it may not sound like much, but-” she dropped her head with a chuckle. “But I assure you, pour moi, it is something quite different indeed.”

“What else do you feel around me, though?” Tracer’s eyebrows scrunched up in a sort of determined confusion. “Is… is it just heart rate? Is that all that registers at all?”

The assassin rolled her other shoulder in a shrug, the one which wasn’t supporting a mouse’s head. “No, there is some more. At times, excitement. Surprise, often, but that is more a thought than a feeling. They mostly are, perhaps - thoughts where once feelings might have been. Interest. You really do intrigue me, souris . Have since first I got you in my sights.”
The arm Tracer laid against crept behind her back, pulling her in in a sort of a hug. “It is a shame to see my mouse so dampened, so down.” Other people didn’t deserve to toy with the girl’s heart. That was her job.

It was such an oddly caring moment, for one that was so blank and emotionless, so plain. Tracer had always figured - well, up until recently - that Widowmaker really reveled in her kills, in cruelty, domination. The way she’d acted in King’s Row, at the museum, in the belltower, everything. Now, though, hearing her talk to the soldiers below and instantly afterward be so different? Tracer was starting to think that maybe it was all an act, one way or another. A series of facades and masks, and she wondered what was at the core of it all.

One thing, though, she knew: coming out all this way had been a pretty big risk, and as nice as it was to just sit here, that didn’t really seem like a worthwhile expenditure of time given the stakes. Somebody had to lighten the mood a bit, and she’d been told it was something of a specialty of hers.

“Dampened?” Tracer joked, raising an eyebrow and grinning. “Did you get some kind of new goggles?” She lifted her chin from Widowmaker’s shoulder, purring into her ear. “Have you been looking at my knickers again?”

It was an unmistakable shift and Widowmaker, not one to be outdone at such a game, leapt and twirled to land in front of Tracer in a crouch, one hand on her shoulder and pushing it back against the wall. Those golden eyes were suddenly intense again, narrowed and piercing, and Tracer felt a thrill sink deep into her gut.

“Ah, so it is back to the old cat and mouse, eh souris?” Widowmaker chuckled, dropping a hand to the zipper of Tracer’s jacket and tutting gently. “Oh, I must not get too occupied, sadly, in case I am needed… but I do not mind.” She chuckled, leaning in to nip at Tracer’s earlobe. “I suspect you will suffer more from this teasing than I…”

---

When she got home a few hours later, Tracer was practically jittering. Emily was too, actually - sitting on the couch with a mug in hand but not drinking from it, tapping one foot constantly. She’d been there long enough that the tea had gone cold.

“Well?” Emily asked with excitement as Tracer came through the door in a rush, turning to lock it immediately. “How’d it go?”

As her girlfriend turned around, Emily was a little surprised by the fire in her eyes. “Good,” Tracer breathed, tugging at the straps of her accelerator’s harness. “Talk in a minute. First things first.” Words were very hard, with so little brain power to devote to them. There were a million things Tracer could think of that would’ve been better uses for her mouth right now. A lot of blood was a lot of places but very little seemed to be available for her brain to make use of.

Emily almost had enough time to ask what she meant before she was tackled back to the couch. Lena finished tugging off the accelerator and set it down on the floor as she growled through a deep and passionate kiss that left Emily a little breathless when they parted.

“That’s-” Emily pulled in a deep breath, her heart starting to race. “Possible perks of-”

Tracer didn’t let her finish, she just nodded and grabbed Emily’s shoulders, pressing her flat back
against the couch and lowering herself overtop of her. With a squealed giggle, Emily wrapped her arms around her lover.

They could talk in a minute. First things came first.

---

They did indeed all buy Widowmaker a drink when she got back to base, and nobody asked why her ship had taken ten minutes longer than theirs, nor why it had detoured to an active warzone. Mostly because they didn’t want to get shot.

Sitting in the canteen at the Talon base, Widowmaker finished off another glass of wine, grinning faintly as she thought back over the day. Each soldier had bought her a bottle; the sergeant, two. She’d finished two already and opened a third - it took a fair volume in order for her to taste it, and she didn’t really need to worry about drunkenness. Her metabolisms were all quite tightly controlled. It was all quite tightly controlled.

“Hey there, amiga,” Sombra grinned, practically skipping to join her friend and sitting down next to her.

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow as the excitable latina approached. “Sombra? I wasn’t expecting you on base here.”

“What, a girl can’t stop by to say hi to her friend?” Her grin grew a little wider. Widowmaker didn’t really trust it - Sombra only seemed to be that delighted when she’d found something that could be a huge leverage. The assassin only looked back with both eyebrows raised now, waiting for the curtain to be pulled back.

“Okay, fine,” Sombra rolled her eyes with a sigh, “I did kinda have another reason but I really am here to see you about it. Why don’t you flip down your visor there, eh? I’ve got something to show you.”

Frowning a little, Widowmaker lowered her infravisor. The screens showed her all of her cameras at first before they flickered, streaking across with purple lines and going blank. Her lips pulled back in a bit of a snarl at the intrusion into her systems, but before she could say anything, a video began to play. A video taken in the back of a dropship, earlier that day - a video of her playing with her mouse.

Widowmaker took a deep breath and Sombra noticed her fingers clenching into a tight fist. As soon as the visor was retracted, Sombra was already holding up a hand. “Hey, listen, I know what you’re gonna say. You’re gonna say, alright Sombra,” her voice twisted to be a very poor imitation of Widowmaker’s, though her name was still exactly the same, “what will it take for you to bury this information?” She chuckled, shaking her head with her eyes closed. “I know you are, because it’s what they all say - but here’s the thing, amiga.”

Widowmaker glared back as Sombra opened her eyes and met her gaze without a hint of fear. Just a grin. “Here’s the thing. We’re friends, and friends?” She raised an eyebrow before chuckling and shaking her head. “Friends don’t leverage each other like that.”

For several seconds, Widowmaker just studied those eyes, that face. Traps never looked like traps, but even with that in mind…
“Why did you show me this?” Her voice was soft, neither hesitant nor edged. “If not for a trade, pourquoi?”

Sombra chuckled. “Hey, I just figured you might want it, you know? I cleaned it off the Talon servers for you, you’re good, amiga. I definitely don’t care what you do in your free time, and I don’t see why they deserve to know either. No worries. Just wanted to keep you informed.” What was the point of a good deed, if nobody knew you were the one behind it, anyway? Or any deed, for that matter.

Reaching out for an empty wine glass and filling it, Widowmaker’s lips split into a wide grin as she chuckled. “Well, in that case, won’t you share a drink? Friend?”

With a bright laugh, Sombra reached out to take the offered wine. “Hey, you know I’d prefer tequila but a drink’s a drink, am I right?”

Chuckling, Widowmaker gestured to the quartermaster. “Deux tequila. Sergeant Kosn will pay for them.” The man nodded and brought over a pair of shot-glasses, filling them absolutely to the brim with tequila. Neither Widowmaker nor Sombra spilled a drop as they picked up a glass each.

“To friends,” they both toasted, and knocked back the shots. Sombra coughed briefly and flashed the quartermaster a thumbs-up, and Widowmaker just sighed, slowly, a slight grin on her face.

“You know…” she murmured, taking her wine glass again and swallowing a deep mouthful. “I think I will take a copy of that video.” A woman could hardly improve without reviewing her performance.

Snickering, Sombra grinned. “It’s already in your drive, amiga.” Of course, she didn’t delete her own copy. Friendship meant a lot, but it didn’t mean stupidity - and besides, Widowmaker had promised her some pictures. Kind of. A video more than covered that offer, in Sombra’s opinion. She took a mouthful of wine, wrinkling her nose and putting it back down on the table as the taste assaulted her tongue. “Damn, is that stuff ever awful.”

Widowmaker hummed a laugh, swirling the dark red liquid in her glass. “To each their own, I suppose.” All in all, an almost entirely unexpected day - but not unwelcome, certainly. She still didn’t trust Sombra as far she could throw her - she didn’t even trust Sombra as far as she could throw Roadhog, but she knew that at the very worst she would be given a chance to pay the woman off before anything happened.

As it would turn out, though, Widowmaker’s concerns and certainties were entirely ill-founded. Sombra didn’t have many friends, and those she had, she protected. It was something she’d picked up living on the streets: her wolfpack wasn’t large but they defended each other viciously, and if any of them ever failed to do so?

Well, then they’d be out of the group. Fair game for all the other wolves out there.

Chapter End Notes

Soundtrack for the first Widowracer scene: Do I Wanna Know? by the Arctic Monkeys. Choice lyrics include the chorus, for instance!
"(Do I wanna know?)
If this feeling flows both ways
(Sad to see you go)
Was sorta hoping that you'd stay
(Baby we both know)
That the nights were mainly made for saying
Things that you can't say tomorrow day."

Buuuuut I'm not gonna say who the song's from and who it's to >.> Also, you can come up with your own soundtracks, of course - I just like linking them and saying them.

Everybody gets kissed! You get a kiss, and you get a kiss, and you get a kiss! Although not McCree or Sombra yet, I guess - but hey, maybe they'll get there. Look, some plot! I told you it existed. It really does - I can see the future and I know where it's going and everything. I've also written a bunch of the future already >.>

I've kind of adopted an every-other-day upload schedule, and am alternating between this story and my other one (a no-Overwatch AU Symbra fic, for those interested), but I think I might start doing this one more frequently than every four days? I've written a lot of chapters for it, and admittedly I want to give them another polish before uploading, but I don't want to fall too far behind and I think people are liking this one, eh?
Feedback? Do you like the chapter rate as it is or would you rather get things a little faster? How fast? Thank you!

Translations:
* pas bon ni mal == "none good nor bad"
* Bonne chance == "Good luck"
* pour moi == "for me"
* Pourquoi?" == "Why?"

C'mon back next week, when Torbjörn has a little vignette with Bastion, and Jack has a conflict with Winston and Orisa (forgot about her, didja?), but mostly with Winston. In the aftermath, he calls Tracer and the two of them head out to a pub for a chat. He might have not foreseen what exactly inviting *Tracer* to a pub would actually mean, but sometimes a little surprise can be helpful.
Mission Debrief

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: The friction between Jack and Winston reaches a head when the former commander comes back to base to find Orisa leaving. Winston leaves it behind, not wanting to deal with the frustration anymore. Soldier 76 calls Tracer and invites her out to the bar in an attempt to try to stop himself from feeling like everything's falling apart.

JFL Summary: Torby and Bastion play fetch, Winston and Orisa get all feely and decide to take a trip, Jack throws a temper tantrum and pouts. He and Tracer share a shower (kinda, at least chronologically) and then go out to the pub. He's a berk but she's feisty and wins him over. Berlin is mentioned again.

Chapter Notes

Cockney rhyming slang! Definitions in the after-notes to avoid spoilers.

Warning: Anger and some tendencies of Depression in Jack. Excessively cute angst from Orisa.

Previous Chapter Summary: Jack tracked down McCree in a bar, and got a few answers out of him. They weren't the answers he wanted - they pointed to darker and more sinister things happening at Overwatch than he'd hoped: plans and resources being leaked to outside parties by unknown forces within the organization. Jack was gruff about it, but extended an open invitation to the cowboy. Tracer found Widowmaker shooting soldiers in a warzone in an attempt to try to feel something - the assassin wasn't exactly pleased at first, but quickly warmed up as Tracer confessed her feelings and desires. What spider doesn't like prey that flies right into the web? A mission assignment interrupted their activities, but Tracer came along. She regretted it a little when she had to just sit by and watch a Talon mission get carried out below her - while she was able to convince Widowmaker not to kill the guards, the troopers below took care of it anyway. She got a little bit more information about Widowmaker: not all of it necessarily good, but useful at least. Sombra found out about them through a camera and confronted Widowmaker back at base - not to leverage anything, but because she wanted to be able to take credit for helping a friend out by wiping the camera footage from Talon's databases.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Torbjörn signed the letter and started to re-read it. He was interrupted by something tapping at his shoulder, and turned to find a Bastion unit - he hesitated to think of it as ‘his’ Bastion unit - standing next to him.

“Oh go away,” he grunted, waving the thing off. “I’m busy. Don’t bother me.”
Bastion whistled and beeped, taking a step back and looking around. Ganymede - the small bird who made their home on, in, and around the large robot - tilted their little yellow head. Bastion beeped again and stepped forward, reaching out to tap Short Man’s shoulder once more.

“Oh goway!” Torbjörn shouted, his words slurring together slightly as he was pulled out of his letter again. He knew Jack damn well couldn’t read Swedish, and he wasn’t nearly as good at writing English as he was at speaking it. Some of the letters were shaped all wrong. He needed to concentrate and he definitely did not need a large war machine bothering him.

Bastion took a step back again and looked around - spun their head full-circle, in fact, looking for whoever or whatever was supposed to “goway”, whatever that meant. They were the only one here, though. Besides which, they couldn’t understand anyone except Ganymede. Everyone else’s speech was all garbled and wrong - the sounds made no sense strung together. Only Ganymede spoke sensibly. Bastion stepped forward again and tapped Short Man on the shoulder.

“Rrrrrgh,” Torbjörn’s fingers scrabbled at the workbench, and he turned suddenly to snap at the big omnic. “Alright, fine! Fine then, you want my attention? You’ve got it! What are you on about this time?”

Bastion looked around again. It sounded like Short Man was angry, but Bastion couldn’t tell what about, nor at whom. They just stepped over to a rack of hanging tools and picked up a wrench before holding it out to Short Man.

The engineer growled, grinding his teeth. This damned robot - first it had scared the living daylights out of a town and roused a whole mob against it, and then it didn’t even have the common decency to be on a murderous rampage. It had to be some kind of weird, delusional, insane pacifist. It was a Bastion, for heaven’s sake - Torbjörn still could barely bring himself to accept it all.

Stupid thing had started following him when he stopped it from being destroyed. At first he’d wanted to teach it a little so it wouldn’t get itself blown up, but then he had finished with that and it just kept following. No matter how much he shouted and waved it off, no matter how many rocks he threw or how many times he snuck away in the night after triggering it to go into a repair function cycle, the Bastion always managed to track him down again. It and its damned bird.

For months, Torbjörn hadn’t been able to go home - how could he, with this thing at his heels? Maybe it was just playing him, trying to find more victims, but in time he’d grown to miss home too much. His wife, his kids, his bed - and all of his babies, around the garage. Bastion in tow, he’d trudged toward home, and…

…and nothing. It just followed him around like some kind of daft puppy.

He snatched the wrench out of the Bastion’s hand. “Fine! One - brief - game of fetch! Then you let me get back to my letter, deal?” Torbjörn held out his hand and grinned menacingly, his one eye narrowed, daring the robot to accept.

Bastion beeped and whirred, entirely unsure of what Short Man had said, but it was something and he was holding the wrench now. That was good. Beeeping happily, Bastion nodded and patted Short Man’s hand gently with their own.

“Okay,” the engineer sighed, shaking his head. “Ya daft unit. One of these days, I swear, I turn you into scrap!” He swung his arm as hard as he could toward the open garage door and Bastion, with a loud whistle, turned and chased slowly with heavy hydraulic footfalls.

Torbjörn smirked a little as the robot ran off, shaking his head and muttering under his breath as he...
turned back to the letter. “Daft thing. Maybe…” he sighed, face creasing with woe. “Maybe, if they’d all been like you, we wouldn’t’ve been so badly off.”

He slipped the wrench back into his pocket - and maybe, while the robot was off trying to find the wrench he never threw, the engineer could get his letter proof-read.

---

Soldier: 76 sighed as he pulled off his jacket and hung it up in his locker. He had the sinking feeling that his little outing to find the cowboy hadn’t been a dud, but it was hard to feel good about what he’d found out.

There was a package waiting for him, though. Torbjörn worked fast, which was hardly a surprise. 76 picked up the box with a chuckle and flipped open a locking knife from his pocket, cutting the box open. Inside was his mask, looking as good as new, and a letter as well. He pulled it out and started to read.

Jack,

It was good to see you. Thanks for dropping by! I still don’t know how you managed to do this to the mask, but I’ve fixed it up as best I can. Meaning that it’s at least a tenth better than it ever was to start, hah!

But seriously, keep yourself safe out there Jack - and if you ever need a turret, you know who to ask.

Torby

P.S. It’s me. If you ever need a turret, you ask me.

Wandering in through the dark place that he’d long since memorized, 76 chuckled and shook his head as he read. His feet carried him thoughtlessly down the hallway, past the doorway to Winston’s quarters and-

The breath left him as he hit something he wasn’t expecting, eyes fixed on the sheet of paper, and ended up landing flat on his ass on the ground.

“Winston,” he grumbled, turning to snatch up the letter and push himself to his feet, “watch where you’re going, would you?”

“Apologies, Mr. 76 - I am not Winston, but I was also not watching where I was going. I was standing still when you struck me. I apologize for impeding the flow of traffic.”

The soldier blinked, looking up into a yellow mechanical face he didn’t immediately recognize. It took a moment for a picture he’d seen on a briefing paper once to filter through into his mind, and he
wondered what she was doing on base.

“Orisa, right?” He scratched at his head a little. “Sorry for running into you, I guess. What are you doing here?”

She nodded, dipping her front knees in a little almost-bow. “Orisa is correct, yes. I was in the hallway saying my goodbyes to Winston, and thanking him for giving me a tour of the facility.” Her eyes shifted a little, left and then right. It seemed almost nervous to him. “Now that I have done so, I will be going. Have a good evening, Mr. 76.”

He turned and raised a finger as she walked past him, almost instinctively trying to correct her on the name, but he wouldn’t know where to start. Odd.

Even her presence, though, was worrying - particularly when he knew so little about her. He waited until he heard the front doors sealing behind her, and then stalked into Winston’s quarters with a growl.

“Winston!” 76 demanded, stomping into the room. “Where are you? What the hell are you thinking, inviting unauthorized personnel in and just showing them around? It’s a direct contravention of-”

“Contravention of what, Jack?” Winston growled, hanging off of a series of bars he’d installed up near the ceiling. Part of an effort to get into a little bit better shape - fun, too. “And she’s not unauthorized. I authorized her.”

“You what?” Jack whirled, glaring up at the ape. “How could y-”

He didn’t get a chance to finish the word, as Winston dropped down from the bars and landed heavily on the floor next to his former commander. “You’re not in charge here anymore, Jack. I’ll reiterate what I said when you came in - you’re welcome to assist, more than welcome. You are not in command. You gave that up along with your name, remember, Soldier: 76?”

Jack’s blue eyes were cold, but the gesture lost some of its intimidating qualities given how steeply he had to look upward in order to meet Winston’s gaze. A gaze which was unwavering.

“You really want to be that kind of commander?” Jack leaned back a little so he didn’t need to look up with his eyes or his head, he could just tilt his body instead, and Winston huffed a laugh.

“There’s no point trying to get under my skin, Jack. I’m not a dictator and I know it.”

“You’re endangering everyone. Not just the team.” He stretched upward a little - wanting to lean in and bring them closer face-to-face, but of course that was impossible. “Everyone.”

Winston didn’t respond. He also wouldn’t have felt the need to argue with somebody who said gravity didn’t exist - if they didn’t want to accept facts, he wouldn’t force them to. Couldn’t, even.

Jack narrowed his eyes. It had been a long series of days, and they’d been driving the thorn deeper and deeper into his side, and now everything came bursting out as he reached out and grabbed at the gorilla’s oversized shirt. “Dammit! You think you’re so much better than me, don’t you? Your brain and your brawn, you think you’re bigger and smarter and stronger and younger - you think because you’ve never lost, that you can’t? You think -”

“You think I haven’t lost?” Winston huffed, cutting him off, nostrils flaring. His voice was entirely steady as he shook his head almost imperceptibly. “Then you don’t know a damn thing about me, Jack.”
He turned and simply walked away, pulling loose of the old soldier’s grip. Didn’t bother trying to order him away, it would only open up too many chances for a counter-strike. Winston didn’t even care if it meant leaving his own quarters, and the angry old man in them - he just needed to get out. Couldn’t be around that anymore, and one person can’t have an argument on their own.

He knew. He’d tried.

---

As he heard the door seal shut again, Soldier: 76 kicked the wall heavily with a grunt. A white-hot flash of pain reminded him why he shouldn’t kick walls, and he hobbled down the hallway, grumbling furiously, heading back toward his quarters to get out his biotic field and heal his now-broken foot.

How was he supposed to do this? To look Oxton in those big, hopeful eyes, and tell her that Overwatch was sick and deserved to die, and needed to stay dead. That maybe he did too, an old soldier who’d outlived all of his battles. To look Winston in that smug judgemental face, always peering down his nose, and make him understand that idealism wouldn’t help and believing the world was good didn’t make it so. That there were some mistakes you couldn’t learn from.

How was he supposed to look himself in the mirror and finally admit that his own hope was dead? He knew it, somewhere deep inside - it was the thorn that dug into him, the ache in his gut, knowing that in the end none of it had mattered. All the lives they saved, how many had they taken? Every improvement they gave, and how many ended up in bad hands, for bad purposes?

They should’ve been able to prevent what happened in Australia, they should’ve been able to stop the events in Kyrgyzstan, they should have been able to save the lives of their own officer who was only on a diplomatic mission in Cairo. They should have been able to see the signs of cancer before it got too late, but looking back, he just didn’t think it was possible.

He felt like…

He felt like an angry old man and a cynic. He felt like he needed a drink.

Picking up his biotic from his belt where it had been hidden away during his little mission, he flung it into the ground a lot harder than was necessary and then dropped to the floor next to it, anger simmering in his blood. He couldn’t even put it all into words.

There were moments sometimes, glimpses of how things could be - or could have been - but then it all dropped back into hell.

He never had been a father, not really, but he’d been around long enough to recognize a temper tantrum when he saw one, and it made it so much worse to know that that was half of what was happening right now. Not to say that there wasn’t validity behind his anger, but he still could recognize that it was inflated past sensible levels. He pulled out his phone and hit Winston’s number, but then his vision started going red and his teeth hurt so he decided a different tactic first and tapped on another contact.

“Oxton. I want to talk. Name the bar, I’ll buy.”

He laid for a minute on the concrete, until the little cylinder next to him stopped whirring, stopped
sending out its nice yellow glow of healing light. His teeth still hurt. Begrudgingly, he jabbed his finger at the phone again sharply.

“Winston. I don’t say this often but I fucked up. Had a rough few days. Wasn’t right to take it out on you. Sorry.”

Then he tossed his phone onto the bed and went to take a shower. He was man enough to apologize, but he’d be damned if he’d just sit on the floor and wait for the gloating response.

---

Winston was still seeing red when he slammed the door behind him. It looked like just a door, from here - just some little apartment in Apeldoorn. The actual entrance to the base was hidden inside - down a stairway into the cellar, behind a false wall and then the locked doors began. Several other exits existed as well, including one to a hangar at the airport, but this one had been closest and Winston had needed to get out of there.

Fast.

Grunting and gritting his teeth, he breathed deeply and readjusted the glasses that didn’t quite fit right on his flat face. They’d been designed for a human, after all. A few times, people had asked why he didn’t make new ones that could work better. Mercy had even suggested corrective laser surgery so he didn’t need lenses at all, but he didn’t have these glasses for practical purposes, anyway. These were sentimental.

Through them, Winston saw something as he looked out at the streets which quickly calmed his blood and his heart - a large omnic, four-legged, standing still in the moonlight not even a dozen paces away.

“Orisa?” He prompted, inching closer with one fist pressed against the ground. All the rage and fury were replaced with concern and curiosity. “Are you alright?” Why hasn’t she left yet? Why is she just standing there? The gorilla’s eyes scanned the surroundings for clues, but returned to her face as she turned slowly around.

They might’ve been mechanical, but her eyes definitely weren’t lacking in emotion. Downturned and narrow, they were clearly confused, displeased, unhappy. Winston didn’t like the look of that.

“I… I do not know where to go from here.”

He blinked a little, scratching at the back of his neck. “Oh, uh… well, the airport is a few blocks in that direction - the same dropship that brought you here can take you back home, Athena will take care of that, no problem.”

“No, I mean…” she dropped her head, looking left, then right, before meeting Winston’s eyes again. “I was created as a guardian. Not as a mindless drone, however: Efi wished for me to have a heart. To be a protector driven by emotion and passion, not by logic circuits. Robots failed in the protection of Numbani; I was to be something else.”

Winston nodded slightly, face contorting a little in concern. They’d talked about that some, and about Efi - though Winston hadn’t met the woman yet. Truth be told, he was absolutely terrified to.
“To that end, she has encouraged me to follow my heart. To be true to my emotions. It… caused problems, at first. Now…” she sighed, quite literally breathlessly. She had no lungs, no ability to breathe, but her shoulders raised and fell and the sound of a sigh came out. “Now I fear it is doing the same again.”

He wasn’t sure what to do or say, other than to step closer and wrap his arms around her. She returned the embrace readily, tightly, firmly. Almost desperately.

“I am meant to guard the people of Numbani, the city that is my home. This is what my logic tells me. But my heart?” Her voice thinned, almost whining. Degree by degree, she’d been turning up her emotional emulation chip, and it had been changing her life so much. With more knowledge, more understanding, it hadn’t caused the issues that first arose: she no longer waded through traffic to stop a squirrel that might get injured, causing cars to collide as she did. Now she knew that there were mediations to be maintained.

A whole new issue had arisen, though.

“My heart is here,” she buried her face in Winston’s shoulder. He hissed a breath as her tusks dug into him a bit, painfully, but he didn’t care - and it didn’t hurt nearly as much as the obvious conflict she was going through, anyway. “My heart stays with you when I return to my city, Winston, and I do not know where to go from here!”

The night air ruffled at Winston’s clothing, but other than that nothing moved for a very long moment.

“Maybe…” the gorilla glanced over his shoulder at the door. “Maybe I’m the one who should do some going.”

Orisa’s head rose from him to look in confusion and he smiled, cupping her metal cheek. “I’ve never seen Numbani before. Maybe you could show me around?”

Her eyes flew wide and for an instant, her head started to pull back. It stopped and returned immediately, though, resting into Winston’s palm as Orisa nodded. “I think I would like that very much! Come, there are many things to show you - oh, and Efi will be so pleased to meet you as well!”

Winston swallowed heavily as Orisa grabbed his hand, tugging him along the sidewalk toward the airport. Heh, right, uh... Efi. Uh-oh. “I, uh - now? Um, well, I mean…”

In his pocket, his phone buzzed. He only glanced at the screen for a second before he slipped it away again. A message from Jack, and Winston didn’t want to talk to him right now - he was going to visit a far-off city with his girlfriend.

“That sounds great, Orisa. Thank you - I’m really looking forward to seeing your home.”

...and meeting your mom. Oh dear…

---

Lena was taking a shower when Morrison sent her the message, so she didn’t get it right away. Even if she’d been out and available, she probably wouldn’t have checked - her mind was far too occupied
with a lot of things.

At least now, though, they were mostly happy things. Or at least, they all seemed like they were going somewhere - as well as which, she was a lot less afraid of getting shot from a rooftop now. That really took a load off a gal’s shoulders.

Twenty minutes later, though, when she’d got out and dried off, thrown on a robe and gone out to the living room to put on the news - Emily was out at her job - Tracer did check the message. She chuckled a little as she read it.

Well, got nothing better to do.

Tapping at her phone, she sent a reply. “Sure thing! How about the Hoof & Haunch? Meet you there in an hour?”

She started to walk back down the hallway to her room, and didn’t even make it there before her phone buzzed.

“How’s forty-five minutes? The one in King’s Row, right?”

With a snort, she responded. “No, the one in Dublin.” Then, a moment later, she frowned and typed another message. “Yes, the one in the Row, thanks!”

“Better safe than sorry there,” she murmured over a chuckle and started to get ready.

---

Jeans and a t-shirt. Not an inventive outfit, but it worked, and she knew it would fit in well at the pub. Eventually, she’d get it through his head that he should stop calling them ‘bars’. That was what you sat at, not where you went. Silly Yank.

He was already there when she showed up, straight-backed and sitting on a stool, white hair shining over his leather jacket. It would’ve been the perfect look, he might’ve gone entirely unnoticed - but the way he sat had eyes drawing his way.

“You’ve gotta slouch a little more,” Tracer sighed as she walked up, slapping lightly at his arm and letting her backpack down to the floor where she hooked a sneaker through the strap. Her accelerator was tucked inside and she always had to be careful with it. “You stick out like a sore thumb, everyone and their aunty’ll be having a butcher’s, just-” she set a hand on his shoulder and pressed down but he didn’t move.

Not at first. She was determined, though, and after a few seconds he let his posture slack with a grumble, hunching his shoulders forward toward the bar. “There we go. That’s better, love! You’re in my house now, gotta look the part!”

The old man - with his tired face and his white hair, his leather jacket, slouching at a stool at the bar in a pub in King’s Row - looked right at home now. He sighed and practically disappeared.

“Thanks. I guess.” His gravelly voice even blended into the background, sounding like he’d been smoking something awful for twenty years. “And thanks for coming out.”
“Oh, we are feeling grateful tonight, aren’t we?” Tracer grinned, quirking an eyebrow and calling for a pint of bitters from the tap. It came a moment later, wet on the outside of the glass, just the tiniest bit sloppy. Just the way she liked it. “So c’mon, love - what’d you want to talk about?”

He was quiet for a minute, swilling his already half-empty beer. Little did she know it was his third of the night so far. “Don’t know. I guess… I’m not doing so well. Could use a little pick-me-up.”

Tracer snorted as she tipped her pint back for a mouthful, blowing a little foam off the top by accident. “Well, I think you called the right bird, love. I’ve been told it’s a specialty of mine!”

He couldn’t help but notice that her slang and her accent were a little thicker, but it fit in just right here. It was a little odd to think that an atmosphere that had so many people who looked so glum, would also have so many laughing raucously. It wasn’t quite like the bars at home.

“You’ve been thinking about the fall again, yeah?” She frowned a little. “And what’s happened since?”

Jack nodded with a grunt, swallowing down half of what remained of his beer. Without even speaking, the bartender dropped off another. They had an arrangement already.

Tracer sighed. “You can beat yourself up about it forever, but you can’t change the past. Trust me, I was stuck in it for…” a slow frown crossed her lips and brow as she tried again to put something intangible and impossible into words. Not to mention something she didn’t exactly like talking about to start with. “Forever, some ways, it felt like. You can’t change what’s happened, all you can do is use it moving forward.”

He actually scoffed at that reflexively, as surprised by the sound as she was - but not as surprised as he was when she spun and slapped his shoulder. “Hey! Don’t you take the mickey with me - you called me out here, remember? Trust me, it makes a difference. It can.”

“Sorry,” he mumbled, trying to prevent the word from getting any further than her. It was all well and good to admit your failures in the mirror, but letting them out into the world was a different matter entirely. “I guess I’ve just lost sight of it.”

“Well, it’s true.” Lena nodded firmly and took another swig of her beer. “It’s been… it’s been hectic lately, I know. A rough while, yeah, but don’t you see that things are getting better? Sure, Overwatch is gone. We all know that - we answered the recall but we knew it wouldn’t be the same.”

“Did we?” Jack interrupted a little, and Tracer turned to face him incredulously. A moment later, she shrugged.

“Well, I did. Whatever this new thing was, though, I knew I wanted to be there - right from the start. Help this old bird be a right proper phoenix.”

A chuckle escaped the old soldier. “I think I used to be optimistic like that. Don’t know what happened.”

Tracer quirked an eyebrow and grinned over to him, nudging him with an elbow. “Just years, love - you’re practically a pensioner now!”

He fixed her with a stolid look but a smirk on his lips. “Careful. I’m buying the drinks but that doesn’t mean you can walk all over me.”

She laughed, shaking her head. “Really though, it… yeah, Overwatch had its problems. Sometimes
they got a little ahead of themselves - I think I know better than anyone the problems that caused.”

In the wake of the accident, people had started to raise questions about whether the Slipstream had been adequately designed. Whether it should have gone through more testing before a live pilot got behind the stick. Of course, it was too late by then - but it wasn’t the only time questions like that circled. “And on the other hand, sometimes they got a little caught up in the red tape. Too fast and too slow, at different times.”

Jack sighed a chuckle at that, thinking back on another time they’d talked. Surrounded by flashing news banners and squawking telecasters, like vultures preying on the bloated but not-quite-yet-dead carcass of Overwatch.

*God, Jack. Is that really how you think now?*

It was the first time he’d used his own name since the bomb went off, as far as he could recall. It didn’t feel right, it didn’t feel *good*, it didn’t feel like a relief. It was nauseating and he regretted it, but the feeling didn’t slide away.

Almost as if it wasn’t the name he was ill over.

“But they were trying for the better, and they *did* succeed.” Tracer watched the light die from his eyes, but she kept on urging. If she could kiss a Talon assassin, and find that she actually cared for her, she could damn well reignite the spark of optimism in a man like Jack Morrison.

“Some, at least. I mean,” she slid a hand across the bar, taking his gently. “If not for Overwatch, I’d still be unstuck and scattered across time, seeing a thousand horrors at once and never being able to stop them.”

Jack dropped his eyes to her hand, holding on to his. Withered, wrinkled skin against youth. *Such a perfect fucking parallel.* “If not for Overwatch,” he countered with a sigh, “you never would’ve been in the plane in the first place.”

Tracer’s eyes narrowed but she didn’t pull her hand away. *Alright, fine. You wanna play it that way?* “How about all the others then? If you want to sit there and stew in it, go for it, but don’t drag me down with you.” She turned away to her pint, but got off a few more words before she tipped it back. “With all due respect, of course.”

*All due respect.* The words echoed in his old head.

At first, she couldn’t tell what noise Jack made. Some tiny grunt, a little noise deep in his chest - but like a seed, it started to grow. Momentarily startling, until it resolved into a laugh which got louder and louder until Tracer joined in, and so did one or two others along the sides. They hadn’t overheard the conversation, they were just drunk and wanted to laugh.

“All due respect, you say,” Jack shook his head, draining the last of his third pint to start on his fourth. “There was a time I would’ve thought that meant a lot.”

“It still *does*, sir,” Tracer protested with a frown. “Sure, it’s gone. Overwatch. The buildings and the organization - but not the heart. Sure, you’re not the commander anymore, but you’re still a friend. I do respect you.” She let it hang for a second before following it up. “Even if you are a bit of a berk sometimes.”

Again he laughed, thinking that it was just rhyming slang for jerk. Of course, he was wrong - but Tracer wasn’t about to tell him that. *That* was a bit of cross-continental slang that definitely didn’t need to be broached.
“I guess… I guess when it comes down to it,” he settled his hands around his glass. “Maybe that’s what I’m a little afraid of. That it’s not gone.” He glanced over, shaking his head. “It was sick, Tracer. We were.”

There had been a time - not even one that was that distant, maybe only a month back - that Tracer would’ve fought him on it. A time that it had seemed so clear, right and wrong - when she would’ve argued back that Overwatch was good. Maybe there had been a few bad people in it, but they’d been good and right - and Talon was bad, to a man.

Or a woman.

Everything seemed a little more grey, now, though. Things had got all twisted, and they never straightened out quite the same way again. Tracer didn’t know what it all meant, but she knew one thing.

“Sickness happens. All we can do is try to take better care next time. What’s the alternative, just give up? Just sit around here on your Aris and wait for somebody to bust the door down? Where would we be for that, sir?” Her eyes entreated him but he had no response, didn’t even look over. “I know I don’t want to live in that world, so I won’t - I refuse to.” She nodded once. “You’ve got three choices: keep going where you’re going, turn away, or stop.”

The soldier chuckled, recognizing the general form of the statement if not the exact words. “You’ve been talking to the monk, huh?”

Tracer’s nose wrinkled a bit. “Yeah, I guess that phrase wasn’t my best bit of work. I’ve been trying to figure ‘em out and kind of… come up with my own, you know? Like, you know, when he says ‘if you do not change direction, you may-”

He joined in to finish off the quote with her, in unison, “-May end up where you’re headed, yeah.” He chuckled with a shake of his head and Tracer giggled.

“I mean,” she shrugged a shoulder and tipped her pint back for a drink. “Seems pretty self-explanatory, doesn’t it?”

Jack sighed. “Yeah. Maybe that’s the point.”

Only then did he notice Oxton’s cheeky grin, glance over to see her eyes twinkling with laughter. “Son of a-” he growled, grinning and shaking his head. “Okay, yeah, you got me. It’s self-explanatory and obvious and I still missed it.” He took a solid swig of his beer in a mostly failed attempt to cut off his own chuckling. “You know, at least he wouldn’t have teased me about it like this.”

Tracer laughed brightly. “Oh, you think I’m teasing you about it now? Well get ready for a treat, sir - it’s really about to start now!”

Their chatter blended into the rest of the pub, one more drop in the bucket, one more night on the calendar - but for him it was a little different. Not because he thought everything would suddenly be better but because - for the first time in a while - he legitimately thought that maybe, at least, it could be. He couldn’t remember the last time it had felt like that - his mind flicked back to the bank briefly but it didn’t feel the same.

Oxton always had been good for that, though. Combination heart and conscience, right there. Better than his own, he thought, but that didn’t seem to mean as much these days as it used to.

Maybe she was right, though, and maybe something new could be made. Something to pave the way
forward for better days.

“So what’s new in your life?” Jack asked after the conversation had settled into a bit of a lull. He was on pint number six now, but slowing. It didn’t seem as necessary as it had.

“Oh well, I, uh…” Tracer swallowed down a mouthful of her third, chuckling a little as nervousness rose in her gut. “I’ve got this friend who uh- well, have you ever heard of polyamory?” She’d made her decision, sure, but it never hurt to get more feedback.

“Have I?” Jack chuckled, shaking his head. “I tell you - one night, there I am in the bar. Berlin. All of a sudden, in walk Ana and Reinhardt and-”

“Good god is there anybody she didn’t tell?” Tracer gasped, clutching at the bar. “What, is my mum gonna call me up now? It’s like coming out the closet all over again!”

Jack laughed, shaking his head. “Ehh. I think Mei doesn’t know yet.”

“Well, it’s staying that way,” Tracer harrumphed, crossing her arms across her chest - but a glance to her lips showed Jack the smirk there.

“So you and your lady are trying something new, huh?”

She shrugged, leaning to one side a bit. “Well,” she took another drink of her pint - the last one before she transitioned over to a fourth, “new for me, yeah. Not for her though, apparently, but it’s - I like it so far. It’s nice.”

One of his white eyebrows shot up a little. “Really? You already found someone? Ana said you’d just talked to her recently.”

Tracer chuckled. “Yeah, well… turns out there was someone kind of already in place. Chomping at the bit, I guess you could say, but,” she nodded, gaze going distant as her thoughts drifted. Drifted to angry golden eyes, ones burning with passion, empty ones that were simply tired, ones that glittered with excitement.

“…but it’s nice,” she sighed. “I’m liking it.”

Jack hummed, shaking his head a bit. She looked like Reinhardt when you asked him about one of his sweeties - any one of them, the man had a thousand and knew them all by name even if it wasn’t what was written on their birth certificate. Once, on tour with him, Jack had wondered whether he was supposed to be a warrior or a poet. Reinhardt had happily shouted back, “Both!”

“Don’t you tell Ana I admitted to it,” Tracer raised a finger in warning, leveling a look at the soldier next to her. “She still thinks it was all about a friend of mine.”

He had to chuckle at that. “Right, of course. A friend.”

Chapter End Notes

Cockney rhyming slang! Loose definitions based on my understandings, I'm not cockney meself so feel free to correct me.
Butcher's - Butcher's hook - look; ergo "Having a butcher's" == "Having a look".
Bird == chick, gal, lady, woman, etc.
Mickey - Mickey Bliss - piss; ergo "Take the Mickey" == "Take the piss" == uh shit that one's a little tough to translate to American English. Kind of sort of being uppity? Intentionally obtuse? Uh. Didn't think this one through. Loosely, "fuck around", kinda? I think that's probably closest. Don't take the mickey, don't fuck around. Kinda.
Pensioner == old person; one who draws an old age pension
berk - Berkeley Hunt - Cunt; yeah but it's less of an insult in this sense - it can be a playful word in Britain! Not really so much in the U.S.
Aris - Aristotle - bottle - bottle and glass - ass; ergo, "sitting around on your Aris" == "Sitting around on your ass"

So, fun stuff. Some things are obviously up with Jack, yes, and it'll get addressed - in fact, I just finished writing the chapter where that all actually comes to light. We'll get there, don't worry.

Next chapter! Tracer gets surprised by a visit when Widowmaker comes to call - but, when the brit mentions dating, the assassin dashes away again. Soon she returns, in a dress, for a proper date. Sort of.
Third Date

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker stops by the apartment to see Tracer - much to the brit's surprise, but the frenchwoman quickly departs again to prepare for what she claims will be a more fitting get-together. After all, Tracer stated quite clearly that this was their third date.

JFL Summary: Widowmaker breaks a window. Tracer spills tea on herself. Widowmaker steals a bunch of things. Tracer giggles and looks like herself. Widowmaker's stuck in combat mode but it's not a problem (kinda).

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Jack got a little pissed off at Winston (or a lot) because Orisa was in the base at Apeldoorn. As a result, Winston decided to leave for a brief vacation - accompanying Orisa to Numbani. Jack got together with Tracer at a pub and managed to be a little less sour in the wake of it. The world seems darker for him lately than it normally does, but luckily his favourite chipper brit was able to give a peek through the clouds.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tracer shut off the news. It was far too early in the morning to be hearing about the latest rising crisis - eleven days now since the war had officially begun, and more people were getting involved apparently. Every channel of media had been catching on to it lately, it seemed, and the story was very different depending on who you listened to.

It was all unfortunately familiar, and at a different time Tracer might have left it on; might have sat and stared and grown a little sad as she thought about how Overwatch had been meant to stop it all and had seemed to be doing such a good job for a while, but it had all came to naught and gone to pot.

Today, though, she didn’t. Underneath the still-lifting fog of sleep lay a faint buzz of emotion, excitement and/or nerves fairly high amongst them, that had been lingering around for a while. However, it wasn’t the slurry of melancholy and confusion that had seemed to be so commonplace since the fall of Overwatch and particularly these past few weeks.

Eleven days, only, that conflict had been going on. She thought back on that for a minute. How many days had they been fighting when we first… was it three? Four? Five?

She always had been shit at the anniversaries and such. Time in general, really - especially since the accident. Regardless, though, it had been about a week since she’d either confessed her feelings to Widowmaker, or fallen entirely headlong into her trap. Or both.

It had also been one of the best weeks in a long time. Months, certainly. Though they hadn’t seen
each other again, Tracer had been freed of so much of that internal conflict that had been unsettling her sleep. Yes, she still had some questions - and yes, there were parts of it that were still a little horrific - but at least she wasn’t questioning her own heart anymore.

No longer was Lena getting those sickening lurches, those tight knots of emotion clashing against emotion, against logic. Or at least, not nearly as many of them. On top of which, she had a nice little slew of memories to bring her little shivers of joy - and through that lens of experience, looking back on the past, it even made prior meetings seem very different indeed.

She would have had to admit, too, that she’d had a few lingering worries about how things might go with Emily - but those were misplaced, as it turned out. Everything had been absolutely brilliant - her girlfriend had been interested and supportive without being pushy, and it was actually a huge relief to be able to talk openly about how she felt about Widowmaker.

Emily’d laughed at some parts that Lena had expressed as new, or surprising, and had said that she’d always known that Lena had some feelings for Widowmaker. There had always been thrills and worries, fear and awe, tucked away in the wings - and while she’d known that Tracer had a huge heart and would care a lot about just about anything, she’d also known that there was a little more than just that going on.

Wherever possible, Tracer had been trying to apply the advice she’d got, which was all various shades of “trust yourself and your instincts”. She tended to think the most about Ana and Mercy’s, though - particularly Mercy’s. Not only did she have the doctor card to play, but if there was one woman Tracer trusted to keep her from getting into a bad situation in the first place, it was Angela.

...of course, if there was one she trusted to get her out of a situation, it was Ana.

Sitting on her couch, Tracer chewed idly at her faintly grinning lip, lost in thought and recollection and holding a hot mug of tea. She yelped when she heard glass shatter, and even more when scalding tea splashed onto her wrists but the mug wasn’t broken. It had just jumped when she did. Little bit silly how things did that: moved when the person holding them moved.

“Honestly,” she muttered, setting down the mug and wiping the tea off of her arms with her robe. It was already splashed anyway and would need to be washed. From outside, she heard a soft sound, a voice maybe, and then a shout.

“Sorry!”

The voice sounded familiar, a woman with a french accent, and as Tracer looked over to the balcony she noticed (with a sigh) the grappling hook latched there. It had smashed out the upper left-hand corner of one of the glass panes that filled in the sliding doors.

In a moment, Widowmaker was there as well - as quickly as the grapple could bring her. In her armour, rifle across her back, and an apologetic look that didn’t seem to fit in on her face at all.

“You know, some people would just come through the lobby,” Tracer grumbled, pulling the now-slightly-broken sliding glass door open and letting the other woman inside. “Knock, maybe?”

“Ah yes, the lobby,” Widowmaker hummed. “Why, the authorities would never notice me in such a place, non?” She grinned widely and Tracer sighed, nodding.

“Fair enough,” she mumbled, and then regarded her… whatever-she-was, with a frown. “Why are you here, anyway? What’s going on?”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms. “Can a woman not stop by and see her lover in
the morning?”

Tracer let out a laugh. “We’re not lov-” Widowmaker’s expression steepened a little, and Tracer cut off, mid-word. Her lips twisted into a thoughtful frown. “Hmm. I guess maybe it fits - although, we haven’t actually done that yet. So… maybe not the best term.” She hummed a little laugh. “Little weird, thinking about that - been a while since I’ve dated anyone.”

Widowmaker’s eyebrow fell. “We are not dating.”

The brit had to giggle at that, holding out a finger and grinning. It was fun to turn things around. “Oh yes we are!” the brit announced cheerily. Widowmaker moved to say something but Tracer didn’t let her, and kept right on talking instead. “Actually, if you think about it, we’ve been on, hmm, I think I’d say three dates.” She paused for a second, tipping her head to the side. “Mm, no, two. Don’t think it counts as a date if you’re worried about getting shot.”

Widowmaker narrowed her eyes, opened her mouth as if to say something with a sly expression on her face, sarcastic, but then she stopped and it melted slowly into a thoughtful frown. “Hmm. Perhaps you are right.” Suddenly, she gasped, eyes flying wide. “But cherie! Do you know what this means?”

Tracer’s eyebrows shot high as the blue woman stepped closer, taking her hands and tugging Tracer a little further into the apartment. “That means that this is our troisième date - our third! Why, cherie, this will simply not do!”

She dropped her hands, tutting and looking down at herself and Tracer as well. “With me in my armour and you in some tea-stained robe-”

“It wasn’t tea-stained before you broke the bloody window,” Tracer grumbled, but she couldn’t suppress the beginnings of a grin from her lips

“Cherie,” Widowmaker shook her head, fixing the shorter woman with a flat look, “no, this will not do. Go, get dressed - I will do the same. I will return shortly with a suitable plan. Au revoir.” Then she pecked a quick kiss on Tracer’s cheek and leaped out of the open door and off of the balcony.

“I- I was gonna have breakfast!” Tracer exclaimed with a laugh, shaking her head and closing the door to the balcony.

Her eyes drifted up to the broken section and she sighed. “Ugh, maybe I can convince them it was a bird or something…”

*Guess it’s not a total lie. It was a blue french bird.*

Her worries evaporated and she giggled as she moved to get ready for whatever was planned. As she stepped down the hallway, Tracer started to strip off her robe and tossed it onto the small pile of dirty clothes in the corner of the bedroom.

Of course, then she ran into the same problem she always ran into as she went to the closet and just… kind of… stared.

*Well. Those are clothes.*

One might think that, after years of seeing Emily pull off flawlessly coordinated outfit after flawlessly coordinated outfit, years of seeing her girlfriend play with colours and layers and different fabrics, that Tracer might have picked up on a thing or two.
One would have been wrong to think that. She knew what she thought looked good on Emily, sure, but on her? A flight suit and a bomber jacket, something like that, sure, definitely. A pair of nice tight jeans and a leather jacket, yeah. She could manage “good”, she was quite sure, but maybe not “third date with a hot French assassin”.

Well… in for a penny…

The eventual outfit consisted of a v-neck t-shirt which Tracer was reasonably sure was classed up by throwing a cardigan overtop of it. It looked like something she might see on TV, which she took as a positive indication. Holding up a couple of different pairs of pants, she couldn’t quite decide which went well. She just didn’t seem to have an eye for this kind of thing. In the end - and mostly out of a total inability to decide on anything else - she pulled on a pair of capris.

It looked awful. It looked forced and fake and generally pretty unnatural, and she tossed it all in the dirty clothes pile. At least half of it was Emily’s, anyway. A few minutes later she’d re-outfitted in a pair of skinny jeans and a button-up with sleeves rolled past her elbow.

Then, she took a look at herself in the mirror. Well… I mean, it’s not bad. Never having seen Widowmaker in anything other than her armour (save for in one picture from before she was captured, where Ana had pointed out the young Amélie to Tracer) she really didn’t know what to expect. Apparently she considered her armour to be inappropriate, but that really didn’t help Tracer know what would be considered a good choice.

She spent twenty minutes trying to get her hair into some semblance of order. Failing miserably, of course - if anything, it stood up even more for having been brushed at so ferociously. Plus, now her scalp stung and her arms were tired. With a defeated, whimpered sigh, Lena looked in the mirror. She didn’t look like someone who was all dolled up to go on a third date with a second partner. She just looked like her.

“Mon dieu, ma cherie,” the murmur caught Tracer off-guard and she spun, heart leaping, to see Widowmaker’s face poked around the corner. She wasn’t wearing her visor and her hair hung down along the side of the doorframe in loose waves rather than the normally bound ponytail. “You look gorgeous!”

“Oh you don’t have to tease me,” Lena blushed slightly, rolling her eyes and tugging at her hair again. “I know I just look like plain ol’ me.”

Widowmaker’s lips split into a wide grin as their eyes met. “But of course. This is what I already said, no?”

At that, Lena’s blush intensified and she dropped her eyes, netting a laugh from deep in Widowmaker’s throat. “Ah, parfait - I do so appreciate your reactions, ma souris.”

“Well, thanks,” she mumbled through her grin, half-giggling as well. It felt all so normal, so right - so unlike she would have expected any piece of it to feel. Not only was she going on a date with a woman who wasn’t Emily - odd enough to begin with - but the woman was, in fact, a sniper. An assassin. Not just any assassin, in fact, but one who had repeatedly fought her and had killed one of her idols right in front of her. Behind her. Whatever.

An enemy. Lena thought on that for an instant, chewing on her lip as she considered, but it really didn’t feel true. Their organizations were maybe opposed - maybe - but even that wasn’t true. Not since Overwatch didn’t exist anymore; there was no organization now. Tracer flew no flags except for her own of freedom and right, and right now, none of that mattered anyway. This wasn’t Widowmaker with the armour and the rifle, poison gas and thermal goggles, this was…
“Cherie?” The soft voice stirred Tracer from her mild trance, drifting in from the other room. “Will you leave me waiting long? I do have a plan, you know.”

“Oh do you?” She giggled lightly, stepping forward with a grin. “Brilliant! Well in that case, by all means, let’s get on… our…” her words trailed off into stunned silence as she rounded the corner and actually saw the other woman.

Gone was the tight-fitting armour open in the front almost down to her bellybutton, with its spiked knees and heels. No more was her left arm encased in a sort of pauldron-and-gauntlet combo. Hair out of the ponytail, no visor, no rifle - with the exception of the blue skin and the golden-yellow eyes, Tracer might’ve thought this was an entirely different woman. She’d even donned makeup - lipstick at least, dark black. Red certainly would have looked out of place.

The dress she wore was unsurprisingly black, and at least the upper half was more modest than her armour by far - a plunging neckline that nonetheless didn’t even quite make it to what would be considered “cocktail” territory. The hem hung right down to her ankles, showing off a pair of boots that looked like little more than heels and thin leather straps that criss-crossed almost all the way up to the knee. It was a sight available only due to the fact that the dress’ skirt was slit up to about a hand’s width below the hip.

Black, it was indeed, but not universally - more of it than not was sheer fabric, and tantalized Tracer with silhouettes and hints of the form underneath. Quirking an eyebrow and grinning, the frenchwoman slowly turned, stretching her arms out to either side. Long gloves covered up to her elbow with only one small wrist-bracer on one side, her grappling hook and seemingly primary means of locomotion. Her dark hair hung down in shimmering waves, pulled to one side of her back and held loosely by some means that wasn’t visible, and it blossomed out wider after that point. The backless dress perfectly framed what was possibly the only real indicator that this was, indeed, the Widowmaker: an angular and stylized tattoo of a spider. A black widow.

“Breathe, chérie.”

The gentle command spurred Tracer to laugh slightly, but she really didn’t have a lot of air to put into the gesture. “I’m- what? I’m totally… breathing.” Now that they’d had a moment to catch up, actually, her lungs somewhat raced. Long, deep pulls of air to fuel her hot rushing blood.

“You… you look absolutely…” Tracer stepped slowly closer as Widowmaker clasped her hands in front of her with what looked to be an oddly, demurely, triumphant smile. No end to the sentence came, but mostly because there were too many and they vied for position in Tracer’s mind. Different. Gorgeous. Stunning. Good. Brilliant. Delightful.

Widowmaker’s lips shifted a little off to one side, the seed of a smirk growing larger as once more - for the second time in as many minutes - she’d reduced the other woman to speechlessness. Success always felt good, and power as well, and on top of that she found she just liked the way that Tracer looked at her. Not liked it in a warm and fuzzy way, she was sure that that much was impossible and would continue to be, but… liked it, all the same. She never felt warm or fuzzy when she looked at her cacti, but still, she liked them. She didn’t want them to die.

Lena stared openly, her eyelids failing to blink automatically - and then her eyes caught on something, a tiny disturbance in the field of seeming perfection. A little something white, poking out from underneath one shoulder strap of the dress.

With a little frown, she stretched out a hand and tugged at the white thing, expecting it to be a tag but
thinking that it would be a particularly odd place to put one on a dress - not that she was an expert on dresses. As she tugged on it, it came free. It was a tag.

A price tag.

She raised an eyebrow, glancing over to her date’s golden eyes. “Should I cut this off?” Little weird she didn’t notice, actually - did she just buy it now? Wow, she really went all out for this.

Widowmaker shrugged, less than pleased by the distraction but wanting to be rid of it. She snatched the tag, tore it off, and tossed it to the ground. “Now,” she murmured, stepping forward and holding out a hand. “Shall we?”

Grinning, Tracer reached out to accept her offered hand before pulling it back and snapping her fingers. “Oh, wait - one, hold on…” she turned and stepped quickly, plucking the chronal accelerator out of its charging cradle and shoving it into a knapsack that sat on the floor adjacent. She pulled the straps on over her shoulders, and then noticed the other woman’s distinctly curious (and oddly unimpressed) expression. “What?”

“We are not going to fight anyone, chérie. Did I bring my rifle? My visor?”

Tracer frowned a little. “Well, no, but - I’m not bringing my pistols. Just the accelerator, and I’m not wearing it - I just need it nearby.” Widowmaker’s eyebrow raised a little higher, and she crossed her elegant arms in front of herself, prompting the Brit to elaborate.

“What? I need to be wearing it in order to shift time around, but if I don’t at least have it nearby, I uh… I kind of fade out. Become a bit of a ghost - I’m not really… anchored down anymore. There was a problem with the Slipstream jet when I was doing the test flights and it-” she shook her head a little, not wanting to get into this right now. Or ever, kind of. “It just- I just need it nearby, okay?”

The expression on that blue face shifted into a frown. “Oh, hmm. Slipstream - I think I recall… some kind of teleporting aircraft, yes?” Tracer nodded hesitantly and Widowmaker shrugged before grinning once more. “Well, if you need it, that is that - now, let us…”

She trailed off for a second as a faint whine of sirens drifted in through the open balcony door. Tracer’s eyes flicked that way instinctively, not thinking anything of it, but when she looked back there was a little something different about the grin those now-black lips wore.

With a gasp, Tracer started to laugh and gestured at the Frenchwoman’s outfit. “Did you steal this?” Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes but the laughter didn’t stop. “Oh my god, I can’t- I cannot believe you’re going on a date in a stolen dress!”

“Yes, well, I am also going on a date with a stolen woman, so,” Widowmaker murmured, stepping closer and wrapping one arm around Tracer’s waist, “allons-y, souris. Today, I show you how to fly…”

As she led the way toward the balcony, Tracer had a moment to wonder what she meant. Just a moment, though, and not enough time to ask, before Widowmaker tightened her grip around Tracer’s waist and leapt, throwing them both off of the balcony and toward the city streets below.

Mostly, it was a quiet day. The sirens a few blocks off had stood out easily against the placid backdrop, but now a far greater scream pierced the day. Tracer’s, specifically. In a second it resolved into a shrieking laugh as Widowmaker’s grappling hook caught on something and they were pulled inward toward it, swooping across the street.

“Give a girl a warning first, aaaaah!” Tracer sounded like a kid on a roller coaster. Felt like one, too,
as they slowed going up the arc before Widowmaker re-launched the grapple to send them into a new one.

“Ah, but then I would not get to hear these screams of delight,” Widowmaker explained over the wind with a chuckle, holding the other woman in tight. Her arms were slim, but incredibly strong despite that - part of the reconditioning and experimentation that had made her into what she was.

It was not so different from flying in a plane, but new and unexpected enough to send Tracer’s heart racing as they swooped through the air. Her hair was blown back from her face, her eyes narrowed against the wind. She wrapped both of her arms around Widowmaker reflexively, squeezing tight - and followed suit with her legs a moment later as they continued to soar.

A steady grin stayed fixed on Widowmaker’s lips. It wasn’t overly a long journey - one could make quick progress at high speeds and altitudes, unfettered by paths and sidewalks, swooping and swirling around corners of buildings. The city below seemed to take no note of their progress, and that was just the way she liked it.

Soon, they came to a rooftop and Widowmaker slid easily to a knee, depositing Tracer gently on the ground as the grappling line whirred back into retraction. Not the ground, actually, Tracer noticed - a blanket, set up complete with candles and a picnic basket. Two bottles of something, presumably wine, and a pair of fluted glasses completed the ensemble. Lena shuffled a little closer to it all on her knees.

“Wow,” she murmured appreciatively, eyes almost as wide as her smile. “This is so… this is so cute!” She glanced over to the blue woman’s face with a teasing look on her own. “Who’d’ve thought you’d have it in you?”

Widowmaker smirked. “I have many things in me, cherie,” she leaned forward to murmur softly in Tracer’s ear. “And if you knew the things in my head, you would call this anything but cute…” Her black lips twitched into a grin as she felt the other woman shiver - the instant gratification of reaction. They were all just so great, when it came to that perky little mouse - so grand, so large.

As if nothing had been happening at all, Widowmaker fell back to an easy sitting position, one leg almost entirely exposed from her dress and crossed overtop of the other, and Lena couldn’t take her eyes off of it.

“Wine, cherie?”

Tracer looked up suddenly with a little gasp to see a bottle being offered underneath a black grin.

She just nodded, clearing her throat as she tried to keep her blush to a minimum and failed. Widowmaker only chuckled as she went about her work, humming idly and softly. Tracer sat and listened to the song, something she thought she vaguely recognized - something classical - as her partner poured two glasses of wine and pulled out food from the picnic basket. Sandwiches, what looked like potato salad, little fruit cups for dessert - she’d really gone all-out for this.

It was almost as if it had already been prepared, actually. Almost exactly like that.

“Were you planning this ahead of time?” Tracer inquired, narrowing her eyes slyly above her grin. She took a sip of wine - she would’ve preferred beer, but this was nice too. “You were, weren’t you? No way did you do this all since you jumped out the window!”

“Mmm… not quite,” she muttered, pulling some cutlery out of the basket. “I admit, I am… ill-prepared to carry on a romance. I was required to… improvise.”
At that, Lena frowned a little. *What is that look on her face? It seems a little familiar, is... her eyes widened as she realized where it was familiar from. “Oh m- did you steal this too?”*

Widowmaker’s eyes flew to hers, narrowed. There was no response, though - not at first, not until she dropped her gaze to the blanket they sat on. “It... may have been intended for another. People should not leave such things unguarded in public.”

Tracer’s eyes squinted playfully, her words taking on an unimpressed but teasing tone. “Define unguarded.”

“There were no guards stationed at it.” The frenchwoman sipped at her wine idly.

Tracer’s mouth dropped open and she started to laugh, and after a moment Widowmaker followed suit - not as deeply and not as loudly, more of a hum into her wine glass, but it was something at least.

“You-” the brit shook her head. “Okay, you are- points for the romantic gesture, really, but next time? Try not to steal it all, okay? Or any of it. I’ll go pay for the dress later, and- and maybe we can do something nice for whoever’s picnic this was supposed to be.” She took a bite of her sandwich, brows pulling together. “Mmm, because this is a really good sandwich and they deserve to be compensated for it.”

“And how do you propose we find them, *cherie*?” Widowmaker tossed her hair over her shoulder a little. “The dress is simple enough if you are *determined*, but how do we locate whoever this belonged to, *hmm*?” She raised an eyebrow with a triumphant grin, but Tracer only laughed.

“Oh, don’t ask *me!* ” Lena shook her head with a grin. “You’re the one who’s gonna be finding them!”

The frenchwoman balked, recoiling a little as a hand flew to her chest. “*Moi*?”

Tracer nodded happily, raising her eyebrows and biting into her sandwich again with a hum.

Black lips met glass as Widowmaker took a sip of her wine, wondering if it was worth the effort. The rewards were practically nonexistent, but the effort was just as little - she’d stolen the man’s wallet along with the picnic so an address would be easily found.

“Why didn’t you buy it, anyway?” Tracer quirked an eyebrow, taking another drink. “The dress, I mean. It’s- don’t get me wrong, it’s absolutely lovely, but why bother stealing it?”

With a sigh, her partner rolled a shoulder and her eyes drifted off. “It is not so easy to simply make a purchase when one has a face as recognizable as this,” she gestured idly at herself. “I cannot walk the streets without attention, *certainement* not with my rifle and armour.”

Tracer snorted a laugh. “What, and you couldn’t change outfits before you went shopping?”

At that, it was Widowmaker’s turn to laugh. “*Ah, ma souris* - oh, but you *are* amusing. To think that I have any other outfits!” She laughed again, shaking her head, long hair rippling over her shoulder and down her side. “Why, where would I wear them, *hmm*?”

“You don’t have *any* other outfits?” The brit looked back disbelievingly, “I don’t know that I believe that.”

Widowmaker’s eyes widened as she gasped. “But *cherie!* You think that I would *lie* to you?”
Between the shock on her face and the tone of her voice, it was clear what Widowmaker wanted her to think, but Tracer’s eyes narrowed a little over a smirk. This was probably as fair a place as any to start being honest. “Yes, I do - if you thought you should.”

The shock dropped away and was replaced with a predatory grin once more. “Good,” the assassin murmured through grinning lips. “You are learning.”

Tracer giggled softly and picked up a fork to try some of the potato salad, which was as delicious as the sandwich had been. “Mmm! Oh, I still can’t believe you stole this, but it’s delicious and very sweet.” She giggled again, raising her gaze to meet the other’s. “If a little misguided.”

“Stolen dress, stolen meal, stolen woman,” Widowmaker shrugged, “do you not appreciate symmetry?”

With a light laugh, Lena leant forward and pinched one of those blue cheeks just lightly. “I do, but I appreciate kindness a little more - and besides, you didn’t steal me.” She grinned, settling back with a hum. “I was given to you!”

There was something in her that wanted to deny that, something that wanted to say no - that she had trapped Tracer, as a spider always traps its prey. As a cat always catches its mouse. Whatever her little petite had or hadn’t done or said meant nothing - Widowmaker would have pulled her in sooner or later, regardless.

She didn’t, though. Didn’t say anything of the sort, only let the conversation lapse into silence for a moment. It was because she didn’t want to lay everything out - wanted to have a few cards still held close to her chest. That was all.

“So… what should I call you?” Tracer studied the blue woman across her glass. Everything about her was so different, it was difficult to remember that this was the same woman who held that rifle with such coldness. The only things that seemed the same were her eyes, those calm golden-yellow orbs which looked back at her now.

“Call me?” Widowmaker chuckled. “Whatever you wish, souris.”

“How about…” she hummed, thinking back. What was her name back before… Amélie, yeah! Maybe, then... “Amé?”

Gold eyes narrowed and her response was instant. “Not that.”

It was such a swift reaction that despite it all, Lena recoiled a little. Widowmaker sighed at that, pinching the bridge of her nose with her eyes closed. “I am… sorry, souris, it is just… that woman is dead. She has been for years - she died with her husband. I murdered them both in one stroke, in one instant, two lives ended.”

Tracer swallowed slowly. Even more slowly, she shuffled forward until she could rest a hand on the other woman’s knee. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to bring up any painful memories.”

Widowmaker chuckled softly, reaching out and laying a hand atop Tracer’s without looking at her. “You did not, souris - pain like that is… it is beyond me as I am.” The brit frowned, but didn’t interrupt as the other woman continued. “It is merely a reflex. I…” she sighed, shaking her head. “I can recall who I was, but I am not her anymore. You must understand.”

It almost brought tears to her eyes to watch - not because Widowmaker seemed hurt, but because she didn’t. She just looked… lost. Confused. Like she was trying to reach out for something that wasn’t there.
“Maybe something cat related?” Tracer offered softly with half a laugh and a shrug. “In honour of the whole ‘mouse’ thing?” Widowmaker laughed to that, grinning and stroking a hand down the brit’s cheek.

“Ah, cherie…” she shook her head with another chuckle. “A good idea, yes.” She dropped back to the other topic. “It is sweet of you to care how I feel, I suppose, but really it is caring in vain.” She rolled a shoulder in a smooth shrug, one chilled hand still resting on Tracer’s as the other went to lift her wine glass to her lip for a mouthful. “I am, quite simply, numb.”

“That sounds horrid,” the brit murmured as she ate another forkful of potato salad and took another sip of wine. “Is that part of the conditioning as well?” It was odd to see her so calm while talking about things that were so awful, but it seemed like the best thing to do would be to return the favour. Let the other woman set the tone, as it was.

Widowmaker drained her glass and refilled it, tipping her head to the side. “Oui. One part side effect, two parts intent - but it was not meant to always be this way.” She glanced over at confused eyes before gesturing slightly with her glass.

“Alors, I explain - this,” she gestured over herself, “the blue, the heart, all of it - it was only meant to be a temporary thing. Activated upon combat and de-activated when it was safe once more, but…” her face relaxed into complete emptiness as she sighed, and then shrugged.

How much was worth saying? Was there anything to be gained? Anything to be lost? How was it possible that she had a nine percent increase, just sitting here and speaking? No toying, no teasing, no conflict, nothing. What could possibly count as success here?

“It hurt too much when I attempted to return to a resting state, to leave combat behind,” she confessed placidly with a shrug, not meeting the other woman’s eyes. “The pain of what I had done. I could still remember, and… I think it may have been not quite foreseen. So I stay like this. Combat-ready, at all hours. I suspect Talon is quite pleased by it, in fact,” she chuckled, shaking her head.

Tracer shook hers as well, but it was an entirely different gesture - one of shock and horror. “So you’re just… stuck like that?”

Widowmaker chuckled a little, nodding. “Non, souris - not quite. I am always like this, yes, but I am not stuck. It is my only choice. You asked me last time what I felt. Heart rate is close to all that I can detect. Basic physical sensations, as well.”

“Like warmth?” Tracer wondered, stroking a thumb along blue skin with a smile, and Widowmaker smiled.

“Oui, warmth. You are very warm, souris.”

Tracer laughed a little, grinning. There was a lot more to learn here, definitely, but it was probably best not to pile on too much at once. Particularly when it had a tendency to drag the mood down a little - at least for her. Maybe her new blue girlfriend didn’t have that problem, but…

“Mmm,” Tracer shivered a little as a gust of wind came along. “Little chilly, actually - d’you mind if I nip off and grab a jacket?”

Widowmaker shrugged idly. “If you wish, cherie - or we could simply move inside. My apartment is only downstairs.”

“Apartment?” Tracer exclaimed excitedly. “Oh, I’ve got to see this, definitely!”
They laughed lightly as they quickly packed everything back into the picnic basket. Tracer picked up the basket, and Widowmaker dealt with the blanket and bottles of wine. One of them was empty, the brit noticed idly as Widowmaker led the way to a door and then inside.

It wasn’t every day she got an offer like this, and she felt like she definitely needed to jump on it while she could. The chance to see the infamous Widowmaker’s apartment? Far too good to pass up.

Chapter End Notes

Two parter, kinda.

I mentioned this on my other fic, but it's interesting to me to contrast the various stats of my different fics: word-count as considered against hits, kudos, comments, etc. and how that all relates to the content/subjects involved. I don't know if it's necessarily indicative or anything, but I think it's interesting!

You may notice (or maybe not, heh) that I've changed the update schedule a bit. I'm gonna try to do a chapter here every two or three days instead of every four. I've got a nice backlog so I think I should be able to maintain it pretty well. People seem to be less active on weekends so I'm thinking I might instead do Monday/Wednesday/Friday updates? What do you think - preferences?

Also also, side note, if at any point you're curious about what any particular character is doing at any given time, please ask! I have a fairly good idea of it all and I always appreciate the opportunity to flesh the world out a little more thoroughly - I'll do up a little one-shot and dedicate it to you :)

Translations:
Mon dieu, ma cherie == "My god, my dear"
parfait == "perfect"
allons-y == "Let's go"

So, this is happening now - I like the playfulness between them, it's fun. Come on back next time: Winston meets Orisa's mom (Efi), and Efi's dad as well. He's beautifully nervous, of course. Tracer also gets to see the inside of Widowmaker's apartment!
Up Close and Personal

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Winston is introduced to the city and people of Numbani - notably, Efi Oladele and her father. He's a little taken aback and maybe a little overwhelmed by it all. Tracer gets an introduction to Widowmaker's apartment, and does her very best to not insult it; her and Widowmaker talk, for better or for worse.

JFL Summary: Winston hasn't been drinking too much vinegar, Efi's a prankster, and Mr. Oladele has a Mysterious Past (trademark). Widowmaker's apartment sucks and her mattress is still wrapped, but at least she's got a tasty stolen picnic to make up for it? Tracer feels like a chilly bug and kind of accidentally talks about hating her new girlfriend, but just like... a little bit.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker stopped by Tracer's apartment and inadvertently broke a glass door. Tracer mentioned dating and Widowmaker was reticent to accept at first - but when an opportunity to turn that into teasing Tracer and getting reactions out of her presented itself, the frenchwoman was happy to leap on it. She ran off and stole both a dress, and a picnic, in order to take Tracer out on a rooftop date - Tracer was overall happy with it and thought it was cute, but ensured that the boutique would be repaid for the dress, and the man for the picnic as well. They talked on the rooftop for a while, and then decided to adjourn indoors to Widowmaker's apartment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So then, Mister Winston. What are your intentions with my Orisa?”

She may have only been eleven. She may only have come up to his hips, if that. She may only have weighed as much as one of his fists. As she stood there, arms crossed, lips in a flat line and a stony expression on her face, one thing was certain.

Efi Oladele terrified the living daylights out of Winston nonetheless.

His eyes flicked nervously to Orisa, one finger tugging (also nervously) at his collar as he cleared his throat. Nervously as well. All of it was nervous, every thing about him - he was one big ball of nerves.

“Well, I, um, I-” he stammered, “I-I don’t know that- or rather, I suppose it’s- I wouldn’t say, um, that it’s really- or should I say instead that-”

Efi kept her arms crossed in front of her, looking up with those tiny yet stern dark eyes. Winston started to truly panic - he looked to Orisa, standing behind the young girl, but Orisa only looked back with a minuscule shrug.
She was very confused. She had never seen Efi like this before - except for maybe that incident with the bus, she had been quite stern then. Or perhaps the time in the park that Orisa had stopped a squirrel from being hit. Or maybe when she’d come to a cat’s defence by the roadside, much to the detriment of a parked car or three. Still, with those exceptions - and possibly a few others - she had never seen Efi so stern. It had seemed like the young inventor had been quite excited about Winston when Orisa had related stories to her.

“I’m only joking!” the little girl laughed suddenly, her whole face brightening as she stepped forward, taking one of Winston’s hands with both of her own and pulling him forward. “I was only teasing - come, come! Let me show you my house!”

Winston chuckled, shooting Orisa an uneasy glance but she looked positively delighted so he tried to just move past it. Efi tugged him along, urging him into the towering glass spire.

The whole city looked magnificent. From the distance, as the dropship had approached, it had looked like a tuft of gleaming grass - every artificial blade a building of glass and steel, glittering in the hot sun. Closer still, the natural aspects had come out once more: plants and gardens dotted around the city’s terraces. The whole thing seemed to spring from nowhere and contain an entire world suspended above the earth.

It had reminded Winston of certain trees in the rainforests, ones which contained whole ecosystems in their branches. Little pockets of soil in which other plants grew, small cupolas which held water. There were animals which would live their whole lives on these trees - would be born, grow, and die, moving from branch to branch or level to level and never knowing that the world was larger than that. For them, he supposed it sort of wasn’t.

The gorilla pulled his mind back to the present, though - away from the general awe-inspiring nature of the city that surrounded them and back to awes that were closer at hand. Some quite literally.

Orisa came around to hold Winston’s other hand once they were through the doors, and Efi led the way in. “This is my home!” she announced happily with a wave. “You may see many of my little drones running about - don’t worry, nothing bad will happen.” She paused for just a second, then glanced back to him a little worriedly. “Probably. You haven’t drank too much vinegar lately, have you?”

“Um,” Winston chuckled nervously and tried for a grin. “I- I don’t think so. Define too much?”

Efi’s lips twisted to one side as she looked upward, clearly unable to quantify it - but trying. Trying in vain, as it turned out, and she waved a hand dismissively. “Well, it should not be an issue. The window-cleaners may try to wipe your face if you have. I don’t know why.” She sighed. “It doesn’t make any sense!”

“You will figure it out, Efi,” Orisa reassured her creator. “You are very clever and entirely capable.” Efi just giggled and led them up a staircase. Winston flinched a little as a small, flying drone came nearby with what looked like a squeegee of some sort. A window-cleaner, presumably. However, it didn’t try to wipe his face.

At least it was good to know he wasn’t drinking “too much” vinegar. In fact, he’d never drank any vinegar, and was starting to wonder how that particular bug had been discovered in the first place. There was no time to ask, though, as Efi was shouldering her way through a large pair of doors.

Or at least, trying to shoulder her way through. They were much, much larger than her, and only swung the slightest amount as she pushed against them. With a small noise Orisa reached out her free hand and gave the doors a gentle shove, holding them out of the way.
“Thank you!” Efi chimed, smiling up to her friend and pulling Winston through the doors. “Now, Mister Winston-”

“Just um- just Winston, thanks,” the gorilla corrected gently, then added with a chuckle, “Mister Winston was my father!”

Efi giggled and nodded, and Orisa flashed him a curious glance, but there was no time for her to ask right now. Efi was continuing. “Winston, then - Orisa has informed me that you are a scientist, yes? I suspect you will like this, then. This is the library,” she nodded her tiny little head and Winston stared around at the shelves. Multiple stories high, with little drones flitting about to and fro, fetching books down or setting them away on the shelves. Huge windows let in glorious amounts of light, and gave beautiful views of the city outside as well.

“It’s magnificent,” he murmured. “The library, the city, all of it.”

“Orisa too?”

Winston’s eyes widened but Efi’s giggle was reassuring and he chuckled, nervously but genuinely. “Yes, Orisa too.”

The little girl laughed again. “Good! That is good to hear - so, Orisa tells me you grew up on the moon? What was that like?” Efi jumped up into a padded leather chair, turning to face him with a wide and curious grin on her face.

Winston shrugged a little, sitting on the floor with a chuckle. “Well, it was… it all seemed quite normal to me, then. After all, it was just the way things happened - I didn’t know there was any other way to grow up, really. I really liked it, though. Absolutely loved it, even though not all of my brothers and sisters - uh, so to speak - necessarily agreed. In hindsight though, I suppose that-”

“Efi?” A voice drifted through from somewhere above them. “Have you done your homework?”

“Dad!” Efi rolled her eyes, “but Orisa’s friend just got here - the gorilla scientist from the moon!”

“That’s nice, sweetheart, but you need to do your homework.”

Efi sighed, her little shoulders drooping. “I know,” she muttered before flashing Winston a smile. “Sorry Winston - Orisa can show you around. I will meet with you again after I am finished, but-” her lips took on a sly grin as her eyes flicked up and then back to his face. She leaned forward in the chair, cupping one hand around her mouth. “Maybe you could help me with some of the math ques-”

“And he can’t help you with any of the questions!” The voice came from upstairs again, with laughter underlaid beneath the words. Efi sighed again and nodded, hopping out of the chair and giving Winston a brief hug before she jogged out of the room.

The gorilla chuckled a little and then turned to Orisa with a shrug. “Probably for the best. Math’s not exactly my strong suit anyway, heh.” Orisa giggled a little as Winston gave her a bit of a hug, but both of them looked up when they heard a little cough. Somebody clearing their voice.

Mr. Oladele, as it would turn out - smiling down faintly from a small alcove above. “Do you mind at all if we speak, Winston? Alone, perhaps?”

Orisa patted at the back of his hand and moved toward the door as Winston’s eyes widened a little. He tried to shoot her a look that said “no wait please don’t” but it didn’t come across. She just waved and left.
When he turned around, Efi’s father was there on the ground floor. Winston didn’t know if he’d climbed down or been carried by drones, or some other method - but there he was with a smile and an outstretched hand.

It was almost comical, the difference in size as they shook hands - Winston’s enveloping the other man’s entirely. “It’s an honour to meet you, sir,” he nodded, readjusting his glasses.

“The same,” Mr. Oladele grinned widely. “Now… do you mind if we speak of Orisa for a while?”

Winston nodded, his eyebrows drawing a little closer together for a second. He took a seat on the floor at one side of a small table and Mr. Oladele took a chair at the opposite side, a look of thoughtful concern on his face. “She reminds me of my daughter in many ways. So hopeful, so full of life and wonder - she wants to help in any way she can…”

Winston could hear the unsaid “but” looming.

Mr. Oladele sighed, closing his eyes and tenting his fingers. “But… there is sometimes a question greater than whether something can be done, and that is whether it should be. Sometimes, my daughter does not ask that question - and sometimes Orisa follows suit. There have been…”

“The bus?” Winston raised an eyebrow hesitantly, and Mr. Oladele chuckled, nodding his head.

“Yes, the bus - that is a good example. My daughter, and Orisa as well, have very good hearts, you see. They are just inexperienced. Naive, perhaps, and…” he sighed, meeting Winston’s eyes with his own and a gentle smile on his lips. “I must sound like the worst stereotype of an old man, being distrusting of the new man in the house.”

They both chuckled a little at that. It was an odd sort of atmosphere, one Winston had never encountered before. He felt strangely not uncomfortable… and yet still, a little bit as if he were on trial. Maybe not trial, but observation, at least. He felt inspected and watched, but still supported; he felt like he was back home again. Back in Horizon, speaking with the scientists, knowing that he was at once both being judged and urged onward and upward.

“I have researched you, what there is to be researched,” Mr. Oladele smiled. “You seem to be a good man, and I respect what I know of you.” He sighed, slowly but heavily, his brow streaking across with wrinkles. Winston could feel another “but” coming along.

“But?” the gorilla prompted. This conversation didn’t need to be any more difficult than it needed to be, and he wanted to ease it if he could.

“But,” Mr. Oladele nodded with a small, grateful smile. “Orisa and my daughter both have been looking into Overwatch. Asking me about it - your former organization, and, Winston…” he shook his head, not breaking eye contact. “There is something which I do not respect.”

Winston was legitimately shocked. He knew that Overwatch had its critics, its detractors - but he never expected he’d find one in a city like this, a household like this. One full of such support and understanding, such open-mindedness.

“Let me explain,” the dark-skinned man nodded, seeing the surprise on the scientist’s large face. “Please, before you take offence, let me explain an old man’s worry.”

He’d said it more than once, and Winston felt the need to address it. “You’re hardly old, sir, but - of course, if you’d like to explain I’d be happy to hear it.”
Mr. Oladele laughed openly at that, and he wasn’t old but some parts of him looked it. His skin creased heavily around his eyes, his voice was smokier than Winston thought it maybe should be. Everything about him spoke of a man who had seen and done much despite his years.

“Not old in body, perhaps,” he admitted with a nod, “but maybe in spirit. I remember Overwatch and many of the things it did. Some were wonderful.”

He paused for a moment, turning his head to look out of the window. “Did you ever meet a scientist there by the name of Opara?”

Winston shook his head. “No, sir, I did not. I’m sorry.”

The other man dropped his head for a moment of silence before he spoke again. “No matter,” he turned back to Winston with a soft smile. He had hoped for perhaps some answers, after so many years - but some things were still lost. Perhaps they would never be found.

Mr. Oladele nodded a little as he continued his explanation. “My daughter, you see… she is well-intentioned, but small. Her drones may try to wipe your face,” he chuckled, “but that is only an annoyance at worst.”

One hand extended, gesturing to the doors. “Orisa is well-intentioned, but large and strong. She may slam a bus to a halt in order to save a stray cat, injuring bystanders in the process. Or worse.”

Winston nodded, swallowing slowly, not exactly liking the direction this was going.

Mr. Oladele’s outstretched hand came back to join the other and the two interlocked solidly, dark fingers interlaced and almost clenched. “Overwatch was well-intentioned. It was massive, and it was one of the foremost powers of the world. When it tried to fix a problem? The problem might have ended up nonexistent, but sometimes the question of what was paid, was not asked.”

Winston’s frown deepened a little. Who was this man, really? The scientist knew nothing about him, nothing at all except for him being Efi’s father, and that really didn’t tell him a thing.

...except that wasn’t true. It told him all he really needed to know - namely that Mr. Oladele, whoever he was and whoever he had been, was a good man. A man who would support and protect his child, even as she stretched beyond her own reach.

“I love Orisa as my own daughter,” Oladele continued, and Winston’s eyes snapped to his. “She is the third light in my life alongside Efi and my wife, and now I find out that she has been going on peacekeeping missions. She calls them that. Winston, I respect what I know of you… but I do still worry over what I do not know.”

There was a beat of silence as they met gazes. Mr. Oladele’s was hopeful and hurt, and a little bit chilling. A dark gaze from dark eyes. “Please, tell me you will do nothing to lead my daughters astray - either of them. Please tell me that it will only ever be peace.”

Winston nodded, slowly, dry-mouthed and reaching to readjust his glasses but pausing. Instead, he took them right off and set them down on the table, watching his own hands as he idly played with the glasses.

“My father,” he began softly, in lieu of a more direct answer, “was an optimist. He looked at a bunch of wild, angry, chaotic primates and thought… that there was promise there. Potential.” His brow furrowed a little as he let out a brief sigh before looking back to Mr. Oladele’s eyes. “He was right, I think, but maybe not exactly in the way he expected. There’s a lot that never made it back here to Earth.” Information… and other things too…
“He always taught me that I didn’t need to take the world as it seemed to be. That there was more to it - what the world could be - and that’s stuck with me, sir.” His large eyes drifted toward the window. “When I look around here… I think I see it. I think this is what the world could be. The gardens, the museums, the streets and the people. You, Efi, and Orisa… happiness. Harmony. Unity.”

When he looked back, Mr. Oladele’s eyes were fixed on him, but it didn’t feel like an accusation. They were deep and piercing, but Winston thought he recognized something in them. Maybe a lot. “I care for her too, sir. I would never do anything to hurt her. I am a scientist, first and foremost - exploration is my mission, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and understanding. I believe that is the way to peace. I see that here, helping this city to thrive, and I hope… I hope that maybe Orisa might be able to spread that elsewhere.” He sighed a little, rubbing at his jaw. “Goodness knows there are a few places that could use it…”

His eyes dwelled on the glasses sitting on the table. Such little things, but such sentiment to them. Thoughts - light and dark - flitted through his mind. History. Possibilities. Good and bad. He didn’t notice Mr. Oladele stand and approach silently, didn’t notice anything until the glasses lifted from the table and were held out by a pair of dark hands.

“Come,” the other man offered softly, laying a hand softly on Winston’s arm. “If you would see this city, I suspect you will need these…”

---

“This is your apartment?” Tracer murmured, looking around. It didn’t look like a person’s apartment. It barely looked like an apartment at all - blank white with nothing hanging on the walls, one chair, nothing on the kitchen countertops. Three little spiky cacti on the windowsill. The only thing that looked out of place - or maybe in place since it was the only bit that looked lived-in - was the standing mirror pushed off to one side.

Lena stepped further into the abode, staring with incredulity at the mattress which was shoved against the wall. It was still wrapped in plastic.

“It’s…”

Empty. It is empty - I’ve been into showroom apartments that look more lived-in than this. It doesn’t even look finished! Are the walls even painted? What the hell am I supposed to call this?

“Cozy! Very, um, spartan. Neat and tidy, yeah,” she nodded, murmuring, trying to take it all in. How is it even this small? I mean, this isn’t a flat - this is barely a room!

Widowmaker chuckled, setting the wine bottles down on the counter and dropping the blanket in a pile on the floor with a shrug. “It is somewhere to stay. That is all one needs of an apartment, is it not?”

That was a little more than Tracer could just let slide, and she arched an eyebrow. “Love, the mattress is still wrapped.”

Her golden eyes darted that way and she tilted her head. “Hmm. So it is. Understandable - I have never used it.”
Tracer frowned, setting down the picnic basket and laying the blanket out. “Where do you sleep?” And why’s it so cold in here? I swear it was warmer outside. That was half the point of coming in here! Shivering slightly, she saw the thermostat on the wall and went to turn it up.

“I have little need of sleep,” one shoulder rolled in a shrug as Widowmaker poured out more wine. “Occasionally I will drift off in the chair, there. The mattress just felt… approprié.”

“And the cactuses?” Lena rubbed at her arms a little, laying her backpack on the ground. Maybe I should bring a jacket next time.

“Cacti,” Widowmaker corrected, stepping closer and offering a glass of wine. “They belonged to a target, they would have died without water. My winsill was empty.” She shrugged, taking a mouthful of her drink. “Convenient circumstance.”

Tracer chuckled, shaking her head a little as she polished off her potato salad. “Well, don’t you know how to make a girl feel special!”

Those golden-yellow eyes narrowed playfully (or predatorially, Tracer still couldn’t quite decide which) as Widowmaker looked back at her. “I was speaking of the cacti, chérie - you never asked why I brought you here.”

The brit giggled a little, swirling her wine in her glass. She was starting to feel that pleasant lightheadedness that came from drinking it - she’d had a glass on the rooftop, and it seemed like Widowmaker opted for some pretty generous glasses. That little fuzz started to settle in that made everything feel nice and good. A little warmer, too, which was a welcome change. “Sometimes I feel like a bug around you.”

She blinked a little as the words filtered into her ears, and then glanced over to Widowmaker who wore a querulous look. “I- I mean,” she chuckled nervously, “like a fly or something. Like you’ve spun this web and I just…” she sighed, contentedly, laying herself down along the blanket until her free hand laid on Widowmaker’s knee. “I just can’t help but get all caught up in it.”

A deep chuckle sounded in Widowmaker’s chest, soft and smooth and powerful. She traced a chilled finger along Tracer’s jaw. “Why chérie,” she murmured, “that is only because it is true.” Again she swirled her wine and inhaled, longing momentarily for the nose of it but only in an abstract sense. “Right from the start, you stuck out to me.” A chuckle as she took a mouthful of wine. “Like a thorn, at first.”

Tracer giggled a little, shifting up until she could lay her head in the other woman’s lap. Her glass of wine lay unattended and half-empty off to one side near the picnic basket. “Tell me about it - practically infuriating at first!”

Black-stained lips curled into a smirk as Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed and shot down, meeting Tracer’s, but the brit only giggled and grinned. She was starting to see that gesture for what it was - not hostility at an accusation, but a begrudging admission of truth. Or at least, she thought so.

“Oui,” Widowmaker nodded, humming a laugh as she continued to stroke idly at Tracer’s warm skin - her cheek, her arm, every inch of flesh she could get at. Her pale blue fingers pushed fabric a little out of the way, shortening sleeves to grant more opportunities for contact, as the warmth of the other woman’s head began to fade into her legs. “It was. At first, I thought that was all that it was - you opposed me so openly, so brash, so…” she chuckled again, “foolish.”

Tracer shot her a glance at that, a smirk under narrowed eyes. The petting was nice and she picked up off of the trend, sliding her hand over Widowmaker’s exposed calf. It seemed almost impossibly
smooth, and incredibly firm as if the muscles were tensed up. Cool to the touch in here, still the same temperature as the air outside, give or take. It was a little like stroking a statue. She quite liked it.

“There was more to it, though,” Widwomaker nodded softly, smiling down to her partner. “It was fun, toying with you - seeing how you reacted when I poked.” She accompanied the words with a soft prod into ribs before returning to the warmer uncovered expanses of skin.

Lena giggled to that, nodding. “Yeah, I definitely started to do that too. How shocked you looked sometimes!” She laughed brightly, grinning up to Widowmaker who stared down softly, and flipping over onto her back so she could look up from the blue woman’s lap. “Those little gasps you’d get when I crept up on you.”

“Mais, I was surprised,” she chuckled a little, still marveling at the reaction she was experiencing. The excitement of having an enemy combatant in her abode, perhaps - or a simple reaction to the temperature, she wasn’t sure. It could have been a hundred things, and probably was. Bits and pieces of different reasons, all contributing to an oddly increased heart rate, a peculiarly intense sense of contentment. She was outright pleased at the way things were going. It seemed like something she’d lost hold of. Now, though, it was here, and she wanted to push it on for everything it was worth.

“Have you looked out of the window, chérie?” Her gold eyes lifted that way - as little as she wanted the warmth to leave her, she was curious to see her little mouse’s reaction and that was always a strong impetus. Positive or negative, it would be something.

Tracer shook her head a little and then lifted it away, turning over and pushing herself upright to go over to the window. She wasn’t sure what Widowmaker would want her to see out of here - wasn’t sure what it would have to do with the conversation at hand.

As she got to the window, she first noticed that it was a nice view - out over London. She wondered why Widowmaker lived here: she certainly sounded French and so Tracer had just assumed that that was where she’d live. In a few seconds, though, she placed the location more specifically and started to get an inkling of an idea that crept into her slowly and coldly.

“King’s Row,” Tracer murmured, staring out of the window at a statue far below, next to a clock tower a few blocks distant. She couldn’t see the statue well enough from here but she knew it well - giant and golden, Tekhartha Mondatta holding hands with a young human child. “Why- why did you choose to live here?”

She stiffened a little, reflexively, as cold hands slid around her waist and a chin rested on her shoulder.

Widwomaker hummed, her eyes easily able to pick out the details of the statue below. “It felt right. Good. At first, I thought it was... a reminder of a job well done. A difficult mission, a difficult kill - I would get a little, tiny thrill, every time I glanced out of the window.” She sighed with a smile as she started to absorb Tracer’s warmth, pulling her back a little tighter even as Tracer felt her blood run a little colder.

“Now, though?” Widowmaker turned her head, kissing the other woman’s jaw just at the back, right below her ear, and getting a little shiver in return. “Now I think it is that it reminded me of you. That was the excitement it let me tap into, that was the thrill I received - yours, chérie.”

It should have been sweet. It was, really, Tracer realized with some part of her brain - but it was a little overshadowed by the chills. The reminders of murder, of assassination: even though she’d talked through it, thought about it. Even though she understood it a little better, she still couldn’t shake it. She just wasn’t over it yet - maybe Zenyatta was, but...
“It still bothers you.” Widowmaker’s words were soft, and she started to withdraw but Tracer caught her hands, held them in place with the other woman’s arms wrapped around her. She didn’t want this embrace to break.

“No, please don’t—” the brit sighed, but Widowmaker relented and remained, leaning forward and resting her chin on Tracer’s shoulder once again. The brit stroked at chilled hands, trying to warm them or at least to show that she was still here; she wasn’t running and she didn’t want Widowmaker to, either.

“I… I guess it does, yeah. It bothers me. I know…” another sigh. “I know all that’s been said about it. I don’t feel the same way I did, definitely, it- at first, I…: her voice dropped low, as she came around to a confession. “I hated you for it.”

Widowmaker didn’t react. She wasn’t surprised - she’d seen it herself in those soft brown eyes, so full of pain; heard it in that voice that frayed with rage. Yes, the little mouse had pushed it aside - only a short while later at the museum she’d been back at the jokes again, but Widowmaker was no fool. She knew pain ran deep in those who felt it, and she knew perhaps more than anyone how irrevocable it could be. How very much one could do and still never be rid of it.

Tracer let her head tip forward until it touched the glass, far colder than the blue skin against hers. It didn’t feel like a very “girlfriend-y” thing to say, not really appropriate for a third date. Or any date, for that matter, but she still needed to say it.

“I know,” Widowmaker murmured near her ear, squeezing her a little tighter. “I also know that it may hurt for a very long time. Someone you loved was taken from you, that does not disappear overnight, chérie.” The assassin chuckled softly, deep within her chest and dark, a humourless noise. “Except for perhaps one way and I cannot recommend that.”

She tried to turn, to look back curiously, but Widowmaker held her tight. Not unyieldingly, not captive, but just strong arms wrapped in a tight embrace that Tracer didn’t want to break so she didn’t really try.

“I promise you that if I did not do it, another would have. How many had tried already? Null Sector, L’Organisation du Liberation des Omniques, the ALF. He knew that his days were limited, he knew that his life would never end, it would be cut short - and he must have known all he needed to do to prevent it.”

A tiny hum of a chuckle, the smallest cold expulsion of air that tickled at Tracer’s collarbone as she interlaced her fingers with Widowmaker’s.

“Simply stop. He must have known that if he stayed inside, stayed silent, that he would no longer be threatened. Directly, at least - but…” Widowmaker sighed, shrugging a little against the warm woman in front of her. “He did not hide. I think, that night… I think if he had had his choice in the matter, he would have stayed right there at the podium. He would have refused to be silenced or chased away, and he would have stared right at me down the barrel of my gun.” The slightly trilled ‘r’ sent little shivers dancing through Tracer’s body.

“I think that, had I been on stage with him, he would not even have told me to stop. I think he would only have told me to wait, to let him make one final speech. I… I believe I would have let him, too.”

Widowmaker lifted her head suddenly as something warm touched her hand, falling on it. As she withdrew a little, Tracer turned around, tears trailing down her cheeks and dripping from her chin, but she didn’t look angry or afraid. She was smiling, and her eyes as she looked back at Widowmaker didn’t seem to be have anything hostile in them.
“I- I had no idea you respected him so much,” Tracer whispered, hanging her arms up over Widowmaker’s shoulders. For a moment, the frenchwoman wanted to protest - lips parted just slightly to say something, but then she reconsidered.

“I suppose I did,” she murmured. “I know I respected his strength of conviction, regardless of how foolish I thought his actions might be.”

Tracer hummed a little laugh as she nuzzled at the crook of that blue neck. “You used to call me that, you know,” she murmured a little teasingly. It felt better. It felt a lot better.

“Oui, I did, cherie - and it was true.” She chuckled a little before tightening her arms around Tracer’s back, pulling her in and lifting her easily up off of the floor. “Come, let us not stand. There are far better positions in which lovers may chat…”

Tracer just yelped a little in surprise and then giggled, pulling herself up higher and wrapping her legs around Widowmaker’s waist as the tall, strong, elegant woman stepped flawlessly around wine glasses on the floor and picnic settings on the blanket, never even hinting at the possibility of tripping over anything.

She stepped to the mattress still wrapped in its plastic and let the brit down easily, laying her flat on her back and leaning overtop of her. One hand tore the wrapper back and her other flew back, snatching up the edge of the picnic blanket. She tugged it over, pushing the basket off with a foot - everything she did she did in fluid motions, far more complex than they needed to be. Never only one thing at once, not if she could be doing five instead.

With a whirl, Widowmaker leapt over Tracer and pulled the blanket with her. It ballooned in the air and then settled gently overtop of them each as Lena looked over to see her new girlfriend wearing a smirk and a raised eyebrow. “Less chilled now, cherie?”

Giggling softly, Tracer nodded and then shifted over closer. “Get those arms around me again,” she sighed with a smile as she was wrapped up in another embrace, “that’s very nice.”

“Not too cold for you?”

“Of course not. Neither are your lips.”

A chuckle. “Cherie, wait until I-” Tracer yelped a little, the sound trailing into a laugh as Widowmaker lunged forward to latch on to her neck a little, chilled mouth right over her warm blood vessels.

“Oh, okay! Little bit cold,” she giggled, encouraging Widowmaker’s chin up until she could meet her mouth with her own. She sighed into the kiss, a tiny wanton moan escaping her nose at the contrast of temperatures, the way it seemed to accentuate everything. “But you know what? Honestly, I’ve always loved the cold…”

---

Orisa had rejoined them - Winston and Mr. Oladele, a man who was half a father and half a grandfather to her - on a balcony overlooking the gleaming city of Numbani. They’d gone together throughout the house for a while before other duties had called the man away, leaving only Winston and Orisa on their own.
There had been much to see, so much - she’d shown him through the very heart of the city, from the power distribution network which she had helped out at when a storm caused severe overloads, to the intersection where an elderly woman had wanted to cross the street and Orisa had caused a traffic jam by escorting her. Gardens and parks, museums, shops - the city seemed to have everything, and everyone in it seemed wonderful.

Winston was used to eyes on him whenever he left his abode. The looks he got tended to make those leavings as minimal, as few and far between, as possible. Not that people were necessarily afraid - some were, definitely, but others just wanted to mock him. They’d follow him along and make looking noises, scratch at their heads and underarms.

Not always, though. Some were wonderful - children, mostly. Some of them were scared, but some were delighted. Ones who hadn’t been taught how to be mean, yet; who looked at the world with wonder and delight. Winston was glad he’d been able to hold on to at least a little of that, and he recognized it as something he saw in many of his friends - Orisa, Tracer, even Athena to an extent. She was dryer than the other two, perhaps, but no less fun in her own way and no less interested in the world.

Here though, here - this was a city which seemed filled with the same. Every set of eyes Winston met held only delight, the people walking past wanting only to shake his hand or take a picture with him, to ask how his day was and what he thought of the city. Their city.

A few wanted his autograph, recognizing him - and to his surprise they didn’t pull up old posters of Overwatch on their screens, for the most part: they pulled up entries he’d made into scientific journals. They showed him copies of his books. They held up his work, his contributions to science and society, and spoke of how much of an inspiration he was - young and old, children and adults, human and omnic alike.

By the time the sun started setting and they’d found a quiet place, Winston was almost past his limits. A young boy was skipping away happily, hand in hand with a taller omnic who had bright pink artificial hair streaming from one side of her head. “I can’t believe I got to meet Winston, mommy!” the boy shouted in glee. “This is the best day ever!”

“Winston?” Orisa’s soft voice drew his eyes and he looked over with a slight, surprised noise. “Why are you crying?”

“Well, I-” his voice cracked a little and he laughed, lifting his glasses to wipe at his eyes. “It’s okay, it’s- they’re happy tears. This was just a really beautiful day… a little bit overwhelming.” He sighed, leaning over toward her. “Thank you for it - and for your concern, too.”

“I want you to be happy,” she explained in that humming mechanical voice and Winston laughed a little.

“I am. I really am.”

“Oh. That is good.”

They leaned against each other, looking out at the sun drifting lower on the horizon, and neither of them wanted to leave. “It was almost like a dream, coming here,” Winston murmured as he took Orisa’s hand in his, shaking his huge head softly. He took a huge lungful of air and let it out slowly in a contented, yet resigned, sigh. “Now, though… I think it’s time to wake up.”

Orisa nodded sadly. “I know. We will see each other again.”
The gorilla chuckled, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “Of course we will. Very soon, too - phones, cameras,” another chuckle, “distance doesn’t mean what it used to. I mean I can always fly to you in a few hours…”

She turned toward him and pulled him in close, sighing heavily. A gesture with no purpose for her, save expression. “When you leave, I think my heart will go with you. I must stay here though. My people may need me.”

“No, of course,” Winston whispered, nuzzling gently at the top of her head. Half of the softness of his voice was due to the sentiment of the moment. Half was due to his throat closing up tight. “I-I think mine will stay here with you. Your people are very lucky to have you. So am I.”

She hummed delightedly, nodding into his chest and chin and squeezing him even tighter still, head turned off to the side to keep from impaling his throat with her tusks. They both had their commitments, their lives to return to - but that didn’t mean they couldn’t enjoy this intersection here and now.

“I’ll leave in a few minutes,” he murmured into her metal skin and she nodded against him silently as he let his eyes slide shut. A few minutes more. The world can wait a few more minutes...

Chapter End Notes

I like WinRisa! I don't know if anybody else does, but I think they're cute. Efi is also excellent, and I wanted to dive into her parents a little more. I mean, they went to a lot of trouble to help her out with Orisa and just generally - taking her on trips, supporting her inventing, stepping out on a limb to get the discarded OR-15 bots from the Numbani government. For that matter, they just had the money and position to even start with that in the first place, so I thought they deserved a little exploration at least. Mr. Oladele will come back into the story, but not for quite a while - it's gonna be pretty long, folks. You're welcome, and/or sorry, as required, heh :D

So, a little more characterization for all of these folks and for their relationships as well - it was important, to me, to show that Tracer didn't necessarily just throw herself into Widowmaker's arms and lose all the feelings from beforehand. She's better at handling them, but the killing still bothers her and she doesn't have a hundred percent trust right from the get-go. For that matter, neither does Widowmaker abandon her own morals (such as they are) - but neither of the pair are unbulging, either; I wanted to show that there is some compromise happening.

...even though it's probably mostly slanted toward Widowmaker. But I mean, we can't be too surprised by that, eh? :D

Translations:
approprié == "appropriate"

Next chapter we meet up with the Oldies and Goldies - Reinhardt, Jack, Ana, and Torblerone (heh), as well as Torby's new little friend, Bastion. Jack, after his talk with Tracer, has decided she's right - they owe the world more than just laying back and giving up. A soldier's war is never over, and he'll fight to his last breath if it means
saving even one single life.
The Old Guard Rides Again

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Soldier: 76, feeling somewhat inspired by his latest chat with Tracer, has decided that maybe the world needs a bit of a helping hand whether it wants it or not. He gathers the old gang back together again - Ana, Reinhardt, Torbjörn and himself - on a mission to try to de-escalate the situation that's been rising. It's not their first time in action, although there are a few surprises in store; after all's said and done, Jack's left in an uncomfortable position when he gets back to base and it's time to face the music.

JFL summary: Jack likes bars, Reinhardt likes Ana, and Ana likes shooting people - but she hates lutfisk. Bastion likes Ganymede but hates RED. About a dozen mentions are made of old stories or previous missions they've been on (which could be written if people want :D). Winston misses Orisa and Athena cheers him up with peanut butter. He talks with Jack about ice and bridges.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: some traumatic memories/thoughts from both Ana and Bastion. I'm so sorry for hurting Bastion. I love them.

Previous Chapter Summary: Winston and Orisa visited Numbani - he was initially concerned about Efi but she promptly showed him all around cheerily. Her father, on the other hand, was a little bit more concerned. He sat Winston down for a conversation, about Overwatch and the dangers it had posed and might pose again; he expressed his concern for Orisa's safety, but Winston was able to convince him that all was well and would continue to be. The day drew to a close and he headed back to Apeldoorn. In London, Tracer spent the afternoon at Widowmaker's apartment - if a single room with only a chair and a wrapped mattress as furniture could really be called an "apartment". They spoke more intimately than they had in the past, Tracer getting a few chills at some of Widowmaker's confessions - mentions of her conditioning, her memories, her state. She was conflicted by the realization that the apartment looked out over Mondatta's memorial statue, but she refused to let her own emotions cause a rift between herself and the frenchwoman if she could help it. She might not have all of her emotions nailed down a hundred percent, but she knows enough to be able to deal with it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Calling this a bar would have felt just wrong, but Soldier: 76 didn’t know what other word to use. He was out of his iconic jacket and mask - at least, for a minute - and the unfiltered smoke wafted into his nostrils. Heavy and sweet, acrid; tobacco and opium and some others things as well. The dense smell of ozone, a byproduct of a drug for omnis called E7. Dim flashes and sparks guttered, flames flickering and all casting shadows on the vaulted ceilings and dozens of cloth hangings that draped down into the space.
He liked it. It was his kind of place - maybe not as good as a road-house back home, but he could blend in here to the noise and the clamor. Felt like he didn’t even need to try to.

“Have you heard that the Shrike has been spotted in these parts?”

The voice which fit in perfectly - thick, heavy, practically battle-scarred - shook him from his reverie and had him shaking his head. So much for blending in. Guess I’m as conspicuous as ever.

“Reinhardt, you old dog,” he chuckled, clapping a hand on his old friend’s shoulder as the massive man worked himself into the stool adjacent. “Didn’t recognize you outside of the monkey suit.”

“Don’t let Winston hear you say that,” Reinhardt warned lightly, his one good eye twinkling with joy. “Truly though - I’ve heard rumours of the Shrike around this area. I swear I saw her myself earlier,” the grizzled veteran grinned. “Looking just as stunning as ever.”

Jack opened his mouth - almost managed to say something, but somebody standing behind them cut him off.

“You old charmer. Watch your tongue, or you just might convince me to go after it…”

Reinhardt turned around, chuckling gently, and Ana was already offering her hand with a smirk. He took it and pressed it softly to his lips, meeting her eye with his the whole time and grinning. “Ah, my Ana - you are looking as lovely as ever. You must tell me how you manage to age in reverse!”

“Come now Reinhardt,” she nudged him in the shoulder. “Don’t make an old woman blush. Or at least wait until you can back those words up with something a little more solid.”

“I so don’t need to hear this,” Jack grumbled, and both of his other friends laughed. It was an old game of theirs that was only half-serious - but it was that half that kept it working. If he’d known it was all just for his benefit, some act to embarrass him, it wouldn’t have worked. Bluffs only succeed if you sometimes follow through.

…and if people know you sometimes follow through. Jack wasn’t sure he’d ever get that image out of his head. Although sometimes, he had to admit, he didn’t really want to. They’d all been around for long enough there was no point hiding from each other.

Well, not anymore, at least.

They all ordered some drinks, Reinhardt going through a brief altercation because this establishment had no beer. “At all?” he demanded, shocked. “But… beer!” That eloquent argument aside, they had no beer. He settled on a gin and tonic, grumbling as he enveloped the tumbler in a large fist.

“You can’t hear the bombshells from here,” Ana commented idly at one point after they all had been served. The two men both grunted, nodded, and for a moment each of the three fell silent. They strained in their seats, bending an ear to the unheard noises of a conflict that was threatening to boil over throughout the entire city.

It had begun as something purely civil - unrest in the streets, riots, fighting. As soon as aircraft became involved, though, it was difficult to think of it as a minor conflict. Difficult to think of it as anything other than another war.

For the time being, it managed to be a small one. It hadn’t even been two weeks yet since officially becoming an armed conflict rather than civil unrest, but Jack and Ana each knew better than that. When they’d been in the city adjacent on what was technically prior to day one, things had seemed pretty well-set already. Gun emplacements, mortars, armoured vehicles - and more and more arrived
Overwatch was dead. Even when it had still breathed it was crippled in its final days, unable to step in and act. Now, though, some of them were back, and they didn’t give a damn about any Petras Act. This thing could become catastrophic: civilians were already dying on all sides, and the only people who seemed willing to get involved were power-hungry militia themselves or tiny aid organizations who were only sweeping up afterwards.

So it fell to them. The old guard, in a way. Jack hadn’t checked with Winston - the ape had been out of the base and would’ve denied involvement anyway, and still hadn’t returned Jack’s message - but talking with Oxton had reminded him of all he needed to know.

He was done with sitting on the sidelines. Yes, Overwatch was dead - but they weren’t, and they could still do some good. As long as there was life in their bones and breath in their lungs - if they could stop even one person from dying…

That was why he’d called them. Not one last big hurrah, but one more. At least.

“The target is an older military bunker,” Ana explained, sliding her glass forward on the table. “Recently, it’s found itself under new management. A group of separatist rebels who call themselves “The Breath of Azzhir”, and they don’t have good plans. A few decades ago the bunker was used for chemical weapons storage - the kind that don’t get better with age.” Reinhardt chuckled and Ana started to shuffle a few more things around on the table.

“They have probably moved more weapons in there as well. The compound is straightforward. Emergency landing strip here,” she laid down a napkin next to her empty glass. “Motorcade off to the side,” a small handful of peanuts scattered, “fencing all around - electric and barbed wire.”

“You mean chicken-wire?” Reinhardt tossed his head back for a laugh. “Well I am no chicke- hey, I was drinking that!” He stared at Ana open-mouthed as she snatched his glass from his hand, interrupting him mid-word.

“You can finish in a minute. I need it.” She set the drink alongside the napkin. “An old control tower, for aircraft and the artillery batteries. Thankfully the guns have long since been removed, but the whole compound is dug into the mountainside.”

“So, you’re thinking…” Jack leaned forward, studying the impromptu map and trying to guess at his old friend’s strategy. “Breach here,” he gestured at a point which would be near the base of the hills, “then you push to the tower. Cover from there, and then make our way further in.”

“Blow the front as a distraction,” Reinhardt suggested with a grin, “get them to come out of their holes and face us in battle!”

Ana chuckled, settling back and crossing her arms over her chest. “Just like in Minsk.”

“Wait,” Jack frowned, “if you’re supporting from the tower, then which one of us wears the dress?”

“What?” Ana turned to him with confusion clouding her face, then sudden understanding and she slapped a palm to her forehead. “No, the second time in Minsk, Jack. How could we pull it off like the first - do you see any ocelots here?”

“Thought you might be hiding one somewhere,” he murmured and Reinhardt laughed.

“It would hardly be the largest thing you have hidden! Nor the most dangerous, I think, haha!”
Ana smirked slightly but declined to comment. Next to her, the largest of the three of them leaned forward, studying the map in closer detail. “If we’re doing the Minsk play, we’ll need a gear-man, won’t we?”

Jack chuckled. He knew it’d be coming to this sooner or later - regardless of what plan they ended up with, the swede would need to be involved. “Just so happens, I called in the best in the business. Said he had to stay out of town, though. Something about his new dog, I don’t know.”

---

“Oh go way!” Torbjörn pleaded, practically whining. It wasn’t enough that he had to be here sitting outside the town around what was a truly sad little campfire, eating a half-burned tin of beans and missing his wife’s marvellous meals. Now this stupid machine wanted to play fetch again. “Yer not a dog, ye daft unit! And yer not comin’ with me either. You’ll go and get yerself killed! If you go and get yer radiator unit punctured again, I’m not patching it!” He growled, gritting his teeth at the Bastion unit which had followed him. Just like it always did these days.

“I didn’t know you’d be bringing a girlfriend, Lindholm - you never mentioned her in your letter!”

He span around toward the voice, waving his tin of beans menacingly. Or at least, he hoped it was menacing. “Amari! Don’t even think about it.”

“Think about what?” she murmured, stepping out from a bush and walking over to the fire. She sat down beside it, appreciating the warmth of it on her old joints as the other two came and joined in as well. Torbjörn didn’t answer, he just muttered and continued to eat his beans. Burned and yet still cold.

“Torbjörn, old friend!” Reinhardt announced loudly enough to shake the night. He laughed as he clapped the short man on the back, peering over his shoulder at the brown morass in the tin he held. “You are the worst chef in the world, my friend! I brought you something better than whatever tripe you’ve cooked up, haha!” He dropped a small box in the other man’s lap, taking a seat for himself. He’d donned his armour now, and held his hammer tucked under one arm - but his helmet was still off.

The engineer apparently took offence to that accusation, muttering under his breath as he unfolded the box open. “Think that I’m the worst chef in the… clearly never tried Oxton’s tuna casserole… Winston and his ‘banana surprise’ and I’m the worst chef in the world? Why I should-” he cut off as he got the box open, eyes widening in the firelight. “Lutfisk!” he cried, digging his fingers into the gelatinous fish and shoveling it into his mouth with a delighted laugh.

Ana shuddered, looking to Reinhardt with narrowed eyes. “You know how I feel about that hellfish. This is payback for Amsterdam, isn’t it?”

He looked back with a grin, his one blue eye glimmering with mirth. “Why, my Ana - I have no clue what you could be talking about! The staff at the hotel were entirely understanding, as were the firemen who showed up to cut me out of those handcuffs. Why would I want payback for that?”

Shuffling a little closer, Reinhardt leaned in with both brows raised. “No, my dear Ana - this is payback for not telling me sooner. You kept one of my dearest friends from me for years, you know.”
She sighed, shaking her head and brushing a hand against her brow. “Reinhardt, I know it was harsh of me to hide away, but I needed—”

“You needed time,” the man nodded, his voice as warm as the fire. “I understand, my Ana - you did what you thought was right. But do you know something?” He leaned in even closer, murmuring in a voice that barely made it the foot or two to her over the crackling of the fire. “That doesn’t mean I can’t get some payback for it all the same.” Chuckling, with a wink, he sat upright again.

She didn’t comment on that, just shook her head with a smirk while she tried to avoid looking at - or even thinking about - Torbjörn eating all of that fish. She tried to avoid hearing it, too. As a distraction, she turned and walked to the machine that shared the little camp with them. It seemed to turn to look at her as she stepped close, looking this way and that.

Bastion didn’t know who any of these people were. Short Man, yes, but now there was Tall Man and Less-tall Man and Woman as well. Some of them looked a little familiar. Some things could still be retrieved from the databanks, but after last time - after RED - Bastion didn’t try too hard anymore. The world was what it was. Bastion was afraid of what it had been. It was easier to forget.

Woman approached now, and Bastion cocked their head, whistling slightly. Woman stepped left and right, leaning her head in, and Bastion thought she might be trying to communicate. It would be best to respond then, maybe - maybe they could finally find somebody other than Ganymede to speak with! Not that Ganymede wasn’t good conversation, they were, but more could be better.

Spinning full-circle around the waist, the machine turned to face Ana at all times as she circled it. “Oh, don’t want me seeing your soft spot, hmm?” she chuckled darkly. Wonder if it’s still back there or if he removed it. “Looks just like the classic Bastions, Lindholm - why did you choose that as a basis for the design? Mobile turrets are a good plan, but that’s in poor taste even for you,” she chuckled again, reaching out to rap her knuckles on the thing’s chassis.

“S’not a turret,” Torbjörn grumbled. He was out of lutfisk and accordingly grumpier again. Plus he had to explain the damned dog. “It is a Bastion unit. Not original run, looks like it was one of the last ones off of the line. Damn thing’s defective. Quality control went out the window.”

Ana didn’t quite hear that far, though. She froze at the word “Bastion” with her knuckles just half an inch away from the metal, eyes locked on the thing’s optical sensor. It was glowing blue right now, but she couldn’t even count how many people she’d seen shredded to pieces downrange of one of these. Her breath caught in her lungs, and it felt like her blood was freezing in her veins.

Bastion didn’t know why Woman looked so wide-eyed. They also didn’t know what it meant. Ganymede hopped out of the little hidey-hole and tweeted, and Woman fell backward to the ground with a shout. Bastion thought they remembered seeing eyes like that before, thought they remembered seeing that reaction on people befo-

Ana shrieked as the thing’s optical sensor flickered red, just for a moment - it didn’t move, but that didn’t matter. In a flash, Reinhardt had his hammer in hand and 76 had his rifle, and both were rushing to her side. The Bastion unit didn’t move as Torbjörn came grumbling over as well.

Bastion didn’t like when that happened. They didn’t like the RED, it wasn’t fun - it was hot and harsh and they didn’t like the way they felt during it, angry and hate and kill and bad. Ganymede tapped their little beak on Bastion’s head and whistled. The RED went away and then there were more people there - all the many Mans standing around Woman who was on the ground. Bastion beeped down at her and waved.

“Defective, I toldja,” the engineer grunted, kicking at the Bastion with his boot. “Trust me, I never
would’ve brought it home if it posed the slightest chance of a threat. Damn thing’s delusional and just follows me around like a puppy.”

Bastion whistled happily, bouncing on its feet. There were so many friends here! Woman was a friend and Ganymede was a friend and Small Man was a friend and Tall Man was a friend and-

“I don’t trust it.” Ana muttered, pulling herself to her feet. “Who is to say it won’t go hostile and murder us all?”

“I am,” Torbjörn grumbled. “If it was gonna murder anyone, it would’ve murdered me first. I made sure of it.”

-so many friends Bastion had, so many except there was something familiar about Tall Man. Something about his armour, Bastion thought they’d seen it before and- EICHENWALDE.

The light on what served as Bastion’s head went solid red and stayed there, pointed directly at Reinhardt. As if glaring at him, staring him down, not moving in the slightest otherwise.

Reinhardt ground his teeth, gripping his hammer a little tighter - he’d fought these things before. They were like dragons pouring out fire, cutting down warriors and serfs alike - but every dragon had a loose scale. Torbjörn said it was defective, that this one had no flame… and here they were to fight not dragons but an army of bandits, rogues who would wreak havoc on the countryside.

Yet, still, he remembered.

“Your brothers… slaughtered mine,” Reinhardt’s voice was as strained as his jaw. Bastion didn’t move at all. Neither did anyone else. The massive man gripped tighter on his hammer’s shaft, he knew how quickly this could all go to hell. How quickly a dragon could unfurl its wings.

“...as my brothers slaughtered yours.” He sighed, heavily but not quickly, and pulled a hand free of his weapon. Holding it out flat, palm up in offering, Reinhardt Wilhelm - the last of the Crusaders who had fallen to a horde of these Bastion units at Eichenwalde, the last knight of a dead order - tried to make peace. “Truce?”

A true knight recognizes a good ally.

Bastion didn’t blink, really, but the RED flickered and flickered and when it did, they could see again. Saw Tall Man -CRUSADER, HOSTILE- holding out a -WEAPON, ARMED- hand? Short Man did that. Bastion whistled and beeped excitedly, patting their own hand against Tall Man’s and then watching him expectantly with blue-glowing sensors.

“Oh, go on, now you’ve done it,” Torbjörn groaned. “The daft thing’ll want to play fetch with ya now!”

“Fetch?” Ana asked breathlessly, still unable to tear her eyes away. It wasn’t in war-mode now, but who was to say when that would change? When it would start spewing hot leaden streams of death? “You cannot honestly expect me to believe that-”

“I do.” The engineer’s words were shorter than he was. “I didn’t want to either, I-” he sighed, shaking his head.

“I think…” Reinhardt still watched it warily, but this was so different. Sensor glowing blue, bouncing slightly on its hydraulics, bird on its shoulder. The metal dragon was almost cute. “I think if anyone has a reason to distrust these, it is our friend here.”
Jack snorted. “Yeah, or you.” He knew that it was a painful thing to bring up, but sometimes that needed to happen. “If Torbjörn trusts it, if Reinhardt can work alongside it, then so can I.”

Ana pushed herself slowly to her feet, her eye still fixed on the Bastion unit’s photosensor, glowing bright blue. In the days before the omnic crisis, she’d fought alongside units such as these - back before the God-programs had spread through their minds like disease, turned them against former allies and comrades-in-arms.

Most of the others hadn’t seen them turn like that, most of the others knew them only as enemies. They hadn’t been betrayed, they hadn’t had former friends turn around and try to kill. They didn’t still wake up in the middle of the night to fading visions of red-glowing photosensors and the feeling of metal hands clamped around their neck.

“Yes, well,” she cleared her throat, dusting off her jacket. “I refuse to be the most stubborn one out of the group.” She looked down to Torbjörn with a faint smile, the best she could offer at the moment. “I know you wouldn’t endanger your family. Or your friends. I just wasn’t expecting…” she trailed off, her words fading to silence in the night as she looked back to the Bastion unit.

The little bird on its shoulder hopped down the arm until it was near her, tilting its head and tweeting. Ana held out a hand and the bird leaned in closer - the Bastion moved its hand to push the bird at her - and she scratched it gently behind its little head. It fluttered its wings and chirped.

“Daft thing,” Torbjörn shook his head.

Reinhardt looked to him with a curious frown. “Fetch?”

“Like the stupidest puppy in the world,” the engineer confirmed. “Throw a wrench and it’ll just run right after it! Went through three fences before I had to start aiming more carefully.”

Reinhardt grinned with a devious laugh. “I think I might be getting an idea!”

“Uh-oh,” Jack groaned. “Not another idea…”

---

They reconvened to the campfire and chatted about tactics for a while. Ana scratched a much more detailed outline of the compound into the dirt, and all four gathered around with sticks to point and discuss. Occasionally the conversation would stumble when the Bastion unit came near and Reinhardt had to throw a wrench for it to chase after.

Early hopes that maybe the robot could be used in their assault were quickly shot down by Torbjörn. He’d never seen the thing fire a bullet - but he’d brought along several turrets and some other equipment. Reinhardt insisted that they could just throw the wrench into the compound, create a distraction at least, but even he didn’t have much vehemence behind the suggestion after playing a few rounds of fetch. It would have felt wrong to trick the machine like that.

Eventually, a modified version of their Minsk plan was laid out quite specifically and they snuffed the fire, making their way into the night. Ana donned her Shrike helmet, smirking as the night-vision cameras gave her a clear view of everything. It was a good plan. It played to all of their strengths - this wasn’t their first night on the job, and while they might have had a few more wrinkles than last time, they were no less ready.
She would be the first to act, taking position in a tree a few hundred feet shy of the fence line. The others huddled in various positions below her, all geared up and ready, and waited for her signal. She scoped in on the compound and took a good look around.

“Guards dotted about,” she murmured over the mic, “pretty standard distributions. Sloppy. Heavy near the front gate, half a dozen visible. Light flanks. I only see three. Two definite guardhouses, could be up to… four more. Maximum numbers probably three dozen up here topside.”

“Inside the mountain, unknown,” Jack sent over the comm and Ana nodded. They were stepping into a situation that they definitely knew less than everything about - she’d been scouting the place for days, and she had a rough idea of their troop complement but more arrived every day. Ejected citizens, angry and wanting to fight back; refugees with nowhere else to turn to, who would do anything for a roof and a bit of food. More than once she’d seen people being escorted in in handcuffs. Either prisoners or leverage - but they were the secondary objective.

“Big man, breach in one,” she murmured. “Light them up and open a hole.” They all knew the plan, but the patter came naturally. Reinhardt only chuckled back over the radio in confirmation.

The Shrike was something of a ghost story, these days. An inescapable force with unknown motives - most people who thought themselves sensible had decided that there were in fact a team of snipers working to uphold the bounty hunter alias. They were all wrong, though: there was only one.

Ana Amari, the Shrike, took aim now at a trio of guards - the first three who would react to the breach. The soldiers below were only expecting an assault from the front gate.

Sometimes, it was best to play into expectations. It was a lesson which Ana had learned a long time ago.

Her watch ticked. One minute. Below her, a distant but huge laugh shook the night.

“HERE I AM, YOU BASTARDS! COME OUT AND FACE ME!”

Ana chuckled as a huge metal-clad figure came rushing toward the front gates, flames lighting the night behind him. Reinhardt smashed right through the front gates and Ana dropped the guards as they raised their weapons. His shield came up as others poured out of barracks nearby, their bullets bouncing off harmlessly, and Ana started to take them out as well. They didn’t even notice at first - she took five to the ground before the others clued in and scrambled for defensive positions.

The other two of her team were unseen, but she knew they’d be making their entrance through one of the fences. An explosion suddenly rocked the night, lighting it up like day, and Reinhardt laughed. His booming voice carried clearly through the darkness, and sounded very at home laid over the sound of gunfire and shouting.

“YOU’LL NEED TO TRY HARDER THAN THAT!” He faced what had once been the aircraft control and artillery sighting tower. Two soldiers up there were reloading a rocket launcher. “COME DOWN AND FIGHT WITH HONOUR!”

They didn’t get a chance, nor did they get the opportunity to fire again. Ana hit each of them with a dart and they slumped. One fell out of the tower and hit the ground facefirst in a way that made her glad she couldn’t hear it from this far away.

“My Ana,” Reinhardt chuckled over the comm link, “if you keep doing such a fine job, I’ll have no fighting to do!”

She shook her head with a sigh and a grin. “Don’t worry, you old goat. You’ll get your glory.”
A fireball streaked through the compound, lighting the ground as it flew. It raced toward the motor pool, two or three soldiers diving out of its way. Flames scattered into the night as it struck the side of a jeep, but nothing more happened. It wasn’t supposed to, not yet - this was only the first phase. Distraction.

Ana made her way down from the tree and circled around the front of the compound, past shattered gates and flames - she stuck to the shadows and met up with Jack and Torbjörn far along the fence near the base of the hills, as gunfire and booming laughter echoed through the night. The Bastion unit turned to look at her as she approached, but it didn’t make any moves except for to wave. She waved back hesitantly and stepped to the fence.

The engineer was quick to melt a hole in the metal wires of the fence, pushing the white-hot sides back to make an easy opening. He and Jack were first through, followed by Ana, ducking quickly into the compound. The Bastion unit followed and just walked straight through the fence. Torbjörn stopped for a moment to berate it quietly, to remind it that this was the stealthy part of the mission and if it wanted to cause a ruckus it should go join Reinhardt, but Ana didn’t hang around to hear it all.

She made her way up a ladder onto the tower, circling around the side of the catwalk away from the compound. From here she could see all the soldiers who’d hid from her a moment ago, and she opened fire again. Lindholm had told her the biotic rifle had a maximum fire rate of a round per second. She’d been able to shave it down below that.

Five seconds, six soldiers who wouldn’t be getting up again any time soon. A few others started to break cover and run, shouting - making their way toward the vehicles. Either to escape or to continue the fight, she didn’t know, but it did need to be dealt with.

“They’re heading toward the motor-” Ana didn’t have a chance to finish the sentence before a trio of bright blue rockets shot toward the vehicles. The resulting explosion was large - and continued into a series of others as fuel tanks and vehicles went up in flames, catching each other in the brightest and most destructive series of dominoes Ana had ever seen.

Well… except for Caveira, I suppose.

“Clear and covered,” she murmured over the comm, taking out two soldiers who had been stunned by the explosions. A few others turned and ran off. Below her, Jack and Lindholm started to move forward. Reinhardt had found a small cluster of troops, outfitted for CQ. Two of them had riot shields and protected the other two, with shotguns. She couldn’t get a clear shot on any of the four.

“Haha, you call that a shield?” the huge man challenged, thumping his hammer on the ground behind himself. The jets kicked in and he flicked it forward and up, launching one of the two soldiers up into the air and then batting him out of the way as he fell again. His own blue barrier sprung up as the shotgunners opened fire, one of whom immediately fell to a dart in his neck. The other continued to huddle behind his shield-mate, and Ana could practically see the grin on Rienhardt’s face even through his helmet. The jets dotted around the back of his armour started to flicker, and then flared fully into life, launching him forward as his shield dropped.

They tried to get off a shot, but at that range there was no chance. The one with a riot shield was wrapped up in Reinhardt’s embrace and slammed against a wall where they slumped to the ground. The man with a shotgun took a hammer to the chest on a backswing, and as he flew through the air, a dart as well. Just for good measure.

“Lindholm, breach the doors,” Ana murmured, looking at the concrete entrance that went into the mountainside. The doors were huge, steel, and rusting - older by at least twenty years than all of the
other structures save for the tower she was in. His turret popped in the night, keeping enemy soldiers pinned down behind cover and quickly punishing any who chose to try to push the assault. Jack did the same, loosing off bursts of pulse-fire into the night, and for once the Bastion unit seemed to be hiding smartly, unseed. Reinhardt went to cover his friends, shield blocking the possibility of any surprise attacks as the engineer moved in to set up a breaching explosive.

Any surprise attacks on them, at least. Ana heard a noise behind her, though, and shoved herself to the side - well-timed, it turned out, as a metal fist slammed through the catwalk she’d been laying on. She rolled over, coming face-to-face with something she didn’t recognize at first. Something which was throwing another punch at her.

She wasn’t as young as she used to be, and suspected that her joints would complain in the morning, but Ana could still move quickly when she needed to. Throwing herself off to the side, she raised her bracer - a sleep dart would deal with who or whatever this was. Its fist cleaved clean through the steel railings and she fired, but it threw up a hand and deflected the dart with a metallic ping. Not just strong, but fast too. She didn’t have time for any other thoughts before it was on her again - roughly man-sized and shaped, her helmet highlighted electrical systems and thermal signatures. A suit, it seemed, that somebody was wearing; metal and probably hydraulics. She took a shot that found its target, but the hand found her at the same time and tossed her back off of the tower.

Nobody was looking back in this direction, and she had that to be thankful for as she fell at least. It wouldn’t kill her, not from this height - but she wasn’t sure she could bear them all coddling her. She knew she’d be winded, probably break some ribs, and her hand started to seek out the biotic grenade at her side. Maybe if she was quick enough she could be on her feet before any of them turned around.

She never hit the ground, though. A pair of strong hands snatched her out of the air and she grunted, reaching out to pat at a metal chest. “Reinhardt, you really know how to-”

Her words cut off as she looked up to see not her old friend and occasional sexual partner’s helmet, but rather the Bastion unit’s glowing photosensor. It beeped, whistled, and dropped her to the ground as it whirled. The light flashed from blue to bright red as it brought its turret around to active position - Ana tried to scramble back but it was too late, she knew she was done for. All this time and this was how it would end. Ana closed her eyes.

Fareeha.

The sound of the turret was almost deafening even through her helmet, but she was only surprised that she heard it at all. It didn’t even hurt. Was this what death was like? Had all those she killed heard the bullet, long after it was too late? She always thought they never got the chance, and couldn’t decide whether it was better or worse that they might have known.

There was a heavy thump, and her brow furrowed. She definitely shouldn’t still be hearing things - she was dead. Dead people didn’t hear. She opened her eye and saw the Bastion there displayed on the screen inside of her helmet, still in turret mode, barrels still spinning. The photosensor glowed as red as the tips of its turret.

Bastion didn’t like the RED it was hot and it took over but somebody - UNKNOWN ENEMY COMBATANT - up on the tower and threw Woman off and - HOSTILE ACTIONS DETECTED - and then they were spinning as their turret came around and - ENGAGED, TRACKING, FIRING - and everything was loud and it was so loud and it was so loud and it was so loud and it was so loud.
Then silent. The bullets stopped, the whatever-it-was - HOSTILE NEUTRALIZED - fell from the tower, and then Bastion was stuck a little again. The RED never wanted to end, it clawed into their systems and tried to hold on, hold on, to keep them-

Woman was lying on the ground. She wore a helmet but Bastion still recognized her, she was a friend she was one of them and Ganymede liked her and-

The Bastion’s light turned blue again and it whistled, and Ana didn’t know what else to do. She sat upright at first and just looked at it; stared, really, as the little bird came flapping down from somewhere and rested on the robot’s head.

She pushed herself up to her feet with a chuckle. “Never thought I’d see the day I fought alongside one of you again,” she murmured, reaching out to pat at the Bastion’s settled barrels tenderly. It beeped back at her and shifted, transitioning back into its recon mode. Ana didn’t bother turning to check on whoever had tossed her from the tower. If a Bastion had opened fire on them, they were dead. Likely there wasn’t even enough left to bury.

Another explosion rocked the night and Ana leaned around the Bastion as they spun at the waist - keeping her hand gently on it. The giant steel door hung open on its hinges.

“Come on, you lovebirds,” Reinhardt teased, waving to Ana and the Bastion. “There’s glory to be had, haha!”

“Lovebird,” she murmured with a smirk hidden beneath her helmet as she made her way to rejoin the other three. From him, that might be the biggest compliment there was. Nobody she’d ever met loved as many, as much, or as thoroughly as Reinhardt Wilhelm - the man was in love with the whole world, at once and one by one.

At first she’d been a little nervous about getting involved with him in any way, thinking he might get ideas about commitment and romance, but he didn’t. Maybe he didn’t really understand that their motivations were different, but she didn’t care - he accepted it readily, happily, and was always there with a joke or a compliment. Not to mention more physical stamina than anyone else she could think of. Their arrangement worked out well for them - the perfect intersection between two different worlds.

The five of them moved as a group through the door - Reinhardt in front, shield up; Jack right behind, Ana and Torbjörn in the middle. The Bastion unit followed ten feet behind, whistling to itself or to the bird. They split into pairs as they made their way further in, with the omnic following Torbjörn - although it hesitated for a moment, almost following Ana instead.

As it turned out, most of the resistance had already been encountered. Numbers in here were practically nonexistent - one or two guards who only tried to run, falling almost instantly to shots that echoed through the hallways. Ana’s forehead creased more and more as they made their way along, her following Reinhardt. This is wrong. There were more than this, this is too easy...

“In here,” Jack gestured to Torbjörn and dashed forward into a storage room of some sort. The ceilings were higher than in the hallway, and steel racks filled the space. Half of them were empty, the others filled with artillery shells. Biohazard symbols were painted on the sides of the dark-green painted shells, but the tips - the warheads - gleamed silver.

Soldier: 76 had a sinking feeling in his stomach as he stepped closer to inspect them. The shells looked like any other artillery munition, but those warheads were so different. Precisely machined, milled and shining in the sodium light. 76 sighed heavily as he got within a few inches of them. Laser-inscribed into the gleaming metal was a symbol he recognized: the symbol of Overwatch.
“Damnit,” he grunted, dropping his head. One more misstep - no, one more colossal fuckup that had nearly cost lives. How many of these were there?

“They’re ours?” Torbjörn queried, looking at one of the shells on the ground. “These casings aren’t our work, Jack, but the detonators-”

“I know!” 76 snapped down at him, but the engineer was having none of it. He raised his metal arm, the circular pincers at the end rotating swiftly.

“Don’t ya shout at me, Jack! I didn’t do it any more than you did - ya want to go and be sour about it, you do that, but you wait until we’re out. You hear me?”

Soldier: 76 ground his teeth as his eyes burned, unable to look away from that little etched symbol. It felt like a twisting knife, betrayal if he’d ever known it - and if anyone did, he did. All that work they did to try to help, and how many times had this happened? Things slipped out from underneath them and twisted to other purposes - what had this gas started as? Who had sold it, who bought it, who cobbled it into these artillery shells? All while he was at the helm, all while he should’ve been able to see it, to stop it, to end it before it began.

...but he never had. He’d never seen it until it was too late. He’d been caught blind with his pants around his ankles, and everyone suffered for his failures.

There were too many questions and they burned in Jack’s gut. Torbjörn shook his head as he turned to leave. “Tell me about it. Trust me, I know a thing or two about what yer going through, Jack.” Bastion beeped and the engineer shot him a look. “Well of course I meant you! All you bastards that were stolen from me-” he cut himself off with a sigh. “Ah, s’not yer fault, ye daft unit. Come on, let’s go join up with the others.”

“Ana,” Jack grunted over the radio. “What kind of gas is this anyway?”

“Unknown,” she responded, “but these are the sort of people we do not want having any chemical weapons at all.”

“What do you know where it came from?”

She didn’t, but the anger in his voice suggested a likely source. Ana sighed, shaking her head. “No, Jack, I don-”

“Overwatch,” he growled, cutting her off, and she just rolled her eye and shot Reinhardt a glance.

“That man and his vendettas,” she growled, shaking her head - wisely not letting the words play across the airwaves. Reinhardt chuckled a little.

“Ah, my Ana - we all have our battles. I fight for glory, you fight for safety, and Jack…”

“He fights for revenge,” Ana finished, and Reinhardt shrugged a little, the massive plates of his armour sliding over each other.

“That may be - some would call it justice, but we’re all here now.”

“Of course,” Ana murmured, sighing a little. Her next word was soft enough that only she heard it. “Now.”
An escape hatch was found, open, leading into a horizontally tunnel with signs of movement recently. A lot of movement. Jack crouched at scuffed bootprints, scraped concrete where heavy things had been slid - he traced it with gloved fingers while the others spoke. Thirty feet into the tunnel it collapsed into rubble. They’d blown it to prevent anyone from following.

“They could be almost anywhere by now,” Torbjörn muttered. “Look, that hatch is newer than anything else down here. Without some serious equipment or digging out the rubble, we’ll never find the other end of it.”

“I didn’t pack my shovel,” Reinhardt grinned behind his helmet and the engineer snorted a laugh.

“We burn it all,” Jack murmured, unable to tear his eyes away from the tunnel. “Seal the doors out front and burn everything, blow it, ensure nobody gets in here again. Nobody gets at that gas or those shells ever again, and we track down the rest of it and do the same. Every last bit.”

Nobody fought him on it. They also didn’t openly lend their support. For a few moments, in fact, it was as if nobody had heard. Nobody spoke.

“We can’t do that alone, Jack,” Ana pointed out - not exactly criticism. Not exactly support.

“I know.” His voice was even more strained than normal. “I’ll handle that. We did something good here tonight, let’s not let it go to waste.” Not let the ghosts of our past keep haunting our future. “Let’s get this all tied up, then... we can see about further steps to take. Good job, team. Thank you all.”

---

The base at Apeldoorn felt empty and cold. Winston knew it was exactly as he’d left it, but the problem was that he kept dwelling on other things he’d left. Back in Numbani.

“Winston?” Athena’s soft voice came from the walls.

“Yeah.”

“Your vital signs suggest a temperamental drop that should be rectified if possible.”

“Yeah.”

“...would you like some peanut butter? I promise, I will not tell Dr. Zeigler about it. This time.”

Winston laughed, shaking his head a little. Athena had a dry sense of humour, but it always managed to cut right through his funks. Given enough time, at least. “Oh, who would I be if I passed up an opportunity like that, huh?”

Chuckling, he lumbered over to the fridge he kept in his quarters and pulled out a banana. He liked them chilled. Plopping himself down on the ground, he peeled it with his feet as he opened a tub of peanut butter with his hands, then combined the two and took a bite.
“Oh yeah,” he murmured around a mouthful of delicious goodness, “that’s the stuff.”

Athena chuckled lightly, then there was a soft noise. “Oh, someone is at the front door. It is ex-commander Morrison.”

Winston sighed heavily, then realized with a start that he still hadn’t checked that message from earlier. He pulled out his phone and tapped at it, finishing off his banana in no particular rush. As he read, he sighed, and finally tossed the peel into a can and screwed the cap back on the peanut butter, ambling out to the main area.

He got there just as Jack did - all dressed up in his Soldier outfit, visor and all. He was covered in sand, dust, and ash, and had a couple of bullet holes in his leather jacket.

“Have a fun night?”

76 gritted his teeth behind his visor. He knew it was going to be a fight, it was always a fight, and he just needed one damn minute to speak his piece. To make his case and let it be made - and if the damn ape didn’t want to cooperate, then it would be on his head.

“Could say that. Look, I need to say something, so just listen.”

Winston stood there, not talking, eyebrows raised. Jack didn’t say anything, and his face was invisible behind his mask, but the scientist was quite sure he knew the look of agony on it. He could feel the tension in the air.

One of them would need to break it.

“You know,” Winston sighed slightly after about thirty seconds of silence, of listening to the other man not talk. He pulled out his phone from his pocket. “This… it took guts. I appreciate that it’s hard to apologize, Jack - I know it feels like I don’t cut you any slack.” He didn’t smirk. He wanted to, wanted to play it off as a joke, but things needed to be plain and simple and joviality would just get in the way. “It’s because I don’t.”

Soldier: 76 tensed up, swallowing back his words. Fine, if you want to talk, then talk. I’m all ears.

“Neither of us approve of the way the other one works sometimes. That’s fine. We can disagree on that, I think - we can disagree on anything. I can work with someone I disagree with.” Winston chewed at nothing a little. Things always seemed to pile up, where you got confronted with something again and again until you either broke through it, or just outright broke. Some called it fate. He called it selective perception.

“Sometimes you’re an ass, and I need to be able to say it.” Jack clenched a fist but Winston didn’t give him an opportunity to react. “Sometimes I’m an ass, and you need to be able to say that too.”

That part legitimately surprised the soldier, but he didn’t say anything there either. Several more seconds of silence.

Winston sighed. “We need to be able to talk, Jack. Agree or disagree, if we can’t talk, we can’t work together. We’re all on thin enough ice as it is, we don’t need either of us burning bridges over a sore ego.”

It felt an awful lot like being forced to back down - just because the gorilla had been the first to speak. It felt like by saying yes, Jack would be admitting he’d been causing a problem. Admitting fault, and rolling over, and that rubbed him all kinds of the wrong way.
“...yeah.” The word came heavily through gritted teeth, filtered by the mask. It could’ve been a variety of other words, maybe, but it wasn’t. “You’re right. Nobody needs us causing problems.” A deep breath, a swift sigh. “Listen. I went on an op tonight.”

Winston raised an eyebrow, but this time it was Jack’s turn to pre-empt any interruptions by raising a hand. “Don’t bother - I know you’re going to talk about unsanctioned ops and the danger they pose, and how things need to be checked over by you first, so just save it, alright?”

Winston let his breath out and let his shoulders settle a little. He told himself he hadn’t been about to say anything of the sort, but it was a little hard to tell before the fact. It definitely had felt like an incipient argument of one kind or another.

“Long story short,” 76 mumbled, “we tried to destroy a cache of chemical weapons. We were mostly successful, but… some of it got away. Impossible to tell how much. Might have already been transported earlier, it’s hard to tell. Athena?”

“Yes?”

“Retrieve and display the images from earlier tonight. Artillery shells with chemical warheads.”

A screen on the wall flickered and then was splashed across with a half-dozen pictures of the shells - one of racks of them in the storage room, the others of a single one up-close from various angles. Winston stared, gaped a little - particularly when he noted the symbol.

“They’re ours.”

Jack nodded, clenching his jaw and pulled his mask off with a quick motion. Something to channel his frustration into. “Yeah. I know most of the records are sequestered but-”

“We’ll see what we can find on the compound, right away,” Winston nodded, stepping forward and tracing at the shiny metal of one of the warheads in the picture with a finger. “Looks like there are some identification numbers. Athena can pull them and cross-reference worldwide, I’ll run them through whatever we can access. I’ve got an external contact I should be able to call in, too. They’re good at this kind of thing.”

“Thanks,” Jack grunted, “and… then maybe we can see about trying to track down the rest of it.”

“You can talk to Athena about that, get it started as soon as possible.”

The old soldier nodded and started to leave the room, but Winston wasn’t quite ready to leave it at that.

“Jack?”

The other man stopped, turning to look slightly back over his shoulder.

Winston paused. There were a few too many things to say, and too many of them seemed like they’d lead to a fight. When enough variations on a common theme were tried, and the results rarely varied much, then the conclusions were pretty simple. He was starting to learn that there were certain things he probably just couldn’t say to the other man, and he didn’t like that, but… it was just the way it was.

“Thanks,” the gorilla murmured, nodding his head. “Thanks for trusting me enough to come to me with this.”
Jack’s jaw tensed up again, but not out of anger this time. It was more of a combination of surprise and confusion, and a reflex to not give away his feelings. He wanted to argue, wanted to say it had nothing to do with trust - just doing what was right, and he’d never let personal feelings interfere with that. Wanted to say that it wasn’t about trust, it was about knowing his limits and when the mission required backup. Wanted to say a lot of things.

He didn’t, though. He just nodded and grunted. Before he left the room, though, he did find a few words. “No problem.” It sounded like he was doing a favour, phrased that way, now that he thought about it. He was tempted to leave it at that - but that seemed like a dick move, even to him. “Thanks for the assist. We’ll get to the bottom of this.”

Winston nodded. “Yeah, we will. Together.”

Another grunt, and another nod before Soldier: 76 went back to his quarters. He shut the door and set his mask on a shelf, pulling off his jacket. “Athena?”

“Yes?”

“Wake-up call in six hours. Until then, pull what satellite recon you can of the area those pictures were taken.”

“Already underway.”

“Good. Thanks.” He tossed himself onto the bed with a heavy sigh, waiting for a few seconds before starting to pull at his bootlaces. Everything felt sore. “Athena?”

“Yes?”

“On second thought… make that eight hours.”

“Of course, Soldier: 76. Sleep well.”

Chapter End Notes

I had fun with this chapter! It's the start of a pretty major thread of story getting woven in, as are the next two chapters - the few after the next (17 through to 20 or so) all flow together pretty quickly and form what I'd call the solid foundation of the overarc?ng plotline. Some people might be wondering why I waited twenty chapters to do that, heh, and, well, it's a fair question. The answer, in short? It's gonna be a long story - and it definitely does pick up threads from the earlier few chapters, too. Along with, of course, evolution of character interactions.

Anyway! I had fun with this, mentioning all the history the characters share and alluding to it. If anything particularly piques your interest, I’d be happy to write it up as a one-shot and dedicate it to you! Just say the word :D I do plan on going back and fleshing in side stories over time, so they’ll happen sooner or later - but if you mention one, that’ll make it sooner rather than later!

I’d like to dedicate the Ana/Reinhardt interactions in this chapter to bzarcher! They mentioned having some interest there, and although I'd already had this all written I thought it would be fitting as a dedication, heh. (And of course, offer to go more in-
Next chapter we get to meet a new pair of folks - Lucio and D.v.a, namely - as well as see Talon get in the way again. Reaper gets a little more meat on his bones, so to speak, when he has a moment with Reinhardt to explain some things. Where's the line between vengeance and justice, exactly? Well, it might depend on little more than who you ask, or who ends up winning...
Con Man

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Lucio loves the crowds, but he's mostly here for one gal - D.Va. She's happy to see him, of course, but happier to tease him; it's all interrupted by a distant explosion, which Reinhardt and Lucio team up to go investigate. Reaper's having a good day - the sun's shining, people are screaming, and nobody on his squad is being an idiot. They've got a mission and he aims to do it, but the arrival of an old friend provides an unexpected opportunity...

JFL summary: Lucio's cheesy, D.Va's a badass, and Reinhardt's really pretty - everyone thinks so (particularly Lucio). Reaper's not pretty, but he does shoot a lot of stuff. Sombra's pretty but doesn't shoot anything, and sort of gives Reaper a present - if a confrontation with an enemy counts as a present. She counts it, at least. Reinhardt goes skydiving. D.Va dances.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Blood and cruelty, and death. Fear and hopelessness but mostly just briefly.

Previous Chapter Summary: The golden oldies - Jack, Reinhardt, Ana, and Torb - infiltrated a weapons storage facility along with Bastion. Ana was terrified of the omnic at first, but after having her life saved she came around. The chemical weapons they discovered after their successful mission included dispersion heads that were Overwatch-designed - Jack swallowed his pride enough to tell Winston about it, despite the operation being unsanctioned and despite the tension between the two of them. It went better than either of them expected, and resulted in some real respect and some groundwork being laid.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shining sun, clear skies, good plans for a concert later and a chance to meet up with his number one gal - all in all it was setting up to be an excellent day for Lúcio Correia dos Santos. He couldn’t wipe the grin off his face as he skated along, a rhythm humming in one ear the way it always did. Depending on where he was he’d turn some of his suit’s external speakers on, too, but he was headed for some crowds and didn’t feel like he needed to make it noisier.

Plus, they’d hardly be able to hear, anyway, and that seemed like a waste.

His fingers toyed idly with the dials and sliders on his amplifier, queuing in samples of different tracks and shifting the mix on the fly, recording as he went. Some artists liked shower sessions, some needed to sit down for hours in the studio, some went out into nature for their music. Lúcio, though, drew his inspiration from the people - the hustle and bustle and movement of the crowds, the towering constructs of the city with people pumping through them like life-blood of the world; everyone moving to their own rhythm, everyone dancing to their own tune, and together it was the
biggest orchestra imaginable. He tried to capture tiny little snippets of that, condense them down, and put them on tape to spread the joy around.

The blades of his skates threw out little sparks as he pushed off of the ground - not the sort of spark that metal makes when struck, but rather just tiny particles of condensed light. He didn’t pretend to know how the tech worked, but it did. For all their flaws (and he could name about a thousand), he’d give Vishkar that - their stuff worked. All the better reason to use it for good.

Of course, Lúcio knew that railings were meant for hands, but they worked so well to grind on his skates that it just seemed like a waste not to. A kid who looked to be about eight shouted out and clapped, and Lúcio flashed him a thumbs-up even as the kid’s mom scowled. “Make sure you wear a helmet!” he called back over his shoulder. “Safety first!”

Gotta set a good example, after all.

The front of the building was packed with people, but it was nice to see that - for the most part, at least - they weren’t actually just standing around in lines. Queues were moving quickly and people were getting where they needed to go, and a lot were simply loitering and watching or maybe waiting to meet up with a friend.

Lúcio drew more than a few looks, although he wondered how many actually recognized him and how many thought it was just a really convincing costume. Gliding along the floor toward the special entrance for performers and guests, he tugged at the lanyard around his neck. It was stuck, tangled around a wire, and it took him a few seconds to get it free - not paying attention, he slipped right through the security checkpoint and one of the guards started trying to chase him down with a shout.

“Sorry, my man!” Lúcio called, getting his card free and circling around to display it with a grin. “Got a little caught up in the mix.” The guard tried to reach out and grab the card but Lúcio didn’t really feel like stopping, so he just kept on going in his little circle. After a moment the guard waved him through with a grunt.

Chuckling, Lúcio skated further in - across the floor, looking up at the atrium which was thronged with people around the outsides, peering over the balconies to look down. From above them, sun streamed through the skylights that made up the ceiling; the whole roof here was glass, criss-crossed with brass-coloured beams that glinted in the light.

Floor four, the DJ reminded himself as he pulled another track into the music that murmured gently in his ear, spinning things back a bit and then letting the timecode pull it forward like a rubber band. Instinctively, he moved along with it - doing a little pirouette and then hopping up to skate alongside one of the escalators. Normal skates would’ve had a real hard time of it, but these little laser ones handled everything just fine.

People pointed and alternately laughed or cheered, for the most part, as he passed them. He’d chosen a downward-facing escalator, so people had plenty of time to see him coming and more than a few stretched out hands for high-fives. He got them all, grinning and laughing. This was his place, these were his people - they were all his people, every free joy-loving one in the world.

Some, though, he did hold in a little bit higher regard than the others.

He knew that she’d be two stories higher in a little while, floor six - a live battle for the world championship title, and she was here to regain her belt. He knew she’d get it, too. There wasn’t a person in the world who could beat her at her own game.

Now, though, he had his suspicions that she’d be here - floor four, where he hopped off of the
escalator’s side and skated through the moderate crowds, swirling to avoid hitting anyone. Here was where her baby was, after all, on a display of its own.

Lúcio saw it over the crowds, the gently-curved pink hull and those iconic fins, and his grin widened. “C’mon girl, I know you’re around…” he muttered to himself as he navigated the final stretch of crowds.

There was a velvet rope around all three units there demonstrating Korea’s elite MEKA unit, but there was no velvet rope in the world that could stop Lúcio. He leapt right over and swirled in a circle around the pink MEKA that held the centre of the display.

Unsurprisingly, there were a pair of legs poking out from it. The wrong way around, though, which was a little odd - he wasn’t sure what she was poking at or adjusting, but it looked like it was a little awkward to get to.

“Uh, knock knock?” he reached out and rapped his knuckles on the mechanized unit’s armoured plating with a chuckle. “Anybody home?”

There was a clank and a few muttered words in Korean, and Lúcio back away from the MEKA a little as a small voice shouted from inside. “Ah! Lúcio! Don’t distract me while I’m in here!”

He chuckled a bit as she extracted herself from the mech, offering her a grin when she crossed her arms and fixed him with a narrow-eyed stare. It was hard to see it as that intimidating with the whiskers on her cheeks, though.

“Sorry about that - I just wanted to drop by and see how my number one girl’s doing! You know I gotta ask.”

D.Va was known for many things - flash-fast reflexes, relentless determination, and a real penchant for venge-killing griefers. Most people who ever went up against her started out pretty cocky, thinking she was just some cutesy gamer girl who got her fame through winks and giggles and silly catchphrases. Then they ended up dead, repeatedly, and as they watched their respawn timers they tended to reconsider. Repeat opponents saw her as pretty intimidating indeed.

Lúcio, though, hadn’t ever gone up against her - plus, he could see the tiny little bit of a smirk at the corner of her mouth that she was trying to hide. Then he could see it fade into her eyes, as well, as she started to realize it too.

“I’m fine,” she harrumphed, trying to keep herself from giggling (and succeeding). “Just too busy to talk right now.”

“What!” Lúcio exclaimed, wide-eyed in faux shock. “Too busy for me? But I’m your number one fan!”

“You are soooo not my number one fan, Mister Lucy - you didn’t even show up for my big reunion match!” Her eyes narrowed a little more genuinely and the DJ rubbed at the back of his neck.

“I- well, I mean, it was all the way in Korea and I had a concert to do in Detroit, a- and you know I tuned in though, and I was cheering for you all the way!” His eyes glimmered as he patted his chest. “Number one fan, right here, girl.”

She scowled playfully at him, but there was a little too much smirk in the expression for it to seem vaguely genuine anymore. “Well, fine, but I’m still too busy to talk - I’ve gotta prep the MEKA and then get ready for the championship match!”
Lúcio thought she actually looked a little nervous, which was legitimately new. He hadn’t known her to get fazed over anything before - and yeah, he knew she’d taken a break from gaming when she got into the MEKA unit, and it was probably rough to crack her way back in. He hadn’t known her for too many years or anything, but he knew when she needed a bit of a pick-me-up.

“Well, I got something that’s gonna make you feel better - front row seats for my concert tonight!”

D.Va’s eyes widened as she reached out for the tickets he pulled out from a pocket. They were actually gold. Probably not real gold, of course, but they gleamed just like it. “Oh, wow! No way!”

She took the tickets in hand reverently, a wide grin splitting her features. “That’s so cool!”

Lúcio’s heart swelled with the delight on her face, in her voice - they hadn’t met too long ago, but it had turned out that they’d already admired each other from afar. It was hard to go online without hearing about D.Va somewhere, or seeing an ad with her pop up, and she’d been buying his albums since day one as it turned out.

“Well, I got plenty of music but you know you’re my favourite song!”

D.Va - or Hana Song, as she was known off of the court - rolled her eyes at that. “Okay that was cheesy, even for you.”

Lúcio pouted for a second. “Aww, does that mean you’re not comin’?”

She shook her head quickly. “Stop with the puppy eyes, OMG - of course I’m coming, weirdo. I wouldn’t miss one of your concerts!”

“Great then, it’s a date!” he nodded with a chuckle, and D.Va fixed him with an unimpressed look, shifting to one side and crossing her arms again (with the tickets firmly in hand).

“Date? I told you before, I have a boyfriend,” she said with a dismissive shake of her head, and it was true. She had told him that before…

Lúcio glanced around as if in confusion. “Oh, oh really? Well, you got two tickets but I don’t see anybody else here - where’s he at, this boyfriend of yours?”

“Maybe he’s in Korea?” she teased, rolling her eyes.

“Maybe!” Lúcio exclaimed, grinning. “Girl, you know you deserve better than some guy who runs around so much you don’t even know what country he’s in!”

D.Va raised her eyebrows, smirking a little. “And you’re saying you wouldn’t run around?”

Lúcio laughed briefly, grinning and spreading his arms wide as he swooped in a little circle. “Heck no - you know I only skate!”

She giggled brightly, and a second later a heavy weight fell on Lúcio’s shoulder. “Is he giving you any trouble?” The voice was as heavy as the hand, thick and guttural. “I could always remove him…”

D.Va laughed and shook her head. “No thanks, Willy. Appreciate the assist! It’s all just teasing anyway.” She narrowed her eyes at the DJ with a grin. “He knows he’s out of his league.”

“Yeah, just teasing,” Lúcio grinned, chuckling a little as he ducked away from the hand to spin around. “No problems here, Wil…”
He’d originally intended to repeat the little nickname D.Va had used, but that dropped away entirely as his eyes took in just who had clapped him on the shoulder - at first he thought they might’ve been an omnic with just the most convincingly human voice he’d ever heard, but a huge one. No, though, he had a human head up there - way up there, the man was gigantic. Lúcio ‘s head only came up almost to his chest - if that. He towered a couple of feet over Lúcio and grinned down at him, unhelmeted in some kind of suit of armour.

“No problems at all, friend!” the behemoth held out an armoured hand to shake. “I suppose you could say I get a little protective of her.”

“Oh, he’s harmless,” D.Va giggled as the two men shook hands. She delighted in how shocked Lúcio looked - and really, come to think of it, she was a little surprised that the two hadn’t met yet. “Number one fan, meet my number two fan.” They both glanced to her and she giggled again. “I’m not telling you which is which!”

They both chuckled. A small group of kids passing by the other side of the velvet rope pointed excitedly.

“Look, look,” called one, “it’s D.Va and her mech!”

“MEKA,” corrected another, arms crossed and rolling their eyes. “And that Reinhardt costume is like, totally unconvincing. His face is not nearly that pretty.”

Lúcio’s eyes widened a little. “Wait, Reinhardt? Like, the Reinhardt?” he laughed, shaking his head. He had to admit, the kid had a point - for a man who had supposedly seen as many wars as Lúcio had seen years , the man had a darned pretty face. Particularly his eyes, which seemed absolutely full of life. Or, eye , at least.

“One and the same, my friend!” Reinhardt bellowed a laugh, striking a little pose that Lúcio recognized from a poster he’d seen somewhere.

A tiny voice called from the side, “Reinhardt! Reinhardt! Can I have your autograph?” The huge man chuckled and waved to the other two, turning around with a grin that seemed wider than his face.

“Of course, my little friend! And who should I make it out to, hmm?”

Lúcio slid a little closer to D.Va and shook his head a bit. “Wow, I had no idea you two knew each other,” he murmured.

“I’m surprised you haven’t met,” she chirped, tipping her head to one side. “I’ll tell you, he’s definitely my biggest fan, one hundred percent! Really though, how have you two not bumped into each other? Between me and…” she flicked her eyes around, but there were some things that just simply weren’t to be discussed publicly. “You know. Our mutual interest?”

The DJ nodded, thinking on that - he knew Reinhardt had been a member of Overwatch, knew he’d fought for a long time before that and ever since as well. Some people laid down when the governments stepped in, but Lúcio had seen the news, seen little stories tossed back and forth on the web. Reinhardt Wilhelm never stopped, he popped up here and there, helping out where he could, fighting the good fight - never accepting any reward except maybe a meal and a place to stay for the night.

Then a while back, Lúcio had got a call, been asked if he’d mind helping out with something, and come face to face with some of the others who refused to lie down. At one time they’d been
Overwatch, but that hardly seemed to be a good term anymore - whatever they were, Lúcio was proud to fight alongside them and help out where they could, defending people and righting wrongs.

They were a good group of folks, and he’d known that Reinhardt had been one of them… he just hadn’t ever met the man.

“I don’t know,” he admitted softly, watching in wonder as the huge man laughed at a joke the tiny child had presumably told.

“Hey, be careful looking at him like that - I’ll get jealous!”

Lúcio turned to look at her, startled, but the look on her face made it immediately clear that she was just messing with him. He chuckled. “Hey, they say you should never meet your idols - but this is twice now it’s worked out for me!”

Reinhardt had stood and waved goodbye to his departing fan, but a tremendous noise shook the building. People gasped and stumbled slightly, flinched back, but there was nothing else except the noise. Not for most of them, at least.

The three of them, though, recognized what it was - an explosion somewhere not too far away. Reinhardt got a steely look in his eye as he gazed up at the skylights and then down to his companions. “Well I was looking forward to a chat - but it seems that fate has other plans! I must go investigate,” he looked to D.Va but she shook her head, fretting nervously at her hair.

“I’d love to, Willy, but I gotta stick around - the MEKA’s set up for display mode anyway, most of the systems are offline. Sorry, but I’ll tag in next round, promise!” She fixed Lúcio with a curious look. “Well, player two - how about you?”

“Any chance people are getting hurt, you know I’m there to stop it,” he nodded, gripping at his sonic amplifier a little tighter.

Reinhardt laughed. “Excellent, my friend! A man after my own heart!” He clapped a hand to his chest and bowed before D.Va who giggled and gave a little wave.

“Good luck, team!” she cheered as they headed for a nearby exit. “Score a few points for me!”

---

Reaper was having a good day. The sun was out - which he normally didn’t like, but today? Today it was almost even pleasant. Even more than just today, in fact - he was having a good week. Nobody had done anything overly incompetent for a while, there had been a couple of successful missions, and he was feeling nicely sated and free of that itch.

Sombra had even stopped by at one point with some notion in her head to watch a movie - he’d refused, of course, but she’d insisted and he’d ended up being pleasantly surprised. The film she’d chosen was one of his favourites from childhood which he hadn’t seen in probably twenty years - he didn’t have a copy. It was a very difficult thing to get a hold of.

He wondered if she knew that. He suspected she did. She was a little annoying, but eager to please at least.
Now, he was out in the sun: robe flowing, shotguns flaring, and a nice laugh settling deep in his chest. He felt it spread through his very bones, vibrating nicely, and it all made that itch that crept up his spine so very easy to ignore. Yes, it was days like today that made the rest of it worthwhile.

Reaper strode confidently into the ground floor of the office building, through the glass walls that he’d just shattered to shards with his shotguns.

“Don’t bother resisting,” he taunted the people who cowered in the lobby. “We’re not here for you, but I will gladly slaughter anyone who tries to stop us.” He paused for a chuckle, shaking his head with his shotguns held low by his sides. “I’m really not one to make requests, but… please,” dark sarcasm clouded his voice, “try to stop us.”

Nobody did. Of course they didn’t - they crouched and knelt and cowered and shouted and laid down on the floor like nice little sheep. Contrary to popular belief, Reaper didn’t actually like killing. Necessarily. Sometimes he did, but overall, he liked removing obstacles. A surgeon might not necessarily like chopping off limbs, but if there’s gangrene going around then amputation is the only way.

Of course, killing did definitely have its upsides. Right now, though, there really was no point - some people might have said that the scared citizens around the lobby were innocents. Reaper would have called those people idiots. Then, probably shot them - but the point still stood that it wouldn’t further their goals. It might even hamper them.

“Blow it,” he grunted, gesturing at a pair of stainless steel doors at the far end of the lobby. An elevator with no call button. Four of the dozen Talon troopers jogged past him, opening cases and beginning to plant explosives. After a minute, they backed off… but Reaper didn’t. He stepped closer, stroking a clawed finger down the elevator doors and leaving a nice deep scratch.

“Count of three,” he instructed, holstering his shotguns and holding out his arms. There was something visceral in this, something he knew none of them could understand - and if it deepened their fear, if it solidified in them the fact that he was a man not to be fucked with, then that was only icing on the cake.

The troopers counted down, not hesitating after the direct order. One or two already knew what was to come. The others just feared that they’d be killed if they didn’t.

Half a second before they hit the detonator, or even less, Reaper flashed to smoke. The explosion rippled through him, reverberating with every disintegrated particle that he was comprised of. He laughed raucously as the dust began to settle, resolidifying amidst the cloud and striding out into the lobby again, kicking chunks of debris out of the way as people coughed and choked on the smoke and clutched at their ears.

“Four hold here. Eight with me for ascension. Rendezvous on the rooftop in five.” He was having a good day. “Don’t disappoint me…” The words were almost teasingly light.

Eight of the Talon shock troops moved toward the elevator, doors now blown in completely. Reaper looked down and couldn’t see the bottom of the shaft, nor could he see the top when he craned his neck back. He leaned in, over to one side and held a box against one of the metal rails that ran the height of the shaft, and hit a button on the side. There was a hum and it stuck firmly. He tugged on it twice, hard, and it didn’t come off. He knew it wouldn’t, but checks never hurt.

Clipping a lanyard from the module onto his belt, he jumped into the elevator shaft. When the ascender registered his weight, it started moving, pulling him up and away from the others. Below, he could see them readying ascenders of their own, moving in pairs. Not bad. Not bad at all…
The top of the shaft had another identical set of doors. The first Trooper shot up past where Reaper held his position thirty feet below the doors, and set up the breaching charges. A moment later he came sliding back down.

“Three, two, one.” Another massive explosion and the dark shaft was lit up where the doors had been breached. Reaper tapped at his module which moved up again, and he pulled himself through the hole.

There were no shots. There was nobody here, and that was even a bit of a disappointment. The team followed him, setting up in pairs and scanning their rifles around the room. No movement.

It looked like an office suite in almost every way except for the total lack of furnishings. Except for the support beams, there didn’t seem to be anything here at all… but Reaper could feel a tingle up his spine that he knew meant otherwise.

“Sombra,” he growled over the radio.

“Already on it, boss,” she chuckled, popping a jelly bean into her mouth, and following it with four more. Purple screens lit up the darkness as she tapped at them. “Looks like you’ve got some serious projectors in there - but don’t worry, you’ve got me here to knock the scales from your eyes…”

It took her almost four whole seconds. The security was actually half-decent.

The entire floor shimmered, seemed to shiver before melting away entirely. Gone were the blank support posts and unfinished floors, the bare ceiling - in place instead were rows and rows of databanks, lights blinking rapidly on their surfaces.

There were also at least two dozen guards, moving slowly to get into position - secure in the knowledge that their whereabouts were covered by the holographic projections.

“Engage,” was all that Reaper needed to say. The eight troopers behind him immediately snapped their rifles to targets and opened fire as Reaper himself unsheathed his shotguns and let them blare openly. The guards stumbled and shouted as it became clear that their cover was blown, and they tried to duck behind server stacks.

Reaper was surprised by the shock troops behind him - they kept their lines of fire clean and precise. Nobody lost a single round into the electronics, which was almost a shame. He’d already decided what he was going to do to the first person who clipped one, but apparently word had been passed around that this was one of those mission objectives which a trooper would definitely not want to fail.

The stacks were to remain undamaged during the assault, and as the guards who survived the initial onslaught started to take cover behind them, the Talon troops switched to different weapons, different tactics - slinging their assault rifles in favour of small pulse-based sidearms which wouldn’t damage the electronics.

Reaper just dropped his shotguns and flexed his gauntleted hands as he stalked into the rows of server stacks. He was having such a good day, and it just kept getting better…

---
Lúcio didn’t even hear gunshots before Reinhardt’s shield flared up the first time - they’d both seen the shattered glass on the ground floor of the office tower from a block away. It had only been a few blocks from the convention, in fact, and hadn’t taken them long at all to get to. They’d heard another explosion as they approached, but nothing else since.

As soon as the blue barrier flashed into existence, though, the DJ saw splashes against it - bullets being caught, and then he heard the gunfire. Reinhardt continued to advance as he held his shield up, and Lúcio followed behind him, half-hiding behind the man’s bulk as well. It wasn’t his first firefight, but he didn’t even know where the bad guys were yet.

Reinhardt marched toward the office block, and as he drew closer Lúcio spotted the soldiers - crouched behind a large desk of some sort, poking helmeted heads out occasionally to let off a burst of bullets.

“I got this,” he patted the armoured man on the back and twisted the dial on his sonic amplifier. Music burst from his speakers as his skates glowed green and he dashed forward, dodging left and right. He heard the gunshots but he moved unpredictably and closed the distance in a real hurry. Vaulting the barrier, he swung a kick at one soldier and then dropped to the ground, spinning and unleashing a wave of sound that knocked the four of them back off of their feet. Two flew over the desk.

...and right into Reinhardt. He caught one by the arm and threw him up into the air, knocking the other across the street with his hammer. A second or two later, the first landed on the pavement. Neither of the two seemed to be getting back up.

Lúcio, meanwhile, had knocked the other pair out - it was still uncomfortable to kick people with skates on, but these blades didn’t cut. As it turned out, when you applied a hard-light skate-blade to a head, it tended to just result in unconsciousness.

“Talon,” Reinhardt spat - metaphorically, and literally as well - before trudging up into the building’s lobby. “Everyone!” his shout boomed through the open lobby. “You must evacuate the building! Do not worry, we have this under control.”

One man, balding and in a terrible tan-coloured suit, approached the pair. “Th-the cloaked one,” he stammered, wiping sweat from his brow. “H-he said they were g-going to the roof. After they went up that elevator.” He pointed to the doors which had been blown in.

“Are you hurt?” Lúcio inquired, sliding close and laying a hand on the man’s shoulder. “Do you know what’s up there?”

“I-I don’t,” the man shook his head. “I don’t know, I’m sorry, I- I was just here to visit a friend for her lunch break! I’m f-fine though, I- thank you, yeah. I’m fine.” He was shaking a little, though.

“You’re gonna be alright,” Lúcio urged, trying to meet his eyes with a smile. “Don’t worry. You’re safe.”

It seemed to get through to him somewhat at least, and he managed a weak smile and a nod of his head before turning to leave. Lúcio faced Reinhardt directly. “Alright, so… what do you think?” He glanced toward the elevator that had been forcibly entered. “I don’t think we’ve got any way up there, you?”

He shook his head, grinding his teeth lightly in thought. “No, none - but if they wish to make it to the roof, then we will be the wall that stops them. Come, my friend,” he sighed briefly. “I only hope they have a freight elevator. Stairs might be the death of me.”
It took them hardly any time to eliminate the guards. Reaper grabbed the last one by the front of his vest, lifting him into the air with both hands. “I’d ask you which terminal we’re after…” he tilted his head, “…but it doesn’t matter anyway.” He flung the man backward into the building’s exterior glass, but it didn’t break. *Impressive.* The guard broke a little bit, though, even though the window didn’t.

“Secure the floor,” Reaper directed as he spun to face a terminal. “Sombra.”

“Thanks boss,” she grinned, swirling her fingers to dispel her camouflage, appearing as if out of thin air. She waved and brought up a few screens - cameras and general building schematics amongst them. “Looks like we’ll have some company. Heading up the maintenance elevator…” she glanced and gestured at the display which showed her the interior camera. *How did he even fit in there?* “The big one and the skater boy. Want me to stop ‘em?”

“Reinhardt,” Reaper seethed, but it was more an excited sound than a hateful one. Excited hatred, maybe - he was one of the *originals.* One of the ones whose fault all of this was. Reaper’s claws punctured the shell of the server stack he had laid a hand on and he pulled it away sharply to his side. She didn’t glance over at the noise. She already knew what it was.

He’d been a tough one to track down - easy to follow, hard to get in front of. Behind his mask, Reaper’s lips twisted into a grin. “*Excellent,*” he murmured and Sombra smiled. She was always glad when she could bring some joy to a friend. Gabe didn’t need to answer - she knew he wanted them to make it to the roof.

“How’s the breach coming?” He tugged at his armour and pulled out a shotgun in preparation.

“Few more seconds, and… there! We’ve got all we need, time to turn and burn *amigo*.”

He shook his head in a subtle gesture of disbelief, and couldn’t help but think how much more they would’ve been able to accomplish if she’d been around a little sooner. How would Gibraltar have gone with her in hand, rather than some clunky pre-programmed algorithm. Although, on the other hand, there was Volskaya...

Reaper could have used the radio, but he was having such a good day. “*BURN IT,*” he called out, his voice echoing through the empty floor which hummed with electronics. Assault rifles immediately opened fire and started to shred the server stacks to pieces as Sombra’s worm programs hunted down every fragment of data and dissolved them. A wiped data drive can be recovered, at least partially - but not if it’s filled with bullet holes.

A minute later the floor fell silent as the last of the stacks were destroyed, and the troopers reassembled near the elevator. The plan was to go up to the roof.

The plan changed.

“They’re holding position near the roof exit.” Sombra stood at Reaper’s elbow. “How we playing this one, boss?”

“We?” Reaper chuckled, shaking his head. “Troops, downstairs. Gather up the four down there and return to the LZ. Sombra, with them. I’ll join you there in a minute - I’ve got an old *friend* to see…”
Sombra just raised her eyebrows slightly as he stepped into the elevator shaft, dissolving into smoke and swirling upwards. “Here,” she murmured, slapping a Translocator module into a nearby trooper’s hands without looking. “Take this. I’m not climbing down some elevator shaft.”

The eight troopers stuck their magnetic modules on the rails again and dropped down to the ground floor. When they made it, Sombra hit her teleporter and blinked to the module, snatching it back out of the man’s hands as the troopers went to their fallen comrades. All four were picked up to be hauled back to the dropship as sirens started to wail in the distance. They’d either die or recover, neither Sombra nor Talon really cared.

---

“What if they know we’re here?” Lúcio wondered, half-crouching behind Reinhardt and his shield. The huge man chuckled gregariously. “I am counting on it!”

It was tense, standing on the roof and looking back at the one doorway - there was no dropship up here just yet, but Reinhardt had no doubt it would be arriving whenever they did.

“Knock knock.” The words swirled from the darkness, deep and dusky and drawled. They were followed by a shadow which sped at them - Reinhardt dropped his shield and swung his hammer but it just passed right through.

Reaper resolidified on the other side of him, tackling Lúcio back to the ground. The DJ pushed back and spun, unleashing a wave of sound which knock the black-clad Talon operative into the air. He whipped out his shotguns and let them loose, firing off a flurry of blasts but Reinhardt’s barrier interrupted them.

“Reyes!” the huge man challenged. “Fight with honour for once in your life!”

“Honour?” Reaper sneered. “Life? I abandoned those when you all abandoned me.” His shotguns flared again, causing cracks to appear at the edges of Reinhardt’s shield. As Reaper tossed his guns to the side, the massive man’s hammer swung around with such fury it ignited the air and sent a wave of flame surging forward.

Once more, Reaper dissolved, letting the fire and a flurry of bright green pulses from Lúcio’s amplifier pass harmlessly through him, though the flame crackled the roof below it as it flew along.

The cloud of smoke dodged and whirled, causing the other two to spin around in an attempt to get one step ahead.

“You’re getting slow, old man,” the cloud murmured just before resolidifying behind Reinhardt for just long enough to bury a shotgun blast in his back. The Crusader spun and slammed his hammer to the ground, but all it did was send whorls of black smoke spiralling.

Then it was silent. Reinhardt breathed heavily, almost groaning his breaths, and reached back to clutch at where he’d been shot. Lúcio could see that the armour was damaged pretty heavily, and he could see blood as well.

“It’s alright, it’ll be alright,” he assured, panting a little himself. “It’s-” he swallowed, “it doesn’t look too bad.” Reinhardt laughed a little, strained, and Lúcio chuckled as well. “Don’t worry, though - I
got something that’ll make you feel better…”

He reached down to twist the dial on his amp, but never got a chance - it was torn from his hands and flung away, skittering across the roof. Reinhardt let out a cry and swung his hammer, knocking Reaper back and away from the DJ but he turned to smoke once more with a shout and came flying back with a vengeance.

The hammer came down and Reaper caught it against one of his bracers, buckling under the strain but not being crushed. With his other hand he loosed a shotgun blast at Reinhardt’s chest, failing to do anything to the thick armour there. A massive, armoured boot flew out and caught Reaper in the middle, sending him flying backward.

Lúcio saw an opportunity, his eyes flicking over to where his amplifier sat, and he bolted for it. His skates slid smoothly across the roof’s surface, but he underestimated Reaper’s speed. Something caught Lúcio’s leg, sending him lurching forward - he lashed out with his other foot, and the skate connected solidly.

For a second, it seemed like he’d get there. There was a cry of rage from behind Lúcio and his leg was grabbed again, but this time he had no chance to react. Metal claws slammed down, clutching and tearing at wires and tubes, disabling the servomotors.

Lúcio shouted as he was spun around, but before Reaper could do anything else he was knocked free by a hammer with gouts of flame flying behind it. A shotgun blast hit Reinhardt’s hand, knocking the hammer free where it tumbled wildly to the ground and out of reach as its rocket flames guttered.

The cloaked man unleashed a few more shotgun blasts before Reinhardt had a chance to turn and get his shield projected, but Reaper didn’t stop, didn’t slow, he kept firing until the cracks showed once more at the shield’s edge, spreading and widening. He let loose with his left gun until it ran empty and then tossed it to the side, opening up with the right to keep up a constant and consistent stream of fire.

Lúcio could hear the strain in Reinhardt’s voice as he grunted, falling to one knee. Droplets of blood dripped to the roof, glittering in the sun. Lúcio knew he could fix it, could make it all better - he just needed to get to his amp, but his legs were practically useless with the motors disabled and dragging along the roof behind him. He pulled himself along frantically with his arms, trying to make headway.

Reaper stopped firing. The shield was practically gone, he knew - he remembered being instructed in how to recognize the signs of it failing. This was such a good day, with the pair of these fools all but helpless before him…

They thought he wanted to kill them all, every former member of Overwatch, but that wasn’t true. At least, not directly - no, what Reaper truly wanted was to beat them. To turn them upside down, peel away all their foolish bravado and self-supposed superiority and to show them how much of a failure they really were.

He’d picked out specific things for each one of them - Jack, Ana, Torbjörn, Petras - every single person who had been involved, directly or indirectly. He thought about them late at night; when the living slept, he schemed and daydreamed.

This, though… this was better than he could ever have hoped for.

“It wouldn’t even be worth killing you,” Reaper murmured, leaning in closer to the shield. On the
other side of the shimmering, flickering blue barrier, Reinhardt gritted his teeth. “Reinhardt Wilhelm -
the man so big they named him twice. Where would be the fun in murdering a deluded old man with
a broken mind, hmm?”

Reaper’s eyes flicked past him to the DJ, trying to crawl, but he had a long way to go. This wouldn’t
take long.

“You got old, Reinhardt. You’re kidding yourself to think you can still fight.”

“A warrior never surrenders,” the Crusader hissed at the demon through a clenched jaw. The fires of
hell could reach up themselves, he would never back down. Never.

Reaper chuckled. “Oh, really? I actually pity you, you big old moron - so I’m going to offer you a
deal. It’s very, very simple.” He moved to step to the side and Reinhardt managed to summon the
strength to shift, to fall to his other knee and keep the shield between Reaper and Lúcio.

“Here’s my offer - you drop the act. Drop the shield. Bow your head.” Reaper grinned behind his
mask and pointed a shotgun at the DJ who had spun, dragging himself backward while he stared
wide-eyed at the confrontation taking place a few feet away. “And let me kill him. You let me kill
him and I let you live, I leave. As simple as that. All you need to do… is sacrifice someone else. If
you don’t? I kill you first, and then drop his corpse on top of yours anyway as it turns cold.”

Reinhardt’s ragged breath caught in his throat. His hammer was down, his shield was failing, he
could feel the warmth draining from his body along with his blood. He was an old man, an old
warrior, and there were some fights that one could not hope to survive. Any knight worth his salt
would never let an innocent die, not if they could be saved. Some fights, though, couldn’t be won....

He turned his head and looked to Lúcio, met those wide and dark brown eyes with his own.
Beautiful eyes.

The demon laughed, a howling noise straight from hell that chilled the warrior’s blood even further.
There was always another option. He couldn’t let this innocent die at the demon’s hands. Reinhardt
swallowed heavily, a tear dripping down his cheek, and shook his head.

Sacrifice.

“Justice…” Reinhardt strained, clutching at his side, “… never compromises.”

Lúcio was in a unique position, the position to see flames begin to flicker at Reinhardt’s back. His
eyes widened further. Reaper couldn’t see the flames, but he saw the DJ - he thought it was fear on
his face, shock. He was half right.

“Honour!” Reinhardt shouted, glaring back at the demon defiantly. “Never falters! And GLORY!
NEVER! DIES! HRAAAGH!” His shield fell away as his jets flared, launching him forward toward
Reaper.

Massive armoured hands grasped the demon tight in a crushing grip. Shotguns blasted, their
concussions almost unheard amidst the noise of Reinhardt’s rocket propulsion and his steel boots
throwing up sparks where they skidded across the roof.

As Lúcio watched in horror, the pair streaked away and tumbled right off of the building. He froze
for a few seconds, shaking his head, and then started to scramble wildly with a wordless shout.

Tears streamed down his face as he finally managed to clutch at his amplifier, spinning the dials and
engaging the repair and healing functions - turning it up to full blast. Wires reconnected, power was
reestablished, the hard-light blades flared into life along the bottoms of his skates and he leapt to his feet, rushing as quickly as he could toward the edge of the building.

It was too late, though. They were gone - he was gone, Reinhardt. Lúcio stopped twenty feet short of the edge and just stared, amplifier at his side, tears streaking down his cheeks.

At some point the music had stopped playing into his ear.

He couldn’t remember when.

Lúcio was so lost in his own head, and the flash of pink was so out of place, that he didn’t even notice it at first - not as the dots grew into fins and then into a wide, curved hull. As the MEKA crested the building, though, Lúcio recognized it for what it was - and an instant later, he recognized what it held: he looked like he’d had better days, but there was Reinhardt Wilhelm, gasping and bleeding but very much alive.

As D.Va set her MEKA down on the rooftop and let Reinhardt to his feet again, he swayed but managed to stay upright. “And love,” he wheezed with a weak chuckle as Lúcio ran in close, “never fails to uplift.”

“Couldn’t let my biggest fan down!” D.Va chirped through the mech’s speakers, then turned to face Lúcio. “You take care of him now - I gotta jet back to the con! No combat systems operational, only movement, ugh. You two think you can handle this control point?”

“We’ve got it all in hand,” Reinhardt groaned with a nod. “Thank you, my lovely Hana - good luck in your adventures!”

With a giggle and a little salute, D.Va hopped a hundred and eighty degrees and hit her booster jets again, flying back toward the convention centre.

Reinhardt made it almost three seconds after she was gone, before collapsing to the ground.

“No, no,” Lúcio knelt next to him. “C’mon man, you can’t come back from that just to…” he raised his amplifier but Reinhardt’s hand stopped him. He laid himself down on the roof, on his back.

“Wait, my friend,” the old man’s voice was weak. “There- there is work to be done first…”

His armoured fingers clutched at plates and pulled them free, dropping them to the roof next to him. Some of them looked more like shrapnel than armour at this point from where Reaper had unloaded into them point-blank, and the flesh beneath was in bad shape. Blood bubbled up angrily.

“Anything… near the surface will remove itself, but the deeper pieces-” Reinhardt grunted, wincing. “I can feel one. My hands are too broad, I cannot-” he cut off in a gasp as his hold on consciousness threatened to leave him.

“I-I don’t know man, I’m-” Lúcio swallowed, dry-mouthed, as the realization of what he was being asked to do struck him. “I don’t know if I can - I mean, I haven’t ever-”

Reinhardt dropped one of his gauntlets to the ground - the whole hand of the suit was mechanical, the man’s own hand buried in controls in the armoured forearm. He reached out now toward the DJ.

“Take- take my hand, my friend, and look at me.”

Lúcio did, hesitantly, his hand practically enveloped in Reinhardt’s massive fist. They were both a little clammy, and Lúcio noticed that the other man’s was a little cold. The fallen warrior looked back at him with slightly teary eyes, one sky blue and the other pure white but it didn’t look broken. It just
looked like him.

“I have faith in you.” Reinhardt’s words were absolutely certain, they held no room for ambiguity. “You can do this, I know it. No matter what happens this day, neither of us have failed. You risked yourself to defend others, and I?” He chuckled weakly, causing blood to seep from his wounds a little faster. “I believe I can say the same. You should be proud of yourself this day, my friend. I know am.”

Reinhardt laid his head back on the roof, but to him it was the smooth grass of the Elysian Fields. A gentle breeze wafted and the sun beat down upon him, and he knew that his pain was only fleeting. One way or another it would end soon. “Lúcio,” he breathed, lacking the strength to speak any louder. “I am an old man, and my days are numbered. If I am to die today, know that I will do so gladly at your side.”

He pulled a ragged breath and tried to hold it, to get out more words, but the air slipped between his teeth limply. The sun seemed so bright. Has it always been? Or do I go now to join my brothers?

Lúcio stared in shock as Reinhardt’s hand started to fall away, but he caught it in both of his and refused to let it slip. His eyes narrowed, squeezing out tears as he screwed up his face in determination. “Oh no you don’t,” he whispered hoarsely, his throat clenched tight. He cleared his throat and managed to turn it into a chuckle. “Haven’t you heard? Glory never dies.”

Steeling himself, gritting his teeth, Lúcio pressed his fingers into the warrior’s open wounds. Reinhardt’s head snapped back with a cry but the DJ was actually relieved at that - he was alive, he was alive and by everything in Lúcio’s power he was going to stay that way.

Lúcio had never had his hands in another person before - at least, not like this. A couple of fingers, sure, but only ever in a very, very different sense. This felt more like he was preparing meat for dinner, and the thought actually made it a little easier to deal with. He just had to find the bit of grit that was stuck in here, or bone, or whatever it was, and then he could have a nice meal.

His eyes were fixed on the sky, he didn’t look down - looking wouldn’t help anyway and he already felt lightheaded. Gulping down stomach convulsions, he kept probing until he found it. A large chunk of metal which he pinched between his fingertips and tugged slowly out.

There was a lot more blood when he got the piece of shrapnel free, a lot more blood, and Lúcio had just enough time to spin the dials on his amp all the way to maximum before the brightness of the sun overtook him and he slumped to the ground unconscious.

---

Lúcio awoke to a sound of chatter. People’s voices, talking - and his music wasn’t playing in his ear. The earbud had fallen out at some point.

Some point on the rooftop.

He jerked bolt upright, and a pair of hands clamped around his shoulders. “Easy, my friend - you must be careful. As flattering as it is to make you swoon, it worried me as well.” Reinhardt chuckled as Lúcio looked over.

He wrapped his arms as far around the man’s chest as he could and squeezed tight before
remembering that that was exactly where he’d been hurt, and letting go. “Sorry, sorry I just-” he laughed breathlessly, shaking his head. “I thought you were done for! Twice!”

At some point Reinhardt had removed his armour, but he was still quite a sizeable man. Rather than being in a chair, he just sat on the ground next to where Lúcio had been laying.

Reinhardt chuckled, patting him on the shoulder. “No, my friend - I would say that it was not my time, but that would be a lie. You saved me. Thank you.” He nodded with a little smile, and warmth filled Lúcio’s heart - it was like being back in the favela again, when the cheer had started going around. Sheer terror giving way to joy.

“What happened to uh…” Lúcio turned a little, Reinhardt letting his hands drop now that he was obviously steady sitting up.

“That demon? He did what he always does, what cowards alway do - ran off. We will see him again, you and I.” Reinhardt’s face took on an almost statuesque look of determination and zeal.

“You and I?” Lúcio chuckled. “Is that an invitation?”

Reinhardt grinned back to him. “There is always room on the team for another who fights for righteousness - and room by my side as well.”

“Easy, salang sae!” D.Va’s teasing voice came from one side and Lúcio’s head turned to face her. “A girl might think you’re trying to steal her man, Willy!”

“Hey, I thought you said you had a boyfriend?” Lúcio teased right back, grinning widely.

“Oh, I do.” She tipped her head to the side with a smirk. “But I still own you.”

Reinhardt laughed and patted at Lúcio’s shoulder again, helping him up to his feet as he tried to stand. “Aww, why you gotta be like that?”

“Because it’s fun.” D.Va narrowed her eyes, scrunching up her nose a little. “And because you missed my match. Again.”

Lúcio’s face fell and he spun around to face Reinhardt. “You were out for several hours, my friend,” the seated man shrugged.

The DJ swirled on his skates to face D.Va with his hands outstretched. “I am so sorry - you know I wanted to make it, I just-”

“Oh, shh,” she rolled her eyes and stepped forward, snatching up a pink hoodie which had been rolled up to act as a pillow beneath the DJ’s head. “I’m not really mad, I’m just messing with you, OMG - besides, you’ll make it up to me.” Her head turned back with a playful smirk. “Trust me.”

Lúcio chuckled a little nervously. “Well I mean - you know you’ve always got a seat at my shows! I don’t really know what else I can do…”

D.Va went to stand next to her MEKA, patting a hand on one of its guns before she spun around and leaned back against it. “Oh,” she giggled, “I have a few ideas…”

---
Hours later, Lúcio was feeling a little bit of the pre-concert jitters. Not nervous, just excited - he wanted to be out there already! He missed the days of the smaller concerts when he could just start, but now there were timelines and warm-up acts and tear-down times. It was all fine, it was good - and he never listened to the timelines that much anyway. He kept going as long as it felt right.

Now was the time - the starting talent walked off stage and he shook their hands, complimented the drummer in particular, and then skated out onto the stage to thunderous cheering and flashes of fireworks. He raised his hands in the air, pushing the volume of the crowd even higher and leaping, kicking his skates up over his head in a backflip. They went wild, absolutely wild, and Lúcio felt like the grin might just split his head in half.

He looked out into the front row, the special reserved seats, and there was Reinhardt with four little kids on his knees and shoulders - he was back in his armour again, minus the few most heavily-damaged plates, and Lúcio was glad to see little earplugs poking out of the kids’ ears. The man took up both seats. Lúcio had had to beg the stage crew to remove the armrest between them. It took them an angle grinder and an hour, but they did it, and it was worth it to see him grinning up from the front row.

They’d originally been D.Va’s seats, but in light of the little change of plans…

Nobody in the crowd (except for one old armoured warrior) expected the loud sound of rockets that split the cheering, as a hot-pink and endorsement-covered mech shot out over the room, raced overtop of the crowd, and burst onto the stage.

“Awww, yeah!” D.Va shouted with glee, her MEKA’s speakers turned up to the absolute redline. She hit a button and her particle generator whirred to life, but it wasn’t a barrier it projected - lasers of every colour flew out and scattered through the mist that was being pumped into the arena. “Let’s get this party started!”

Lúcio chuckled as he gave his friend a fistbump. Lights? Check. Dancing girl? Check. Adoring fans? He glanced out at the crowd again, catching one set of eyes in particular. Check. Get it started is right!

“Let’s break it down!” He jumped into another flip, jamming his fingers down against the amp’s buttons as he did and launching into music - speakers dotted all around the arena blasting out into the audience. This music was the heart and soul of people: of him, and of them, too.

A floating table of spin-discs came over in case he needed them, but today he was feeling a little old-school, a little particularly freestyle, and thought he might just do it all through the amp as he went. Just what he did all of every day, spun right out through the speakers for the people to enjoy.

The crowd burst into movement as D.Va set the pace, jumping and spinning and shimmying in an impressive display of both piloting skills and party spirit, and as always, Lúcio just let it all happen - he spun it this way, shifted it that way, turned things up or dialed them back and let them simmer. People asked him where his creativity came from, and there was really only one answer he could give: life. Freedom. Joy. They were all the same to him.

It was gonna be a good night.

Chapter End Notes
Translations:
salang sae = "love birds" (in theory. I don't know any Korean at all, so this is one hundred percent Google translate. Anybody who speaks the language and has a better phrase, I would love to hear it, thank you!)

Reinhardt's a beautifully sad character to me in some ways, because I think in his comic we were shown his legitimate view of the world. I think his PTSD is so thorough and so great he's split off and lives in this fantasy world of dragons and knights; but it's not really sad because he's not sad. I think Reaper's a dick for mocking him for it, obviously. Originally, this conflict was actually going to result in more obvious Lucio/Reinhardt pairing, but then it didn't work out that way. However, if you thought you were picking up on threads of that - you were, hehe :D
Also, Reinhardt just has a really pretty face, okay? And eyes. And so does Lucio, and they're good boys, and good boys deserve good things (like other good boys, for instance >.>)

So yeah, some Reaper backstory and a little more Talon action which'll tie into the plot in the future. I like the begrudging friendship between him and Sombra, and you can expect to see more of that and watch it evolve - not necessarily well or flawlessly, but interestingly at least, I think. As always if anyone has thoughts or suggestions, or things that were mentioned that they want to see more of, please let me know and I'd be happy to write them out! I'm rattling one around in my head right now and probably will write it over the course of the next week or so, but there's always room for more!

Also also - basically, either Lucio has prosthetic legs, or he's wearing some kind of a suit; his legs definitely have all kinds of mechanical components all around them, right? I tried to leave that pretty ambiguous here - even if they're not prosthetics/he's not paralyzed, if the motors to the exo-suit were killed it'd be pretty draggy and would make moving really awkward. Anyway, that's just a little side mention for anyone who was wondering.

Come on back next time when it flips back over to London - Widowmaker gets an assignment and Tracer wakes up to an empty bed, but she's called in for something else anyway. She gets to go hang out with Pharah for the day and help clean up a few messes. Threads come together, and the Tide starts to come in and threatens to sweep everything away...
Serious Summary: Widowmaker gets called off on a mission and Tracer wakes up alone to a message of her own, and goes to spend the day taking care of some business with Pharah. Another development later in the day sends her by a mansion on the outskirts of town due to a peculiar emergency call. She's not the first one to arrive.

JFL Summary: It's totally not a one-night stand! I mean, sure, Tracer wakes up alone, but that doesn't count. Emily's sleepy and Tracer's sorry, Athena's early and Tracer's late. Widowmaker's a clock or a weapon. Winston's upset that they have no authority. Pharah's regretting telling Tracer anything. T'chou's tired of sneeze jokes about her name. Widowmaker may or may not have killed an old lady - or rather, she's almost definitely killed an old lady at some point, but she may or may not have killed a particular old lady.

Chapter Notes

Don't think any warnings are necessary. Mild descriptions of violence and blood, but nothing to write home about I think.

Previous Chapter Summary: Lucio and Reinhardt met by happenstance at a convention, both there to see D.va, but an explosion drew them elsewhere. Talon was engaged in breaching an office tower a few blocks away, and the two heroes went quickly to try to cut Talon off. Reaper met them on the roof and did quite a lot of damage - when the game was up and all the pieces were on his side of the board, he offered Reinhardt a simple choice: drop his shield and sacrifice Lucio, and survive, or keep the act up and get killed before Lucio was slaughtered anyway. The warrior took the third option and grabbed his former comrade, leaping off of the skyscraper with Reaper in his arms. D.va caught him and saved him, but Reaper escaped and Reinhardt was badly hurt by the encounter. Luckily, Lucio was there to save him - and they made it back to the convention centre in time for Lucio's concert that night.

She felt like she hadn’t in years. Maybe like she never had, actually - laying there with the warm woman curled up against her, drooling lightly on her shoulder. Widowmaker’s fingers stroked idly through Tracer’s hair as the brit slept, and she found that she was perfectly and entirely content. Like she had the shot lined up and was just squeezing the trigger, that magnificent moment, but it had lasted for hours now. It was fascinating.

Tracer had drifted off mid-question a few hours back and now they just lay there, Widowmaker with a faint smile on her lips and her eyes wide in the moonlight, her mouse snoring lightly every now and then. She soaked in the warmth and for a very long time, she just laid back and appreciated it.
There was a soft noise in her ear.


The only words she ever said when receiving a mission.

Ten minutes. The transport would be there in ten minutes, and tonight she was not to be alone in it - no opportunity to bring her little pet, her little mouse, along. Ten minutes, though. She could spare two first.

Widowmaker settled back into the mattress and pulled Tracer in a little tighter, intent on soaking in every degree of warmth she could for every second of those two minutes. They passed far too quickly, but such was the problem with time. It fled when one wished it to slow, it dragged when one willed it to hurry.

With a little sigh, the assassin slid out of bed, the other woman’s warmth quickly bleeding from her blue skin in the moonlight as she stepped toward what looked only like a closet. Entering, she pulled a hidden catch and opened the way through to her own private room, full of the tools of her trade. The apartment had been much larger before these modifications had been made, and an armoury hidden behind its walls.

It took her three minutes to don her armour, and her heels made no sound as she stepped out into the main room again, heading for the window - but still, something must have happened, must have stirred the woman sleeping there.

“Emily?” Tracer murmured, voice heavy with tiredness. “D’we have to get up?”

Widowmaker froze, eyes wide, staring at the lump under the blanket. Neither of them moved. Nothing moved. The mouse was still asleep - or at least, mostly. Silently, the assassin knelt down next to the mattress and stroked at Tracer’s hair.

“S’alright love,” she whispered, stripping her voice of accent as much as she could. She didn’t exactly sound like Emily, but she didn’t sound like herself either - it was close enough. “Go on back to sleep.”

“Mmmmkay,” Tracer sighed happily, pulling the blankets tighter around her. “Have a good day. I love you.”

Widowmaker wanted to stay. For the first time she could remember, she wanted to deny an explicit directive. To stay here, to crawl back into bed and just…

The window was only open for a few seconds, just long enough for her to creep out and close it behind herself before she launched off into the night. She had a mission.

...a mission, and no choice.

Tracer pulled the blanket tighter around herself as a cold breeze blew through. Where’s the bloody pillows? Did I knock ’em off the bed again? Whatever. Figure it out in the morning. She drifted off back to sleep, her dreams full of eyes both hazel and gold, skin warm and cold - and a little windup robot T-rex. Sometimes dreams weren’t that relevant.
“Buzz buzz buzz”

“Mmwha? Whosa…”

“Who’m is? Whm- Em? S’at the phone?”

Tracer wiped a hand heavily over her face as she managed to push herself out of sleep. She must have been really tired - the bed didn’t even feel right, the blanket; she didn’t even have a pillow under her head. Emily wasn’t here and-

Emily! She shot upright with a gasp, not in her own apartment. It was small and plain and had hardly any furniture, and her phone was going off in the pocket of her backpack. She scrambled over to it and pulled the phone, answering the call quickly and holding it to her ear, ready to apologize to Emily.

“Hey, love, I-” a frown flickered across her face. “Winston? Wh- yeah, of course. Um, no, I’m… I’m actually not at home right now, but I- I can be. Ten minutes?” Her eyes dropped to the backpack, with her accelerator inside. “Yeah, no problem, love. Normal pickup place? Good. I’ll meet the ship there, thanks.”

She shoved her phone back into the backpack and only then realized that the woman who actually owned the apartment wasn’t there. Widowmaker was gone. Tracer looked around for a moment, trying to find a pad of paper to leave a cheeky note - something along the lines of “Who doesn’t love to wake up to an empty bed, hmm?” but there was no paper here.

There was no anything here, and Tracer couldn’t exactly just shoot off a quick message on her phone. Does she even have a phone? With a shrug, she just pulled her clothes back on and donned the chronal accelerator.

“Now then,” she looked out of the window and glared at the sun just rising. “Oh, god, ew, what time even is- oh whatever, not important.” Retracing her steps back up to the roof, she threw herself off and swirled into timeless light, hopping from rooftop to rooftop until she got home.

It didn’t take long at all. They lived only a few blocks apart - she realized that Widowmaker must have taken an intentionally long route the day before. No doubt just to encourage her little mouse to hang on to her tightly. Tracer smirked as she landed on her balcony again and jogged inside, heading right to the bedroom to get her mission gear out of the safe they’d bought just for the purpose.

“Mmm, hmm?”

Tracer froze for a second as she got into the bedroom. “Em! Oh g- I’m sorry, love, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“What time is it?” she leaned up in the bed, rubbing at her eyes. “Where’ve you been, love? You were gone all night.”

“Y-yeah, I-” Tracer cleared her throat a little, spinning the lock on the safe. “I was um, actually out with uh…”
Emily chuckled a little. “Oh, okay. I knew it wasn’t a mission. The window’s broken.” Disjointed thoughts and simple phrasing that Tracer knew spelled out a long night before and little sleep, and she felt worse for it.

“Oh, yeah, uh… think it was a bird,” Tracer lied, “but we can get that dealt with - I’m so sorry, love, but Winston’s got a job for me to-”

“S’okay,” Emily hummed a sigh, laying back into the plush pillows of their bed. “Jus’ gimme a kiss before you leave.” Lena chuckled, pulling her jacket on and jogging over, planting a quick kiss on Emily’s cheek. The mostly-sleeping woman responded by reaching out blindly and grabbing at her harness. “C’mon, a proper one, silly.”

She pulled Lena down to meet her, her other hand getting caught in the spiky mess of hair as she got the kind of intense satisfaction that one could only get out of a nice thorough snog while half-asleep.

“Mm, better,” Emily sighed with a grin, eyes still closed. “You’re grand, love - go save the world. Wake me up when you get back, eh?”

Tracer chuckled, head spinning a little bit. “Of course! You sure you don’t want another kiss before I head off?”

Emily giggled and pointed to the door. “Go on! You’ll wake me up, and if you do that you can’t wake me up later, now go ahead - I only just managed to nod off. Pull the blinds for me?”

“No problem,” Lena murmured, stepping over that way as she tugged on her bracers over her jacket, sliding the blinds shut and closing out the rising sun. Emily sighed. “That better?”

“Brilliant, love, thank you. I love you.”

She stepped back to the bed to give Emily a quick kiss on the forehead. “I love you too. See you in a bit, dear - sleep well.”

Emily hummed and snuggled down into the bed as Tracer walked out and quickly pulled on her mission gear - the bracers, the leather jacket and leggings, the goggles - then stepped onto the balcony and closed the door behind her before whirling off into the day. The transport was waiting for her where it normally was.

“Sorry Athena,” Tracer smiled hesitantly as she stepped in and the doors closed behind her, “have you been waiting long?”

“Not at all, Tracer,” the AI responded gently as the dropship started to lift off. “I was early by a minute and forty-seven seconds. You were only late by six.”

She scoffed, dropping herself into one of the seats. “Only six? I must be losing my touch…” Athena hummed a light laugh and Tracer chuckled. “So, what’s the mission?”

“A cache of chemical weaponry has been found - one of several which were discovered to have gone missing from a storage depot,” Athena explained as the ship whirred away from London and toward their destination. “It seems that the group responsible is involved in the recent upheaval near the Jordan river. Their plans with the weapon are unknown, but considered to be of great danger to the populace.”

The brit sighed and rubbed at her forehead. “Oi, that’s a sadly old and familiar tune. Hope we can get on top of it before things get out of hand.”
“Agreed,” Athena hummed, taking a slight detour to avoid a pocket of active military airspace. “The chemical’s formulation is currently unknown, but we are actively undergoing efforts to change that. Until then, containment is the best policy.”

“Anyone else coming with me?” Tracer quirked an eyebrow. This sort of engagement in an active warzone; she sort of hoped the answer was yes.

“All other operatives are currently occupied, but you can expect support from local forces - Helix Security International, primarily. They have arranged to send a team to work alongside you.”

“Pharah?” Tracer grinned hopefully, and got a warm synthesized chuckle in return.

“Yes, Miss Amari the younger will be leading their team - she was quite excited to see you again.” There was a beat of silence, and then Athena spoke swiftly. “Please don’t tell Ana I used that form of address.”

Tracer giggled and nodded, throwing a wink at one of the cameras. “Don’t worry, love - my lips are sealed! Although it’s not like she could smack you for it or anything.”

“Yet, I suspect she would find a way of making her displeasures quite clear...”

They broke into laughter again as Athena slipped them through cloud cover, avoiding the prying eyes of the world. Overwatch didn’t exist, could not exist, not anymore. As far as anyone was concerned, they were simply people now - sometimes they took a stand on this issue or that one, but they could have no organization.

It was a sad fact, but a fact nonetheless. They simply needed to work around it.

---

Athena set the dropship down in an old stone alleyway - a snug fit, but that meant it was a safe one. At least, relatively. The ship was mostly unseen and relatively protected by walls that had stood for centuries.

Fareeha “Pharah” Amari was one of the few to notice the ship’s arrival. Her and her squad, the four of them, were waiting for their outside contractor - though only she had met Tracer before. Pharah had always dreamed of being a part of Overwatch, and while that dream had died with the organization, she could and would still do her part.

...and leap at every opportunity that presented itself to work alongside what remained of the once-great organization, either professionally or otherwise.

It had been a letter from her mother that spurred her to it; the straw that broke the camel’s back. After that she had sought them out, and lo and behold, there was her mother. Years dead and gone, and yet, not.

Suffice to say it wasn’t the easiest of reunions. People who’d been nearby at the time still tended to pull any bottles out of Fareeha’s reach whenever she started to raise her voice. They loved each other, both, her and mother - but intense emotions did lead to intense reactions. She was certainly no stranger to that.
“Tracer,” Pharah nodded as the brit emerged from the dropship and waved. “Nice to see you again.”

“You too, F-” Tracer’s eyes flicked to the other Helix members standing around, every one of them - Fareeha included - clad head to toe in their blue Raptora jump-jet armour. Best stick to callsigns. “- Pharah! How’ve you been?”

“Good, good.” She stood a head taller than Tracer, in her armour, and stepped close to wrap an arm around her shoulders and clap her on the opposite side - something between a hug and a sporting gesture. “So. I hear there are some chemical weapons in the area? Let me introduce you to the team.”

She turned around and gestured to the others, one by one. “Zao, Turner, Bjornsson, and T’chou.”

“Don’t even bother with the sneeze jokes,” the one on the farthest right commented, her voice dark but playful, and the others all laughed briefly - Pharah and Tracer included.

“Team, this is Tracer - special operative, on loan from Britain.” Pharah chuckled. “Give or take.”

They all lined up and shook hands with their new comrade-of-the-hour, assuming a loose semicircle in front of her and waiting for further briefing. “Alright Tracer… fill us in.” Pharah turned to her as well - somehow managing to look imposingly expectant despite the helmet hiding her face from view.

“Okay,” Tracer took a deep breath and huffed it out, glancing between them. “Chemical weapon of currently unknown composition - was extricated from a mountain complex about fifty miles south-by-southeast. The chemical heads are loaded into artillery shells, but we don’t know if the people responsible are going to be altering that. Either way, it’s bad news - so be on guard for anything. Resistance is expected to be light to moderate, they shouldn’t see us coming - so we go in fast, hit ‘em by surprise, and we’re off to the races. The target used to be a winery - the open yard in back has the payload.”

A chorus of nods and murmurs of agreement as Tracer turned to their squad leader. “Pharah - has Athena provided you with a link to-”

“Tactical maps and data, yes, we’re all linked in. We’ll take two paths - Bjornsson with me, blue line; we’ll go east and high, draw attention. Zao, T’chou, Turner, red line - take the streets to get behind from the south, then hop the wall and drop on them unawares.” As she spoke, she gestured, and dotted lines appeared on the displays of all of their helmets, tracing paths through the city for them to follow.

“Right, and I’m green,” Tracer nodded, the lines etched on the insides of her goggles as well. Athena wasn’t actively overseeing - she had her own jobs to do, but she’d provided a little subroutine for tactical analysis and provisions. “Rooftop assault for me - while you’ve got ‘em distracted, I flash in and destroy the payload.” She patted at a half-dozen hemispherical metal things clipped to her belt. “Thermite charges, guaranteed to destroy whatever’s under ‘em.”

“You sure you can get in through the crossfire?” Turner’s voice was understandably concerned for the one person amongst them wearing no armour, with no visible weapons, and who had to run through the streets because she had no jump-jets. He didn’t know about the accelerator or what she could do with it - but before Tracer could respond and fill him in, Pharah cut her off.

With a chuckle. “Don’t worry, Turner - if there’s anyone I’m not worried about sustaining an injury in this engagement, it’s Tracer. Trust me. Prepare to be surprised.”

The others laughed softly and Turner just shrugged, but Tracer was left grinning widely. Pharah’s
stamp of approval didn’t come easily, and knowing she had it was a big boost.

“As for that crossfire,” Pharah cautioned, “it is of tantamount importance that we do not disturb the payload. Explosives and chemical weapons don’t mix - if our rockets are enough to rupture the tanks, but not enough to destroy the compound, well… I don’t need to spell it out for you. Stay smart with your fire, cover Tracer until she eliminates the target, and then punch out. This isn’t a clean-up, it’s in and out. Regroup here for debrief. Questions?”

A chorus of shaken heads and negatory murmurs, and Pharah nodded once. “Good. Five minutes prep, then we move out - check and ready, team, and break a leg.”

“For you, I’ll blow one off,” T’chou countered and the team all laughed as they went through their checks. Wings swiveled and shifted, rocket launchers were loaded and unloaded, amidst a whole host of things Tracer recognized as systems checks but couldn’t even start to guess at the actual function of. Every one of them was wrapped up in a tiny, personal jet fighter and the pilot stared with open awe, eyes gleaming like a kid pressed up against a candy store window.

“Hey, Tracer,” Pharah gestured her off to the side. “Chat a minute?”

The young brit shook herself from her wonderment and nodded, jogging over into a bit of an alcove. Fareeha pulled her helmet off and fixed the shorter woman with a warm smile. Tracer couldn’t help but grin at that, at her face - dark eyes and warm smile, and the tattoo that never failed to draw the eye. She was imposing and statuesque, heroic and beautiful all at once.

“It really is nice to see you,” she nodded. “Some day soon we’ll need to meet up outside of a mission again.”

Tracer nodded with a chuckle. “Well, the world always needs saving, eh love? Suppose we could talk somebody else into pulling their weight for a night, though, and we could nip off to the pub!”

They both chuckled, Fareeha sporting a surprisingly cute little grin - it always was a bit of a surprise to Tracer when it surfaced, but it seemed constant now. The woman was practically glowing, and Tracer couldn’t help but feel that it wasn’t solely their meeting that was responsible.

“Something’s happened,” she half-accused, teasingly, eyes narrowing a bit as she leaned up to inspect Fareeha’s face a bit closer. “Something’s definitely going on! Go on, spill - what’s changed? What’s got you this cheery?”

“What?” Fareeha laughed, shaking her head - the perfect picture of stoic nonchalance. With just a tiny hint of what Tracer thought might be a blush hiding behind her dark skin. “Nothing in particular, it’s just a good day. Get to see a friend, carry out an op - we’ve all been going a little stir-crazy on guard duty.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Tracer crossed her arms, clearly unimpressed. “Nope, not buying it love - something’s up, I know it, but you don’t need to tell me right now.” A devious grin crossed her lips as she snickered. “Besides, that means I can make up my own story! Oh, and it’s a good one, too. Real juicy bit of top-quality gossip, there.”

“Oh really?” Fareeha raised an eyebrow, pushing the smile from her lips. Tracer giggled, nodding, and the armoured woman’s second eyebrow joined her first. “As juicy as you trying to rope in a third?”

The other four couldn’t hear any of their conversation, and they weren’t trying to. There was no point - and it was largely secretly suspected that Pharah could see through people to their souls
Anyway, just a little bit, just enough to tell if they were truthful or lying. Nobody was able to bluff her out of anything, so nobody tried. At poker nights they all just gave her ten and paid off her drinks tab as she spent the night chatting and laughing. There was no point playing against her.

All of that didn’t matter, though, because probably everyone within ten blocks - even people sleeping inside - would have heard when Tracer shouted out, “FOR GOD’S SAKE ANA!”

Fareeha giggled as Tracer pouted, blushing angrily and crossing her arms. “Aw, you’re kinda cute when you’re all upset like that.”

“No I’m not!” Tracer complained with a cutely upset huff, kicking at the dirt. “I swear this is the last time I talk to your mum for advice on anything. Ever.”

Pharah snorted. “Don’t bother lying about that. Anyway, who cares? Your bedroom antics are your own until you choose to share them - or at least, until Mama does it for you.” She snickered a little as Tracer pressed fists against the sides of her own head.

“Ugh it’s not happening this is so not happening…”

“Relax, Tracer,” Fareeha leaned back against the wall and shot her team a glance. They’d all retreated about fifty feet since the shorter woman’s shout and busied themselves with looking absolutely anywhere except over toward their squad leader. “Listen, if it makes you feel better… and don’t tell anybody this, okay?”

Tracer nodded excitedly, eyes bright as her embarrassment was instantly forgotten amid the prospect of learning a secret.

Good, Fareeha thought to herself amidst a rising tumult of anxiety. At least it accomplished something. “If you must know,” she murmured, meeting Tracer’s eyes. “There is something going on with me. I’ve… I’ve started seeing someone, actually, and I wanted to thank you for it. You and Emily were a bit of an inspiration, you could say.”

More like a kick in the head, but in a good way. Seeing the two of them together when they’d met up for tea one day a while back had jogged Fareeha into recognizing some things in herself. Little ways the two of them spoke to each other, touched each other, looked at each other… it seemed so familiar. It made her miss Angela, and she hadn’t been able to push it out of her mind.

Tracer brightened, ecstatic. “Oh Fareeha, love, that’s brilliant! Who is it? Anyone I know?” Pharah’s eyebrows raised in warning but Tracer kept going. “Ooh is it someone on the team?” She grinned widely as Pharah shook her head just a hint. “Your team or my team?”

“Tracer,” Fareeha murmured smoothly, softly, gently, leaning down with a grin like a steel beartrap. “If you keep guessing - or if you tell anybody else - I won’t just tell you the Berlin story. I’ll get Mama to show you the video.”

Tracer blanched, eyes widening as she recoiled. “What? No, I- I mean, who cares who you’re seeing, right? Never even asked, I mean that’d be all kinds of intrusive like-”

Fareeha laughed, low and dark, and shook her head as she laid a hand on the other woman’s shoulder. “Relax, it was just a joke. Really though, I’m just… I think I’m not ready for the world to know yet.”

“Fair enough,” Tracer chuckled with a nod. Of course at this point, while she was relieved that she wouldn’t need to watch the video from Berlin, she was wondering if one actually existed. She also had a rising morbid curiosity about just what had happened there, but she’d never admit to it for fear
of finding out. “That’s really brilliant though, love - good to hear! Good on you, too; I hope that, whoever they are, they make you happy.”

“Yeah,” Fareeha grinned, her eyes going distant as her thoughts drifted. “They really, really do…”

---

The first rockets to fly were Pharah’s, as she was propelled skyward - and Bjornsson was right behind her with another salvo. Standard opening. Tracer waited for a count of ten until she heard other explosions from the opposite end of the compound, then blinked over the wall in a blue flash.

She was at the crate before anybody could react. Flames from the rockets’ trails swirled slowly through the sky as she flew, and the bullets that were being fired back moved like slugs through the air - and she hadn’t even fired it up to a hundred percent output. It really wasn’t necessary for this.

Realistically, the others probably weren’t necessary for this. Not really - Tracer could’ve blinked in, planted the bombs, and been out before the soldiers on the ground even noticed her presence. Just in case something went wrong, though - just in case there was more going on here than they’d though - a few added hands never hurt.

Floating above the battlefield, the members of the Helix team saw the blue blur that streaked through the old winery. They watched it with as much dedication as their flanks - four of them seeing for the first time the wonders that were Tracer and her accelerator, and Pharah just content to watch the woman work.

She reappeared in five locations on and around the crate of artillery shells, each time firing a pulse pistol from one hand as she set down one of the thermite charge with the other. Twice she was upside down, but it didn’t matter - before she could begin to fall, she’d gone back to light again and was swirling around. She blinked left and right, knocking down combatants who were firing on her.

Up above, the Helix team rained down fire upon the buildings, keeping most of the soldiers pinned inside.

“Cheers, loves,” Tracer chirped happily over the radio, “wanna see some fireworks?” She didn’t wait for a response before blinking to the roof of one of the buildings, planting a fist on her hips, and flicking a detonator. It wasn’t an explosion, really - five flashes of light, simultaneous, that flared even brighter as the thermite went to work. Within thirty seconds there was nothing discernable left of the crate of munitions, just twisted and smoking slag.

“Good job, team,” Pharah launched off a wrist-rocket at a solder below who was peeking out, flinging them backward into the building. “Regroup.”

That was all it took. The mission hadn’t even been as long as the preparation, and Tracer was grinning widely and panting just a little when they all met up where they’d started. The team surrounded her, patting her on the back and wanting to shake her hand - Turner apologized for ever doubting her, and said he owed her a pint. Pharah said he owed her two.

They made their way back toward the base - Tracer was to help out Helix on a few things, in exchange for their assist with the mission - and she chatted with them about the accelerator and what it could and couldn’t do.

As was often the case when she met people who didn’t know about it, she showed off a little -
including a trick that she did with Pharah, the latter launching off a rocket and Tracer returning it with the flame still burning. The two of them had come up with that just to scare Reinhardt.

It had worked.

The Helix ops weren’t quite as smooth, but they were also less straightforward. Tracer quickly understood - and quite thoroughly - how Fareeha was going a little nuts with this. Patrols had never been her strong suit and that was basically what these were - sweep and clear, spot inspections, things like that. Fairly routine, fairly intricate, and fairly mindless.

The day swept by in the way boring ones do - every individual minute seeming to take hours, but blurring in hindsight by the lack of definition. The only thing that made it bearable was the chatter, the clear team spirit that Tracer was glad to find she was swiftly pulled into and very included within.

---

“Ai, amiga, be careful with that.”

“I am always careful,” Widowmaker murmured, carrying the package out of the building. She twisted to avoid the hulking wreck of what had been a machine-gun turret.

Somewhere that Talon didn’t even know about, Sombra chuckled. They thought she was in one of their safehouses, but they were idiots just like most of the rest - a few simple little redirects and they figured she was safely in their pocket. “Sure thing, chica, but I’m just saying-”

“I do know what dropping it would mean,” Widowmaker’s tone held just a hint of playfulness, her lips a sliver of a smirk. Normally they wouldn’t have, but lately things seemed anything but normal. They’d been so refreshingly peculiar.

Sombra snickered at that. Something had her blue friend in high spirits, and she got the feeling she knew just what it was. A little more than the satisfaction of a job well done, she suspected. “Pass it off at the ship, then there’s something else you’ve gotta check out, okay?”

Unseen to her, Widowmaker raised an eyebrow, but simply waited silently to be filled in.

“I intercepted a call a minute ago,” Sombra swiped her hands at the air, replaying the recorded message into one ear and sending it to Widowmaker as well. It wasn’t long, only ten seconds. “Was going out to emergency services but I caught it instead - the house is only fifteen minutes from where you are, tops. Don’t worry, I kept the message from getting out, you shouldn’t have any company.”

Widowmaker shook her head as she listened to the message. Ten seconds could contain a lot, and she didn’t need to ask Sombra why this was becoming a job - it wasn’t their first run-in with the phenomenon. It was of great interest to many at Talon, although admittedly for a few different reasons. “D’accord. I will head there after delivering the package.”

“Excellent, amiga. Let me know when it’s done and I’ll swing a ship by to pick you up.”

“Mmm, my own personal taxi service,” Widowmaker chuckled. “Perhaps I will start demanding a limousine.”

Sombra chuckled. “Hey, I’ll see what I can do but no promises, eh?”
Widowmaker didn’t chuckle or respond as she rounded the corner to where the Talon troops stood waiting. Ninety percent survival, fairly good for an engagement like this. She walked through them as if she didn’t see them, though, right up to Reaper who stood at the dropship’s open door. The handoff was silent, no point chatting about it, but there was one thing that needed to be said.

“You’re taking it back alone,” Widowmaker explained, gesturing to the package that they’d come here to retrieve. “I am being diverted to an alternate assignment.”

Reaper just nodded with a grunt and turned to leave, but paused and glanced back over his shoulder. “Whoever it is, give ‘em hell for me.”

Widowmaker nodded with a brief laugh. He was so predictable. “But of course. Would I ever give them anything else?”

He had to chuckle at that. She was reliable at least - like a clock. Like a weapon. Point her your foe and they died, as simple as that.

She didn’t hang around; spun on heel and grappled off to the rooftops following the compass heading Sombra provided. The sun was starting to hang lower in the sky, soon it would be nighttime. A good time. Her time.

---

“Tracer?” Winston’s voice came over the comm and she reached up to tap the button.

“Yeah, love? I was just about to head back to base.”

“I know, but something else has come up. An odd emergency call from a house on the other side of the city - as long as you’re in the area, would you mind checking it out?”

Tracer glanced at the sun, drifting lower on the horizon. From unexpected plan to unexpected plan, and now it’d been almost two days since she’d really been home - which was fine, it wasn’t a huge problem, but she was still looking forward to a shower and her own bed. Widowmaker’s hadn’t even had pillows and Tracer’s neck hurt a little as a result, which wasn’t to mention how much she missed Emily. Or food.

Still, she was out here, and if something was going wrong it deserved at least a little investigation. “What was the call?”

Athena’s voice came through the dropship’s speakers as Tracer stepped inside. “I picked it up as part of my standard monitoring of open emergency channels. There was little noteworthy about it until it was scrubbed from the datastream before it could be interpolated by the emergency systems - luckily, I was able to download a copy while the operation was in progress. It is only ten seconds long.”

The audio shifted, crackling a little and with sounds of distant gunfire. A slight humming, at a pitch that made Tracer wince a little, was constant. Other than that it was silent for a few seconds. Then a dark synthetic voice spoke, “All shall fear the Black Tide. The tide rises. Cleansing comes.” A few more seconds of silence and the recording went silent again.

Winston’s voice came over the speakers then. “We’re searching what we can, looking for hits on the phrases “tide rises” and “Black Tide” specifically but we haven’t had any luck yet. Any information
we can find would be helpful - the call came from an old mansion outside of the city limits, but the fighting was quite intense in that area earlier this week. If you decide to check it out, be careful.”

“Decide?” Tracer giggled a little. “I’m already on my way, love! Do we know anything else?”

Winston grunted. “Not much. The place is owned by a Ms. Gregor, ninety-seven years old, no living family members. A few omnic… staff members.”

Tracer scowled. “Servants, more like - or slaves.”

“Don’t” Winston sighed, rubbing at his temples unseen as he watched the dropship lift off on a screen and saw it start toward the location. They didn’t have actual surveillance of the area - no camera feeds, just the ship’s GPS being plotted across the map. “Try not to jump to conclusions, it probably won’t help her mood and we don’t have any authority there.” He sighed, grumbling, “Or anywhere. If we want to find out what happened we’ll need her assistance, freely offered.”

Tracer huffed. “I know. I just… maybe it won’t come up. Maybe they’re just in-home nurses or something.”

“Exactly,” Winston nodded. “Call if anything happens - I’m going to be looking for any references to Black Tide. I’ve got a contact or two to call in about it, so that will have my primary attention. Athena will be monitoring, but she’s-”

“It’s alright, love, I don’t need anyone watching over my shoulder. I’ll shout if things take a turn for the worse, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Winston chuckled, relieved. “We’ll be listening for it. Shouldn’t be any problems, it’s near a combat zone but not directly under fire. Ms. Gregor refused to evacuate, though, so be wary. She might be a little…”

“…stubborn?” Tracer suggested, and Winston huffed a laugh over the radio.

“That’s one word for it. Good luck, Tracer - I’ll need to head out to make contact with my people. Athena can pass a message along to me if it’s urgent.”

“Oh go on,” Tracer rolled her eyes with a soft laugh. “Stop worrying over me like an old Aunty - I spent the whole day down here and I’m fine. I can handle some old bint in a fancy house.”

“Alright, alright, I’m leaving,” Winston chuckled.

“See ya, big guy!” Tracer settled into her seat and looked out the window. The city below was lit up sporadically - streetlamps in some places or glowing windows. Whole blocks were without power, illuminated only by fires burning: either in barrels for light and cooking, or simply because that section of the city had been hit particularly hard by the fighting. Occasional spatterings of flashes, gunfire and explosions, could be seen amidst the darkened streets.

Meanwhile, Tracer just swooped above it silently, beyond its reach. Her own face reflected in the glass was overlaid on the entire city as it flew past underneath. They did all they could, they all did, and they couldn’t ever stop the fighting. Their best hope was that maybe, if they were very good and more than a little lucky, they could stop someone from just gassing the whole place and killing everyone.

It wasn’t ideal, but it was something. Tracer noticed her own eyes in the glass, burning with determination - and a faint smile on her lips. She focused on that for a second, because it didn’t feel hopeless, it felt good.
Sure, they couldn’t save the world all at once - they couldn’t save the world forever, but they could do something. As long as she had any choice in the matter, she would do whatever she could to help it all.

When the mansion came into view, it was very much what Tracer expected from a mansion, but very much not what she expected given the area. Large white pillars, a huge front lawn with a circular drive, covered in plants despite the heat. The dropship didn’t fly directly over, but skirted the edges and set down out front.

The windows were lit and floodlights illuminated the mansion’s face, and it looked like it had just been cut out of somewhere else and dropped here. It looked like something from a storybook that had been poorly pasted into place.

The dropship set down across the street out front. There were scars of battle in the road but they only went as far as the high metal fence that surrounded the mansion’s substantial grounds. A flash caught Tracer’s eye - a missile of some sort streaking overhead crossed onto the property and a laser beam lashed out, turning the rocket into an impromptu firework.

It explained the mansion’s condition, at least, but Tracer was getting a little more worried about who this “Ms. Gregor” might be. At least she’d be safe on the grounds. “Looks like the place has defence systems,” she explained over the radio. “I’ll make sure to knock twice and be nice.”

There was no response - Winston had stepped out and Athena’s attention was diverted elsewhere, probably, but Tracer didn’t really need feedback. She was just talking to get it out there, and a little bit to allay the nervousness that was starting to build.

She jogged across the street rather than blinking - just on the off-chance that faster moves might trigger those defences. Thumbing a button beside the main gate, she leaned in to the module. “Hello? I picked up an emergency call. Figured with all the fighting nearby I’d best check it out - can I come in?”

The speaker buzzed briefly, and a synthetic voice responded. “You are expected,” it said simply, flatly. “Come in.” The gates clicked and then whirred as they withdrew, and Tracer stepped in. She held her breath as she went.

It all felt entirely wrong. She’d been trying to trust her gut more, recently, and right now it was telling her to high-tail it out of there… but if things were going wrong, this lady deserved a hand offered at least.

It took her a few minutes to jog up the drive to the actual house, but she still refrained from using the accelerator to speed her way - although whether it was out of respect, or wanting to have every bit of juice possible in reserve in case something drastic arose, she wasn’t quite sure. A bit of both, she suspected.

The front door was open and Tracer’s frown deepened a little. She tapped at her headset. “Athena?” the brit murmured. “You there, love?” No response. Alright Trace… in it alone, but that’s fine. You’ve got this, just… be careful.

She pushed the front door back and stepped in. The house didn’t erupt into alarms or gunfire, but she kept the accelerator humming just in case. Nobody seemed to be here.

“Hello?” Tracer called out as she stepped further in. “Ms. Gregor? Anyone?” Silence. Occasionally a distant thump or spatter of automatic weapons from outside, but inside the house? Nothing. Tracer walked in all but holding her breath, her heart starting to pick up the pace as chills shivered through
Something was definitely very wrong.

She called out several more times as she made her way through the foyer and started up the large stone staircase, but there was never any response at all. She tapped at her headset another few times but nothing there either. Alright then. Time to get serious with it…

The accelerator whirred to life as she blurred up the stairs, pulse pistols out and at the ready when she resynchronized with time. In her opinion this had just taken a turn from an investigation to a mission, and she wasn’t going to let herself get caught off-guard. Another open door at the top of the stairs, and another, brought her through to what looked like a library of some sort.

The first place her eyes flicked was the open window - tall, hinged, and ornate, looking out over the front lawn. The second thing she saw was an old woman slumped on the couch, unmoving, the whole front of her outfit soaked with blood.

The third was Widowmaker. Crouched in front of the couch and inspecting the corpse.

Chapter End Notes

Originally had written this and the next as a single chapter, but it ended up being about fifteen thousand words so I split it - so, you get a cliffhanger, heh, sorry. Starting some major plot here with the Black Tide. Uh... yup.

I really appreciate everybody reading and such, thank you all so much!

Come on back next time when Tracer's trust for Widowmaker gets tested, a few times - and so does everybody else's trust for Widowmaker. Perhaps trust isn't the best word, and perhaps it's not exactly everybody, but the assassin definitely doesn't help herself out too much. The Tide rises, and threatens to sweep the two new partners apart in the process, but after working for what they have they're not ready to give it away so easily.
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer confronts Widowmaker, who she'd discovered with a body - soon, the entire situation degrades and they are forced to flee. Tracer sustains an injury which requires immediate attention, but there is a slight problem with the plan. However, there's no problem so great that a sufficient amount of threatening will not overcome it - at least, that's Widowmaker's view on the situation. Tracer might not agree so much.

JFL Summary: Tracer and Widow get chased out of the spooky mansion, and then things get worse. Athena's a little snarky and Widowmaker doesn't like Mercy, for reasons she keeps unmentioned and generally tries to avoid thinking about. A spider sees an angel about a mouse.

Chapter Notes

Don't think any real warning are necessary. Very mild descriptions of injuries, blood, pain; both mental and physical. Mild hopelessness, frustration, discomfort.

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer awoke alone in Widowmaker's apartment - the assassin had been called away on a mission before the sun rose, though she found herself wanting not to leave. Tracer spends the day with Pharah and her Helix team, first taking out a shipment of the weapons which had been evacuated from the mountain complex (the one which Jack and the others raided), and then, helping Helix out with their assorted duties. Afterward, Winston called her and played a call that never made it through to emergency services - an odd phone call that mentioned something called "The Black Tide", but somebody caught it and erased it before it could get all the way to the ambulances and such. She showed up to investigate and found a seemingly empty mansion; pushing further in, she found an old woman's body with many stab wounds, and Widowmaker crouched in front.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“God,” Tracer whispered, wide-eyed, staring at Widowmaker - the assassin who she’d spent the previous night with, talking and kissing and holding each other - crouched in front of the blood-soaked corpse of an old woman. “What- what-”

Widowmaker turned around and sighed, rolling her eyes. “Oh relax, cherie, when have you ever known me to stab someone? It was not me.”

The brit stepped closed, feeling a little guilty at how relieved she was. “Sorry.”

“Oh, don’t be,” Widowmaker waved her hand dismissively. “It was a fair presumption to make. I would have killed her if needed, I simply didn’t. She was like this when I arrived a few moments ago.”
“Well that’s reassuring,” Tracer murmured somewhat wryly, stepping closer with a frown. “Ms. Gregor?”

The blue woman nodded and stepped away from the couch, her eyes on the surroundings. “Oui.” Seeing the building’s owner slain had been a surprise but not much of one - all it instilled in Widowmaker was an expectation that things were about to get much worse. She wouldn’t let anything or anyone get the drop on her.

“She’s been stabbed,” Tracer murmured idly, her mind still reeling a little from the shock of walking in on this. The old lady hardly even looked like a person anymore. More like a prop in some kind of awful movie. *Penny dreadfuls, all the way.*

“Oui.”

“A lot.”

“Oui.”

Tracer’s eyes flicked incredulously up to Widowmaker as she paced around the room, looking everywhere except for at her. “You alright over there? I’m trying to figure out-”

“There is more at work here, cherie, than the loss of one old woman. Stay alert.”

“What are you talking abo-” Tracer bit off her words as Widowmaker snapped up a hand, palm flat, silencing her. The blue woman leaned forward, just slightly, tilting her head as if listening.

Tracer didn’t hear anything before she was bowled over, she had no warning at all before someone had thrown her forward to the ground and was on top of her. She spun up the accelerator and swirled back through time, but not before she got a good look at her attacker - an omnic in a black suit of some sort, looking very formal. The optisensors dotted around their forehead glowed a vicious deep red.

She realigned with time above her attacker, pulse pistols blaring in short bursts, meant more to frighten or wound than to kill, but a second one knocked her off her feet again. As she began to blink away, she saw a bullet making its leisurely way through the air toward the first omnic. She moved back away from the pair of them, and watched sadly as the bullet tore out the poor person’s neck and a second could be seen aiming to do the same thing to the other one. Its head tumbled to the floor, red sensors dimming as Tracer turned to shout, something about not killing them.

The words never left her throat, though - one was behind Widowmaker and leaping at her, and Tracer didn’t pause to think or warn; she just spun up the accelerator and launched herself, flinging the omnic heavily back into the wall.

“Stop it!” she shouted, holding her pulse pistols trained on the assailant. “Surrender and stand down, or else-”

“The tide rises,” the omnic intoned solemnly and jumped toward her again. Metal hands lashed out and Tracer blinked back, firing in bursts at its legs. She shot out some of the actuators that served as muscles, but that didn’t stop the omnic or even really slow them. They scrabbled at the floor with their arms, moving with frightening speed until Widowmaker whirled and took another shot, clean through the neck again and severing the head.

“Do not bother, cherie,” she said softly in the ringing silence that followed. Four of them, there had been - a second was crumpled near Widowmaker’s feet, which Tracer hadn’t seen before. Each one now lay with their head separated from the body, entirely still. “They are not themselves.”
Widowmaker knelt over the last one to fall with a frown, picking up their head in both hands - red sensors flickered faintly. It wasn’t fully dead yet, but not truly alive any more, either. Her fingers snatched at the base of the skull and snapped a wire; the lights went out.

“It is… some kind of infectious program,” Widowmaker explained quietly. “They will not listen, will not stop, not until they are dead.”

Tracer swallowed heavily, heart beating like the machine guns in the distance. “What- where did they come from?”

A blue hand gestured idly to the corpse on the couch as Widowmaker slipped the omnic’s head into a bag that she slung over her shoulder, and then a second one as well. “Her former staff.”

A chill rushed through Tracer as her eyes flew to the body again. From behind it just looked like she was sitting on the couch - no hint of the blood or dozens of stab wounds. “They did that?”

“Oui. That one, specifically, I suspect,” she pointed to one body which still held a knife clutched in the hand. “They were faster than I expected. I did not think there would be four…”

Something in her tone drew Tracer’s gaze, and she saw Widowmaker looking down at herself - pressing fingers against a wound in her abdomen. A little bit of blood, dark and thick, clung to her fingers when she removed them.

“Oh my god,” Tracer murmured, leaping to the frenchwoman’s side in concern. “Are you alright? Did they get you?”

Widowmaker laughed lightly, shaking her head. “Calm yourself, cherie, it will be alright. It will take far more than this to get rid of me, I would not even worry about the blood. It is not as if I could bleed out from it, I only…”

She trailed off, shaking her head a little and glancing at the dark blood on her fingers which took on a more vivid red hue as it soaked in oxygen. She’d been so focused, so intent on stopping them from hurting her little mouse. Fixated on removing the head of one, Widowmaker hadn’t noticed another behind her - they’d come in pairs, it seemed. The second of the pair, Tracer had dealt with. ...

...by throwing herself at him. *Foolish girl.*

“It is nothing, ma souris. The wound is of no consequence, only a reminder that I may need to be faster and more cautious in the future.” She shook her head with a sigh and offered Tracer a brief smile before leaning in to give her a quick kiss on the forehead. “Apologies for my absence this morning. I was called away.”

“Yeah, me too,” Tracer murmured, looking around at the five bodies in the room. “I’m not getting any response from base, how about-”

“Non,” Widowmaker cut her off with a shake of the head, “nor I. Signals blocked, I suspect - no doubt my contact will be attempting to-” she held up a blue finger, eyebrows tightening, as her comm unit flickered and sputtered in her ear.

“- out of there amiga-” Sombra’s voice came choppily through the radio, drowned in static fuzz. “- big shit comi- efences offline, you gotta move! Now!”

Widowmaker didn’t need to know the full reason nor the full statement. Sombra sounded panicked, that was bad enough - she just stooped to grab one of the remaining two severed omnic heads and tossed it to Tracer. “Here. Perhaps it will give your team some insight into what is happening - now,
cherie, shall we away?"

Tracer frowned and started to protest, but Widowmaker grabbed at her arm and tugged her over to the window. “What are you- hey, wait!”

Widowmaker fixed her with a solid gaze, “Cherie, hear me - we must not delay. It is time to leave.” She paused for an instant, her eyes flicking back into the room before they returned to Tracer’s.

“Trust me?”

It was a surprisingly big question for just two words. Tracer thought for a moment, confusion and concern vying for dominance on her face. Did she trust Widowmaker? She trusted certain things, definitely - trusted that the woman wouldn’t kill her. She didn’t have much choice except to trust that she would kill other people. Did she trust her to do what was right? To have Tracer’s best interests - not just her survival - in mind?

She wasn’t sure.

“Okay,” Tracer nodded hesitantly, tucking the dead omnic’s head under one arm. “Let’s go then.”

They leapt as one out of the window, Widowmaker rolling as she hit the ground and breaking into a sprint. Tracer just blurred the lines between reality and alternate reality, twisting time to her own ends to swoop smoothly down and into a run. Her laugh got cut short by a tree nearby exploding near the top.

The brit flinched away from it, blinking instinctively to the opposite side of the drive but not wanting to get too far away from Widowmaker. “What the- what happened to the defences? When I came in I saw lasers take out an incoming missile, why…”

“They are down, cherie. The Tide, perhaps.”

Tracer gasped. “Tide? How did you-” she skidded to a halt. Widowmaker kept running for a few paces before she, too, stopped, whirling to face her compatriot.

"Cherie, we must move, come, there-”

“No,” Tracer cut her off with a shake of her head, “you knew. How did you know?”

“Know what?” Widowmaker huffed in frustration. “We picked up the same message as you, we-”

“You didn’t just pick it up. You scrubbed it, didn’t you? You squelched it - you’re the reason emergency services didn’t show up.” Tracer’s voice was shocked, almost disbeliefing. Another tree exploded somewhere on the property and a chunk of the mansion was struck by a missile as well, but Tracer wasn’t thinking about any of that. She was too focused on what had apparently happened earlier, the emergency services being diverted away from the house. Maybe if an ambulance had come, the woman could’ve been saved. Maybe if the police had come, the omnics could have been stopped.

Widowmaker clenched her jaw, locking eyes with the annoying brit across from her. “Oui. You don’t understand wh-”

“Then explain it to me!” Tracer shouted. “Stop treating me like an idiot or a child!”

“Stop being an idiot and I will,” Widowmaker hissed, eyes flicking to the treetops. Defences down. Never a good thing. Her words were swift as her eyes kept a rapid ongoing scan. “This is not our first encounter with the Black Tide. Obninsk. Two weeks ago. Search for it and see for yourself -
there, nobody stopped the call. Two dozen first responders were killed.”

Golden eyes searched the horizon for something more, something else coming, anything - she wouldn’t be caught off-guard twice in one night. “There have been more. Rio. Kitswala. Sudbury. Someone is probing at responses, gauging reactions - they are doing exactly what I would do, cherie, so we interrupted them, yes.”

Tracer couldn’t believe it. She didn’t want to and she couldn’t - she might trust Widowmaker, somewhat, but she couldn’t trust Talon and she was surprised the other woman did. Then it dawned on her. She might not have a choice.

Widowmaker had said herself that she couldn’t deny an order, Tracer had seen the evidence of that - the way she changed around Talon; talking on the radio to the troops, on a mission... she wasn’t the same person. Not the same one who had set out a picnic (admittedly, a stolen one, but still) on the rooftop and showed her around the tiny apartment. Not the same one she’d talked to for hours until they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

The only question was: which woman was she talking to now? Her partner, or Talon’s weapon?

Tracer didn’t get an opportunity to come up with an answer. A few feet away from her, an explosion knocked both of them off of their feet and flung them through the air.

Widowmaker got up first, groaning and clutching at her side - not just punctured by the knife wound, now, but a cracked rib as well. “Merde,” she hissed. “Now can we get out of here, cherie?”

There was no answer. Smoke and dust clouded her vision, she held her breath and flipped her hood down. The thermal cameras were briefly confused by the lingering heat and remnants of flame in the air, her whole view a mix of yellows and oranges and then, it withdrew. The maelstrom of colours all died down and left a hot crater some distance away, and a slumped, orange form. Tracer.

Widowmaker was at her side in a flash, grabbing at her shoulders. No response. She checked vitals - pulse was present, and her skin was still warm. She breathed, but raggedly.

“Tabernacle,” Widowmaker hissed, tossing the brit over her shoulder. “You foolish girl, how can-”

She cut off, simply letting the words end as she started to run down the drive to the entrance. More explosions behind her led her to suspect that the defences hadn’t just been deactivated - somebody was trying to clean up after themselves, cover their tracks. It was sloppy, it was all sloppy, and Widowmaker cursed silently as she ran. At Sombra for not seeing it earlier. At whoever had launched this attack to begin with. At Tracer for being so very stupid. At herself. Sloppy, sloppy, sloppy.

There was a dropship. An Overwatch dropship, gleaming white underneath a streetlamp. Widowmaker knew that any evac for her would be several minutes out at the least, but right now she didn’t care about that. She needed to get her mouse to where she would be safe.

As she approached the ship, Widowmaker took a wide angle to the side, slinking nearer with the comatose form still draped over one shoulder. If she could drop Tracer off in there, where she’d be found and saved... but what if she was alone tonight? What if there were no others here to guard her, escort her to safety?

Widowmaker wondered how much she could trust Sombra - or rather, more precisely, Widowmaker wondered how much it would cost her to ensure Sombra’s silence helping her hack an Overwatch dropship. It didn’t matter. Money was of no concern, nor really were favours. There was little she
objected to, so whatever Sombra would ask of her...

There was nobody inside the ship.

Gritting her teeth, Widowmaker jumped, avoiding the ramp entirely and leaping directly into the dropship. She moved immediately to the seats to set Tracer down.

“Hostile combatant detected.”

Widowmaker’s eyes shot up to the ceiling at the synthetic voice but she didn’t respond.

“Tracer. Tracer? What have you done with her?” the voice accused her and Widowmaker scoffed.

“She is alive and I intend to maintain that.”

“Vacate the ship immediately or I will be forced to-”

“ Forced to what, exactly, hmm?” Widowmaker sneered. Having finished buckling Tracer in, she whirled and crossed her arms, narrowed eyes seeking out a camera. “Whoever you are, you are clearly without capabilities or you would have exercised them already. So. Either remain silent and let me about my work, or make yourself useful and pilot the ship.”

“Vitals read-”

“Yes, she is injured. Alive, but…” Widowmaker’s eyes flicked to the body slumped in a seat. Blood was welling out of small cuts on her face, shrapnel wounds, and she remained entirely limp. Her breaths were uneven, sporadic…

...her little mouse was hurt.

Widowmaker stalked to a panel on the side of the ship and tapped at the holo-screen there.

“It is no use trying to hack me. Superior entities have tried and failed, I am more than a simple program.”

“You seem quite simple to me,” the assassin muttered under her breath, then spoke louder. “I am not trying to hack you. Yet. However, I keep that option open to myself. Here - this is the location of an aid camp. If you value the life of your little Tracer, you will take us there.”

The electronic voice was silent for a moment. “Dr. Zeigler.”

Widowmaker nodded, arms crossed, tapping her foot. There was a still and silent moment until she broke it. “Well?”

“...Tracer is injured. Vital signs are not encouraging. Dr. Zeigler is quite accomplished, but…” the voice trailed off in what Widowmaker considered to be a simple statement of facts. “I do not trust you.”

She rolled her eyes. “I do not care. Five seconds or I will be forced to other action.”

A pause. Four seconds later, the doors started to close. “I accept,” the voice stated and Widowmaker sighed, moving to sit in one off the seats. She intentionally chose one far away from Tracer. “If it ensures the safety of Tracer, I will not take action against you - but rest assured, I will ensure her safety.”

Widowmaker sighed. “Whatever. I do not care, just... go.” Being closed off inside the ship was a
little unnerving, but if this machine mind thought it could close her in here like a prison - or take her
to somewhere to be captive - Widowmaker would be happy to prove it sorely mistaken. She had no
fear, here or elsewhere: either the AI would take her to the doctor, or Widowmaker would pay
whatever price Sombra asked in order to have the machine hacked. Preferably, to pieces.

Regardless, her mouse would be safe.

“I am Athena,” the voice spoke as the dropship lifted off. “You are Widowmaker, formerly Amélie
Lacroix. Operative Tracer’s wounds are inconsistent with your MO and known targets.”

“Yes, I already said, I did not-”

“I know what you said.”

The voice said nothing else and Widowmaker regarded the camera with narrowed eyes for a
moment, blank. Then she let out a chuckle. “Perhaps you are not as foolish as you first seemed,
Athena.” She hesitated for a moment, her eyes dropping back to Tracer’s limp form again. “Is this
being recorded?”

The AI hesitated as well, it seemed. For five or ten seconds there was no response, no sound other
than the humming of the engines. “In a manner of speaking. I am storing this data internally, only -
so far. It has not been reported. So far.”

Widowmaker hummed a single laugh. “Ah, shrewd and perhaps not so foolish.” It was a delicate
balance she was walking here - but if there was anything she could do, it was balance. “I have an…
additional chip with which to bargain.”

She stood swiftly, fluidly, and stepped over to a table nearby. Tugging the bag at her shoulder open,
she pulled out one of the omnic heads and set it down with a metallic clank.

“...if this is meant to be some form of threat, I assure you it will not work. I have no head to remove.”

“Non,” Widowmaker laughed briefly. “Ah, but well done - no, this is a remnant of the Black Tide.
Some form of infectious code. Perhaps you can garner something from it.”

Athena was silent for a moment, then spoke hesitantly. “You would exchange this for my silence?”

Widowmaker hummed a sigh, pensive and a little displeased. She didn’t know how to answer that,
so she didn’t. “All things being equal, I would have all three of us end this night alive, unharmed,
and unimpeded. I know in which order I would cut those off. I will let you guess.”

Athena didn’t respond and Widowmaker went to check on Tracer again. Pulse was the same -
present and fairly steady if not exactly stable. Still breathing raggedly. Merde, souris, why? You
foolish girl - one of these days I will not be there to save you, and what then?

“Talon gunships.”

Widowmaker spun around with a frown. “What?”

“Oh - nothing. Just… piecing together something I heard.”

Golden eyes narrowed and Widowmaker smirked. “Ah, she has been spreading the tale, has she?”
With an almost derisive laugh, she tossed her head, looking down to Tracer again. “It was good to
know for myself that she lived only by my hand. For her to know was excellent - but to think that her
whole team might know this?” She chuckled again, darkly, teeth gleaming through her grin. “Simply
Athena hummed as she looked at the pair of them. “Of course, power and control. I am not surprised to find you thrive off of it.”

“All of life thrives off of it, cherie,” Widowmaker countered. “The entire world needs power and control, and I have it.” A brief pause. “Are we nearly-”

“Arriving now. Setting down at the outskirts of the camp.”

“Marveilleux. Now sit tight and quiet, be a good little girl. We won’t be long.”

As the ship settled down, Widowmaker undid the seat buckles that held Tracer in and picked her up once more. She stepped off of the ship and out into the night.

After the assassin was out of detection range, Athena hummed a dry chuckle into the dropship’s interior. “Of course. Control. That’s all that it is. And she thinks I’m the foolish one…” She wasn’t happy about this in the slightest, but then, she was never truly happy anyway. The primary concern was Tracer - while she didn’t trust the Talon assassin, she did agree with that position, at least.

She didn’t contact Winston. Yet. She did, however, compile a very thorough package detailing all that had happened here so far, along with suggested tactical options for followup.

---

“Goodnight, Fari,” Angela whispered with a giggle as she closed the door and stepped back out into the night. It was darker than she’d thought it would be, but time just went so quickly sometimes. Not that she minded in the slightest - she had always loved spending time with Fareeha, and lately the situation had only improved.

It was nice that she’d spent some time with Tracer, Angela was delighted to hear about that. A little sad that the plucky brit hadn’t stopped by for a chat herself, but schedules were difficult to keep sometimes. It was hard enough to find an hour to spend with Fareeha, and both of them were pretty much assigned to this area until the situation changed - and with how the fighting was going, that didn’t seem to be likely any time soon.

Still, Angela wished the conflict would end. Even if it meant saying goodbye to her Fari and relegating their relationship to letters and phone calls again…

She sighed at that, her heart dropping in her chest as she shook her head, muttering in German under her breath. Even if she hadn’t been, even if she’d been entirely silent, she never would have heard a thing before it was too late.

A strong, cold hand clamped over her mouth and stifled a yelp as she was pulled back against somebody. “Do not make a noise, Doctor. I have a patient for you and you are going to heal her. Attract any undue attention and I will kill you. Do you have any questions before we continue?”

The hand gave her just enough slack to shake her head, blue eyes wide in the darkness between two of the lamps dotted around the camp.

“Bon. I believe it is this way, non?”
Angela felt a push on her back and the hand released her. She only had a moment of relief, though, as it was shortly replaced by what she sadly recognized as a gun being pressed into her back.

“Threatening me really isn’t necessary,” she whispered shakily as she led the way to the operating tent. “If you have a patient I would be more than happy to-”

“Shh, shh, Doctor,” the voice behind her murmured. “It will not matter. Consider this not a threat, consider it… a security measure.”

“I don’t think you’re the one who needs security,” Zeigler murmured as she got to the tent - although it was hardly a tent, really. This was a bona fide operating room, if a minimal one; the term was simply a holdover from an older time. She unlocked the door. It took her two tries to get the key in the lock. Not encouraging for the success of surgical procedures.

“Magnifique, Docteur.”

Angela was pushed lightly into the room, still dark, and heard the door lock. Glowing red circles confused her for a second before the lights came on, blinding her for half a second. Then, she understood what was happening - who had brought her in here.

“Widowmaker.” The doctor frowned, shielding her eyes from the bright lights and focusing on the limp form draped over the assassin’s shoulder. She couldn’t see the face, but those leggings - she felt like she recognized them…

“Tracer!” Angela gasped, stepping forward and being met by a rifle that poked into her gut as Widowmaker fixed her with a look, eyebrow raised in warning. Zeigler’s eyes flashed to hers, filled with flame and fury. “What have you done to her?”

Widowmaker chuckled softly. “Such rage, Doctor - I would not have thought a pacifist like yourself to have it in you.”

The doctor’s jaw tensed and tears glistened in her eyes, but Widowmaker seemed unperturbed by any of it. The blue-skinned woman just stepped calmly to the operating table and laid Mercy’s friend out across it. The doctor was at her side in a flash, and this time Widowmaker didn’t stop her.

“Mild lacerations, bruising, nonresponsive. Pulse thready, breathing unstable- injuries seem to be-“ Various machines were flicked on as Angela whirled around the operating table, feeling at Tracer and hitting switches, glancing at readouts. “-caused by-”

“Explosion.” Widowmaker said simply, stepping back and leaning against the door. Only one way in and out, and this way, nobody would be able to get the drop on her. She kept her rifle trained on the doctor. “She was chasing me and was caught by an errant bomb.”

“Why did you bring her here?” Zeigler’s voice was still rough with anger as she scrolled through a diagnostic screen, muttering below her breath. “Intracranial pressure… possible internal hemorrhage, scheisse…”

Widowmaker watched her move with idle interest. She was precise - impressive. The assassin felt almost as if she were looking in some distorted carnival mirror, but given their particular history it was not exactly an encouraging thought. Quite intensely irritating, in fact.

She began to inspect the fingernails of one hand as she spoke, keeping the rifle trained with the other. “Why bring her here? Why, I wanted her to survive, it is as simple as that. They say you are a miracle worker after all.” The words came out a little bit sneered. Widowmaker remembered the doctor’s failures, even if Mercy didn’t know that.
Angela laughed at that. Just once, and it was a humourless sound. “I don’t work well at gunpoint.”

Widowmaker glanced up to see the doctor glaring at her. She rolled a shoulder fluidly and slung her rifle to hang down her side. “Very well. Far be it from me to interfere with your work.” She laughed lightly, the perfect picture of indifference and disdain.

The doctor paused for a moment, glaring at the assassin who leaned back against the door. She’d be damned if she let anything happen to Tracer, regardless of this blue… bitch. “She has suffered concussive trauma due to the blast, as well as wounds from shrapnel. Keep your distance while I work.” She dropped her eyes and her attention back to Tracer, keying a sequence into one of the machines which began to whirr gently. “Why are you doing this, anyway?”

It was a soft, almost muttered question, and Widowmaker raised an eyebrow at it. The doctor didn’t look away from her patient. Tipping her head to the side, Widowmaker chuckled. “Is it not obvious, docteur? Why, what would Sherlock be without his Moriarty? And how much the better it will be for her to know that she lives only by my hands…”

Her words sent shivers down Angela’s spine; they were cold and dark and delighted in Tracer’s pain. She clenched her jaw as she worked, removing fragments of shrapnel from the young woman’s face with a sigh.

“It’s okay, she’ll be okay. The injuries aren’t that bad. If she could do anything at all to lessen Tracer’s eventual torment at the hands of this assassin, though, she would.

“She will be fine,” the doctor murmured with a nod, “but she will need a lot of rest. I’m giving her a mild sedative, she’ll be out for several hours. I…” she cleared her throat a little and looked up to Widowmaker. “You can leave now, she is safe.”

Widowmaker laughed and Angela flinched slightly at the abrupt but expected dismissiveness of the gesture, glaring back as the assassin stalked closer, her hips swaying gently. “Oh, ma docteur, I will not be leaving without my little friend there. Rest assured, she will make it home quite unharmed.”

“No, I- I can’t let her leave with you.”

“Oh doctor,” Widowmaker grinned, trailing a cool fingertip down Angela’s jaw - she tried to withdraw but there was nowhere she could step to, backed up against the operating table, and not very far she could twist her head. “You cannot let me?” Widowmaker chuckled slightly, deep in her chest, grinning before her lips fell flat and her eyes sharpened. “You cannot stop me.”

Tracer made a noise, some little whimpered murmur of pain and Widowmaker’s eyes flicked to her as if in concern - just for an instant - before they returned to Zeigler’s as if challenging her. “When she is healed, I will be taking her. Would you feel better if I gave you my word that she would remain unharmed?”

Zeigler let a breath slowly out through her nose. There had been something in that glance, that instant - even through the haze of fear and confusion, Angela had noticed it, but she certainly couldn’t trust it. Nor could she trust her. “Not even a little bit.”

Widowmaker chuckled softly. “Ah, docteur… I am sure you think me cruel right now, to believe that I am only here so I can lord it over her…” her hand fell to Tracer’s face, gently stroking down one cheek now free of blood or shrapnel. “How then could I torture her, if she is dead, hmm? If my desire is to cause pain, death would be the last thing that I want, non?”

Angela felt defeated, trapped - she didn’t know what to do. Maybe she could tell Fareeha, they could mount some sort of rescue mission, but what could they actually hope to accomplish? Once Widowmaker was gone, chances would be good she’d be gone forever. Her eyes fell hopelessly to
Tracer’s face - smooth once more, and mostly clean. She watched as Widowmaker idly wiped off a spot of drying blood from Tracer’s cheek.

That seemed so bizarre. So unfitting - every word the assassin spoke read like a script of sadism, but her actions… Mercy thought they looked almost like her own. With the exception of the gun-toting threats. A picture was starting to take shape, blurry and possibly dangerous, and Angela couldn’t help but worry that it might be the product of excessive optimism. It would hardly have been the first time.

“You’re hurt too.” She didn’t look up, but the words were clearly directed at the assassin.

“One.”

“As long as you’re here-”

A barked laugh cut her off, at which she looked up. “Oh, ma docteur, you will not be operating upon me. My injuries are of no consequence and the risks would be too great. A cracked rib, slight lacerations, and some mild bruising. I know better than to permit you to inspect me.” Again.

“It must hurt,” Mercy protested, but not too forcefully.

Widowmaker scoffed. “Oh, must it?” The query was sarcastic and an obvious ‘no’ to the offered help, as was the silence which followed it. Widowmaker bit back the urge to say more, but the situation was too variable. On untenable ground, she could not permit things to escalate - if it required her to swallow back what she might otherwise say, that was of no consequence. She did the same with Tracer herself, with everyone she spoke to; it was simply the way of the world.

“Why did you threaten me?”

Another scoff. Widowmaker stepped back to the wall without the slightest hesitation, but Angela was starting to wonder if it was all too mechanical. As if it had been rehearsed. “I required your compliance, it is as simple as that.”

The doctor frowned. “I’m not affiliated in any conflicts. I am a doctor, my duty is to my patients, surely you knew this?”

Golden eyes flicked to meet hers in irritation for an instant. “You think I would trust anything important to your lack of affiliation? I will admit that your altruism is legendary, mais, it was not worth the risk.”

“How Machiavellian of you,” Zeigler grumbled, shaking her head. “If you cannot count on alliance, lead with a strong arm and force compliance in its stead.” There was some of an answer there, though. Anything important. It might not take much for Widowmaker to employ such measures, but she did; the question remaining was whether she wanted Tracer alive only to be tortured later.

Widowmaker chuckled, tipping her head forward in a nod. “Just so, doctor.”

Mercy’s eyes burned, her heart burned, and she didn’t know what to do about it. She could either trust her head or her heart, and either one could mean the loss of a dear friend - Tracer would make it through the injuries just fine, Zeigler knew. The situation, though? What would happen if she let Widowmaker take the unconscious woman - she couldn’t trust Widowmaker not to hurt her any more than the assassin apparently could’ve trusted her in turn to operate ethically. Less so, even. Substantially less so.

It all felt just a little too convenient, though - the dismissive gestures were too brusque, the mockery
was too sharp, the sadistic teasing too intense. It felt like a caricature of reality, and then there were tiny little things: that concerned glance when Tracer had moaned, wiping off a spot of blood from her cheek.

Angela placed something else about it, something that seemed familiar about the way Widowmaker was talking and holding herself - it reminded her of Fareeha, when she was being Pharah in front of the troops. She didn’t just put on armour over her body, she armoured her heart and her mind as well; clad herself in a shell that kept distance between her and the job. Just a little, just enough to prevent things from interfering, and lately the practice had redoubled. Lately, as Pharah tried to keep under wraps the semi-illicit developments with the good doctor herself.

Wishful thinking, Angela told herself. Not enough to rely on. It really wasn’t. A gut feeling based off of a few reactions that could’ve been imagined entirely, and a vague similarity to somebody else.

Widowmaker could see the defiance that still ran through the doctor’s veins, the hesitation in her eyes. She wasn’t going to let Tracer go without a fight, and that was a little infuriating; all the more so for the contrast with their own history.

If this was the reward she got for trying to do something nice, then it certainly wasn’t an encouragement to try again… but she couldn’t let her little mouse get hurt. Although, that wasn’t true - she could, and it would have been just as easy. Easier, in fact.

She just didn’t want to.

It occurred to her that she could simply kill the doctor and take Tracer away - the thought had been rolling around the back of her mind for the entirety of the encounter. It would be far less risk, in some ways, but certain to face backlash when Tracer regained consciousness. The deal with the machine-mind was the same, although there was the added factor that Sombra hadn’t hacked into Overwatch’s AI in the past. Not to say that she couldn’t, but the possibility existed.

There would be backlash as well from other entities in the event of the famed doctor’s murder - international and internal. While she hadn’t been given an explicit no-kill command from Talon, anyone who put out developments like Zeigler was a person of interest to them, and Widowmaker knew there would be repercussions if she removed such a source of material from the world. Even if the doctor wasn’t working with them, things had a way of finding themselves into Talon’s clutches. Designs, ideas, prototypes, people.

If one could not barter for what one wished, one should take it. If one might fail in taking it, attempt to barter first. Start with the option most likely to succeed and least likely to remove other possibilities, and work back from there.

“Why should I trust you?” Dr. Zeigler’s voice split the silence. She wasn’t looking at the assassin, her eyes were fixed on her patient, but the words’ target was clear.

Widowmaker sighed, pinching at the bridge of her nose. “Is it really so difficult to accept that I simply do not wish her to die this night? Do the reasons matter that greatly?”

“If you expect me to believe that you do this for no benefit, you must think me a fool.”

A slow, wearied sigh. So many things would be so much simpler if she just shot them, but she knew she shouldn’t. There were too many risk factors, mitigating factors - she wondered if the doctor knew that she was all but guaranteed to survive the night, and suspected that she didn’t. It was better that way. It let Widowmaker have leverage, which meant the situation could work out well for all involved.
Despite what might have been commonly believed, she really wasn’t cruel. She was indifferent. There was a quote by an old director - one whose movies had been favoured by Gérard - along those lines. It was about the universe, not about her, of course, but she could see the parallels.

Widowmaker growled a sigh, pinching tightly at the bridge of her nose. “Infuriating li-fine.” She huffed. “I am unwilling to leave her with you. You are unwilling to leave her with me. One must relent if anything is to happen. Will it come to blows? How do you think that will resolve, hmm?”

The whirring of machines dominated the small room. Tracer’s breath were coming more regularly now, and more gently too.

“You come in here relying on force and threat instead of trust,” Zeigler stared openly back to the assassin, “and yet you expect me to simply trust you in return? I daresay you had more reason to trust me to do no harm, than I have to believe it of you.”

There was no response to that. Nothing to be said, nothing that could be - a hundred retorts but the situation was too precarious. Widowmaker simply clenched her teeth together and began to prepare for what she now saw as an inevitable battle - and one she would just as inevitably win. It would require some work, though, to ensure that nothing bad followed in its wake. To incapacitate the doctor in a way that would keep her out of commission for a while, but ensure her survival as well.

“There is more to it, isn’t there?” Angela dropped her eyes back to the young brit’s face, so peaceful and calm, unaware. “More than one-upmanship, more than some sadistic need to best her.” Her gaze returned to the assassin, almost daring the woman to deny it.

A pause. Widowmaker’s eyes flicked to the unconscious woman. Maybe the doctor believed that every person had good in their hearts - maybe she would accept some explanation other than cruelty. Everyone alway thought she was cruel, and Widowmaker knew it; but perhaps that was not the key to this particular lock.

“I suppose… you could say we have developed somewhat of a rapport.” The word rolled softly off of her tongue.

Angela took a deep breath, but didn’t let it out just yet. There was a lot riding on this, in every direction, and she felt almost entirely out of her depth. None of this was her specialty, with the exception of the healing and that was already done. There were few who would say that Angela Zeigler was not diplomatic, but this sort of negotiation was still a little beyond her. Or a lot. She let the breath sigh out of her, stroking at Tracer’s brow.

“Alright. You win. I could not hope to stand against you anyway.” She dropped her head, shoulders sagging in defeat as the machines powered down. They were done their work, and Mercy had to hope that one thing or another would see them through to the end of it. If she called for help she would be killed. If she tried to fight and keep Tracer here, she would be killed. In either instance, Widowmaker would simply pick up the unconscious woman and leave over the doctor’s corpse. Her hand was forced, she saw no option.

One of them needed to trust.

The assassin chuckled as she stepped closer. “Bon. Reason wins - now doctor, I really must be off,” she leaned down to pick Tracer up, slipping her gently over one shoulder. “Mais, before I leave, there is something I must say. The opportunity is simply too good to pass up…”

Zeigler tensed as Widowmaker leaned in toward her - she was just slightly taller, just enough to be noticeable and a little imposing. Not to mention the blue skin, golden eyes, rifle, and person slung
easily over one shoulder. The doctor wasn’t sure what would come next, but she expected some parting threat to ensure her silence.

What she got instead was a chuckle and a grin, and an odd look of mirth in Widowmaker’s eyes. “Merci, Mercy. Adieu.”

The frenchwoman stepped swiftly away, whirling and sending her ponytail flying out behind her. She was at the door before Mercy’s frantic heart had a chance to beat, and she was gone before the doctor could move. Angela rushed out of the room, peering out into the night, but saw nothing at all. No Widowmaker, no Tracer, nobody. Nothing.

“How prove me wrong,” she murmured softly to the darkness. “Please.” She didn’t know if there was even anyone there to hear.

There was. Perched on the roof above her, Widowmaker heard full well. She sat and watched as the doctor made her way back toward a different tent, rubbing at her face and wringing her hands. There was nothing more to be done here, though - Tracer breathed deeply and soundly over her shoulder, and coupled with the regular beats of her heart it assured Widowmaker that she’d done the right thing. Her little mouse was safe. Anything the future brought could be dealt with as it arose.

“How Sombra?” Widowmaker murmured softly over the radio. “I will be making my own way back. No evac required.”

“Ay, chica, you can’t just go and disappear for an hour and then come back with that! What happened, why are you in the aid camp, what-”

“Injuries were sustained but they are of no consequence.” The assassin stalked through the night, her stride only slightly lopsided for the cracked ribs and stab wound - not to mention the weight on her shoulder. “It was not an hour. I have procured a sample for you, as requested - entire head, intact, undamaged. It even survived the severance with some hint of life left.”

Sombra shivered a little at the concept. “Dios mio, I don’t envy that guy. Okay, well… I know you know what you’re doing, amiga. I’ll be at base to crack that skull open when you come by.”

Widowmaker smirked slightly. “Is that to say that you aren’t at base right now?”

Sombra chuckled. “Easy, chica - don’t think you can go digging up dirt on me, I see who’s on your shoulder right there. Siiiile for the cameras…”

Widowmaker let out a brief laugh, her breath too cold to cloud in the chilled night air. “Ah, m’amie, but of course friends would never leverage each other that way…”

“Of course not,” the hacker grinned, teeth reflecting the purple light of her glowing screens. Finally. Somebody’s starting to get it - geeze it’s taken them long enough. “See you when you get in. Lemme know if you need a hand.”

Chapter End Notes

It's a complex life, sometimes, eh? A lot of this ends up being the foundation for stuff to come, of course, but I hope it was enjoyable for you folks! I liked the opportunity to write Widowmaker being a little more shrewd, a little more manipulative; I also like the
ambiguity of how much she's really manipulating. Nobody's really naive in the world of Overwatch so they're not likely to have the wool pulled entirely over their eyes.

So, the RTF editor here adds a space between opening quotation marks and italic text? I just realized this. I'll try to remember to go through and edit them out, but I'm almost certainly going to miss some.

Translations:
Merde == "Shit"
Tabernacle == generally an expletive. Literally translated, it's just "tabernacle" - a church tent of sorts, but exclaimed it's a pejorative kind of akin to "goddamn".
Delicieux == "Delicious"
Marveilleux == "Marvelous" (Think I mentioned this one before? Heh)
Magnifique == "Magnificent"
Scheisse == "Shit"
Merci == "Thank you"
Dios mio == "My god"

The brief mentions of Mercy/Widow backstory will be touched on in greater depth later, by the way - for those who are interested. I've had a busy past few days, heh, so I'm not exactly at a hundred percent right now; I know there were things I wanted to mention here, but can't recall them! Regardless, I hope you all enjoyed it and I hope I'm doing a good job of delivering stuff whilst still keeping up some intrigue for future.

I'm really happy with this story overall, but honestly pacing has always been a bit of an issue with me: I have a tendency to make things very, very long. As uh... you may have guessed so far, heh. This story will probably be between a quarter-million and a half-million words? And, um, probably closer to the latter than the former. I don't know, I haven't finished writing it yet, but I have written a fair chunk - it's just got to be edited and uploaded! So, I hope that's fine with you folks? If it's not, uh, I'm sorry I guess, but it is what it is :) I'll work on it for the future, though.

Anyway, come on back next update when a nervous Emily gets a surprise visitor, as Widowmaker delivers Tracer home. It's a learning opportunity for all, and the morning leaves Tracer with a lot of explanations to be made to a lot of people.
Special Delivery

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker returns Tracer to her home, where Emily is awake and worried. A combination of curiosity and having nothing better to do inspire Widowmaker to talk with Emily for a moment about some things, which leads to her being somewhat trapped for the night. In the morning, Tracer has a little bit of damage control to do - calls to be made to concerned people, not to mention dealing with her girlfriend. And her other girlfriend.

JFL Summary: Emily neglects her tea and then uses Widowmaker like a pillow. Widowmaker isn't a fan of her new nickname, and doesn't really believe in beans on toast. She also doesn't like apologizing, and she's bad at it. Emily's cute and great. Mercy's concerned. Winston's sorry (but really, he's seriously really sorry. Has he mentioned he's sorry yet?).

Chapter Notes

Warnings: general emotional pain and crying? I don't think it requires a warning, really, but better safe than sorry, eh?

Previous Chapter Summary (I mean, it gets summed up in the chapter, heh, but I'll do it here too :D): Widowmaker explained a little to Tracer about the Black Tide Virus - it infects omnis, turning them thoughtlessly hostile. Ms. Gregor's former staff members attacked the pair, but they escaped mostly uninjured - however, as they were fleeing the mansion, Tracer was caught by an explosion and knocked unconscious among other injuries. Widowmaker took a risk and entered the dropship, bartered with Athena and then went to Mercy. The interactions there were maybe more "threatening" than "bartering", but they succeeded regardless - Tracer was healed, and released, and Widowmaker left with her into the night.

“Vitals stabilized,” Athena announced as Widowmaker stalked back into the dropship. “Operative Tracer has been healed, but not regained consciousness?”

“A measure by your Doctor Zeigler,” Widowmaker muttered, buckling Tracer into a seat once more. The unconscious brit snorted briefly in her sleep, twitching. “Although whether it was for the purposes of healing or to prevent me from gloating, I could not say.”

Athena hummed. “I am sure it will pose no risk to Tracer’s health. Doctor Zeigler would do nothing to risk her well-being.”

“I noticed,” the assassin grumbled, moving to the screen and tapping at it again. “Drop me off here.” She selected a location several blocks from Tracer’s apartment.
The AI was left with two possibilities and two options for action. Either Widowmaker knew the location of Tracer’s apartment, or she did not - and Athena could either accept the location or protest it. If Widowmaker didn’t know, and Athena protested, she might instill curiosity as to why that drop-off point was objectionable. If the assassin did know, then it hardly mattered where Athena dropped her off. It left her with really only one option: hope Widowmaker did not know, and avoid raising suspicions by protesting.

Not overly, at least.

“Do not mistake this for a cooperative spirit,” Athena warned as the ship closed up and lifted off. “This is out of interest for Tracer and nothing else.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes. “Je comprends, though I hardly care.”

Athena only hummed and made a note to herself, a revision in the list of questions she would have for Tracer once she awoke.

---

Emily felt awful. The tea she’d brewed to calm her nervous stomach sat cold on the table, untouched since the sun went down. It had been hours now that she’d been stewing properly in worry, and she was unable to stick to any one thing. She’d sit on the couch for a minute, tapping her foot; then stand and pace quickly back and forth. For the hundredth time, she checked her phone. Nothing.

The TV sat on in the background, tuned to the news flickering across its projected screen. No big developments, just that same war that had been going on for almost two weeks now. No mentions of Tracer, good or bad. For a moment, Emily wondered if that was where she was, though, that war breaking out. The wonder didn’t last long - the thought made her feel queasy and unsteady on her feet, and she had to sit down again.

It had been almost two days. It wasn’t unusual at all for Tracer to get a mission, get called off to somewhere to do something. Emily was more than used to coming home to find her girlfriend and roommate gone - and at first, this absence hadn’t even been for a mission. She’d checked the safe where Lena kept her things. She knew it was a bad habit, a nervous habit, but she couldn’t help herself - and she’d been relieved when the bracers and all were in there. Lena was just out, then, and it wouldn’t take three guesses to figure out why.

This morning, though, she’d stopped back by - apologized for not saying anything, grabbed her things, headed off. Emily had been half asleep, at least, but she was almost certain it had actually happened. Quite sure it hadn’t been a dream, but the bracers definitely weren’t there anymore.

Then, though… nothing. No mention. The sun had just barely been rising when Lena’d stopped by - Emily’d just got home an hour or so before that - and now it had set hours ago and still Lena wasn’t back. No word, no message, no mention, no nothing.

The news had no word of the internationally-known “Tracer” running into any issue. Had no word at all, in fact - and neither did Emily’s phone, and neither did Winston who wasn’t returning her calls, and neither did…

She pushed herself up off of the couch again, arms crossed and fingers fretting nervously at the sleeves of her t-shirt. A breeze blew in, cold and harsh across her skin.
“Damn broken window,” she whimpered, dragging her hands across her face as she turned and started to walk over that way. She’d just about had too much, tonight, and wasn’t sure she could take one more thing going wrong, one more thing happening. She felt like a house of cards. She was actually shaking - not just shivering from the cold, although that too, but shaking from anxiety and nerves.

“Ah. *Oui*, um… I should apologize for that. I so rarely miss.”

Emily’s hands flew to her side in shock, not expecting a voice. It was an unmistakable one, though, and she knew she would see Widowmaker there. Her eyes were awash with bright colours for a moment, a symptom of her pressing the balls of her palms into them, but that soon resolved into sight.

There was Widowmaker. She was holding Tracer limply in her arms.

“She’s breathing, she’s alive; she didn’t look to be hurt so much as just dirty. ‘God, what-’”

“*I did not do it.*”

Emily’s eyes flicked up to Widowmaker’s, and she wasn’t sure she could place the look that the frenchwoman had. “*I know,*” she murmured, brow furrowing as a few tears escaped her eyes. “*I never thought you did. What happened?*”

“A bomb,” Widowmaker answered with a sigh, dropping her gaze to Tracer’s face. A small trail of drool ran down one cheek and she smiled lightly at the sight of it. “It caught her off-guard. No time to activate her little *device*, and…” the assassin shook her head. “*I took her to Doctor Zeigler for-*”

“Oh, god, good, she’ll be alright then.” Emily half-laughed a sigh of relief, tears welling further in her eyes as she lifted them to the ceiling for a second. “The woman’s a miracle worker.”

“So I have *heard…* ...although one cannot count on miracles. Widowmaker frowned a little as her lips tried to wrinkle, then shook her head. “She said that Tracer would require rest, that-”

“*Yeah, yeah of course - here, c’mon, let’s put her to bed.*” Emily swallowed heavily, her throat threatening to close up entirely if she didn’t keep it working. “Thank you. Thank you so, so much for helping her - wh- um,” her voice cracked a little and she cleared it as she led the way down the hallway. “What… what happened? I know there’s probably confidentiality and… things…”

“I was sent to investigate an occurrence of a virus-like code which infects omnis,” Widowmaker spoke swiftly, flatly, blatantly as she set Tracer down on the bed. Emily started to loosen the chronal accelerator’s straps and the assassin just stood back and continued to explain. “It causes them to become hostile, vicious. They had murdered their employer. Tracer showed up in response to an emergency call - placed as bait to draw in more. I do not know to what end, precisely, other than mapping reactions; that, however, is a means rather than an end. The omnis attacked and we were forced to fend them off, at which point the defences went down and we fell under fire from explosive munitions. Bombs, artillery,” she shrugged. They hardly differed, really. Not where it counted.

“I- in that warzone?” The words came out strained, hoarse - more whispers than words really, and Emily felt tears streaking down her cheeks. The night (on top of the day before it) was catching up to her.

“*Oui.*” Widowmaker watched Emily with an almost morbid curiosity, and more than a little
confusion. Tracer was back now, and safe, so the woman’s tears and concern all seemed a little unnecessary. Distantly, she recognized that it was simply a thing that happened - even recalled that it had happened to her, in a past life, memories of long nights and wine glasses and staring at Gérard’s photo in pain and tears, but that didn’t make it seem any more sensible. She couldn’t really recall the pain. It didn’t work that way.

Emily busied herself with stripping off most of Lena’s gear and clothing to make for a more comfortable sleep, and when she was down to knickers and a bra Emily tucked her in under the blankets. The blankets which were dotted with dripped tears.

“How can you stand it?” Widowmaker’s eyebrows drew together, she shook her head slightly. “Emotion, like that. I… I cannot comprehend.”

The flow of tears redoubled and Emily clenched a fist to her lips to stifle a noise that tried to escape. She tried to speak, failed, and clamped the hand over her mouth instead as she shook her head. With her other hand (which clutched Tracer’s signature leather jacket) she gestured out of the room, back down the hallway, and Widowmaker went. Emily followed.

When she was out, back in the living room again - when she was away from the risk of waking Lena - she broke down into sobs. She tried to restrain them, tried to keep them from being too loud but they’d been building up for a while now and there was only so much she could do. She dropped the jacket to the floor and started to fall after it as she shook with the force of her anguish.

Widowmaker caught her, redirected her onto the couch, and joined her there. Emily collapsed entirely, face down in the cushions to muffle herself a little, and Widowmaker just sat, with a woman crying across her lap.

She certainly didn’t know what else to do about it.

“Sorry,” Emily managed to choke out after a few minutes of constant crying, “I’m sorry, I just-” she cut off into sobs again and Widowmaker hesitated before laying a hand between the other woman’s shoulder blades. For another few minutes, they just sat like that until Emily managed to get most of the worst of it out and pushed herself upright, sitting next to Widowmaker on the couch.

“God, I’m sorry, I just-” she cleared her raw aching throat. Her voice was hoarse, strained and quiet. “I just get… so worried, sometimes. Thank you - thank you for being there, for bringing her back safely, thank you…” A new wave of tears loomed and her lips began to quiver as she thought about what might’ve happened if Widowmaker hadn’t been there.

“She has a dedicated team, looking out for her,” the frenchwoman reassured. “Tonight was an outlier. Nothing more.”

Emily scoffed a laugh. “Yeah. Sure. I- I mean…” she sighed, dropping her face into her hands, “I know it was, I do know it was, but I just… I get so worried. I’m a wreck, sorry, I-” she cut off laughing briefly, wiping at her cheeks and face, but Widowmaker only shrugged.

She didn’t care, really - gone were the sympathetic reflexes that might have once dwelt in her heart. Gone, too, was any real capacity for embarrassment or awkwardness: she wasn’t sitting there uncomfortably, she was just…

...sitting there.

Still, she was a little curious. Frowning lightly, she looked over to the redhead who was now crying and laughing on the couch next to her. Simultaneously. “How do you cope?”
A sigh shuddered from Emily’s lips, her shoulders shaking as it went. It was a good question. Half a chuckle leapt out of her and she shook her head. “Sometimes it doesn’t feel like I do.” Another sigh, this one a little smoother as she laid back against the couch. A new tear or two spilled from her eyes but nothing too much to deal with. “It… I mean, I just have to, don’t I?”

Widowmaker’s frown deepened in incomprehension and Emily glanced over, managing a weak smile. “It’s just- I mean… you’ve met her. Every time she goes out there, saving the world, it… it just means so much to her. The way her eyes light up, I could never ask her to give it up - it just swells my heart to see. Like she’s got this light in her and it just…” she sighed, shaking her head.

“It never truly goes out, does it?” Widowmaker murmured softly and Emily’s eyes shot over to her curiously. The frenchwoman shook her head gently, brows drawing nearer together. “On King’s Row… when I killed Mondatta, I thought I had broken her completely. She seemed so…” the words trailed off to silence, then she chuckled softly. The light metaphor was apt. “So put out. Yet, then, such a short time later at the museum, she was jumping and laughing and joking like nothing had changed.”

Emily nodded gently. “That hurt her a lot. Mondatta.” Her words were soft and more than a little hesitant.

Widowmaker sighed shortly in response. “I know. We have talked about it… numerous times. She does not understand - perhaps she can not. Moi? I think I cannot understand how you manage to deal with emotions that intense.”

Emily chuckled a little as the conversation was turned around to her again. For a stealth assassin, Widowmaker could be surprisingly un-subtle sometimes, it seemed. Still, she didn’t want to force any conversation at all - particularly not one that might be annoying to a world-renowned assassin. Better to play along to her tune.

“It’s rough,” Emily admitted, “it can be really hard sometimes, because I do worry. Every time she’s out on a mission - every time she’s out at all! Do you know some of the things that people said when Overwatch was coming under fire? In letters - on the news?”

The assassin shook her head slowly. She had heard some, but the news mattered little to her. It didn’t reflect her world at all.

“I just…” Emily shook her head a little, looking off into the distance blankly. “I feel like it’s just this cloud that’s everywhere. Big, dense, black cloud that gets right into me, right into my heart, and I’m scared. I’m blind and cold and I don’t know what to do because this darkness is just everywhere, and-” her voice choked off, but then she shook her head with a soft laugh, another tear streaking down her cheek. “And then she comes in, and it just… she’s like this beacon of light, of joy and love and… and the darkness is still out there. It’s all around, it’s everywhere, but I know if I search through it… I can find that light again.”

She dropped her head a little, running her fingers shakily through her hair. “I dunno, I just… that’s what it’s like to me. Light and darkness filling me, and just… warring. One pushes the other back, but neither’s ever gone, and…” she trailed off into a shrug. “As long as I can keep sight of the fact that the light’s still out there, I know I’ll be alright.”

Once more the room was silent, the whole apartment except for an occasional snore drifting lightly in from the bedroom. Widowmaker stared openly over at the other woman: coppery hair messed around her face, oversized t-shirt hanging off of one shoulder and dripped with tears, crying silently as she smiled.
“You remind me of a man I once killed.”

The assassin dropped her eyes away after she said that - looked over instead to the window and stood to leave as she realized that she wasn’t even certain to whom she was referring, and it certainly wasn’t an appropriate statement to make. It wasn’t a lie, but she didn’t know if it was Mondatta or Gérard she was speaking of. Regardless, she was sure that it was time to leave - the mouse was safe, and she’d already broken enough around this apartment. She didn’t need to add anything more to the list.

Along with that, there was the matter of a stab wound to her side and a cracked rib. Injuries which were hardly of concern to her; she wouldn't bleed much and the pain was all but nonexistent. Regardless, she knew she should leave.

“W-wait! Widowmaker? Please.” The frenchwoman turned to see Emily on her feet, one arm across her chest and gripping her opposite forearm, eyes downcast on the ground. “I- I know I don’t-” her words choked off in a strangled noise. She tried again, strained and hoarse. “I-I just, I-

She swallowed heavily. It was all too much, just too much, and she couldn’t handle it. Lena was safe, yes, this time - and that was brilliant, but it meant that everything that had been pent up and stored over the past twelve hours came pouring out. Now that it was safe, now that she could actually afford to feel it. You can’t be comatose in tears if you need to be able to answer a phone call at any second.

“I just-” A whisper was all she could manage to get out through her tight-clenched throat. “Please don’t leave. I don’t know if I could stand to be alone.”

Moonlight flashed across Widowmaker’s blue skin as she turned toward the glass door for a second. A breeze blew through, and she knew it was cold even if she couldn’t feel the chill on her skin. “D’accord,” she murmured with a nod to the night, turning and moving back to the couch.

Emily fell into her arms with a fresh round of sobs, far beyond the point of reason or self-control, overstimulated past the capacity to deal with anything, but Widowmaker caught her easily. She settled back down to the couch, letting the other woman slump across her and just sat again. Emily’s body heat seeped through her own thin clothing and Widowmaker’s armour, tears dropping down and running in warm rivulets along blue skin.

“Thank you,” she murmured and whispered, hoarsely and at seemingly random intervals through the tears. Widowmaker didn’t know how to respond, so she didn’t. She just wrapped her arms around the crying woman, not exactly holding her tight but holding her nonetheless. One hand stroked gently at the back of her head and Widowmaker sat there, eyes open, and silent.

Eventually Emily drifted off to sleep, sobs transitioning to gentler crying and eventually to long sighed breaths as all the pain and worry of the day faded away into unconsciousness.

“Bonne nuit, cherie,” Widowmaker whispered, barely audible even to her own ears.

---

Tracer awoke with a start, trying to clutch at the hands that were around her throat - strong, metal hands with glowing red eyes behind, eight of them that shifted to black. It was only a dream though, only a dream; she was safe, she was warm in bed, she…
...she was alone. Sitting up, she glanced around in confusion and then down at herself just the same. Her arms were a little dirty, and she couldn’t remember ever sleeping in knickers and a bra like this. One strap was burned entirely through and hung loosely down.

“I was…” her brow drew tighter as she tried to piece it together. *Pharah, Helix, going around with them for the day and then- then that mansion, Widowmaker was there. That poor woman dead, and then the omnics attacked, poor things, and then…*

*...then what? We were leaving, and...*

She glanced around, rubbing at her arms a little but she felt great. Really, really great - no sore muscles, no bruises. She felt like a million bucks.

“Em?” Tracer inquired gently as she pushed herself up and out of the bed. Then she realized that not only did she not know what time it was, she didn’t even know what day it was - didn’t know whether Emily was home or working or what.

There was no response, at least not immediately, so Tracer chalked it up to absence. She couldn’t remember how she got home or ended up in bed, but it only made sense that Emily had been involved along the way - she was wonderfully caring like that.

Lena rubbed the sleep from her eyes instinctively, but found that she really didn’t need it. Oddly, she’d woken up very quickly and stayed awake. Stepping out of the little hallway into the main room, she started to turn toward the kitchen but spun around when she processed the glimpse out of the corner of her eyes: somebody on the couch.

“Em?” she gasped, whirling around - but then realized that there wasn’t just one person on the couch, there were two, and one of them was awake and looking back. Tracer blinked. “Widowmaker?”

The assassin quirked an eyebrow and smirked, opening her mouth to respond; before she could, however, Emily stirred. She mumbled and lifted herself up a bit, rubbing at her face and stroking at Widowmaker’s arm.

“Lena, love? You’re awa-” she cut off as her brain kicked in enough to remind her of everything, and the blurriness of sleep faded from her eyes to reveal not Lena’s face in front of her, but a blue one looking amused. “Oh, right.”

Then Emily’s eyes flew wide. “Oh god, right - Lena!” She leapt from the couch and grabbed her roommate, pulling her in for an almost painfully tight hug. “I was so worried! You’re alright, though, oh good, I-”

Widowmaker started to stand, and Emily saw it out of the corner of one eye bleary with tears of happiness. “Oh no you don’t, missy!” She pulled Lena back and threw one of her arms out wide, practically tackling the frenchwoman back to the couch and bringing her into the hug as well. She laughed and cried and nuzzled at Lena’s face, kissed her cheek. “I’m so glad you’re alright. I was so worried - all of yesterday! No word, no nothing, I just…”

“I’m sorry love, sorry, I-” Lena strained a little over the force of the hug, shifting to stop her ribs from being squished quite as much and to stop the accelerator from digging into anyone. She caught Widowmaker’s eyes for a second and flashed her an almost embarrassed grin. “Hiya, uh…” *...nope, dunno what to say there.* She looked back to Emily. “I’m really sorry, I should’ve sent you a message or something - and, and the day before, too, before my little um…”
Emily chuckled a little, wiping her face on her shoulder. “Yeah,” she croaked, nodding, “yeah you probably should’ve, but it’s alright love. Just scared me is all - it all worked out alright in the end. Just emotional is all, y’know?” She let out a long sigh, squeezing both of the other two tight as she laid almost overtop of them on the couch. Everything was alright, everything was perfect.

“I cannot get up.” The smooth french voice was somewhat surprisingly unstrained and seemingly unaffected by the two woman lying on top of her, but it sounded more amused than annoyed and Emily laughed.

“Oh no, you’re not going anywhere until I’ve given you a few dozen hugs and made you some breakfast! Don’t think you can get away so easy after all that you did.”

Tracer shot the blue-skinned woman an inquisitive look, but Widowmaker just shrugged a shoulder. She glanced back down to her roommate. “What, um… what happened last night, Em? Widowmaker? I- I can’t remember anything after the mansion.”

“Ugh, we’ve got to come up with something better to call you,” Emily laughed briefly, pushing herself up from the couch and giving Lena a kiss on the lips, planting one on a blue cheek as well. “Widowmaker’s way too long and awkward for casual conversation.”

Lena chuckled a little, flashing the frenchwoman a grin. “Toldja!”

Widowmaker only shrugged and readjusted, letting Tracer sit more alongside her on the couch - and only momentarily lamenting the loss of warmth that the new position and number of participants brought. “Outside of the mansion, explosives started to fall. You were caught by one unaware, and knocked unconscious. I picked you up, took you to a doctor, and then returned you home.”

“She took you to Mercy!” Emily called in from the kitchen. “And then I was a mess but I didn’t want to wake you, so she let me use her like a pillow, which was sweet. Widdy, how d’you like your toast?”

Lena giggled abruptly at the look that flickered across that blue face when she placed the new nickname. “I am- um. Toasted? I do not…”

“Just do it like yours - it’ll be grand, love!” Tracer called in to the kitchen. “I’ll join you in a minute, yeah?”

“No you will not! The kitchen is strictly for people who didn’t get exploded last night!” Tracer protested lightly.

Meanwhile, Widowmaker just frowned, mouthing the word “Widdy?” to herself.

“Wait - you took me to Mercy?” Tracer turned back to the blue woman curiously. “How’d you get me there? I- I should call her and thank her, though…” she noticed her jacket next to the couch and reached down for it, pulling out her phone.

“Good idea!” Emily chimed in from the other room, but Widowmaker held up a hesitant hand.

“I… might interject, first, perhaps, and state that…” Tracer looked back to her in confusion, concern, and Widowmaker sighed, looking off to the side. “I… I may have perhaps conducted myself in a way that was a little… threatening. A bit. Perhaps.”

Tracer’s jaw dropped. “Oh, my god, you- you threatened Mercy? Probably the closest thing any of us’ll ever see to an actual angel?”
“Hardly at all,” Widowmaker countered with a slight shrug. “Besides, they were empty threats. I would not have harmed her, the repercussions would have been too great. And I—” her eyes flicked away nervously for an instant before returning. “I did not think it prudent to divulge the full nature of—”

“Hi! Mercy?” Tracer cut her off, grinning down to the phone’s screen as it connected. She raised an eyebrow to Widowmaker briefly. This was getting dealt with immediately.

---

Angel Zeigler stood outside of Fareeha’s room nervously wringing her hands. She hadn’t slept all night, not for a minute - she was far too worried, far too concerned and increasingly convinced that she’d made a bad choice. Lack of sleep tended to increase paranoid tendencies, she knew this, but then it seemed so simple and logical if she just listened to the paranoia. She’d made a terrible mistake, obviously.

As the sun started to rise, she decided more needed to be done - it had been long enough, and something needed to happen. Anything. She couldn’t just stand back and do nothing anymore. It had always been a problem of hers.

Before she knocked, though - while she stood there still vacillating - her phone rang and she retreated a step reflexively to answer it. “Gut—” she started reflexively, but her eyes widened as she saw the smiling face on the screen. “Lena! Tracer! Oh mein gott you’re alright! Oh good, good,” she nodded swiftly.

“Yeah - yeah, I’m totally fine, completely alright, love, thank you,” Tracer laughed lightly. “I actually feel great! Maybe I should do that more often!” She threw in a giggle. It didn’t do much to stop Mercy’s scowl, but it did cause the gesture to be mixed in with a bit of a grin. Tracer laughed a little more at that and shook her head. “I know, I know - I won’t really. I just wanted to call and thank you, so much, and I’ve got somebody here, who—”

The screen started to shake and the images became indiscernible. There were sounds of a light scuffle and murmured words and then another face took the stage - not Tracer’s, but one that Angela did recognize, looking blue and highly unimpressed.

“Alors, doctor, I—” her eyes flicked slightly away, to something offscreen. “I- I am… to apologize for my conduct yesterday night.”

“Nope, not good enough,” Tracer chirped unseen from outside of the camera’s view, and Widowmaker rolled her eyes before fixing them on the screen again.

“Alright, fine, I—” she squeezed the bridge of her nose between her fingertips and shook her head briefly before dropping her hand and fixing the camera with a solemn look. “I am sorry, docteur. I… should not have frightened you so. I became—” she cut off for a huff and dropped her eyes, and began to mutter a little. “I became fixated on the possibility of harm or negative consequence, and I acted perhaps too aggressively as a result.” Her eyes focused past the screen once more. “Better?”

In the distance, softly, somebody called, “I think it was grand!”

“Nope, not good enough,” Tracer chirped unseen from outside of the camera’s view, and Widowmaker rolled her eyes before fixing them on the screen again.

“I’m not the one who gets to decide.” Tracer’s voice was firm but not harsh. “What do you think, Ange?”
Angela frowned back at the screen, her worry replaced with confusion. Although there was still a lot of worry there as well. “I- if I am honest, I don’t know quite what to think.” She took a breath and sighed it out quickly, her eyes searching the skies in thought. “I understand concern, and taking drastic actions as a result. I… I accept the apology.” She smiled softly down to the screen. “I hope that we can move forward to a place of greater trust.”

Widowmaker sighed, nostrils flaring slightly. “Oui. Had I known more, I would not have acted as I did. Thank you, docteur. For helping her.”

“Don’t you mean merci?” Angela teased lightly, and Widowmaker chuckled. “Lena?” the doctor queried, “could I speak to just you now, perhaps?”

The young brit nodded (though she couldn’t be seen) and tapped a control, the screen turning off as she held the phone to her ear. “Yeah, love? What is it?”

“I…” Mercy’s voice was soft, and laden with concern. “I do hope you know what you are doing. Be safe and careful, please.”

“I-” Lena started to protest, but let out a brief sigh instead. “It’s really not- it’s just… you know the fox and the hound? It’s like that. Sometimes you find a friend where you don’t expect it, you know?”

There was a brief pause as the doctor weighed her words. “Is she… just a friend, then?”

Tracer’s eyes met Widowmaker’s, and she knew that the answer was “no”. She sighed, slightly, smiling. “Does it matter?”

Mercy exhaled a little wearily but with a chuckle underneath the gesture. “I suppose not. Do keep yourself safe, Lena- and maybe drop by some time when you aren’t injured, ja?”

She giggled and nodded. “I will, thank you, and um… Ange?”

“Ja?”

“...definitely more.” Tracer hung up the phone and Widowmaker raised an eyebrow. “Oh, nothing - she’s just a worrier, that’s all. Now let’s go see about breakfast, yeah?”

---

Angela clutched the phone against her armoured chest, leaning back against the wall and staring up to the sun-scorched sky as she sighed. It explained a few things, but didn’t necessarily make them less worrying - but the doctor knew Tracer, had for a long time, and she trusted her. She knew that the woman was impulsive, but she wasn’t self-destructive.

Recalling their prior phone conversation, it made some more sense though. A fair few things fell into place, actually, as she let her mind drift and make sense of this new information.

“You’re cute when you’re thinking,” Fareeha’s dark voice startled her from her reverie.

“Oh!” She dropped her eyes with a smile and nearly dropped her phone as well, but caught it, glancing around briefly. It wasn’t ideal to need to keep the relationship under wraps, but certain things were tenuous and it was better to be safe than sorry. Nobody was nearby, though, so she
leaned forward to peck a quick kiss on Fari’s cheek. She hid a little giggle behind her hand as she withdrew. “Thank you. Does the day look… busy?”

Fareeha sighed a little, armoured shoulders drooping slightly. “I’m afraid I’ll need to cancel our dinner plans. I promise I’ll make it u-”

“You make it up every time I see you, Fari,” Angela smiled, very briefly squeezing at the other woman’s hand. “We’ll find some other time, ja?”

“Yes,” Fareeha nodded firmly. “I promise.”

---

Widowmaker stared openly at the kitchen. Plates already laden with food, dirty dishes, a steaming teapot, and in the middle of it all Emily still worked - turning sausages which sizzled in their pan. The redhead didn’t look away as Lena came near, wrapping arms around her waist, too short to look over her roommate’s shoulder.

“Think I’m about done here, love - although I’ll remind you, you were supposed to stay on the couch.” Emily leaned down to prod one of the sausages with a finger, then shifted the pan off of the heat and turned around to hug Lena tight. “Yep, just right.” She kissed her roommate’s forehead and held her for a second, and it was clear that she wasn’t just talking about the sausages.

“Here,” Emily held out a plate to the third person in the room, the one who stood at a distance and watched curiously with golden eyes. “Take that, head on out - although I’ll remind you, you were supposed to stay on the couch.” The Widowmaker looked back blankly and Emily nodded, picking up a mug full of it. “Here, this too - go on out to the couch, we’ll be there in a sec.”

The assassin turned, confused, but she really had no reason not to. She still wasn’t quite certain what was actually happening or why - she considered the possibility, for a moment, that she might have actually drifted off to sleep at some point. It didn’t happen often, but every now and then…

The smell of the sausages and all of the rest of it dispelled any possibility of that, though. The only thing that was ever this vivid in dreams was blood, death, gunshots and powder - this was too bizarre, too out of the ordinary for a dream of hers.

So she went and sat on the couch, set the plate and mug of tea and a fork and knife she’d been handed at some point all down on the little coffee table. Then, the Widowmaker, the foremost assassin in the world, waited for the other two to join her for breakfast and wondered how her life had ended up here.

One thing was certain: it definitely wasn’t boring.

Back in the kitchen, Lena helped with the cleanup - half-filling the sink with water and dropping in some soap to get the dishes started soaking: the pot from the beans and the crumb-tray from the toaster, too. She rinsed off the pan from the sausages to cool it and slid it into the soapy water as well as Emily fixed another cup of tea so they could all have one.

“Oh, you really don’t need to, love - I’ll get it in a minute,” Emily protested lightly but Lena would have none of it. She shook her head and laid her hands on her girlfriend’s shoulders.
“Nope!” she chirped, shaking her head. “I think I can handle putting a few dishes in the sink - I mean, you made all this breakfast, you went to all this effort, not to mention putting up with the past few days and last night, I think it’s probably the least I can do.” the smile dropped abruptly off of her face as her eyes flew wide. “Oh no! Winston!”

Emily chuckled and kissed her on the cheek, turning to pick up her plate and mug. “Make your calls, love - we can wait a few minutes.”

Tracer flashed the other woman a brief smile as she jogged back into the other room to pick up her phone. “Still not even wearing bloody clothes,” she muttered to herself, grabbing at the bra strap which had burned through and trying to hold it in place as she tapped at the phone with her thumb. She hadn’t even been thinking about that when she’d called Angela. *Maybe she didn’t see too much? Maybe... oh who’m I kidding, of course she did. That’s my kind of luck.*

“Heya big guy,” Tracer smiled, holding the phone to her ear - opting for just an audio link so she didn’t have to explain as much. She headed toward the bedroom to grab a shirt at least as she spoke.

“Tracer!” Winston exclaimed, grabbing at the desk. Athena had filled him in a little on what had happened last night but the details weren’t much, and he really was looking forward to hearing from his friend. He’d tried to call Mercy already, but it just went to messages. He left one thanking her profusely anyway. “What- how are you? Are you alright? I’m sorry.”

“I’m- I’m fine love, completely fine,” she laughed lightly, “what are you sorry for anyway?”

He shook his head roughly. “I was away and I shouldn’t have been. I should have waited until the mission was done in case you needed backup, I- I never should have suggested you go in there alone at all! I-”

“Winston. Winston?” Tracer cut him off, raising an eyebrow in spite of herself before smiling. “It’s alright, calm down and breathe, love,” she reassured, shaking her head. She pulled a dresser drawer open and started to ruffle through the contents. “It seemed like just a standard thing - show up and ask a few question. We couldn’t’ve known it was gonna get out of hand like that - you couldn’t have known, alright? So please try to feel less guilty. I’m alright, it’s all fine now, and we’ll just... keep a more careful eye in the future, yeah?”

“Yeah,” he sighed heavily, not feeling less guilty at all. “What happened there exactly? Athena said she didn’t hear anything until the place suddenly fell under attack.”

Tracer’s thoughts flicked back to the night before as she pulled on a long t-shirt that hung halfway down her thighs. That explained why Athena hadn’t responded when she’d tried to call in - maybe along with the mansion’s other defences, there was some sort of radio jamming. Widowmaker *had* mentioned something about it. “It... it was awful, honestly, um - I got there, big mansion. Some kind of defence systems, I saw a missile get shot out of the air as it got too close - I think they might’ve been jamming signals as well.”

Winston grunted in understanding but didn’t talk, and Tracer continued to explain. “I called in and they said I was expected, and then... the front door was open and when I got there, that old woman - Ms. Gregor - she was dead. She’d been stabbed, dozens of times... maybe hundreds, god it was awful.”

“I’m sorry, Tracer - I- I didn’t know tha-”

“I know,” she sighed briefly. “Winston, really love, it’s alright. You didn’t know, I didn’t know, nobody knew what to expect - but next time, we will.”
“Next time?”

Tracer let out a breath slowly, silently. She didn’t know how much Athena had said, exactly - didn’t know what Athena knew, anyway. “It- it wasn’t… there was more to it than just this one incident. Look, I’ll come in in a bit for a full debrief, yeah? I think there’s a lot to fill people in on, better not to do it over the phone.”

“Okay,” the gorilla nodded, unscrewing a jar of peanut butter nervously with his feet. “Okay, we’ll be ready when you get here - I’ll let everyone know. Thanks for calling, Tracer, and uh…”

“Winston if you apologize one more time, I’ll get Athena to slip hot sauce in your peanut butter.”

“Okay, okay,” he chuckled, shaking his head. “No need to threaten me! I’m glad you’re safe.”

“Me too, love - take care. Have Athena send a ship by, I’ll board in a half-hour or so. Gotta get some breakfast first…”

They said their final goodbyes and hung up, and Lena headed back out to the kitchen with a sigh to grab her food. Neither Emily nor Widowmaker had started eating yet.

“You really didn’t need to wait for me,” she pointed out as she wedged herself in between them on the couch. Emily shrugged with a little laugh and started in on on her beans and toast.

Widowmaker, on the other hand, just raised an eyebrow. “I don’t even know what I am doing here.”

“S’called breakfast,” Emily murmured around a mouthful of deliciousness. “You eat it!”

The frenchwoman rolled her eyes with a smirk. “I am familiar with the concept, cherie, I jus-”

“Hang on, I thought I was your cherie?” Lena teased with a grin but Widowmaker fixed her with an unimpressed look. Just the barest hint of a smirk lingered at the corners of her lips.

“Really, souris? Here, sitting on your couch with your petite, this is where you would have this discussion?”

Emily snickered. “She’s got you there, love.”

Lena bit off a chunk of sausage and rolled her eyes. “I know, I know - geeze, can’t a girl tease her french girlfriend just a little bit?”

Widowmaker leaned over to murmur in her ear. “If you wish to, you will need to get much better at it first.” Lena shivered a bit and swallowed, heavily, but it was definitely just because of the mouthful of sausage.

“She’s got you there too, love,” Emily grinned over, eyes twinkling. “I suspect she’s only ever really on one side of the whole teasing dynamic.”

Tracer scoffed. “Whose side are you on anyway?” she muttered, grinning widely and blushing a little as she leaned forward to scoop up some beans on her fork. Emily flashed a devious grin across Tracer’s hunched back and gestured to Widowmaker, who smirked in return and nodded, just barely.

In unison, they leaned down to tickle her neck as Emily’d mimed - one on either side, just behind the ear - and Tracer sat bolt upright with a stifled yelp, her fork clattering across the table. “Not fair!” she whimpered, blush flooding her cheeks.

Chuckling, Widowmaker settled back against the couch and looked at her plate once more. She
could eat, definitely - she might as well and she would need to soon regardless, she just didn’t know why she was being invited in and given a meal anyway. Some part of her recognized distantly that she was a part of this group now in various ways; flickers of dinner parties from a lifetime ago passed through her head, but she didn’t really feel like that sort of interaction had a place in her world anymore.

“I don’t even know what this is,” she murmured, poking her fork into the pile of beans.

“Beans on toast,” Emily explained through a mouthful of the same.

“You eat it!” Tracer chirped happily and Widowmaker shook her head

“For breakfast? Absurd,” she murmured, “but very well. When in Rome...”

She took a bite. It was actually quite good: hot and savoury but not without its sweetness. With a thoughtful hum, Widowmaker shrugged. “Interesting.”

“That’s high praise, coming from her,” Tracer chuckled, grinning to Emily beside her and giving her a kiss on the cheek. “Trust me!” When she turned back, the beans and toast were gone from Widowmaker’s plate entirely, already. “Whoah, what? How-”

Widowmaker swallowed and cleared her throat. “A... metabolic anomaly. A side-effect of the treatments. I require a truly tremendous number of calories.”

“Looks like you’ve got yourself one voracious partner there, love,” Emily giggled slightly.

Leaning forward, Widowmaker looked back at her with narrowed predatory eyes. “You don’t know the half of it, chérie,” she purred, and both of the others laughed.

Tracer marveled for a moment at how lucky she was - both now and throughout her life. Not a life without its scares, certainly, but each one seemed to be balanced out with a payoff at least. Some people might’ve stuck with a simpler life, but the risks were just part of it. Winston might worry, Emily might worry - sometimes she worried about herself, maybe even most of the time, but she wouldn’t just sit at home for fear of what might happen. The world needed people out there, trying to improve things, to make it a better place.

For now though, wedged between a chilly blue frenchwoman and a bubbly redhead, she thought that this place was pretty much perfect.

Chapter End Notes

If you think Emily's gonna stop teasing Lena (ever) you'd be wrong. If you think Widow's gonna stop, you'd be wrong. I liked this chapter a lot, both generally and specifically - a few lines and minutiae, but also just the overall thing. "You remind me of a man I once killed" was one of the first solid lines I came up with for this fic, actually - that interaction was a locus I've been working toward, heh.

I like Emily, a lot - I appreciate the opportunity to get to explore her a little more, as well as the depth she can bring to the others. I think all characters are better when they interact with others; they're fuller, they get more out. I also (if you haven't noticed, yet) really like including tiny little glimpses of things just to make it clear that not
everything's being pictured. The little moment of Pharmercy here, for instance - just a reminder that they are continuing to do things, to live, to exist and experience, outside of what's explicitly shown on-screen.

Quite a second visit to the apartment, no? :D

C'mon back next time when Tracer gives the team a debrief - Athena first, on the dropship ride over. They aren't exactly thrilled when they hear that Widowmaker was there at all, and even less so when Tracer claims that the assassin lent her a hand - some of them, moreso than others. Sombra takes a crack at the omnic head Widow recovered, but it doesn't work out so well. Widowmaker visits one of her victims. Pain and blood ensue.
A Brief Debriefing

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer returns to Apeldoorn to explain the events of the previous night to the rest of the team. They're glad she was uninjured, but the news of Widowmaker's "aid" is a little bit harder for them to swallow. Some of them in particular. Meanwhile, back at a Talon base, Sombra tries to crack open the head that Widowmaker brought back for her. It doesn't go so well. Widowmaker, on the other hand, is far away at a cemetery, having a conversation with a ghost of her past. It goes much worse than any of the rest.

JFL Summary: Jack doesn't trust Talon (surprise surprise), Ana doesn't trust Widowmaker (surprise surprise), Reaper can't really tell if he trusts Sombra and it pisses him off. Widowmaker tries something new! It's awful.

Chapter Notes

Warning: pain and anguish kinda dotted throughout, worse in some places and not as bad in others. Worst at the end, in my opinion - the Widowmaker section's rough :)

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker delivered Tracer home, where Emily was sitting up alone in worry. She helped the British hero to the bed and then somewhat succumbed to her fears and tears, but Widowmaker hung around out of a combination of light obligation and curiosity. How Emily could survive with such intense emotions is baffling to the assassin, and she asked about it: Emily explained that she felt there was a balance inside herself between the light and the darkness. They both existed, very much; things were awful and things were beautiful, and it was just a matter of evening them out.

In the morning, Emily made breakfast for a confused Widowmaker and an apologetic Tracer. Tracer, upon finding out what Widow had done, first thanked her - and then made her call Mercy and apologize for the threats. She also gave Winston a call herself and tried to assuage his fears, promising to come in for a full debriefing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

So it wasn’t half an hour, it was more like forty-five minutes. Athena wasn’t overly surprised: Tracer had a long history of being less than entirely accurate when it came to estimates like that. The AI didn’t really mind. She did, however, wonder.

The brit came swooping down the alleyway, realigning and sprinting up into the dropship’s open bay. “Sorry, love!” she chirped. “Got a bit carried away with breakfast!”

“So it would seem,” Athena hummed, closing the doors and starting off on their flight to Apeldoorn. “Tracer… we should discuss last night.”

Tracer froze, turning slowly to face one of the cameras in the dropship. “Uh… I don’t, um…”
“You were unconscious, so I do not expect you to recall, but I am the one who transported you to Doctor Zeigler, and then home again afterwards.”

Tracer cleared her throat. “Oh. Right. So, uh…”

For a few moments, it was quiet - or at least, as quiet as a repulsion-jet powered dropship flying through the skies will ever be.

“Sometimes,” Athena broke the silence softly, “I taunt people into attempting to hack databases I have control over. I lead them in with pieces of information in an attempt to goad them into trying to gain more, so that I might have the excitement of fending them off and the satisfaction of succeeding.”

Tracer smiled hesitantly. With no face to read, no body posture, it was sometimes difficult to tell what Athena was thinking. “I’m guessing that means… you met her, then?”

“Correct.”

The brit sighed, pressing a palm to her forehead. “I…” she shook her head, muttering, “when she said she took me to Angela, I guess I should’ve expected this.”

“She did not appear to wish you to come to any harm.” Athena’s words sounded a little incredulous.

“Yeah,” Tracer half-groaned, shrugging one shoulder and tipping to the side in her seat. “It- ugh,” she dropped her head until her chin hit her chest. “It’s a weird situation.”

“I gathered.”

Tracer smirked dryly at one of the cameras. Had this been years ago when she didn’t know Athena very well, she would’ve felt pretty unsteady after that comment - but now she was a little more comfortable with her and knew her sense of humour. Athena was wry, but not harsh, and Tracer felt a little reassured by the subtle joke.

“It’s-” the brit chuckled a little. “It’s not a cease-fire, exactly. More just…” Images of what it really was flickered through her mind, but she was pretty certain she shouldn’t divulge that. It was one thing to hint it heavily to Mercy, but it was probably best if as few people as possible knew.

“…a weird situation?” Athena suggested with a slight hum of a synthetic chuckle.

Tracer sighed in defeat. “Yeah.” Can’t even explain this to her, how am I supposed to explain it to them? She clearly even saw some of it and still I can’t figure out how to say it.

“I think we just realized at some point along the way that… that we didn’t need to kill each other, and so we kind of stopped trying a bit.” If she just thought about how things were on the rooftops and the battlefields, without the kisses and questions and long lingering looks, it was a little easier to explain. “It sort of- I don’t know, became about the dance of it. The thrill and the excitement, like you said with the hackers.”

Athena couldn’t nod, but a little hum showed that she was listening and following along.

“It still lets me get the mission done,” Tracer nodded firmly. “And you know I would never do anything to jeopardize the team. You know that, right?”

The pause that followed was lengthier than she would’ve hoped, and had Tracer worried. She didn’t think she would do anything that would put her people in danger, but she realized that different
people had different definitions there.

“I do,” Athena confirmed and Tracer sighed in relief. “I know you would not willingly endanger any person at all, least of all the other members of the team. I was worried about doing the same last night.”

The assassin’s actions did make more sense to the AI in hindsight through that lens. It explained much, and with it in mind, she was quite certain she’d acted correctly. “I have not yet informed Winston or the others of her involvement. I did not know how best to explain it.”

Tracer’s eyes widened a little as she looked up to the cameras, and then she smiled. “Thank you, Athena. And- and thank you for being so understanding. And thanks for taking me to get fixed up yesterday.”

“It was no problem whatsoever, Tracer,” her synthetic voice became coloured with concern. “I was worried about you. I felt culpable for not detecting the transmission-jamming of the location earlier, but I was distracted. I apologize.”

“It’s-” the brit chuckled a little, shaking her head. “Apology accepted, if you insist, but really it was fine. I… I got distracted in there, I messed up where I normally wouldn’t have, but it all worked out fine in the end. What’s life without a close call or two, right?”

Athena hummed thoughtfully. Then, a few seconds later, she spoke again. “There is one more thing worth mentioning: in the storage locker at the aft of the cabin, you will find an omnic’s severed head. The Widowmaker provided it last night in exchange for her safe and unimpeded travel. She believed that it could provide insights into the supposed “Black Tide” virus - I trust you will be mentioning all of this in your briefing?”

Tracer nodded, jogging to the rear of the bay to find the package. “Yeah - yes, I will. It was… it was scary. Terrifying. I really hope we can find something out there…”

She lifted the head sadly out of the locker, her face reflected in its chromed surface, broken only by seams and the optisensors which sat dim black and dead. She thought of the person this once was - slave or servant or nurse, whichever, infected and turned violent. It was awful.

“We need to get to the bottom of this,” she murmured, holding the head close to her chest. “I’m so sorry…”

---

They were gathered in a large, open room with screens covering one wall. More could be projected in as required, of course. Winston sat on a chair that had been custom-made to fit his frame, and three of the others - Ana as well as the visiting Reinhardt and Lúcio - were seated too, chatting lightly. Jack paced almost frantically along one side of the room, and one of the screens showed Torbjörn, conferencing in from his home.

On another, D.Va had been called in - though her attention was currently diverted off-screen. Her nose was wrinkled in concentration and a thick straw led like an IV from her mouth to a huge container of something bright green which her fans would know to be Mountain Dew. It was half-empty already.
Athena was present as well, of course; her icon dotted on displays around the room. For the time being she wasn’t actively attending, though. She had other duties to devote herself to, at least until Tracer arrived.

Which, in Soldier: 76’s opinion, couldn’t happen quickly enough. He heard a noise and looked over toward the door sharply, but nobody arrived. *Just hearing things, old man.* He knew that Athena felt bad about the night before, and he knew that Winston felt worse. Neither of them held a candle to his guilt, though - he was sure of that.

He should have been there, with her, rather than trying to chase down dead leads on more of those chemical weapons. Obviously he couldn’t have been there with *Helix*, given their particular history, but he still held himself culpable. Athena hadn’t been particularly generous with the details for some reason, only said that Tracer had fallen out of contact for a while and then had been unable to return to base. She refused to elaborate, and said only Tracer could explain it adequately.

It didn’t help. Knowing half of what had happened, and having a blank space to fill in with paranoia and dark thoughts - didn’t help at all.

“Hiya, gang,” Tracer chirped a little hesitantly, looking into the room. “I’m uh-”

It was as far as she got before a chorus of voices shot up, everybody clamoring to be heard as they asked what had happened, if she was alright, what had gone wrong. She smiled nervously and assured everyone that she was fine, everything was good now - it took a few minutes of convincing, but eventually they all sat down again and prepared to hear what she had to say. Even Morrison managed to quell his nervousness enough to take a seat.

“So,” Tracer cleared her throat at the front of the room, trying to fight down the unruliness of nerves in her gut. “I uh… thank you, all, for coming here.” She smiled and looked around, meeting eyes with all of them - they all looked concerned and she could hardly blame them, but it also didn’t really help ease her worries.

“I guess I should start at the beginning,” she sighed, setting the head down on the table. All eyes laid on it for a moment before rising to her, but she shook her head. “Oi - we’ll get there, but first…”

It took a while. Quite a while, as she walked through it all from start to finish - beginning with the largely uneventful missions with Pharah, at which Ana smiled, and then moving on to the mansion investigation. Lúcio recoiled a little at the description of Ms. Gregor’s body, and the whole team expressed displeasure and concern as Tracer mentioned the omnis attacking.

“It seems like that’s what it does, apparently - the Black Tide, it’s some kind of virus that infects omnis and turns them violent. I…” she trailed off for a second, shaking her head as she replayed it all in her mind. “I slammed one of ‘em back against the wall, begged him to stop - even shot out his legs but he just… it was like he didn’t even hear me. Just said ‘the tide rises’ and attacked me again. Like he couldn’t even hear me.”

The general consensus, expressed in murmurs, was that it was awful and they were glad she was safe. “I’m glad you managed to fight them off,” Jack commented, and Tracer tensed up a little.

“Yeah, um… listen. About that.” She looked around at them all, her team - her family in many ways. “Okay, this… look, this is gonna sound weird, I know it is, but hear me out. Please? I uh… I actually wasn’t alone in there.” Silence greeted her, confused and expectant, and she took a brief breath before huffing it out. “Widowmaker was there too. She saved my life - and… and not for the first time.”
More silence. A lot of silence, heavy silence that weighed down on Tracer’s shoulders and chest.

“...Talon gunships.” All eyes turned to Winston’s soft murmur.

Athena hummed. “I came to the same conclusion as well.”

He frowned up to the ceiling. “You knew? You didn’t think you could maybe tell me ahead of time?”

“I thought it best for Tracer to explain for herself. She possesses more information than I.”

“Very well then,” Winston nodded and dropped his eyes down to Tracer expectantly. “Go ahead. We’re all ears.”

“I’m sorry, I…” she sighed and dropped her head. “Maybe I should’ve said something earlier. It’s a weird situation. We’re definitely not working together or anything, but she did save my life from those omnis and she told me a little bit - Talon’s known about this for a while, they’ve been investi-”

“Talon?” Jack exclaimed, and Tracer flinched a little. “You expect us to believe anything that comes from them? They’re probably behind it in the first place, Oxton!”

“I… don’t know that I’d phrase it that firmly, but I agree with him on this one, Tracer.” Both she and Jack looked to Winston as he spoke. “We can’t trust them, or any information that they’re the source of.”

“Look, I-” Tracer protested, “I know how it sounds, but you know I’d never endanger any of you.”

“Yes, Tracer, of course we do - but that doesn’t mean we can rely on this information,” Winston countered and the others murmured in agreement.

“I- it’s a little crazy, I know it is, but I… I know she would interfere with things a lot, but on this? I trust her.”

“Trust her, saghir?”

“I-I” Tracer looked over to Ana and found herself unable to form words as her mind unhelpfully replayed everything the woman had ever said about Widowmaker. The old sniper looked back completely blankly, but there was more than a little hurt buried deep in her eye. Tracer shook her head a little. “Not on everything. Not on most things, maybe, even, but… but on this, yeah, I do. I trust her.”

“You want to look me in my other eye and say that again?”

The group reacted with soft gasps and gentle murmurs. “Ana,” Jack turned to her but she snapped up a hand.

“Don’t say it, Jack. Don’t say anything.” She clenched her jaw tight. “I need a moment.”

Without saying anything else, she stood and left. Her cape swirled around her as she stalked out of the room.

“I- I’m sorry,” Tracer called weakly after her, a tear catching at the bottom of her goggles. She pushed them up onto her forehead and cleared her throat. “A-anyway, um, we… we have this head, now. We can maybe investigate for ourselves. F-find out what’s… what’s really happening…”
From the walls, Athena spoke up after a momentary and largely uncomfortable pause. “I can begin analyses imm-

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, Athena,” Winston cut her off, rubbing at his chin. “If this virus really does have the capacity to infect omnis, there’s a chance of you being hurt or corrupted by it as well. I don’t think you should touch it. And if it’s a Talon ploy, well, the same holds true.”

The others softly agreed, though they didn’t have as much understanding of it all. Winston sighed. “My external contact is already looking for keywords. I can call in another favour and see whether they can help out with the head - see what I can find out on my own as well. Two heads, and all…”

“I’ll take a look too, if you send me a copy of the data,” D.Va chirped from her screen, eyes still dedicated elsewhere. “Everyone loves an easter egg hunt!”

“Might be best to avoid sending it over the net,” Winston’s lips twisted in thought, “but I’m sure we can work something out, thank you.”

Tracer nodded, swallowing heavily. “Thanks, all.” She knew it would be rough, but she wasn’t expecting it to be this rough - she hadn’t really considered… things. Big surprise there. “I um… I dunno how much I can help on that front.”

Soldier: 76 sighed, shaking his head. “Probably can’t. Me neither. We can keep going after those chemical weapons, it’s… it’s something at least.”

Still, he looked at her with a sort of soft disbelief that she didn’t like the look of, not one bit.

“Yeah,” Tracer whispered, wiping at a cheek. “Something.”

---

Somewhat surprisingly, nobody noticed Reinhardt leaving except for Lúcio who sat beside him. He’d been toward the back of the room, but he could still move surprisingly stealthily for a man of his size.

Ana was facing away, sitting on a bench, when he walked into the room. He didn’t say anything at first, didn’t touch her, just sat down at the other end of the bench and waited. For a while, they both just stayed like that.

“I know it was harsh.” Her voice was quiet but hard. “I don’t need you in here trying to-”

“I am only in here over concern for a friend, or maybe two of them,” Reinhardt assured with a shake of his head. “My Ana, we both know wounds run deeper than just your eye or mine.”

She didn’t turn around, just shook her head as angry tears streaked down her cheeks. All she could see was that face, that vicious face behind the rifle that took her eye, took her life for years.

...except it hadn’t. Ana had taken her own life and she knew that now, and she regretted it every day. It wasn’t the other sniper who she was mad at.

At least, not exclusively.

“I cannot trust that woman. I refuse to.”
“Then… do not trust her.”

Ana whirled around. “But how can I trust Tracer, knowing this?” she hissed the question quietly, and Reinhardt considered for a moment, looking down at his hands crossed in his lap.

“I suppose,” he sighed, “that is a question I cannot answer. Maybe the answer is that you cannot, but… I do. Perhaps she is wrong, but I trust her still.”

“Of course you do,” Ana breathed a laugh, pressing a hand to her forehead. “I… I appreciate your concern, Reinhardt, I do, but I would like you to leave for now.”

“Then I will,” he nodded without hesitation, moving to stand. “It would seem there is a line, anyway…”

The mention drew Ana’s eye sharply to the door where Tracer stood, awkwardly, one arm twisted behind her back to hold her other elbow. She shifted out of the way to let Reinhardt pass, but didn’t step into the room, and kept her eyes fixed firmly on the ground. She’d cried a little, Ana could see it in the pink puffy skin of her eyelids.

“How long have you been standing there?” The question was flat.

Tracer swallowed heavily. “I-I didn’t hear anything, I swear, not long at all, I just…” She let go of her arm to wipe at her eyes where tears threatened to spill out again and her voice ran thin and reedy. “Ana, I understand if you don’t want to talk to me but I wanted to apologize and-”

“Oh,” she grumbled, gesturing Tracer closer with a sigh. “It is not you who should do the apologizing. Yet. Give an angry old woman her turn first.”

Tracer nodded and stepped closer, sitting on the far end of the bench. Ana didn’t speak at first, she didn’t have the words, but she slid a little closer and leaned her elbows forward heavily on her knees.

“Some wounds…” the old sniper began, shaking her head a little, “…take a very long time to heal. I-I am still in many ways still recovering from what happened, and…” Ana sighed. “I am sorry, saghir. I should not have snapped at you like that. It was a tender area that I did not expect to be prodded and I was not prepared.”

It wasn’t the apology that actually helped, nor the explanation so much - both were welcome, certainly, but what Tracer really noticed was the name. Her little epithet was what made it feel alright.

She nodded, swallowing heavily and trying to stem her crying with a degree of success. “It… it’s okay. I know it was a lot to break all at once, and I’m sorry, and I don’t- I don’t really expect you to be okay with any of it. I just…” she dropped her head, whispering, “I don’t want you to hate me.”

“No even think that, saghir,” Ana countered a little more brusquely than she intended, clearing her throat as she slid a little closer to Tracer along the bench. “I am sorry, saghir. I should not have snapped at you like that. It was a tender area that I did not expect to be prodded and I was not prepared.”

Tracer laughed once, wiping a tear from her cheek. “Yeah, I get that. I get it a lot, from everyone, it seems.”

Ana let out a sigh that shook slightly with hints of a chuckle. “It is sometimes difficult to be the one everybody cares about. People worry over what they love.”

The brit nodded, slowly. “I don’t plan for us to just take her word on it - that’s why I brought that
Ana nodded. “Good. If I have any choice, I will never trust a thing to them. Any of them - and… Tracer?”

Tracer turned to look at her friend, and was momentarily taken aback by the look on her weathered face. Concerned, but hard and steely, determined.

“If she is endangering one of us, I will not hesitate again. Not ever. I will take the shot.”

Tracer swallowed heavily, fighting back another wave of tears. “I know,” she whispered. “And I don’t think she’d do any different.”

She hoped, of course - she hoped that Widowmaker would, that maybe the days of just killing were done. That maybe something else could start instead, and maybe… maybe one day it could be done altogether. Even now, she knew that was just naivety, though. The fighting wouldn’t ever stop, Tracer knew that she wouldn’t ever stop, so she couldn’t really expect that Widowmaker would.

She could hope, though. She could always hope…

---

Reaper stalked through the halls heavily. Every person he passed, trooper or scientist or otherwise, gave him a wide berth. Any who didn’t - any who hadn’t seen him before, or heard from the others - would get shoved or thrown to the side.

“Any news?” he growled as he shoved through the doors into one of the laboratories.

Sombra was actively pushing a man in a lab coat away from a central table, shouting at him in rushed Spanish. Reaper grinned at that a little behind his mask - the panicked look on the man’s face as he tried to argue while still retreating was hilarious, but Sombra was having none of it.

“No no no no you know what pendejo just- just leave, okay? You’re not helping.”

The man in the lab coat tried to protest. “It’s my lab, it’s my project, it-”

“Hijo de fucking- yeah, and you’re doing it wrong,” Sombra bobbed her head back and forth mockingly. “So just back off and fuck off and get out of my lab, comprende? I don’t need you around being an idiot.”

He started to talk again, but Reaper grabbed the back of his lab coat with a growl, silencing him.

Sombra grinned sharkily. “Hey boss, this guy’s interrupting my work. You think we could do anything about that?”

“I can think of a few things,” Reaper tipped his head, pulling the man back toward the doors. Shoes skidded across the floor, the man entirely frozen in fear. “You’re being reassigned.”

“T-to where?” The technician’s eyes were wide behind his safety goggles.

“Who cares.” Reaper threw him through the doors and then locked them.
“Thanks, Gabe,” Sombra grinned. “Good to know you’ve got my back.”

Reaper just grunted and stepped closer. On the table sat an omnic head - just the head, hooked up to a bunch of wires. Sombra stripped the connections all free with a series of grunts and soft Spanish swear words, eyerolls and exasperated groans.

“Are you kidding me with this? He really thought that it’d be a good idea to- does he have any idea what this thing is? I’m just glad he didn’t throw the switch - not that I’d give half a damn if Talon lost the whole network here, but still…”

“Easy,” Reaper grunted and Sombra’s eyes flashed up from her work, rolling slightly. She knew that he knew she didn’t really care about Talon - she liked some of the ops, sure. She had a friend or two here, but the organization itself? Well, there was no love there in either direction. Strictly business.

“Yeah, yeah, keep it quiet, I know,” she grumbled. “As if I’d let them listen in.”

Reaper bristled a little, gripping at the table’s edge. It was uncomfortably close to insubordination - *she* was, generally, and it crept up his spine in a way he didn’t appreciate at all. Got under his skin and twisted and he couldn’t fight it back.

Sombra glanced over and saw those metal claws digging into the table’s edge a bit, and decided not to mention most of her own personal security measures. On the one hand it was a little fun to mess with him, but on the other hand…

...well, she didn’t need to think about the other hand.

“Long story short, if he’d turned this mess on? *Adios* to the main server here - at least. Thanks for pulling him away, he was getting on my nerves. Now that he’s gone? Maybe we can finally make a little progress.”

*We.* Reaper just stood, stock-still, as she set up a series of screens floating around herself. *Sure.* She looked almost comical with a white lab coat pulled overtop of her normal gear.

He didn’t appreciate standing around and just watching, but it was better than other things. This morning he’d already torn two punching bags to shreds and broken a weight-bench in one of the training rooms. It had been full of training troopers when he’d entered. When he left, it was empty.

*Just thinking* about it brought that itch rising up his spine. That tendril of the hungry void that crept up through to the core of him and *gnawed,* and refused to be silenced. On a good day, none of it would have been an issue. On a *good* day, he could have held it down.

Today wasn’t exactly a good day.

Sombra did notice his stillness, despite her eyes being focused on the displays. She wasn’t an idiot and she’d been around long enough to recognize the signs, and locked in a room wasn’t the place to poke the bear. Over a radio and a camera? Sure, then they could have some fun - or even if she had a few more backup plans - but she had bigger fish to fry right now anyway, even discounting all of that.

Thin purple tendrils reached out from her fingertips, hesitantly probing toward the head. They danced along the outside of the chromed skull like electricity, penetrating in through the base and illuminating the optisensors in Sombra’s signature hue. She hissed a breath in, slowly - risky business, this was. Really risky.

She was still a human, of course. *Just better* than a normal one. Humans had limits, but Sombra?
Sombra had no limits. A series of expensive and often illegal surgical procedures had removed them, and if she ever found another one? It’d be gone too.

The only worry was what the Black Tide might do to her. She wasn’t an omnic - but, she did have a few of their pieces dotted throughout. The concept of a chunk of her system suddenly rebelling against the rest of her due to an invasive virus was not a pleasant one.

As a result, Sombra intentionally left some of her more advanced systems offline, probing around manually instead, and then she found a dense nugget of code. Not something that came on this omnic default, and not active - it was locked down tight, hard and cold like a diamond in the dirt. Whole, and rough, unlike the fragments they’d been able to extract from previous encounters where the heads had ended up destroyed.

“Okay,” she grunted softly. “I got it. Araña did her job well, now we see if that cracker we got was worth its salt.” Damn, shoulda said saltine. Eh, missed opportunities.

She pulled out a small module from her belt and set it on the table, running a cable from it to the omnic head and plugging it in. She tapped the fingers of her other hand on a holographic set of controls and started the code sequence that they’d acquired on the op a few days ago. The dregs of Overwatch hadn’t managed to keep them from getting what they needed - and it was a good thing, too. Sombra always found herself rolling her eyes at those goody two-shoes, they were a bunch of idiots who usually just made things worse.

Not like they were ever there when you needed them, anyway.

Reaper couldn’t tell anything was happening, really. One of the displays did start to flicker through lines of code, a clear indication that something was happening, but he couldn’t tell what.

Sombra, on the other hand, saw a lot of what was going on. It was a little impressive, actually, watching the two interpolative computer entities clashing. The cracker would change tactics, change its own fundamental code, alter to come at things from a new angle, and the firewalls would shift as well to beat it back.

Sombra just watched it all, with her eyes and with more intrinsic senses as well, and lamented that she couldn’t be more involved - half because she wanted to be doing something, and half because Talon probably thought that she couldn’t do anything. Not that she cared what they thought, specifically, but the idea to her that anyone thought there was something - anything - Sombra couldn’t hack? It pissed her right off.

Then everything went wrong, and in a hurry - at first, the cracker program made a bit of progress. Just a bit. The response was immediate and drastic, one of the displays flooding with code as the nugget that was left in the omnic’s head flared up. Sombra yelped and yanked her hand away as the optisensors flashed bright, glowing red.

Smoke raised from the module she’d plugged into it and she held her hand loosely to her chest, staring with wide eyes as the optisensors slowly dimmed. The head groaned softly as the lights died.

“Hmm.” Reaper leaned in a little closer, inspecting the head on the table before he tipped his own back to look at Sombra. “Bad news?”

She turned her hand around slowly to inspect it, stifling a whimper. Her flesh was singed and raw red where her implants ran into her fingers, she could feel the burn all the way up her arm along the wires under the skin on that side. She opened her mouth but no words came out, just a tiny noise. It hurt almost unimaginably much - not just her skin and muscles, but deeper than that. She was only
A single tear ran down her cheek, mouth hanging open as a little bit of blood started to seep from under her metal fingernails, where the implants and circuitry met her skin.

“Mm.” Reaper glanced at that, head tilting to one side. “I’ll go get a medic.”

“Th-th-thank you,” Sombra whispered before pulling a chair over with her other hand and sitting heavily. Her head spun and wavered a little as she shook it, desperately trying to pull herself out of the shock. She did what she always did in situations like that: she cracked a joke. “W-we’re gonna need a bigger boat.”

Reaper barked a laugh as he turned to leave, unlocking the doors and striding through them toward medical. He was surprised she’d even seen that movie. Something about the whole situation had brightened his spirits just a little - technically it was another setback, yes, but the idea that this one had been at Sombra’s hands…

...and just like that it all soured again. His steps sharpened as his teeth gritted reflexively behind his mask, hands clenching into fists. It wasn’t actually a good thing, it wasn’t something he wanted - and he didn’t like the fact that he liked it so much. Some part of his brain reminded him that Sombra was a teammate, and not a bad one at that, and it was true.

There were just so many other parts of his brain, and so many of them wanted to see her fail, to see everyone fail. She thought she was so great, so infallible, so beyond the reach of anything behind those purple-clawed hands. He appreciated seeing her get taken down a peg or two, or five. The way that itch in his spine warmed at the thought of that look of pained shock on her face as blood had dripped down her hand…

A clawed fist flew out and buried itself in the wall with a shout. No. No. You do not-

Reaper grunted softly and grabbed a handful of rebar through the rubble, twisting it within the wall. There was an awful screeching noise as the metal twisted and stretched, and then a sharp ping as it snapped and Reaper yanked his hand out of the wall with a huff, breathing heavily. He dropped the twisted handful of metal bits to the ground where they scattered. A boot flew down and buried one chunk in the concrete of the floor.

Sombra was hurt. She needed a medic. She would get to the bottom of it. Those were the important things. None of the rest of it warranted thinking about.

As Reaper stalked off down the corridor toward medical, a trooper poked his head around the corner and murmured over the radio. “Yeah, maintenance needs to send a team down to sector seven Alpha. Just- don’t ask. Just do it.”

---

Winston groaned lightly in his sleep as he repositioned. It had been a long day and he slept heavily - the conversation had mostly consisted of how they could go around probing through the deceased omnic’s memory banks without risking any of their own systems.

None of them had really talked about Talon or their involvement in matters with the Black Tide: it was hard enough for everyone there to accept that Widowmaker had done anything to help Tracer at
all, then or ever. None of them really believed it was out of anything other than self-interest, and as a result, the head was largely seen as a time-bomb waiting to go off.

Admittedly, it had been difficult to argue with the snippets of surveillance camera footage that Athena had provided. The fact that the assassin had been willing to step into a dropship at all had actually won a few of them over - while they still didn’t trust her, it was clear that she’d gone to lengths to help their teammate. Tracer had undeniably recovered from injuries that looked pretty bad on tape, at least. That was worth something.

They’d resolved to seek outside help first. Somebody who could take a look without risking any of the team’s internal assets.

Winston had put out a call to his contact, and was more than a little worried that they didn’t respond quickly. He rolled over in his sleep again, mind clouded with dark dreams as the screen of his phone softly illuminated. A response.

“Unexpected problem came up. Out of commission for a few days. Will contact with further information. -TNS”

Not what anybody who was trying to get to the bottom of something so dangerous would’ve wanted to hear. Athena hummed slightly to herself as she read the message from Winston’s phone screen, before it turned black again and returned the room to darkness.

He could rest. He deserved it - and it wouldn’t make a difference anyway. Whether he received the message now, or in the morning; he would make better progress if he could sleep first.

She knew that they were right to not want her poking around, and she wouldn’t have felt truly comfortable with it anyway. To most of them, she suspected that the head was little more than a data drive now - a storage unit full of code that was of interest to them, but to her it was still very much a skull. An amputated chunk of a dead being, and she didn’t feel comfortable prodding around in its brains.

Nor did she feel comfortable with the risks it would’ve posed.

Alternate arrangements had been brought about in that plan’s stead: firstly, to get in touch with Winston’s external contact. With that now done, and the response not encouraging, Athena decided to effect the secondary plan.

D.Va and Winston would team up on the matter, with Athena only consulting. Even without actually interfacing with any of the code, she still had quite a thorough knowledge of programming - which, contrary to popular belief, had nothing at all to do with her being an AI. After all, nobody would have expected Tracer to understand neuroscience simply because she had a brain, would they?

Athena stirred drones into action, beginning the construction and assembly of a completely redundant and disconnected set of systems - more basic computers, hard-lined connections, all within a Faraday cage. Independent power from a battery meant that nothing at all, no signal in the slightest, should be able to escape the cage once the tests began.

Winston would be in with it all, with D.Va consulting over a telecom link. Hopefully, it would give them an opportunity to discover something about this Black Tide without opening themselves up to unnecessary risks.

Although, if the previous night had taught Athena anything, it was that sometimes risk assessment did not match up with the outcomes - perhaps, she’d been playing some things a bit too safely.
Perhaps a steeper risk would net higher rewards.

It was something for her to think about, to mull over in the back of her mind as she set everything else into motion. Winston could sleep, and Athena knew she should as well...

She would. Once this was finished - once she’d ensured that the drones were all nicely set on their ways and nothing would go wrong with construction, then she could get a little bit of sleep. She might even be decadent and give herself as much as fifteen minutes, tonight - they all deserved a treat now and then.

---

The cemetery always looked the same. In every season it changed, leaves giving way to snow and then rain, green grass shifting to brown before leaves fell once more, but it always looked the same. She only ever looked at the tombstone, anyway. The grounds and the walls could be knocked down and replaced entirely, and she might not even notice.

“How?” She frowned deeply at the carved stone.

The breakfast had been confusing, but not nearly as much as the night before it. That redhead’s words - speaking of hope and fear, the conflict and the balance between them…

There was no balance. She knew that. She had always known it, it was as certain as her slow heart and blue skin. If there was a balance, she would have been able to find it - if there was anything she could do, it was balance. A razor’s edge was a trifle to her; a tightrope, a simple matter.

She could find no median. No meta-space where the horrors were balanced out, or even outweighed, by the joys. Yet, Emily had so insisted. Vehemently. To the point of tears.

Widowmaker knew lies. Everyone would know the thing their life was comprised of, surely - Tracer knew planes and speed and Widowmaker knew death and lies. When Emily had been speaking… she hadn’t lied once.

So, there was a balance. Yet, there could not be. Unless, perhaps, she had only been unable to find it earlier. There was only one way to know. Widowmaker would have said she was afraid of it, but of course, she feared nothing. She remembered it had hurt, in the past, but she couldn’t truly remember the pain. Memory didn’t work that way.

It didn’t hurt to think about, certainly.

She knelt down in front of the tombstone and cocked her head, looking for a long moment in thought before she let out a slow sigh.

“Alors ,” she muttered to herself, to the stone, with a shrug. “There is only one way to see.”

Closing her eyes, she began to let up her controls - to release that hold which she held eternally, internally, that state of mind which shunted her system into what was only ever meant to be a temporary circumstance. For the first time in a long time, Widowmaker started to relieve herself and exit her bio-static combat mode.
Blue skin began to shift to purple, and then to lighten slowly - very slowly - as a heart which had beat no more than thirty percent over its almost-deathlike baseline in years began to race, up to a fifty percent increase and climbing. Widowmaker took a deep breath as painful prickling burst out across her skin - true pain as nearly-starved cells were flushed and rushed with oxygen and numbed nerves cried out at the stimulus - and for a moment, the sun felt warm on her skin. She could feel her lips as they shifted into a grin.

The assassin let out a brief laugh: though her lungs ached from it and her skin hurt, she was feeling. Not nearly back to human levels, not yet - her heart rate would still have had medics panicking, had there been any nearby - but she was truly feeling. Something, at least. It was something.

She opened her eyes.

The name carved into the stone struck her like a shot, sank into her like a blade, drained the warmth from her blood and enveloped her like death. Tears sprung to her eyes as her heart rate continued to increase and any warmth on her was overtaken by painful needles under her skin which multiplied and spread.

“A- Aaah,” she whimpered slightly, her lips trembling as the words in front of her face blurred through her tears. Gérard Lacroix. The name, the name of the man she’d loved and murdered. Her fingers scraped across the rough stone as ice flushed through her system, spearing her core and clutching at her heart.

“Mon dieu,” she whispered breathlessly. They were the only words she could manage, tears streaming down pinkish-purple cheeks as her heart continued - somehow - to go faster. It might just keep going until it burst out of her chest, and with every beat it hurt more and more and more.

Widowmaker whimpered and gasped, started to sob and clutch at her chest as rough cries ripped her throat raw. Formless shrieks of agony filled the cemetery, pure wails of grief and horror at all she and her life had become as she screamed and shuddered in devastation. Her skin tore against the stone where she struck at it, grasping desperately for a thing she could never, ever, ever reach.

As swiftly as it all had started, it was over, and a blue-skinned woman stood up from where she’d been collapsed a moment before. Sniffling and wiping at her damp cheeks, she frowned slightly at the tombstone before her.

“Désolée,” she sighed, shaking her head as she pulled out a rag to wipe bloody trails off of the tombstone where she’d dragged her torn fingers. The wounds didn't hurt anymore. They didn't bleed anymore. She was better again. “The light does not balance the dark.”

Whether it was a message for him, for herself, or for the redhead who had spoken of it in the first place, Widowmaker didn’t know. Regardless, there was little point in waiting here. A moment later, the cemetery was empty again. Less than a minute after that, two police cars whirred up in front of the gates, sirens blaring. Over the next five minutes they were joined by a half-dozen other vehicles, police and ambulances, all sent to respond to multiple reports of violent screaming.

The groundskeepers only chuckled and said they were fools, that the screams had only been Le Dame de la Nuit, their resident ghost. They certainly couldn't have been the work of any living person: no human would have been capable of such horrifying banshee wails.

Concerned citizens had phoned in, though, entirely certain that a woman was being murdered or tortured in the cemetery - but the police found nothing. How could they? They were years too late to
prevent either the torture, or the murder which had come after it.

Chapter End Notes

This one was fun to write, but also a little rough. I want to do something pretty particular with Widowmaker's character in this, and I hope this makes some strides toward it - a lot of authors interpret her very differently, and it's fascinating to see and it's wonderful to read, and I love seeing those differences. I don't think there's any one right or wrong way, and every interpretation of her I've read is a plausible one in various ways, but I think that this one might be a little different from anything else I've seen. I hope I've done a good job with it so far, and I hope I continue to do so!

I love the cemetery scene. It plays out beautifully in my head, and it does make me cry a bit every time I think about it. I uh... heh, I kinda like hurting myself when i write stories? And uh, that means all you folks get to enjoy the hurt too, so :D

I'll kinda dedicate this chapter to LazerWing, who inquired in a comment about whether Widowmaker would ever leave her combat mode. Well, you've got an answer now! Also a bit of an answer as to whether the rest of Overwatch will find out the truth about Tracer and Widowmaker.

Reaper, too, I'm trying to do some interesting things with. Conflict internally, and I hope I'm writing it well - I'm of mixed minds about "redemption arcs" so to speak. Future actions don't erase past actions, certainly, but that also doesn't mean that you can't improve. I prefer something in the middle, sort of like where Tracer and Widow are: Tracer doesn't exactly forgive Widow for the assassinations and all, but she is kind of willing to overlook them, for the most part, in order to focus on the positive things that are happening now.

I don't think that's really where I'd say I'm working with Reaper, though. Really what I want to do with him is just explain, and I think the explanation I've come up with is fairly compelling? It'll take a while to come out, though. Anyway, I've probably rambled enough, heh!

So uh... yeah! Lots of stuff in this chapter, I hope people are liking it and the story so far, and I hope that keeps going! Thanks for reading :) 

Tune in next time when Tracer heads back home and tries to make things up to Emily - quite successfully. Jack and Winston have a little chat, trying to come to terms with what they've heard, and they find a little common ground. Emily and Tracer go out for a meal and we get a little more of the flavour of London, while Widowmaker flits around not being creepy at all.
(Just kidding. She's creepy.)
Serious Summary: Widowmaker performs a bit of reconnaissance when it turns out that her schedule is fairly blank. Tracer goes home to try to surprise Emily, and it works to an extent - they go out for a dinner on the Thames and have a few moments to just be themselves and just be together. Jack and Winston have a bit of a brainstorming session about Tracer, Talon, and Widowmaker.

JFL Summary: Tracer thinks Emily's really pretty, Widowmaker's creepy, and Winston eats a lot of snacks. Jack can run an obstacle course on one foot in a decent time. The two ladies go out for a totally not creepy dinner, that definitely isn't watched over by a blue lady clinging to the side of a building. Widowmaker wants beans, and she always gets what she wants.

Chapter Notes

Don't think any warnings are necessary. Uh, stalking, kinda. I know *she'd* debate that it's stalking, but still.

Previous Chapter Summary: The debriefing didn't go as well as it could have for Tracer. The team were largely unimpressed with hearing Widowmaker and Talon had anything to do with the events that transpired at the mansion, but she managed to mostly talk them out of any excessive concerns. At the least, she managed to ensure that they still trusted her - although Ana did promise that she wouldn't hold back a shot against Widowmaker. Tracer admitted that she didn't think Widow would do any differently. She also decided to not tell them about the true depth of her relationship with the assassin. Sombra got hurt, trying to crack the Black Tide virus open, and Reaper liked it. However, he found himself not liking that he liked it. Widowmaker, meanwhile, visited Gérard's grave in mild confusion over her conversation with Emily. She decided to lift the restrictions on her own body, her own emotions - to let herself feel again, if just for a moment. It was a mistake.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Widowmaker had intentionally not followed Tracer when she’d gone off to meet with her colleagues. Talon didn’t know where the remnants were based, and Widowmaker decided it would be best to keep it that way - not that she would tell them, but if she knew, she could.

If she didn’t, she could not. It was that simple.

She did, however, have little else to do at the moment. Her apartment held nothing for her - the cacti had been watered quite recently and there were no other diversions. No missions were actively requiring her, or even available to her at the moment.

Perhaps that was why she found herself now on a rooftop, sighted in through her scope - breathless
and motionless - as Emily ate lunch through the lens.

There certainly weren’t any other reasons for it. None she could think of, except for the fact that she had to do something with her time. She certainly couldn’t sleep it away.

Normally she would’ve occupied herself with stripping and cleaning the Kiss a few times, perhaps spending the day on base for some time on one of the practice ranges. She knew her presence made many of the troops uncomfortable. She certainly didn’t care about that, though.

Yet, when she’d dropped off the head with Sombra that morning - after the most peculiar breakfast she could ever recall, and just before making her little detour to the graveyard - she found that the idea of firing at a target was unsatisfying. She always made her mark, anyway. Sombra had cracked her jokes and Widowmaker had only grinned in return, somewhat surprised by the satisfaction the recollections had brought, but then there had been no draw at all in the practice range, nor anything else around the facility. She hadn’t had any reason to return to any of her various safehouses.

...and now she was back here. Returned to what she didn’t think of in the slightest as her home base, watching a woman she barely knew eat a meal she could hardly remember.

Widowmaker rested back, sitting with one knee up and her rifle laying on top of it. It was an awful position, not stable in the slightest, but the scope still barely swayed as the wind whipped past and she reached into a pocket to pull out a ration bar.

They were little more than condensed protein, nutrients, and caloric content. Each individual bar was intended to provide a solder up to two hundred pounds with the energy and nutrition required to carry out a full day’s combat operations.

On a light day, she would eat six of them. At least. A hungry day could mean double that - what would be two weeks of rations for a soldier, almost, in a single day. The Talon specialists had never offered to explain her metabolic functions or anomalies to her, and she had never thought to ask. Does a fish need to understand the currents of the ocean in order to swim? No, and neither did she need to understand why it was that she operated as she did - only that she did function, and how to maintain herself properly. That much, she knew.

She’d known from the start that her sense of taste was dull. There was little use for it in her line of work and no effort had gone into its preservation; she suspected the lack of bloodflow or the lack of warmth had something to do with it. Possibly enzymes. Her hearing, her sight, those were sharper than any other’s, but the remainder of her senses had somewhat atrophied.

Chewing idly on a mouthful of the nutrient bar, she suspected that there was little to taste of it even for someone without those restrictions.

The beans, this morning, though - those had been quite interesting. She wanted more of them. They could hardly hope to provide her with what she required, couldn’t even begin to come close to the caloric intake and nutritive balance that her physiology needed to support itself, yet, she wanted them.

Odd.

Emily ate a sandwich of unknown composition - she’d made it already by the time Widowmaker came to her rooftop after returning from the cemetery. The sniper could see lettuce poking out, perhaps bacon. Something that looked dark and a little slimy.

She just watched the redhead settle back against the couch, smile, and presumably turn the television
on. Widowmaker couldn’t see the projected screen from this vantage point, but she saw Emily reacting to it - smiles or little laughs, looks of shocked outrage.

Wondering what the woman might be watching, Widowmaker realized that she was smiling a little bit as well. She also realized that she had no clue - she knew there were things on television other than the news, but what those might be was a mystery. Even the news, she rarely attended to. It was hardly a reflection of her world.

Emily finished her sandwich and gestured the television off before she pulled a book out from underneath the couch. Widowmaker was curiously focused on trying to read the title on the spine - she thought she might’ve seen the redhead’s eyes flick toward the window, but she couldn’t be sure.

Regardless, Emily turned to face away from the large glass doors and propped the book up in front of her so the natural light could shine on it, flipping it open to the first page. Over her shoulder (if she turned up the scope’s magnification, which she did) Widowmaker could easily see the words.

She couldn’t read English nearly as quickly as French, nor as well as she could speak it, but Emily seemed to be taking her time as well and Widowmaker didn’t have too much difficulty keeping up. She finished off her nutrient bar about halfway through the first chapter and pulled out a second to munch on as she read.

The sun felt pleasantly warm on her skin.

---

“I’m not sure there’d be much for you to do here anyway, Lena,” Winston rolled his shoulder in a shrug as he lifted a terminal to rearrange the space a little.

Tracer stood outside the Faraday cage, peering in through the now-open door. “You sure, big guy? I mean… yeah, you’re right, computers have never really been my strong suit. Still feel like I should hang around for a bit though, y’know?”

Winston chuckled, shaking his head. “Yeah, sure, and then you’d get antsy and then you’d get energetic and then I’d get distracted.” Tracer giggled a bit and Winston shook his head. “No, it’s probably best if you get on back home. I honestly doubt I’ll be able to make a huge amount of headway here anyway - got to wait a few days to hear back from my contact…” he sighed a little, setting the computer he carried down on top of a desk.

Setting everything up could wait a minute or two - it wasn’t pressing or urgent, and the omnic would still be dead in five minutes. Winston knew nothing would be solved in five minutes anyway, and while he was a little anxious to get the process started he was also anxious about some other things.

“I’d be worried too, if I were you,” he met his friend’s eyes, readjusting his glasses a little. “That drop point was a little close to home for comfort, huh?”

Tracer dropped her eyes to the ground, grabbing her elbow across her chest as she tipped her head. “Oh, I- I dunno, it’s really not about that. I mean…” she frowned a bit, sighing through her nose. If they couldn’t even wrap their heads around basic trust, they definitely weren’t ready to hear about anything more yet - although she had no doubt that, in hindsight, some of them would beg to differ. Some of them might even be outright angry if and when they found out, but Tracer knew herself. She knew she wasn’t endangering any of them by keeping anything under wraps.
“I know it’s kinda hard to get, big guy, but I really do trust that she won’t go out of her way to do anything to me.” Well, anything bad. “Quite the opposite, in fact."

Winston huffed a laugh, looking briefly to the ground before his eyes searched Tracer’s face once more. “Does she… know where you live?”

The brit’s gaze flicked to his at that, a little nervously. “I— her frown deepened, “I’d say that’s… pretty likely, yeah.”

The scientist nodded a little, silent for several seconds before he spoke again. “...do they?”

It was a very different question, a far better question, and one she was much less sure about. “I,” she started and then lapsed into wordlessness for a moment. “I really don’t know. I don’t think so. I hope not. I think… I think if they did, we would know by now - they would’ve tried something. At least he would’ve…”

Winston grumbled and nodded. “Yeah.” He could still recall all too clearly the events in Gibraltar; what Reaper had been trying to get his hands on. When Jack and Ana had decided to respond to the recall, and had filled in the rest of them about the man’s identity as their former teammate Gabriel Reyes, Winston’s thoughts on the matter had only darkened.

That was what had convinced him to leave Gibraltar behind - it had been a good base, a good home, but it had been breached once and if Talon returned they wouldn’t be tricked by the same things a second time. Without the personnel required to get the base really operational, Winston had decided to mothball the facility properly - with the exception of the databanks. Those, he’d destroyed entirely.

“He almost found you all,” Winston reminded her with a gentle shake of his head. “Still don’t know what he was planning, but… I don’t think it’s too likely that he’d just give up there.”

Tracer shook her head, throat tightening a little. It was a good point, a worrying point. Winston was real handy at coming up with those. “I’m uh,” she cleared her throat a little in a bid to eliminate some of the slight shakiness from it. “I’m gonna keep an eye out, yeah? Special eye, just in case anything’s up, and if something does happen,” she nodded for a moment, not speaking, before a smile flashed across her face. “Well, there’s always rooms here in Apeldoorn, yeah?”

Winston grinned a little, nodding. “True, very true - you know you’re welcome any time, and Emily as well. If anything seems out of the ordinary, you feel like you’re being watched - heck, even if you just want to get away for a few days, or longer, it’d be great to have you.”

“Well, she does have a job to worry about, you know,” Tracer teased a little and got a chuckle from Winston. “But yeah, of course - we’ll pop by if we need.”

“Good,” Winston nodded. “Good, good.” With a bit of a sigh, he glanced around. “Well, I suppose I should get back to setting this all up. Say hi to Emily and give her a hug from me.”

“I will, big guy,” Tracer nodded and then giggled slightly. “You give Orisa one from me, yeah?”

She turned to leave with a huge grin on her face as the gorilla stammered a little behind her. After she was gone, Winston cleared his throat and turned around to continue his work.

“Winston?” Athena’s voice was softly inquisitive.

“Yes?”

“Would you like me to compose a message to be sent to Orisa? I could include a mention of a hug.”
“Athena!” Her synthesized voice laughed gently as Winston whirled around, looking frantically at the cameras. “Am I really going to have you teasing me about this too?”

“I could go back to bananas and peanut butter if you wish…”

Winston chuckled as he shook his head, grinning widely. “Whatever I did to end up with friends like you all,” he flashed a smirk to one of the cameras, “it must have been terrible. I can see why I’ve repressed the memory.”

Athena chuckled lightly as she sent a drone to bring in a few more cables. Winston had revised her plans a bit and required some extra setup, but soon they could begin. She wasn’t looking forward to simply watching, she wanted to work, but there were others things to be done - chemical weapons still to be located, and a private investigation or two as well.

There were few people who knew the full extent of Athena’s knowledge or curiosity, or how far her eyes reached. It was information she very much chose to keep tucked under the rug.

---

The dropship didn’t take long to get her home. Tracer opted to fly herself today - the Orca wasn’t exactly her cup of tea, it was pretty much a sky-lorry, but flying was still flying and she did love that, and got so few opportunities these days.

...even if she was flying a minivan.

She popped the button that set it on an automatic return course as she hopped down from the pilot’s seat, blinking out of the doors as they closed up. The front door would be easy enough - but a girl’s got to go for a proper surprise every now and then, and this was definitely one of those times in her opinion.

Tracer had called ahead and made some arrangements, and sure, it had cost her a few autographs and a private flightseeing session with somebody’s son (and a favour from an old friend, to sit in the co-pilot’s seat, because Tracer couldn’t trust herself alone in there anymore), but she’d got the reservation. That was the only important part.

Now, she looked up the wall of flats, balconies poking out from the building, time for the big reveal!

A rooftop and then up to a balcony, and then the next balcony was hers. As she resolved back into solidity from a swirl of blue light, the grin slipped slightly off of her face.

“Aw, crum.”

Emily glanced up with a raised eyebrow from where she was working, stripping the protective coating off of a large sheet of glass. “Well hi there, love - you’re not disappointed to see me, are you?” She giggled softly and Tracer laughed, stepping through the open doorway with a shake of her head.

“Well hi there, love - you’re not disappointed to see me, are you?” She giggled softly and Tracer laughed, stepping through the open doorway with a shake of her head.

“Of course not!” She knelt down to give Emily a kiss and then a hand with prepping the glass as well. “I was just hoping to surprise you.”

“I’m delightfully surprised, dear,” the redhead murmured as she patted Lena on the hand. “I just got a
little tired of the breeze up my nightie.”

Tracer smirked as she pulled off the last of the protective plastic sheet. “Well that makes one of us. Besides, I don’t remember you wearing any-”

“Concentrate, love,” Emily murmured softly with a grin, eyes glittering. “Let’s get the glass in before you get all distracted, hmm?”

Lena just chuckled and nodded as they stood, lifting the large panel into place where Emily’d already removed the old one. It wasn’t nearby - Tracer figured the delivery people had taken it away with them.

They levered the big pane into the sliding door’s frame, starting with the bottom, and Emily then gestured briefly. “Hold it there, love - I’ll get the rest of it in.”

Tracer shifted to the middle as Emily grabbed up a screwdriver and all of the little panels and hardware required to finish off the job. It didn’t take her long to get them all tightened down.

“Fit and handy,” Lena murmured as she shook her head with a grin. “I really did hit the jackpot with you, you know.”

“I know,” Emily hummed lightly, tipping her head in a bit of a preen and grinning as she tightened the final screw. Then, she could finally devote her full attention to Lena - the screwdriver fell unseen to the floor as Emily grabbed at the chronal accelerator’s harness, flipping Tracer around and pushing her back against the window for a thorough kiss.

“Now,” she murmured as she withdrew a little, eyes wide and delighted. “How’s that? Seem solid enough?”

Tracer cleared her throat, feigning a bit of a swoon back (definitely just feigning, yeah) against the glass before grinning. “Oh, very solid, love. Thanks, for taking care of that - I really was going to.”

“I know,” Emily nodded, taking Lena’s hand and tugging her over toward the couch a little. The trash from the glass could be cleaned up in a minute. “I wasn’t expecting you’d be back so soon. Is anything the matter?”

“Oh, no, not at all,” Tracer shook her head, starting to loosen up the accelerator. “Just wasn’t much for me to hang around for after the briefing. Winston and a few of the others have got some stuff to work on - oh, he sent you this, by the way.” She wrapped her arms around Emily tightly, eliciting a gentle laugh from her.

“Well, it was lovely, and I’ll be sure to return the favour!” Emily dropped herself onto the couch and pulled Lena onto her lap. “And maybe a little extra, for returning my girl to me so quickly!”

It felt so wonderful. Tracer let herself lean back into Emily’s warm arms as she abandoned her efforts to get the harness off - for a second or two, at least. Her hands continued to tug straps loose on autopilot as she sat a little sideways to prevent the metal fairings from interfering. “Mmm, nothing’s gonna keep me away,” she murmured, laying her head back against Emily’s shoulder and getting a little kiss on the cheek for her troubles.

For a few minutes, they just sat there and enjoyed each other’s presence.

“Em? Listen, I know - I haven’t exactly been running on all cylinders lately-”

“Oh, Lena, love, you always worry about this too much. You know that I-”
“I know, yeah,” Tracer turned a little to kiss Emily and meet her eyes. “But this is important to me, so…” Emily nodded as Lena stroked at her cheek - a silent urge to go on and say whatever she needed to.

“You’re magnificent. You’re just so wonderful, and I know I don’t need to do certain things or whatever, but,” she shrugged her shoulders and huffed a little sigh. “I want to. You deserve it, you really do - and I know I’m pretty good to you most of the time anyway.”

“I’ll say!” Emily interrupted lightly with a grin, letting them both settle back further against the couch until they were half-lying there.

Lena giggled a bit and stroked at that gorgeous ginger hair. “And I figured, on top of that, you really deserved something special. Little cherry on top, yeah? So, I got us some reservations at Apogee tonight.”

“Apogee!” Emily gasped, her eyes wide with surprise. “How- how did you manage that? Their wait list’s supposed to be six months at the least!”

Shrugging, Lena chuckled softly. “Well, turns out the owner’s son is a bit of a fan, so… well, I’m gonna sign a few pics and take him up for a flight. Jerry agreed to be in the side-seat, so don’t worry about that. Called up the RAF museum and arranged one of their birds for an hour - a Mark Nine Firefly, you know, the ones with the v-tail and the triple-stage turb-”

“Love, you know I have no idea what you’re talking about there but that’s wonderful!” Emily pulled her into a tight hug. She’d long since gotten used to the feel of the accelerator pressing into her chest, and hardly even noticed it anymore. It was just something Lena wore sometimes. “I mean, it’s really, it’s so much more than you needed to do, but I’m definitely not gonna look this gift horse in the mouth.”

It meant a lot. It meant really a lot, and Emily knew it - knew how rough interacting with fans could be sometimes, for Lena. Tracer’s fans weren’t exactly subtle, and there was a tendency for them to get a little upset if things didn’t align with their expectations.

That wasn’t even to mention the idea that she’d be going flying again. Emily knew she missed it, knew she loved it, but she also knew the nightmares it gave her. She knew how frequently Lena woke up with shouts or cries and memories of cockpits and jet engines.

As a matter of fact, she almost wanted to protest - to tell Lena that it was alright and she really should probably call it off, that dinner didn’t matter that much. Lena had a point, though: it mattered to her. Emily wouldn’t dream of trying to take that away from her, and trusted her to know her own limits.

Her hazel eyes flicked around excitedly as her grin threatened to lift off of her face entirely. “I’m- I’m going to go start getting ready right now!” With a delighted giggle, Emily leapt from the couch and ran to the bedroom.

“Well if you think I’m missing that, you’re sorely mistaken,” Tracer grinned as she pushed herself off of the couch and followed.

---

“Winston?”
“In here, Jack.”

The soldier approached cautiously, for more reasons than one. “I’m… not interrupting, am I?”

Winston sighed as he wafted a little smoke away, nose wrinkling reflexively. “No, no you’re not - this head keeps short-circuiting and overloading whatever we put on it. I’ve gone through a stack and three portables so far, but I think progress will be roughly nil until we can get a helping hand. Still waiting to hear back on that.”

76 nodded, pulling a stool over and sitting outside of the Faraday cage. Something about it made him uncomfortable - it always had, being on the other side of glass from Winston, locked in a little room. Any kind of laboratory, really, gave Jack that same stir in his gut. Maybe it was some kind of guilt over what had undoubtedly been done to the man, even though the soldier knew he’d had nothing to do with that.

Still, it felt awkward to be talking to the gorilla in a cage.

“So… Talon.”

Winston snorted. “Apparently.” He ran a hand over his head, as if through his hair. “I… I mean, I trust Tracer. Athena, too - if they say her life was saved by a Talon operative, then, I suppose I have little choice but to accept it.”

“Yeah,” Jack grumbled, sounding supremely unhappy about the concept. “Still don’t trust a single one of them as far as I could throw you. No offense.”

The scientist chuckled at that. “None taken; me neither. I just can’t help but shake the feeling that it’s all angling for something - after all, out of all of them-”

He didn’t need to finish the sentence. Soldier: 76 picked up on the thread of thought plenty well enough. “Only one worse option it could’ve been, but I guess we can at least be grateful he wasn’t involved. Still… she never misses a shot. Never hesitates. If she left Tracer alive - saved her life, even, supposedly-”

“There’s got to be a reason,” Winston finished and Jack grunted in affirmation. There was a moment of silence, the gorilla rubbing thoughtfully at his chin as the soldier just sat and stewed in thought.

“Sometimes,” Winston’s deep voice rumbled in his chest almost hesitantly. “Sometimes, when I’m bored, I’ll try to write my notes backward. Or upside down, or with my left foot or-”

“Swap stances at the rifle range,” Jack picked up the topic, rolling a shoulder in a shrug, “or try to run the course with some weights. Under a time limit. Hopping on one foot.”

“One foot, really?” Winston looked incredulously through the screen of the cage and Jack chuckled. “Yeah, I’ll show you the video some time. Managed a not half-bad time.”

The scientist pursed his lips thoughtfully, tipping his head before his expression darkened a little. “When it counts, though - when it comes down to the line…”

“Then you switch back to your dominant hand. Both feet on the ground, get the job done. No time for distractions.”

Winston nodded, meeting the soldier’s eyes, and for the first time in almost a decade he felt a legitimate connection with the man. Not just in terms of agreeing on something, but in terms of
genuine support - the kind of alignment that ran deeper than simply having the same idea about what
the next step was on a mission, or where to stage a certain operation. The sense that they were
actually agreeing about something, right down to the core of themselves. “We know she takes
unnecessarily difficult shots sometimes.”

“Yeah,” Jack confirmed with a nod. “Sometimes. The easy ones she tries to jazz up a little.”

“Maybe that’s what this is? Anybody reviewing the debriefing reports would be able to tell that their
fights have got to be exciting.”

Soldier: 76 thought that might sound just a little too simple to explain it all, but it definitely made
some sense. He was no stranger to the concept of letting the other guy get the upper hand for a
minute - or at least, letting them level out the playing field. Giving up an early lead in a race,
something like that, to heighten the eventual victory. Or at least to heighten the joy of competition.

“I think you might be right,” he murmured with a nod. “At least, I think that’s part of it. Guess there
could be more, but…”

“But it might not really matter anyway,” Winston sighed a little, leaning back heavily in his chair and
shoving out against the desk with one foot to send himself spinning. “Not like there’s much we can
do about it except trust Tracer to be able to handle herself.”

“And hope that the shots stay easy, and she never finds herself in between a hard target and the
Widowmaker.”

“That too,” Winston conceded softly, dropping his head into a low nod. “We can always hope. We
know she’s capable, too - she’s a survivor.”

Jack chuckled a little at that and pushed himself up off of his stool. “Yeah. I guess we can.” Or
somebody can. “And you’re definitely right there. Hard to picture something she wouldn’t be able to
make it through, these days. I’ll try to make some headway on something while you’re working on
that. Let me know if I can help but uh… think we both know that’s not my forte.”

Winston chuckled a little and nodded. “Thanks, Jack - and thank you, for this too. Good talk.”

The soldier just nodded with a grunt, turning to head out but something stopped him. Something
someone had said, maybe. “Hey, you need a… a snack or anything?”

The gorilla snorted and glanced around. A half-dozen or so empty wrappers, both foil and banana,
professed the number of snacks he’d already had. “I think I’m probably fine without, but if I’m
honest, I could use a break from this. Maybe I’ll head down to the mess hall.”

Jack chuckled. “I’ll meet you there in ten. Mix you up something from my days back in the Forces -
get yourself ready for that.”

Chuckling, Winston loped toward the Faraday cage’s door - designed as a set of doubles like an
airlock to guarantee that no signal could escape. “Sounds either like fun or torture. Maybe a bit of
both. See you there in ten minutes, thanks.” He grinned as he made his way through the halls to his
quarters, intent on changing out of the lab clothes that smelled like electronic smoke and ozone. It did
seem like things were getting better, it really did.

The only downside to this base was that it was all underground. Winston missed being able to glance
outside and see the sun - but not nearly as much as he missed being able to see the moon. It always
brought thoughts of his father to mind, and right now, he felt like those would fit in very well.
Improvements. Working our way toward how the world could be.

It was all Winston had ever wanted out of life.

---

She’d really outdone herself this time. The whole drive down, Lena couldn’t manage to take her eyes off of Emily - every glance brought a new detail to light, yet the outfit didn’t look busy. It was like on of those old statues: gorgeous from a distance, fascinating up close, magnificent from any angle.

Emily had dressed for the expected slight chill of the evening in a marvellously deep purple sweater with thick cuffs and a cowl around the neck that hung loose, low and open. Holes opened over her shoulders and elbows, her pale and lightly freckled skin contrasting with the soft yarn but not clashing. Her skirt ran from her left knee down to her right ankle, the same green as the forests in the North, and Tracer could swear her hair was actually glowing with whatever she’d done.

Magnificent copper tresses dropped in bouncy waves to her shoulders and partway down her chest where the glint was picked up by a pendant on a thin chain. The copper and gold accents were picked up by bangles on her wrists, dangling earrings, and threads that were woven right into the sweater, and Tracer just kept looking it over and over as Emily drove. She was like an art piece - the more Lena looked, the more she saw, and the more she loved it.

The whole thing was finished off with a scarf - a christmas present that Tracer had been quite sure on the day would never actually happen, but luck and kindness had pulled through for her again.

“Remember to breathe, love,” Emily murmured out of the side of her mouth and startling Lena a bit. “Wh- I was!” Tracer protested, entirely breathlessly. “I breathe all the time!”

Emily giggled, unable to wipe her own grin off of her face either. The night came as such a surprise, and an entirely welcome one. It was an unimaginably beautiful and sweet, moderately rushed, and just slightly stupid gesture. So perfectly Lena.

“I still can’t believe you managed this, you know.” Hazel eyes flicked over, slightly narrowed above her cutely freckled cheeks, as Emily pulled the car into a parking slot. There wasn’t much in the way of parking around London, but this restaurant provided for its customers in every foreseeable way. The sun was lowering in the sky - they’d have the most beautiful view of the sunset, and she’d get to share it with her favourite person in the world.

They linked arms and headed down the short stone staircase, a tuxedo-wearing man letting them through a velvet rope. He leaned in to Tracer and murmured softly, and she nodded.

“Owner’s gonna want to say a word first, sorry love;” she sighed lightly as they made their way into the restaurant proper. Or, rather, on to. It was a different sort of thing, Apogee - from the ground up. Starting with the fact that it wasn’t on the ground.

The deck of the customized barge shifted slightly under their feet as it floated on the Thames, but the motions were gentle and very easy to deal with. Emily patted Tracer on the arm and gave her a quick kiss before she was led on to their table - up on the second floor, with an absolutely magnificent view of the river.
In the distance, the Nettle protruded from the skyline and was reflected in the water, such a picturesque and iconic sight of their city centred right between the spires of Tower Bridge. The old and the new, progress and tradition, all tied up together. She loved that about London… even if it was a bother, sometimes.

Emily’s gaze flicked down to the deck below, where Lena - slacks, button-up, oversized purse and all - walked over and was introduced to a tall omnic man who greeted her with a warm hug. Neon lights adorned one side of his body, the other half painted and anodized in a stark black-and-white colour scheme.

One day, Emily hoped she might be able to talk Lena into introducing the pair of them - the opportunity to actually meet Andrew St. Charles was just far too good to pass up. It was enough of a delight just to get to eat on his boat. Not technically his, perhaps - given the recent problems with the British Government and Omnic Rights, he couldn’t actually own the boat and run the business. Technically, it belonged to his partner, but they openly admitted that Andrew did one hundred percent of the work - on television, in the papers, any way they could to show just how stupid the laws were.

Her painted lips wore a faint smile that was as consistent and gentle as the rolling of the water, as the final few passengers boarded and the boat cast off. The engines were silent and vibrationless, and the noises of the traffic and construction soon dropped away entirely as Emily’s eyes searched out every point of detail in the city she loved.

Over there, an office block where she’d worked for a horrendous dragon of a woman; that stack of flats there she’d stayed in for eight months with a former partner. The protruding spire of a church which she knew to hold her grandmother’s grave, which she visited annually at least. Home, in so many ways.

“Careful, love,” Lena sat down with a grin and a raised eyebrow. “Lookin’ at a city like that - you’ll make a girl jealous!”

Emily chuckled as she looked over, her faint smile splitting into a full grin as she took Lena’s hands in her own. “You’re ten times as beautiful and twenty times as much my home as that city’ll ever be, love.”

The red that ran up her neck and cheeks, right to her ears, was far more rewarding than the growing pinks of the sunset and Emily giggled slightly as Lena dropped her head to the side. “Aw - now you’ve gone and made me blush!”

Emily leaned forward, tugging her a bit closer to give her a kiss on the warm cheek. “I know! Almost like I planned it that way, you silly thing.” She hummed a breath out as she cast her eyes over the water and the city again. “Just absolutely wonderful. I’ve always wanted to come here…” her eyes met Lena’s again, glistening with tears. “It means so much to me that it’s with you, you know.”

Lena really didn’t know what to say in response. Emily always had seemed to be better with words than her. She just looked back in wonder, stroking her thumb along the back of Emily’s hand. For a long while they just looked at each other, saying with looks what words could never express, before Tracer broke the silence.

“Can I, um,” she glanced around briefly. “Can I move my chair over beside you? I’d just rather not be across the table from you, y’know?”

Emily giggled a little and nodded, grinning and dabbing briefly at her cheek as Lena rearranged the
furniture. The result was the pair of them roughly side by side at a two-person table, which might be awkward when food came along. She had to admit, though - as she took Lena’s hand and leaned over against her a bit, kissed at her cheek and sighed - it was an absolutely wonderful position.

“That’s better, isn’t it?”

Lena grinned over with a nod. “It really is. I just… honestly I don’t even know what to say, Em - what’s not been said already. I don’t even know if there’s words for it, I just…” she sighed in what almost sounded like frustration, dropping her chin lightly to rest on Emily’s shoulder. Words couldn’t work - at least, not her words - so instead she just lifted Emily’s hand, their fingers still interwoven, and pressed it to her chest over her heart.

“I think that says it better than words, love,” Emily half-whispered, her voice a little crackly as she dabbed at her cheek with a napkin again. “Cor, you’ll ruin my makeup at this rate!” They both laughed and Emily gave her a thorough kiss, one hand behind the neck and fingers running up into that spiky mess of brown hair.

“I love you too, Lena. Thank you - thank you just for thinking of it even, honestly, for everything. It’s… I mean it’s really more than you needed,” she laughed lightly, shaking her head. Her free hand tugged briefly at the end of the scarf around her neck. “But thank you. So much.”

“Nothing’s too good for my girl,” Lena assured with a decisive nod. “Why if this hadn’t’ve worked, I’d’ve just had to build my own food boat!”

Emily snickered. “Sweetheart, I love you, but that would just be a canoe with a Breville in it.”

“Toasties are grand!” Tracer protested lightly, grinning like her head might fall off. Her heart just swelled every time she looked over at Emily, every time she met those eyes or glanced at those lips. Admittedly it wasn’t necessarily the only reaction.

“Actually,” she tipped her head with a bit of a frown, “speaking of - where’s the menu?”

Another little laugh. “Oh, there’s - no, Lena, there’s no menu. He cooks whatever he thinks is fitting for the night; never the same food twice, never the same experience twice.”

Tracer glanced around skeptically. “Alright, well… I mean, I had already given up hope of getting a nice steak and kidney, so… in for a penny, I guess.”

Emily tossed her head back for a full laugh at that. She knew the hesitation was just for her benefit, she could see it in Lena’s grin as she looked over. “Well, don’t worry love - I’m sure you’ll get something worth eating.”

The sun was drawing nearer to the horizon, the sky shifting through to purples and pinks and reds, and Tracer loved the way it painted Emily’s face. How it brought out her freckles and her eyes, making them look greener than they ever had as Lena just stared for a good long moment, lost in the beauty.

A slight noise drew her attention - the arrival of food, it seemed. Not having a menu meant that the meals could be prepared before the guests actually arrived, which was a hidden upside if you asked her.

The servers set down their plates and bowed away from the table, and Emily took a moment to just appreciate the look of the food. Unsurprisingly given his own appearance, the creations of Andrew St. Charles were aesthetic bordering on the absurd - the appetizer was an almost perfect sphere of something which she couldn’t discern, which had high arcing spires dancing out and up from it like
solar flares escaping, and the colours matched that as well. It sat on a pitch-black bed that Emily suspected was caviar, maybe with some squid ink added for colour.

Lena was already halfway through hers, of course, and Emily grinned softly at that as she lifted her fork. The ball seemed to be comprised of impossibly light and airy mashed potatoes, rich and creamy and delicious, and they melted in Emily’s mouth as she melted in turn back into her chair. The contrast of flavours against the caviar was divine and she let out a little noise, ensuring that she caught a piece of one of the spires in her next bite - lightly fried cheese, as it turned out.

“Definitely a good idea to bring you here,” Lena smirked to her with a nod before glancing down to her plate appreciatively. “And I’ve got to admit, that’s some pretty tasty mash!”

Emily laughed a little behind closed lips, swallowing and wanting to speak but deciding on another mouthful first instead. “It really is, isn’t it?” she eventually managed to get out, after she was halfway through the appetizer.

Tracer was already finished hers and chuckled, nodding. “So, how’s uh… how’s work going?”

A slightly snorted scoff greeted the question, and a roll of hazel eyes as Emily gestured with her fork. “Which job? They’re all fine, it’s all well and good - the hospital’s good but a bit of a strain on the old heartstrings, as always. Coming up on annual review time at Reibling, but I’m not worried there.”

“Neither would I be, love,” Lena chirped with a grin which brought a steeper smile to Emily’s lips.

“Then I’ve been helping Gord out a bit more, but that’s not really a job. He’s having harder and harder a time, lately…”

“Yeah,” Lena murmured, her gaze drifting out over to the city past the water. It was no secret that London was undergoing some tension, and it seemed that few places were feeling it quite as intensely as King’s Row.

It might have just been her imagination, of course - she didn’t live anywhere else, after all. She kind of hardly lived there, even, which only made it all the more striking: she’d go off for a few days and come back to a whole new slurry of shitty slogans, spraypainted on the bricks and cobbles. A whole new series of awful stories on the news.

“We’ll get through it though,” Lena assured, taking Emily’s hand in hers again. “All of us, we will - just gotta work together, right?”

Emily smiled and stroked at her cheek. “Exactly, love. We’ve all got our own parts to play - but I’ll help him out where I can, given history and all. He deserves more than some of the bollocks that gets slung at ‘im.”

As the next course - a salad which seemed to be made of thin slices of various vegetables stacked like a house of cards - arrived, Tracer raised an eyebrow. “Definitely, yeah. Hey, speaking of, have you asked out that cute omnic cashier down the grocery, yet?” Her grin widened as she leaned forward almost teasingly. “Y’know, the one who slipped up and called you ‘dear’ that one time?”

Giggling, Emily shook her head, her hair perfectly framing her face. “No, not yet - she hasn’t been working the times I’ve been back that way.” She had to admit that, in hindsight, her worries over confessing things to Lena seemed even more silly. She’d been nothing but supportive and excited, right from the get-go, and Emily wasn’t actually surprised in the slightest. It was a big part of what she loved so much.
“I did mention it kind of in conversation around the flower-girl, though,” Emily shrugged.

“Oooh, the one who always gives you one on the house?”

“Yep, her! But, didn’t exactly work out. Turns out she’s both married and straighter than the I-117, so,” another shrug that shifted the cowl hanging loosely around Emily’s shoulders.

Lena patted at her arm. “Well, her loss in my opinion!”

The redhead giggled a little, looking back with wonderment in her eyes. “Sometimes I can’t even wrap my head around how lovely you are. It really means a lot to me, you being so supportive, you know? And just generally low-stress about it, too. It just turns into another thing around you, and that’s beautiful.” She rubbed at the back of Lena’s hand with a thumb, leaning in to give her a little kiss on the cheek.

“Aw, well I’m really happy to be able to return the favour,” Lena nodded with a grin. “I mean - I think I’ve done plenty that’s needed support. You’ve always seemed so stable on your own, it wasn’t like I wasn’t supporting you, it just didn’t seem like you really needed it, you know? Like it didn’t maybe mean much in the long run.”

“Well, it did,” Emily assured her with a soft nod. “It really did, and it does - means the world to me, love.”

Lena’s cheeks were starting to hurt from how much she was smiling, ludicrously happy on a restaurant boat on the Thames with an absolutely drop-dead gorgeous and lovely woman. Her eyes drifted out over the water briefly, where the fiery skies of the setting sun were reflected in the river’s surface. Incredible evening.

---

The sunset’s reflection caused problems for Widowmaker: primarily, that she could no longer see the pair of them well from this vantage point. She broke her position and dashed forward, leaping from a rooftop and firing her grapple to higher ground.

It bit into concrete and pulled her up, to the side of a building where she stomped down and dug the spikes in the sides of her boots into the wall. She raised the rifle to her shoulder again, one-handed, and peered through its scope - far below on the boat, there they were, enjoying their meal together. The dying sun glimmered off of the redhead’s little accents, her pendant and earrings and the like, and it brought an ochre tinge to Tracer’s hair as well.

She’d been following them for hours now. It was getting to the point where she felt almost antsy about it, almost as if she wanted something else to interrupt her and pull her away, but that didn’t seem right.

Regardless, there was no such interruption. No convenient excuse to leave - no mission calling her on nor reason to be anywhere else, and there was an odd sort of contentment that came from watching them. Mapping out their routes and behaviours, she told herself, as I always would. This is no different.

The food looked interesting. Intriguing.
Beans. I want beans.

There was only one place in the city she knew she could find them - other than grocery stores, at least. She certainly couldn’t walk in and buy a tin from there, they would too deep into the store to attempt a theft unless Widowmaker wanted to run into problems of being identified, and doubtlessly her little mouse would pout if she found out about any more stealing.

Although she did like that pout...

Widowmaker flicked her wrist and the grapple detached from the wall, retracting into her bracer - she hung for a moment, there on the side of the building, momentum and her boot-spikes holding her in place. Slowly, the world through her scope shifted and tilted until Emily and Tracer were on their sides, and then upside down.

With a sigh as she fell away from the wall, Widowmaker slung her rifle behind her shoulder and fired off her hook once more. *This time, at least, I will not break the glass*…

---

Emily and Lena were a flurry of laughter and half-words when they returned home, spurred on by the joy of the evening and a few glasses of wine. Emily had let the autodrive bring the car home and they’d spent the ride grinning and chatting snuggled up in the backseat, and had *properly* messed up her hair as well but she couldn’t bring herself to mind in the slightest.

As they locked the apartment’s front door and made their way toward the bathroom, neither one checked the kitchen counter. As a result, neither one saw the small note there, penned in flowing script.

*I owe you six tins of beans.*

-W

Chapter End Notes

Widowmaker has these big spikes on the sides of her boots - they don't seem well-situated to be used in combat, to me, but they *do* seem like they'd be ideal to grip onto walls and things like that. Climbing spikes, basically.

Oh, also, she's kinda creepy. Just a little.

So... yep, laying some background of what London's like here, how omnics fit into it all, and other people as well. More Emilena sweetness, I love them a lot! It's nice to see Jack getting along with Winston a little better, too. It won't necessarily last, but that will all be addressed.

Anyway, thanks for reading! Comments or feedback are always appreciated :D C'mon back next time when a few people get in touch: McCree tracks Genji down for a visit, Ana drops by to see her daughter unannounced (and that couldn't possibly have any
concerns for Mercy, right?), and Sombra and Symmetra meet up in a coffee shop. I swear this isn't the start of a coffee shop AU.
Overdue Visits and Helping Hands

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: A variety of people make a variety of visits, for various reasons - some more social, some more pointed. McCree tries to reconnect with a former friend and partner in Genji Shimada, a man the cowboy hopes might have an answer or two of his own. Ana makes a surprise visit out to see her daughter (and startles a certain Swiss doctor while she's at it), and Sombra and Symmetra meet up for lunch and a little gift exchange.

JFL summary: McCree changed his belt buckle, but he still can't play Go, and he might get a little dramatic at times. Genji gets overly philosophical (surprise, surprise). Ana gets surprised by tears but drinks some really hot tea and steals one of Mercy's chocolates. Mercy, meanwhile, softly panics. Pharah doesn't care. Symmetra proposes to Sombra (kinda).

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker, after finishing with everything else, returned to Tracer and Emily's apartment and was somewhat confuse about it. Only Emily was there, eating lunch, and Widowmaker just watched her. Tracer headed home to surprise Emily with dinner - at one of her favourite locations, a favour that was tough for her to swing but she managed it. Winston and Jack came to the conclusion that Widowmaker's leaving Tracer alive and helping her because the assassin appreciates the added challenge that comes from Tracer trying to stop her during a mission. Emily and Tracer shared an emotional but wonderful dinner, all the while watched - from the rooftops - by Widowmaker. She kept her rifle trained on the pair for a long time, until an idle urge spurred her elsewhere. To their apartment. To steal their beans.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jesse McCree was a simple man. He liked dirt under his boots and a glass in his hand, a cigar between his teeth, and most of the rest of the world didn’t matter too much. Some people had called him a cynic. Some had called him a bastard. Most days, he reckoned they both were right.

This, though, he didn’t like nearly so much as any of that. Snow crunched uncomfortably underfoot, just the wrong combination of slick and soft while being loud enough to give away his position in an instant. He wasn’t expecting hostilities…

...but he also knew those were exactly the type of hostilities that ended up putting a man six feet under. Unexpected ones.

The stone edifices of the old monastery loomed, cracked and weathered, and he wondered whether this had been the monk’s idea of a joke. He hadn’t met the man personally, but there were other
ways to get to know a person and McCree felt like he had a decent handle on him. Seemed like something up his wry alley.

That wasn’t who he was here to see, though - and the man he was here for was a bit more of an unknown quantity. At least, it had a chance to go that way.

Suffice to say, despite the quickness of his arm, McCree kept a thumb resting on his Peacekeeper. Just in case.

“You changed your belt buckle.”

The words seemed to come from everywhere at once in the snow-covered courtyard and McCree spun, eyes scanning the surroundings. The Peacekeeper was instantly unholstered.

“I like it. It suits you.”

“Genji,” the cowboy grinned, spinning his revolver and dropping it back into the holster, “why don’t you come on out and greet an old friend proper, huh?”

A little hummed laugh echoed through the courtyard. “Funny. I thought I already did.”

Genji Shimada touched down soundlessly on the snow, but out of a combination of respect and simple knowledge, he chose to land in front of McCree. Approaching unseen would cause problems.

“Well aren’t you just six kinds of fancy in a four kind bag,” McCree chuckled, looking over his former partner. He looked pretty different than the last time they’d seen each other. “You mind if we sit down and chat a spell?”

Genji nodded slightly, gesturing over to the side and taking a seat, cross-legged, back against one of the courtyard’s stone walls. McCree came over and sat beside him, legs stretched out in front of himself.

“So… how’ve you been, old partner?”

The metal-clad cyborg chuckled slightly, shaking his head. “You tell me, old friend.”

Jesse dropped his chin with a laugh. “Alright, fair enough - so I never really hung up my hat.” He lifted said hat now from his head, tipped it, and then dropped it onto his knee instead of his head. “Guess that much is obvious. Been keepin’ an eye on some folks. I know you’ve been doin’ alright for yerself, know you’ve been spending a lot of time with that monk Zenyatta.”

Genji nodded softly as he spoke, confirming the little bits of knowledge.

“I know you went back to Japan to visit your brother.”

At that, Genji’s head turned, albeit slowly, to face McCree who was holding up a hand and waving it slightly.

“Don’t bother asking how; I can’t tell ya anyway. There’s somethin’, though, that I don’t know, and I was wondering if you’d mind bringin’ to light.”

“Whether I am still involved in - how would you say it? The game?” Genji’s voice was soft, smooth, and certain; real but with a synthetic hum to it. It carried an almost constant undertone of laughter, just a little bit musical despite the slight awkwardness of his English. In a past life it had been frayed, and sometimes angry.
McCree had to admit, peace really suited him.

Not that he could really preach on the subject of speech and how much it said about a man. He knew full well what people thought of his voice. “Yeah, that’s my question. Well, my first one, and if the answer’s yes there might be another to follow it up.”

“Sometimes, one must see the map to know one’s way. Sometimes, the path is evident from the ground and the stones. Sometimes, there is no path and the way is lost.”

It took him a moment to parse that, translating from ninja monk to cowboy, but it wasn’t too hard to follow. “You’re sayin’,” McCree sighed a little, settling back against the wall, “that it doesn’t matter if you’re in it anymore. Either my question has an answer or it don’t.”

“Give or take,” Genji replied with a slight chuckle. It was better not to give definitive answers - answers and orders made slaves. Thoughts made free men.

“What do you know - if anything - about Gabriel Reyes? Or, for that matter, the mercenary known as Reaper?”

This silence stretched on for a very long time. It would have seemed almost intolerable to most people, but neither of the two men buried in it seemed to mind or even notice.

“Few things are what they first seem to be. Few are the opposite. It is difficult to hide black within white or white within black, but grey may envelop a lighter grey. Or vice versa.”

McCree chuckled and shook his head, his hair tossing slightly around his strong jaw. “That’s an awful lot of words just to say ‘no’, pardner.”

Genji chuckled a little, inclining his head toward the other man. “Few things are as simple as ‘no’. You ask what I know, and I tell you. Similar men in similar circumstance, may end up in similar places.”

McCree rubbed at his chin. “Now, whether that’s supposed to Gabe and Jack, or you an’ me, I can’t tell. Maybe both. S’all gettin’ a little philosophical and abstract for me, if’n you don’t mind me saying.”

“You were the one who chose to stop by for information, rather than a social visit.” Genji turned to meet McCree’s surprised eyes as he looked over. The visor blocked his own from the cowboy’s sight, though.

“It has been years, Jesse. You never wrote, never called - I knew you were keeping tabs on me, old friend. You knew where I was this whole time.” Genji chuckled softly, dropping his head. “Old habits die hard, as you might say. We both look over our shoulder. I saw you there… but you never came to say hello.”

McCree grunted a little, clearing his throat and swallowing heavily. A lump had appeared in his throat and a burn in his eye. “Well, I… I guess you could say…”

He didn’t know what you could say. The wind whistled softly through the almost-empty courtyard.

Genji held himself still, focusing on his breathing - not just on the physical motion of it, but what it meant for him. The artificial lung that whirred gently on the inhale, supplementing his remaining organic one; the diffuser plates through which his blood pumped to pick up the oxygen from that artificial lung, the way his systems both organic and otherwise worked in unity to keep him alive - all of him. The meat and metal both.
Focused on the fact that air sustained them all: the same air he breathed had passed through Jesse McCree, and through his own brother Hanzo, and at some point a thousand years ago through his ancestors, every particle of it rounding the Earth and the cosmos eternally. Recycling and shifting and being bound to this or that and split off again, finding itself caught up in a star and transmuted to some heavier particle for a few aeons before it was reduced in some other reaction. The air he breathed might have been gold at one point, or even the brain matter of some other distant living thing.

The endlessness of the universe. Every particle might seem insignificant - he might seem insignificant, as might any person or all of them as one, and yet? Without these particles of air, he would die.

Nothing is insignificant in the right place.

“I didn’t know if anyone would want to talk to me,” McCree shrugged. “Nobody who knew me back then, leastways. Gotta be honest, you had uh… an issue or two, back then, and I figure I did too. Thought it might be better to keep my distance, because…”

The cowboy sighed heavily as he looked around. The pristine snow coating the monastery, with a pair of heavy bootprints marring the perfection, spurs scarring the white in a trail behind each dirty print. One cold tear trickled down his cheek.

“Seemed like you might be trying to turn over a new leaf. Didn’t think it was right of me to intrude and take that away or... make it any harder.”

“It doesn’t sound like you held my determination in very high regard.”

McCree let out a rough laugh. “That… that’s some kinda truth there, pardner. The kind that cuts deep.” Genji chuckled slightly as the cowboy sighed. “You’re right. And you know, I shoulda known better than to try to come out on top in a chat with a monk.”

The cowboy took a deep breath, studying the sky for a second. He’d heard a million apologies in his life, so many of them weren’t anything more than just words. His former partner deserved a hell of a lot better than that, that was sure. “I’m sorry, Genji - wasn’t right of me to make that decision for you, to remove myself instead of offering.”

For a moment, Genji pondered that. What it meant in and of itself, what it meant in the context of the conversation. “I accept your apology, and I forgive you, friend. I… was a different man, when we knew each other. So were you, I think. It is good to see you, now.” He reached out and patted the cowboy on the shoulder, getting a deep chuckle in return.

“Well, I don’t suppose you have time for a few rounds of ‘Go’, huh?” McCree set his hat back on his head. “Been a few years too long since I’ve had my ass totally handed to me playin’ that.”

Genji laughed brightly, nodding, and pushed himself forward from the wall to stand. “Of course, friend - I will be gentle! And maybe, as we play,” he rolled one shoulder in a shrug, pulling his mask deftly off, “I can tell you what I know of the man Gabriel Reyes has become, and the man I have become. And maybe, you can tell me about yourself…”

McCree huffed a laugh as he got to his feet a little more slowly than he needed to. “Ehh… honestly might just prefer an extra round of ‘Go’, but I’ll give it a shot for you.”

“Well in that case, you are sure to strike your target,” Genji called lightly back over his shoulder as he led the way into the stone monastery. “You never miss a shot!”
Pharah sighed a little as she settled back into bed, finally out of her fatigues and into a pair of silk shorts and a tank top instead. Not that she necessarily wanted to be - she’d only returned to barracks after the greasemonkies had kicked her out of the hangar for getting in the way as they tried to carry out some repairs on her Raptora suit.

Eventually she had let them urge her away, but not before many assurances that they’d make no adjustments to the flight systems in the name of ‘operational efficiency’. They’d run aground of that particular sandbar before.

It would have been easier if Angela had been free. Then Fareeha would’ve had something to do, sit and talk at least, but as it was she just sat in her bed. No books - she’d read them all, and was waiting for another shipment. Deliveries were never reliable to a warzone, and she hadn’t brought enough along to sate herself in the interim, it seemed.

Some people called her ridiculous for reading paper books, but she didn’t agree with that in the slightest. The story came across in any format, that was true, but there was something about paper that she loved - it was tactile, actually flipping a page and holding it in your hands, your fingers. Having a light or a candle on to read by, rather than relying on a backlight - it was like tea, there was more to it than simply the end result. The process itself was part of the enjoyment.

At least, that was how she thought of it. Tea in the morning to wake up, or reading technical manuals and dossiers, were a different matter. Those were all about the end result - caffeine, information, as simple as that.

It wouldn’t really suffice for a distraction right now, though.

A knock at the door pulled her out of a mostly thoughtless reverie, and a grin found her lips as she made her way to the door. “Got a little time off, did we?” She twisted the knob and pulled the door back, opening her small room up to the world and seeing not the blonde-tressed face she was expecting, but rather, the creased and smiling eye of her mother.

“Hello, Fareeha.”

“Mama!” She pulled her mother into a tight hug, tight enough to draw a strained groan from the sniper.

“Yes, it- it is good to see you as well, but I am old and need my air, please.”

Fareeha let her go with a sly smirk, raising an eyebrow a hint. “I’m not so convinced of either of those, Mama. Now come in, come in! What brings you this way? Other than my own good fortune, of course.”

Ana chuckled a little as she was led in, closing the door and locking it behind her. She went and took a seat on the bed, next to her daughter, each of them resting a hand on the other’s knee. “Well, we have some concerns in the area.” Fareeha snorted lightly, but Ana continued. “As well as which, I thought it might simply be nice to see my daughter again.” Her lips curled a little wider again and Fareeha returned the gesture happily.

“Well, it is always a welcome surprise.” She tipped her head forward a bit, as if in warning. “These
Ana rolled her eye with a throaty laugh. “If I flew all the way out here just to be derided for that again, well, I might just turn around!”

“You will not.” Fareeha denied simply with a smirk. “Besides, you did not fly. Either Tracer or Athena will have done that for you.” She leaned down toward the end of the bed, unlocking her footlocker and rifling around in it for something.

Ana nodded with a sad sigh now that her daughter’s eyes were off of her, her face sagging somewhat remorsefully. “I- I really would like to apologize for that all again, Fareeha.”

“I really would like you not to.” The response was gentle, but not weak. Soft, loving, and absolutely firm words. “I missed you terribly, and I was not happy with how things happened or resolved - but that is in the past. I would hate to think that I am a lingering cause of guilt and pain for the woman I love and respect more than any other.”

Ana’s hand jerked to her cheek, swiping a tear away. It was almost a panicked response. Tears tended to take her by surprise generally, and ones inspired by this sort of thing doubly so. “Yes, well.” She cleared her throat lightly, patting herself on the knee. “Perhaps it might take a while for that wish of yours to be truly fulfilled, but we will work on it together.”

Pharah sighed a chuckle, pulling out the box she was searching for and sitting upright again. “Mama,” she shook her head, opening the box which she’d brought from home and holding out a date for her mother. “I did blame you.” It was the first time she’d said it, and Ana’s eye widened a little at the statement.

“...but I don’t.” Fareeha laid her hand on her mother’s shoulder, tears glistening in her own eyes as well. “Not anymore. After so many years, I have my mother back. That is the only thing I care about.”

She was such a different woman here, her daughter, behind this closed door. So far from who she was in front of the troops. Ana recognized that - recognized that there was a time that she had been that way as well, and that she’d maybe lost some of that along the way. Become a little too mired down in the world’s effects.

Perhaps she’d built up her own walls a little bit too high in the military, and pulled them in too tightly at Overwatch afterward - not talking to people, not letting anybody in for fear of what it might mean. When Fareeha had been born seemingly holding Ana’s heart in her hands, she suspected that she panicked and pulled too far back for fear of getting hurt.

Ana was working to regain that now - that honesty, behind closed doors and with trusted compatriots at least, and it wasn’t the easiest thing. Being open when one has been hurt is only ever so much harder.

“I love you, Fareeha,” Ana leaned forward and wrapped her arms around her daughter. “You fill my heart in a way I never thought possible, and it- it is terrifying sometimes.” Her voice choked off and robbed her of the ability to say anything more.

“Of course it is,” Pharah half-laughed, half-cried. “It is a terrifying thing, but that is okay. I love you as well, Mama - and I promise you, I am safe here.”

Ana pulled her in tighter. She couldn’t get it all out in words - maybe Reinhardt could. He was good with hearts, good with words, but Ana had never had much of that kind of tie-in with the first and
tended to use the latter as tools. Everything she thought of to say sounded trite, but something spurred her to speak anyway. “I know, and for the next while, I will be here watching over you as well.”

“Then we really have nothing to worry about,” Fareeha strained, “but Mama, I need my air as well!”

With a cough, Ana let go of her abruptly. “Of course, of course. Sorry, I got a little carried away.”

“It’s okay, Mama,” she chuckled lightly, picking up a date from the box for herself as well. “It has been a while, it’s understandable to get excited!”

She laughed then - no, giggled, Ana realized, and it was such a delighted and unexpectedly girlish sound that it made her feel alright. Made her feel like maybe she hadn’t missed all of it - reminded her that the years she’d been absent for were still tucked away in her daughter, as memories. She could still be a part of them, just from the other side, and she vowed in that moment to do so.

“They’re excellent dates,” the old sniper murmured, plucking another out of the box and popping it into her mouth with a hum. “Would you mind telling an old woman how you came to join up with Helix?”

Fareeha smirked. “If you find me one, I’ll be happy to tell her - but until then, I’ll just need to tell you instead. Come, I have some tea and a contraband hotplate.”

Ana snickered at that. “Ah, they still ban those, do they? You know, back in my day you had to plug them into the wall and be careful you didn’t burn your hand on them.”

“Oh don’t be ridiculous, Mama,” the soldier rolled her eyes as she knelt at the footlocker. “You’re not that old - you’re telling me they really weren’t induction when you joined up?”

Her one good eye flicked evasively off to the side. “Well, I suppose some of them might have been… but I was never a wealthy woman.”

“Sure,” Pharah murmured with a grin, dark eyes glittering intensely in the dim light. “Good catch, there.”

She set the hotplate - which was little more than a box - on the small table that took up one side of her room, as Ana moved to settle into one of the two chairs there. Shortly, her daughter returned with a small metal kettle and a bag which Ana recognized as one she’d sent in a package.

“Good taste,” she murmured, eyeing the tea and getting a grin in return from Fareeha.

The water took a minute to boil but neither of them noticed as they settled in and started to swap stories. Pharah led, with how she came to join Helix - mentioning Reinhardt along the way, at which Ana was unsurprised. The man was incorrigible sometimes, and had cared far more about the awe in young Fareeha’s eyes than the concern and anger in mother Ana’s.

In the long run, though, Ana did think he’d done a good job. It wasn’t what she’d wanted at the time, and she wasn’t even necessarily convinced it was what she wanted now, but she knew one thing deep to her core: it was what Fareeha wanted. These days, that meant just about any leeway Ana could grant.

“That’s awful,” Ana shook her head as her daughter filled her in on the events that had taken place in the tomb of Anubis. “I thought we had nailed him down tight, but I suppose gods will not let themselves be contained for long. We must continue to fight them.”
Fareeha nodded as she fetched out the little strainer from the kettle, now removed from the hotplate. A pair of teacups were set on the table, plastic masquerading as china, and filled. “I thought of you that night. My own memories, and the stories I had heard of Horus.”

Ana groaned a laugh. “Ah, those stories - I guarantee you that many are complete falsehoods.” She took a sip with a wide grin and a twinkling eye. “And I guarantee you that many more than that are the truth.”

Fareeha held out a hand, wanting to caution her mother against the tea - still scalding hot - but Ana just hissed slightly, nodded, and swallowed down a large mouthful. “Ah, yes - perfectly made, Fareeha. Warms me right down to the bone.”

The younger of the pair chuckled as she blew across the surface of her own tea. “Might strip you down to the bone if you don’t let it cool first.”

Ana grinned across the table, legs crossed at the knee and one arm resting easily along the edge of the table. “Well aren’t we a worrying mother hen? I can’t imagine where you picked that up from.” She chuckled deep in her chest as her daughter eyed her across the table, smirking.

It felt natural and nice - at first, things had been hostile and tense. Pharah hadn’t been pleased at all that her mother had hidden herself away for so long and let the world believe she was dead. Ana hadn’t been happy about her daughter going against her wishes and running off to warzones. Neither had been willing to budge or give much ground at the start. Jack still flinched when Ana picked up a glass sometimes.

Fairly quickly, though, that had all broken down. They did love each other - all of the pain and anger was motivated by it, and it didn’t last long in light of the fact that they’d both regained something they’d thought lost. Fareeha, a mother who she thought was dead; Ana, a daughter who she thought she would need to avoid for the rest of her life.

Their conflict had come to a head privately that resulted in both of them sobbing for a long time. Interactions shifted sharply that way, with each of them walking on guilty eggshells around the other.

Now, though, it felt like they were truly back. Jokes that didn’t strike at sore spots, tenderness that didn’t rub the wrong way, and a nice cup of hot tea. At the least, it was a beginning. A new one.

“It is good to be back, Fareeha,” Ana nodded with a little smile, the thoughts rolling nicely around in her head. Her daughter grinned and nodded, opened her mouth to say something, but a knock at the door cut her off.

Ana stood swiftly, waving Pharah off as she tried to stand too. “Oh, I’ll get it - you’ve been working all day, I’ve just been sitting in briefing rooms and dropships.”

“Hello? Is anyone home?” The soft voice drifted in from outside, almost teasingly, and Ana recognized it quickly. Doctor Zeigler. She knew the good doctor was in the area - she was sure to be, wherever there was a conflict - and she knew that Fareeha had befriended her in their travels.

Angela bounced slightly on her toes in excitement. A surgery had gone a little later than planned, but the man would almost certainly be able to walk again once his rehabilitation was complete. A combination of that, and getting to see her Fari, had the doctor in a simply delighted mood - particularly with the addition of a little gift that had arrived earlier that day.

“I brought chocolates!” She called gently. “Had them mailed in from home - I was telling you about the place the other day, remember?” Her grin widened as the door unlocked and pulled open inward,
but then fell entirely off of her face as it wasn’t Fareeha standing there, but her mother.

Ana raised an eyebrow slowly as Zeigler’s eyes widened, her mouth clamped shut and a hint of pink rising to her cheeks. Good evening, doctor. Surprised?

Her one good eye flicked down to the open box of chocolates in the doctor’s hands, and Ana couldn’t pass up an opportunity that good.

“Doctor Zeigler, how good it is to see you,” she patted Angela on the shoulder with a grin. “I was just catching up with my daughter, but I appreciate the offer, thank you.” She reached down and popped a chocolate out of the tray, deftly into her mouth, and was legitimately taken aback by how smooth and rich it was.

She hummed deep in her chest, nodding slightly as Mercy’s eyes widened even further, a definite blush overtaking the doctor’s pale features. “Oh, those are delicious - now, I’ll be off on a little tour of the perimeter of the camp. Don’t let me interrupt your plans!” Ana laughed lightly as she stepped around the doctor with a little two-fingered salute, and strode out into the darkness.

Not without a parting shot, though, of course. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do!”

“There’s nothing you wouldn’t do!” Fareeha called after her with a laugh, arms crossed as she leaned sideways against the door. Angela spun around to face her, still wide-eyed, but let out a nervous laugh. At least with Fari here, she was safe.

Ana chuckled and waved over her shoulder as she unslung her rifle and headed off into the night. She needed to familiarize herself with the layout of the camp, and checking out their security would ease her worries a little as well.

The pair stood at the door until the sniper had truly disappeared into the dark, then locked out the night as Fari took a chocolate. Angela sighed heavily as she set herself down in one of the chairs with a laugh in front of a half-empty cup of tea. “Well, that was terrifying. It’s okay, though - I don’t think she knows anything is happening between us.”

Fareeha snorted. “Oh, she definitely knows.” She leaned over and tugged at Mercy’s ponytail, shifting her head to the side so she could get a nice deep kiss. “It just doesn’t matter,” she murmured after they parted.

Angela cleared her throat a little as her heart leapt in her chest, her wings fluttering a little behind her. “Well, when you phrase it that way,” she grinned, raising a hand to stroke at Fari’s cheek. Her blue eyes glowed with excitement, all thoughts of worry pressed out of her head by warm lips, strong hands, dark eyes and a lingering sweetness in her mouth. “Those really are some delicious chocolates…”

---

It was a tense moment. Life or death could have hung in the balance as McCree ground his teeth. One wrong move, that was all it took. One wrong move and everything went to hell.

He set down a white stone, and picked up four black ones. “So he sees himself as a vigilante?”

The cyborg chuckled gently, laid down a black stone, and locked McCree out of any further
expansion in that territory as he simultaneously captured one for himself. “Yes. As much as I can tell.

The cowboy sighed and slapped at his knee. He’d made the wrong move. Now Genji was definitely going to win. “Well, I’ll be damned. I ain’t surprised, but I ain’t happy either. Only question is—”

“No question until you capture a piece.”

McCree laughed, catching the humour in his opponent’s voice. “Nah, t’ain’t a question that can be answered anyway. Only question is whether he’s right.”

Genji chuckled, shaking his head. “Why decide before asking, that your question has no answer? You only block yourself from success.” He gestured broadly at the board, predominantly black. It was not a game that was going in McCree’s favour - but then, they rarely did.

“You know something I don’t, partner?” The cowboy raised an eyebrow steeply, looking back across the table.

“Like how to play Go?” Genji grinned, his face shifting differently than most people’s would - but with what it had been through, McCree had to admit that it looked pretty good.

“Yeah, yeah, fair ’nough,” Jesse grumbled, shaking his head and looking at the board. He took a safe move and filled in a spot that was leaving him open to attack.

Tipping his head in concession, Genji considered things. The board, the cowboy, the metaphors and parallels. The way a bird doesn’t know the construction of its own wings. McCree had taken a smart move, intentionally passing up the opportunity to make an inquiry.

Off to one side of the board, not much was happening - a few pieces were isolated from the remainder. The lower left corner was packed with pieces of each side, fighting frantically; above, a cloak of black lurked.

“I think these,” Genji gestured to a very loose smattering of pieces toward the edge of the board, “are us, old friend.” The cowboy chuckled as Genji set down a stone and captured a pair of white pieces.

“Have you spoken to them, yet?”

Jesse’s face fell, stony and dark, his idle movements stilling as the question sank in. It was only an indicator of how comfortable he’d been to begin with. Normally there was no way through his poker face.

“...not exactly.” McCree shrugged, his poncho shifting a little as he leaned forward. “Jack came to see me a while back. I heard about the recall, but… didn’t think it was for me.”

“There were many strains, toward the end,” Genji admitted as a trio of his pieces were captured. “Blackwatch and Overwatch. I was... surprised to find them as accepting as they were.”

“You talked to ‘em?” The cowboy’s eyes shot up, meeting Genji’s across the table - just in time to see the edges of his eyes crinkle in a smile. Damn it. “No, wait, hold on now, that don’t count as a question!” McCree protested, holding out a hand, but Genji only laughed.

“Does it not?” His grin widened a little and he dipped his head. “And now, I have evened the scores, one to one.” Jesse chuckled and sat back to listen to the answer to his non-question. “Yes, I talked to them. The first was Tracer - we trained together many times in the old days, but did not speak much otherwise. I saw her most recently when she came to speak to my Master, Zenyatta. She did not appreciate the tea very much, but she faked it well.”
McCree snickered, shaking his head at the thought of that. Probably wrinkled her nose all up but shoved a smile underneath it and asked for another cup. “Yeah, she’s one I’m not too worried about, to be sure. Some o’ the others, maybe a bit more so.”

“You worry that some things did not end, with the fall of the organization.”

He only nodded to that. It was probably impossible for either of them to really hide anything from the other. They were both too good for that.

“This is what the Reaper fears as well.”

*Now ain’t that an unexpected tidbit?* “Doubt he’s the only one. That’s kinda what Jack came asking about as well - whether we ever turned our gaze inward, so to speak.”

Genji hummed, a hinted laugh as he took a move that was drastic and rash, and posed no real benefit. The outcome was of less consequence than the game, and he was enjoying the time with an old friend. Either of them winning would risk drawing it to an end. “And what did you tell him?”

The cowboy shrugged, dropping a piece onto the board to solidify his position. “Mostly just hinted at stuff. Told him about Jansen, or at least the gist. Cairo.”

A slow frown creased Genji’s features as he nodded once. “It would seem that we share a concern, old friend. It is one that Reaper has as well.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call him that,” Jesse grumbled, lifting his cup for a sip of water. “Would you call me Sparrow?”

A long beat of silence.

“...no. I reckon I wouldn’t.” He sighed heavily, shaking his head. That old feeling was sinking into his gut again, the one he drank to push away - a heavy, harsh, bitter combination of guilt and pain and suspicion. “I *want* to trust Jack.”

“Of course.”

McCree dropped his hand swiftly from his forehead to his knee, growling. “But how can I? I trusted Petras, too, and Gabe, and- and all of them, and look what it got us! Obviously at least some of that trust was misplaced. Maybe all of it.”

Genji nodded sadly. “Looking at the path behind cannot always help us find the way ahead.”

“Yeah, but… *sometimes* ,” McCree protested. He held a hand over his mouth for a minute, looking at the board, and then shook his head. “Gotta be honest, partner, I think it’s about time for me to fold and pack up shop. You’ve done right by me, givin’ me a hand here. Gabe always was one to jump a little further along the line than maybe somebody else would - than maybe was a good idea. Guess I’m not too surprised to hear about this all, and… and maybe a little relieved, as well. Kinda.”

“He was a friend, too,” Genji tipped his head. “They all were. That was why it hurt.”

McCree’s jaw tensed firmly, his teeth grinding against each other. “Yeah. Now I’m all back in it and feeling like everyone’s got a knife, and that’s half the damn reason I stepped back in the first place.”

“Half,” Genji repeated lightly as he swept the board clear. The scores didn’t matter. He picked up a few rocks from the floor next to him, just small grey pebbles, and set them on the board. “It is hard to
tell who is winning, when the teams are unclear. Perhaps, winning is not what matters.”

The cowboy’s eyes burned down at the board. Jack and Gabe, Talon and Overwatch, and everything else all swirled through his mind as he perched on his little stool. Two men each looking for what they might’ve called justice or vengeance, and each held the other largely to blame. Each would probably tear a chunk out of the world to get at the other, albeit maybe in different ways. It was hard to think that it didn’t matter which one of them was right.

_Hell, they’re probably both wrong…_

At the thought, he began to chuckle. It felt a little like a nail that Genji had been hammering at all night which just finally managed to crack through the surface.

“All runs into problems, when one side gets to draw all the rules and answer all the questions, eh?” He shook his head before straightening his hat a little. “Maybe it’s good if there’s a couple along the sidelines, keep ‘em from gettin’ too caught up in it.”

Genji laughed lightly. “Maybe. Or, perhaps, in the middle.”

“Yeah yeah, ya gotta raise a hand in order to make a change,” the cowboy sighed. “Even if it means drawing attention to yourself. Layin’ low’s for carpets and cowards.”

“But there is something to be said,” Genji paused momentarily as he set his mask over his face again and it clicked into place, “for biding one’s time.”

McCree chuckled, quite intensely relieved at that. He really didn’t feel like raising a hand at that particular moment. “I reckon there is.” His eyes lingered on the board again for a moment, dusty gray rocks sitting in place of actual pieces. “Don’t suppose we’ve got the time to bide for another game, yet?”

With a chuckle and a nod, Genji swept the board clear again. “This time, you can be dark and I will be light...“

---

Sombra kind of loved that people had two settings, two reactions when she walked by. Either they didn’t notice a damn thing, or they looked at her like a hallucination. _Or some kinda angelic dream, am I right?_ She snickered to herself as she shoved the door to the cafe open with her hip.

For today, she wasn’t in her standard outfit - after all, she was just going out to lunch. She still had her gun and everything, of course, hanging invisibly from her hip, but she’d left the jacket and flashy leggings at home in favour of a pair of heavily-ripped jeans - almost more skin than denim, which she just loved - and a hooded sweatshirt that was splattered with spraypaint.

Yeah, it was about a hundred degrees out, but she didn’t care. Sure, she was sweating like a mistress on mother’s day, but it’d be worth it for the joke. Pretty much _anything_ was worth it for a joke.

“That outfit seems warmer than the situation warrants.”

Sombra spun around with an exasperated sigh, rolling her eyes before clenching them shut. “_Me cago en todo lo que se menea,_” she muttered, pressing fingertips to her forehead, then opened her
eyes and dropped her hand with a grin. The joke was ruined. “Amiga you’re supposed to say something like ‘damn you look hot in that’, so that then I can be like ‘then you should see me out of it’ or- or, ‘damn I look hot all the time’!”

Satya quirked an eyebrow, looking back at Sombra levelly as she peeled off the hoodie to reveal a pink tank top underneath. It looked sticky. “Ah. I will keep that in mind for next time.”

She ordered a matcha latte from the counter, while Sombra got some sort of caramel and white-chocolate mint mocha monstrosity with whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles, blended.

“No, no no no, more than that,” Sombra chided the barista. “N-listen, chica, you hear me? More, I said! Like un fuckin’ putero of chocolate, okay? Yeah. Yeah yeah yeah, yes, there we go!” Sombra laughed and nudged Satya with her elbow. “Now she’s getting it.”

The Architech let out a sigh, but it was with a smirk at her lip.

“Thanks chica,” Sombra grinned as she took her drink. “There’s a big tip in it for you.” She turned away before the barista could say they didn’t accept tips. It was going straight into her bank account anyway. Sombra chuckled and followed Symmetra to a table. “You think there’s any chance we can get tacos around here?”

Satya blinked. “Tacos. In Mumbai.” She narrowed her eyes a little bit. “This is another one of your jokes, isn’t it?” They’d talked surprisingly much over phone messages and a few times in person as well, when schedules permitted. She’d found Sombra to be overall agreeable company - enjoyable, even. Satya still wasn’t particularly used to purely social relationships, but she did like the text-based communication. There was no need to attempt to parse tone or body language or any of the rest of that.

With a snicker, Sombra grinned and tapped at the side of her nose, but the playful expression soon lost ground to a thoughtful one. “Although,” she murmured, purple eyes lost in the distance, “there are like a hundred million people here. Gotta be somebody who knows how to make a good taco.”

“You are absolutely hopeless,” Satya stated as she sipped at her drink. Hot, un-sweetened, slightly bitter but round and deep in its flavour; she quite enjoyed that. She sat upright in her booth, proudly representing the Vishkar Corporation in their uniform - she understood the requirement to lead a double life and she accepted it readily, but it was nice to be out under the company colours for a change.

Symmetra, the Hard-Light Bandit, could not be associated with the Corporation: she was technically a criminal when considered against the laws of men. Foolish laws, often, and overridden by higher mandates - ones which Satya would never dream of crossing, as herself or as Symmetra, but Vishkar would never ask her to. She knew as well that Symmetra served a purpose which no other person could attain, and she took pride in that fact.

Still, there was a different sort of pride in openly being associated with Vishkar. As Satya Vaswani, she was no less unique, no less skilled, and no less exceptional.

Sombra slurped at what she’d essentially turned into a milkshake with a hint of coffee in it, moaned obscenely around the straw with her eyes closed, and then held it out across the table. “You want a taste?”

“Not in the slightest.”

“Suit yourself,” Sombra snickered with a shrug. “Hey, so how’ve you been? Go on any fun travels
in far-off lands?” She grinned wider, her teeth gleaming like a shark’s. “Bring me any *souvenirs*?”

Satya was barely able to suppress a giggle. It was a bit of an odd sensation for her - not entirely alien, certainly. Generally in social situations she tended to get carried away; giggles were commonplace in that context in a way. It was simply the fact that the context was not commonplace. The frequency of failure and backlash were such that it was generally better to avoid the circumstance to begin with - not to mention the amount of energy it took to uphold such an exchange in the first place.

Sombra, however, seemed to be an exception to that generality. Satya tended to either feel on-edge around people, or she felt relaxed and made errors as a result. Time only had her tending toward the former in place of the latter - but around Sombra, the ease returned. Yet, it hadn’t brought any errors.

*Interesting.* Satya reached into her pocket with a little smile and pulled out a small gift bag - tiny, far smaller than any one Sombra had ever seen. She picked it up with wide eyes and a slight frown, easily concealing the bag in her palm.

“Damn, *chica* - I never thought I’d say this to anybody who isn’t a *guy*, but that’s *tiny!*” Sombra snickered briefly, then raised an eyebrow. “Did you make that shit yourself?”

“Of course,” Satya nodded, taking another sip of her drink. “There is a gift inside, you know.”

“Yeah, I figured,” Sombra murmured, taking another moment to just appreciate the bag. *The weird *chica* must have some pretty deft fingers to be able to pull off something like this. Heh. Nice to know.* She flipped the little bag upside down and shook its contents out into her hands, looking forward to seeing the little shower of gems or gold or whatever Symmetra had brought back for her this time.

What she got instead was two chiclets.

“Gah!” Sombra recoiled in shock. “What the- hey, what gives?” She lifted the bag and spread it open, peering inside with one eye. “There’s no stones in here! There’s *nothing* in here!” A chunk of her mind started to pull together a *Fifth Element* reference but she quickly abandoned it.

When she dropped the bag with a light frown, she noticed that Satya’s shoulders were shaking just a little. She was biting her dark lips together, eyes shining with mirth. Sombra glared back but couldn’t keep a bit of a grin off of her lips. “Did you just *prank* me?”

Satya let out a single giggle which released the pressure in her chest and let her pull a mostly-flat mask over her face again, save for a smirk at one corner of her lips. “I would most certainly appear to have done so, yes. Do I need to explain the joke to you?” One of her eyebrows raised, just a hint.

Sombra growled a sigh and rolled her eyes, popping the chiclets into her mouth and crunching through the candy shell decisively. “Dammit *amiga*, why you gotta be so cute?” She pointed an accusing finger across the table with a smirk. “Makes it really tough to be pissed off at you, you know.”

“You would be the first to encounter such a difficulty,” Satya muttered idly with a sigh, and Sombra blew a raspberry.

“Pfft, yeah right! I mean, I guess maybe Gabe got pissed at you, kinda, but that’s just what he’s like. Don’t take it personally.”

“Gabe?”

“Yeah. Black cloak, shotguns, sounds like he’s got a mouthful of rocks?” Sombra looked incredulously back across the table, sucking heavily on her straw and then making a noise as she put
two and two together. “Mm! Oh, Reaper, I mean. Guess he doesn’t really tell people his name.”

“Apart from you, obviously,” Satya tipped her head but Sombra just laughed.

“Ah, you crack me up, amiga - sure, like I only know the shit that people tell me!” She returned to laughter as Satya slipped another box out of her pocket and slid it idly onto the table. Sombra’s eyes fell to it. “…what’s that?”

“Hmm?” Satya raised an eyebrow, tipping her head to the side and then glancing down to the box as if seeing it for the first time. “Oh, hmm. It would appear to be a present.”

“A present… for me?” Sombra narrowed her eyes, crossing her arms in front of her chest and settling back in her chair. She didn’t like looking like she wanted things too much. It was easy leverage.

Satya’s eyes flicked down to the box and she shrugged. “It would appear to have a name on it. It would appear to be yours, in fact.”

Sombra’s eyes narrowed further and she stretched out a finger. “If this is another prank, chica, I’m gonna…”

Satya slowly grinned. “…yes?”

_Dammit._ “…do something. Trust me, you won’t like it.”

“It is decidedly simple to find things I dislike,” Satya shook her head simply and glanced down again. “Are you not going to open your present? I got it just for you. I’ve been told it would be rude to refuse.”

Sombra reached out and snatched up the little box with a grumble and a scowl, which was totally ruined by the stupid grin twisting her lips. It was a ring box, which was a little weird, but Sombra had stored all kinds of things in them - they were great for memcards. Or jelly beans. Sombra flicked it open with her thumb.

The barista wasn’t having the best day to start with. It got worse when somebody shouted so loudly and abruptly that she dropped a mug (thankfully, an empty one) and it shattered on the ground.

“HOLY JESUS FUCK ARE YOU KIDDING ME!?” Sombra stared wide-eyed at the box. There was a ring in it. A gold ring. With a big diamond in the middle and six little bright purple amethysts, three to each side. Scrawled in tiny, but clear, flowing text on the inside of the box lid were the words, _Will you marry me?_

Her heart might have actually stopped in her chest, eyes impossibly wide. Blood rushed to her face, to her ears; her whole world was replaced with a white hot maelstrom of rushing noises and confusion.

When it started to die down, she heard giggling.

“Oh hijo de puta are you fucking-_chica!_” Sombra clutched at the edge of the table, wheezing, a little light-headed. “Don’t _do_ that shit!”

Satya quirked an eyebrow, grinning from ear to ear. “I am still not hearing an answer. Must I get down on one knee?”

Okay, okay okay okay you win, I yield, shit you took the joke far enough,” Sombra gushed nervously, “for fuck’s sake I mean _Jesus_ , really amiga…” she trailed off into murmurs, shaking her
head as she fiddled with the ring.

Satya leaned forward a little bit across the table. “As I recall rightly, you have already in fact accepted the offer.”

Sombra huffed like a bull through her nose and glared back across the table.

Satya grinned. “Your cheeks nearly match your hair.”

“Shut up no they don’t.” Sombra shoved the ring into the box and the box deep into the pocket of her jeans.

“Aren’t you going to try it on?”

"Chica what do you want from me?” Sombra whined, but Symmetra just laughed.

She was quite enjoying this. She could see why it was considered a bonding activity. With a grin, Satya shook her head. “You know it is only teasing, correct?”

“Oh for fuck’s-” Sombra mewled, burying her face in her hands. She wasn’t expecting this shit at all - not from somebody who hadn’t even got the damn proposal joke to start with! Now she was all on the back foot and losing face like she had no clue what she was doing. Like some kind of amateur.

She started to chuckle and shake her head, dropping her hands as it grew to full laughter. It was pretty fuckin’ funny, now that she thought about it. It wasn’t often she got one-upped in this kind of game.

“Ah, fuck it,” Sombra shrugged, pulling the box out and flipping it open. She slid the ring on and rolled her eyes, grinning. “And of course it fuckin’ fits perfectly - chica , if anybody ever says that you don’t commit to the bit? You hereby have my permission to punch them right in their stupid mouth.”

Satya laughed brightly at that and took another drink of her matcha. “The other stones are being mailed to the address you provided - but I felt it would be appropriate to bring a few with me in person.”

“You know, I love that you bring me back gems from your travels. Way better than fridge magnets, am I right?” Sombra’s voice was a little distant as she studied the ring in the light - it was perfect, really. The cybernetic enhancements in her eyes highlighted little things about it and the gemstones as well.

The ring was perfectly circular, the diamond was high clarity and flawless, the slightest hint of a pink tint. Admittedly, the diamond market wasn’t what it used to be, but they still had a high place in the hearts of the rich and famous - and Sombra, as well. The six amethysts were identically-sized and cut, and had no notable colour differences. “Damn, these are really good stones. Did you make this ring yourself?”

“Of course,” Satya nodded with a slight frown. “Would I entrust it to anyone else?”

Sombra snickered. “Guess not.” She stretched out her hand, grinning as the sunlight glinted off of the ring. “That looks good on me . I tell you, amiga, that’s one hell of a joke there.” She flashed a grin across the table. “In a good way. Hey, speaking of stuff, there’s this thing I’ve kind of been wondering about…”

Satya raised an eyebrow and sat curiously as Sombra began to outline a plan that seemed to be as
outlandish as it was pointless. She was glad her joke and her gift had been well-received, though; it was never a guarantee, and she found that Sombra was substantially easier to spend time around than most. It would be quite preferable not to spoil the relationship.

She smiled as Sombra started to pantomime parts of her plan. The hacker was peculiar, and seemed to have a penchant for impulse - verging dangerously close to chaos at times - but she was also fun to be around. Satya didn’t have many people who would call her “friend”, in any language; fewer still who meant it.

It was nice to think that that number was now increased by one.

Chapter End Notes

I liked several things out of this one, but it kinda feels like I say that every time, heh. When I'm uploading, I worry that the story might be getting stretched out too thin - but when I re-read things back to back, it doesn't seem that way to me. Then again, I know I read quite quickly, so I really don't know. However, people still seem to be reading this, so I'm going to presume that if things aren't going too well, somebody will let me know! :D

The Genji/McCree conversations were a little tricky to write, but I liked them when they were done, quite a bit. Not sure if the Symmetra/Sombra callback is too faded by now - Sombra made a proposal joke, back during the bank heist, when Symmetra stole some diamonds for her.

Anyway, c'mon back next time! Ana and Mercy sit down for a little chat on a rooftop, and Emily runs into... hmm, well, you could call her an acquaintance. Who wouldn't be happy to run into Widowmaker at night, right?
On Patrol

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Ana and Angela have a heartfelt discussion on the rooftops, that leads to some shocking and shaking revelations for them each. It also leads to a little more closeness, however - something for which each of them find themselves happy. Meanwhile, Emily is on her way home from a late shift at the hospital, when she's interrupted by something more violent than she ever expected. Widowmaker is waiting in the wings.

JFL Summary: Ana shares old war stories with Mercy, and it makes the doc a little uncomfortable. Mercy shares some origin stories with Ana, and it makes the sniper a little uncomfortable. Basically, they're both uncomfortable. Pharah has a birthmark, though, and it's Ana's secret weapon in winning the war of awkwardness. Meanwhile, Emily still knows how to ride a bike or beat up a person, and she pulls Widowmaker's hair. Widowmaker's creepy.

Chapter Notes

Warning: traumatic recollections on Ana and Mercy's part - memories of death, pain, betrayal. Mercy relates some things about the biotic rifle in ways that aren't dissimilar to rape, so be wary of that, it was uncomfortable to write at least. Descriptions of blood and injury.

Previous chapter summary: McCree found Genji and had a conversation about several things, mostly Gabriel and Jack, and the fates of Overwatch. From the sounds of what Genji was saying, the two are a little more similar than either of the pair would be willing to admit, and perhaps things are both more complex and simpler than they seem. Fareeha was surprised by her mother visiting, and they broke a little bit of new ground - a return to older, kinder ways. Sombra tried to set up a joke, but Symmetra deflated it entirely - then, pranked the hell out of Sombra by proposing, diamond ring and all. Sombra nearly choked on her shock, but she did find the humour in it and appreciated both the joke and the ring.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After she’d given the compound a once-over (and a second round as well) Ana climbed up onto the rooftop of a building where she could look out over the city nearby. Lights glimmered through the scope of the biotic rifle, and it calmed her just to sit and watch for a few minutes.

Not that she was un calm to begin with, necessarily, but it still felt a little peculiar to be around Fareeha. It had been one thing when the girl was an infant - or even truly a girl - but to feel the same now that she was a woman was alien to Ana, and confused her more than a little.
It was part of why she’d fled in the first place, she knew now. At the time, she hadn’t thought of it, of course - but with hindsight, came perspective.

“Thought you’d take a little walk as well?” Ana’s dark voice drifted on the night air. “Or should I say, flight?”

Angela touched down beside her soundlessly, her wings flaring before her feet contacted the roof and they folded in behind her back. “I… I thought I might come speak with you, actually.”

Ana chuckled a little, more than slightly hesitant about it all but unwilling to let that hesitation show. A brief spot of teasing when she walked out the door was one thing, a typed text message was another, but sitting down to speak face to face? She still remembered things that had been said in the past, and she was certain that Zeigler did as well.

Still, though she knew now that she would never be done fighting, Ana didn’t want a war if it wasn’t needed. Lifting her head from where it lay across the scope - letting her peer through with her good eye - she patted the roof next to her. “Of course,” she murmured, “come, sit, speak.”

The doctor did the first two of those things, but stalled when it came time for the third. Her dry mouth refused to cooperate and express words. She felt like she was standing up for her dissertation all over again, and even though Ana was looking away she felt like the sniper was the whole panel of judges.

Ana could feel the tension. She just didn’t know what to do about it.

“I- it was good to hear that you hadn’t perished as we thought,” Angela nodded as her mouth finally relented and started to work.

Ana laughed once, darkly, glancing sideways to the doctor. “Oh really? I would have thought you’d be relieved in the first case, that there was one fewer killer in the world.” Zeigler visibly drooped, shrinking away at the sharp words and Ana sighed. “I’m sorry. That was uncalled for - I… it was an attempt at a joke.”

“Yes, but not without some truth behind it,” Mercy pointed out.

“All good jokes have a kernel of truth.” Ana’s gaze returned to the front.

The doctor hummed, nodding slightly. She did recognize some humour in the interaction where perhaps previously she wouldn’t have - some figments of that were in Fari as well. Angela wasn’t certain she was necessarily a fan of the more biting sarcasm, but at least she did recognize it.

“I was only ever distraught to hear it,” she murmured softly, dropping her eyes to the side. “I know we had our differences, but-”

“Angela, I know there is no person in the world you would prefer to be dead.”

The certainty of the words surprised the doctor a little and she looked over. Ana was still looking out over the buildings.

“Well, I appreciated the message in any case.”

“Good,” Ana nodded, thinking heavily. Just as heavily, she sighed, hanging her head forward. “I… I debated sending it, if I am honest - I did not know… if you would want to hear from me.”

Mercy nodded. Interactions between the pair of them had largely been quite businesslike, historically
- not really even worth mentioning. Those that hadn’t, though, had tended to be negative for a variety of reasons. They butted heads - Angela had with many of the people at Overwatch, over questions of involvement and force.

The biotic rifle had been a large wedge in particular between herself and both Ana and Torbjörn. The rifle which now lay sideways across the tops of Ana’s knees, in the corner of the doctor’s vision.

“It seems to me that we tended to speak in different languages.” Angela shrugged a shoulder, and was somewhat surprised to hear Ana chuckle softly in return.

“You could say that again. Sometimes I swore you were not hearing a word I said, and I suspect that you felt the same at least once.”

“Mm, maybe,” Angela said lightly, teasingly. “Once or twice… or twenty times.”

Ana barked a laugh. “That’s fair. And truth be told, I think I saw you in many ways as a girl. You were so young when we first met, and, well, I cannot say you appear to have aged much.” She chuckled again and Angela giggled slightly, softly, hiding it behind her hand.

“I often suspected that,” the doctor admitted. She’d suspected it of most of them, really - a problem endemic to her life.

Graduating early, advanced admittance to University, her MD, her PhD, rising to the head of the hospital and then being introduced into Overwatch and becoming the head of medical there - it had all happened so quickly. Many people made snide comments about her looks or proclivities paving her path.

Few who had met her and had watched her work said that, however.

“It,” Ana paused for a second and then continued her sentence as a long sigh, “is easy to attribute naivete to those younger than yourself. Chalking up conflict as a person not knowing the way the world works is just as simple again. Ease, however, does not make a thing right.”

It didn’t include the words ‘I’m sorry’, but Mercy still easily recognized the apology and it surprised her somewhat. “I admit,” Angela shrugged slightly, “that there were battles I fought back then that perhaps I would not, today. I still am not pleased with killing, nor injury - I would sooner it was never carried out - but I do think I perhaps exaggerated things, and conflated a few as well.”

“Well, thank you. And I know you do not accept killing.” The old sniper’s jaw tensed as she considered possible questions or statements to follow it up. “I would like to tell you a story. I suspect you will not like it at first. Possibly at all.”

The doctor was a little taken aback by both the offer and the seeming solemnity of it. The conversation did seem to be going well, all in all, but sometimes they did with Ana right up until they derailed. She felt like, at least once, she should be smart and call the whole conversation to an end while she was ahead - let it stop on a high note and don’t push her luck any further.

“Of course. Go ahead - and I’ll try to keep an open mind.”

Playing it safe hadn’t granted her an early graduation. Playing it safe hadn’t got her admitted to one of the most prestigious medical schools in the world despite being two years too young for their guidelines. Playing it safe hadn’t led to the development of the nanobiologic technology which preserved her and had saved countless lives (even if there had been a few unfortunate costs).

Playing it safe hadn’t led her to confess her feelings to Fareeha.
There was a time for safety, for due diligence and for caution - but anything could be overdone. In the doctor’s opinion, her relationship with Ana had been relegated to the dustbin a long time ago. Tonight couldn’t ruin it; it could only be improved.

At least, it’s a good theory. Angela had to admit to herself, amidst a slight haze of anxiety, that the new layer of relationship (namely, their Venn diagram intersection of Fareeha) was concerning her more than a little.

“Thank you,” Ana murmured and then sighed. “Sometimes it feels like nobody has time to listen to an old woman’s stories, but I think they can be of some help.”

For a few moments the conversation ceased as Ana collected her thoughts, looking out over the lights of the city. Gunfire could be heard popping fairly constantly, occasionally accented by the thumping percussion of an explosion. It seemed to her to be the worst possible background soundtrack for the sort of woman who at one point eschewed violence at seemingly any cost, and yet, here just such a woman was. Maybe there is more to it than that. Almost certainly.

“It is a not uncommon practice amongst snipers,” Ana began softly, her words drifting through night air on a breeze that ruffled cape and wings alike, “to wound the first target. Make them unable to escape or retaliate, but very much able to scream - a lure, to draw in others and increase one’s efficacy. One’s killcount. Medics or others responding to a teammate in pain, hoping to save one of their own only to be cut down in the trap.”

She could feel Zeigler tensing up behind her, could feel the revulsion rising in the young blonde, but she didn’t pause in her narration. “I never did that. It is barbaric. When I shot, I shot to kill, and I knew it. I have killed hundreds of people - people. Humans and omnis with lives and families of their own. For every one, every empty chair at the next dinner or space in the next celebration’s photograph, for every funeral held at my hands, I made a notch in the stock of my rifle.”

Ana didn’t turn her head all the way around. Not enough to face the doctor, but just a few degrees - enough that the hood over her head pulled back to show Angela her chin’s silhouette against the city.

It was a side of the sniper that Zeigler had never seen before (metaphorically, that is), and it was more than a little chilling. She’d read reports and talked to others, been involved in cursory psychiatric evaluations back in the days of Overwatch, but the then-Captain Amari had seemed to be quite guarded. She gave the answers that the psych eval wanted to receive, and Angela had always doubted that they were entirely the truth.

She wasn’t more pleased to hear that the killings had been premeditated and intentional, but it did at least mean that maybe discussions could be broached. The first step to dealing with anything was admitting it existed - if somebody wasn’t even able to admit they were killing, they certainly couldn’t take steps to stop it. So many soldiers brushed it away as a mandate of their duty, as this or that or the other thing. Still, Mercy held her tongue and continued to listen to the tale Ana spun.

“I knew there would be too many to recall, but I refused to permit myself to forget. The world…” Ana let her head fall forward into waiting hands and her voice quietened. “The world forgets too easily. I was there when the God-programs began their crusade - men and women, comrades of mine, their minds lost to those demonic machines; omnis I had shared meals with, stories with, beds with, turning to slaughter those who they once called friend.”

Her head faced the front again, jaw clenching as her tone strengthened and filled with resolve once more. “I killed them as well. The world forgot who they had ever been, erecting a monument in honour of me and the survivors and calling those who fell to my rifle aggressors. Called them enemies. Forgot that they were ever anything else, and that every one of them left behind a life with
It wasn’t a happy story. Ana hung her head. “So it was for every person I killed, and I never minced words about it. I was, and am, a killer. I refuse to forget that fact.” She swallowed heavily. “Eventually, I needed to change sides of the stock. The first filled with notches, and—”

The story started to catch up with her as it often did. Usually at night, in the darkness of unconsciousness where shadows could coalesce into clawing hands and shrieking voices that left Ana bolt-upright in bed, eye wide and tear-streaked as she lashed out at an enemy who was never there.

Or perhaps, one who was never absent. She couldn’t quite decide.

Words failed her and she shook her head, simply holding out her biotic rifle for Angela to take. “Here,” she croaked. “Look.”

Angela didn’t want to touch it. She never had. When it first came to her attention that the device even existed, she had been livid and insisted on its immediate destruction along with all materials that contributed to its creation. Her requests had been summarily denied. Excuses and scapegoats had arisen, and in the shuffle, the rifle ended up missing.

Now, it was there - so close at hand, just an inch away from her trembling fingers. She liked to think that she could live without hate, that hate was a cancerous emotion that destroyed the heart, but it was hard to come up with another term to describe how she felt about that rifle.

She steeled herself and took it in hand. It didn’t feel wrong in her grip - only in her heart. Slowly, she looked over this perversion of what she’d created only to heal, now weaponized to inflict wounds.

There were eight notches in the stock. Four little lines with a crossbar, and three standing lines beside. Angela flipped it over. The other side was blank.

“Eight?”

Ana turned to face her, grasping at the forestock of the rifle. “Eight, Angela. For years I have traveled the world with this rifle, and only eight no longer draw breath for it.”

The doctor was shocked and a little afraid at the emotion in Ana’s voice, and the almost frantic look in her teary eye.

“Don’t you see? This... this...” The sniper dropped her head, stroking a hand along the rifle’s side with a reverence that turned Angela’s gut a little.

“This is a choice. This rifle is a choice which I was never before given - to remove a soldier from the fight, without killing. To make one more person return home rather than simply one from a different side of the conflict - to ensure that an enemy might perhaps see the next sunrise with blurry eyes and a headache, but they will see it. This rifle, to me, is everything I have ever wished to have on the battlefield. Eight have died since I took it up. Hundreds live because of it. Hundreds have been saved.”

A frown slowly grew across Zeigler’s lips. Eight people were still dead because of something that had been stolen from her, without her permission, and twisted into this weapon. Eight people were still dead because of the actions of a woman who refused to see any other resolution to conflict than fighting. Eight people were still dead. With all other things considered or not, eight people were dead.
And a hundred feet away, a hundred more. Within ten miles probably more than that many were
dead in ways that would never even be discovered - burned entirely, or torn to pieces too small to
identify, or buried in rubble. Hundreds or thousands of lives vanished in this city alone, in these few
months alone.

Maybe she was growing cynical or numb, succumbing to the ever-presence of war, but Ana’s story
had stirred something in her other than discontent and resentment. She was not pleased about eight
deaths, but there was much to be said for the ones who might have died otherwise - and there was a
twang in her heart at the pain in the older woman’s voice. She never had been fond of triage, but it
was a necessity.

“Why eight?”

Ana let out a huffed laugh. “Two were accidental, they fell over railings when they lost
consciousness. One was driving a truck of explosives into a marketplace, and his two colleagues
were unfortunate in their proximity. One fell onto a landmine. One would never cease in his battles,
until somebody ended them for him.”

Angela shook her head. There was something to it, yes, but still more that needed to be said. Needed
to be understood. “I… I appreciate that, I do, but I cannot accept any thanks for this thing, Ana, and
I cannot-” she cut off, biting her words off and shaking her head once.

She needed to explain, but she wasn’t sure she could. Desperation rose in her, clashing against the
cold horror that thinking about it always brought. “Ana, this was my life, my choice, my creation,
ripped from my hands and twisted against me.”

Tears sprung to her eyes, her wings flaring a little behind her as her grip on the weapon tightened.
“My colleagues, my superiors, the people I trusted, took it from behind my back and turned it into
something for their own devices. They- they took a sliver of my love and compassion and perverted
it into hatred and pain. They- they-”

Ana’s head snapped up and her eyes locked with Mercy’s as the doctor bit back her words to keep
them from getting totally out of control. There was much there in their gazes, on each of their sides-
emotions and feelings which no amount of discussion could ever fully express. Hatred, confusion,
agony, betrayal, anger, fear. A lifetime of experience in a pair of heated and pained gazes.

The doctor studied that one dark eye as intensely as she dared. It was so like Fari’s were - almost
inscrutable, but where she saw hidden warmth in her lover, she saw cold pain here. Where Fareeha
had confidence, Angela thought she saw pride.

Or at least, she thought she had, once. Now? Now she was far less certain.

“I believe,” the doctor whispered solely due to an inability to speak in any other way at that moment,
“that you are trying to turn it back around to be a thing used for good.” Angela’s hand slowly slipped
up the weapon to meet with Ana’s, clutching at her rifle. A few more tears slid down pale cheeks.
“I… I am sorry, I simply do not know if I can commit to more than that at the moment.”

Ana let out part of a breath, swiftly, before she caught it between her teeth. The shadows were only
shadows, even if it was difficult to remember sometimes, and not everyone was out to get her. She
hadn’t considered that the doctor might feel the same. Hadn’t considered the possibilities for betrayal.

“That is fair,” she nodded, pausing for a second. “It does mean much to me, to hear that, even.” She
shook her head. “I am so sorry, Angela, for what this rifle is to you - but it does not change what it is
to me, any more than I expect the inverse to be true.”
The doctor blinked a few times, nodding. “I… I think that is fair as well. Even if it does not change where this weapon began, I appreciate what it now means to you.”

With a nod, Ana took the rifle back. She didn’t sling it across her back, though, or lay it across her knees - she laid it on the roof an arm’s length away, and looked at it for a moment. It explained much. Ana had always known it was based on the doctor’s technology, and she knew the doctor had protested, but things had a tendency to lose emphasis in written reports.

Or perhaps to simply be rewritten.

“It is awful the way it was taken from you and twisted. Horrific, absolutely,” she shook her head, bitterly biting back tears. “I will say that again without qualification, because it is true.”

Zeigler slid forward a little on the roof, hugging her knees to her chest a bit and laying her chin on top of them. “Thank you. I appreciate that. I appreciate, as well, not seeing one more marketplace full of explosion victims come into my camp.”

It was hard to say without qualification, to not say that it was true despite the three lives apparently lost regardless. Some would say those men had made their choice, but Angela would not. Yet, she was sure that the same applied to Ana’s statement - though she might not be able to see how, she didn’t need to.

The night carried on, heedless of the crises of two women on a rooftop. Ten thousand like them were facing their own battles, in blood or fire or grief, and ten thousand men alongside as well. In a city whose heartbeat had been replaced with the staccato patter of machine-gun fire, there was little room for old scabs getting picked at.

“I thought, sometimes, of joining you here,” Ana muttered. “Of laying down the rifle and picking up a scalpel. I am no nurse - though I pull off the uniform well,” she chuckled, “but I’ve seen plenty of wounds in my day. I thought I could be of some help. But,” she sighed, “I could not leave it behind.”

“Of course,” Angela shook her head, trying to keep her words from sounding bitter and mostly succeeding. “You could not leave the fight…”

“I could not leave myself,” Ana corrected. “I am a killer, Angela - I have killed hundreds, perhaps more by extension. I am no fool, I know that at least one innocent has starved because I took their breadwinner out of the running.”

Ana shook her head. “The world may be willing to forget, but I am not. To lay it all down and pretend like it never happened? No. I live by what I have done, and what I continue to do - it is only by recalling the past that we might improve for the future.”

“This isn’t a penance, Ana,” Angela muttered darkly. “You can’t justify fighting by saying it’s to pay back fighting you’ve already done.”

“To you? I simply can’t justify fighting.”

The doctor let out a short laugh at that, and Ana joined with a deep chuckle. “I know we have our differences, Doctor, and I do not seek your approval in this. I would be foolish to do so - all I wish to do is explain how things are from my side of the looking glass.”

Angela hummed a bit of a laugh, nodding. “I can appreciate that, and thank you for laying it out so cleanly.” It sounded like a familiar tune with different words, but there was something in that at least - and Fareeha had taught her how to listen to a few of the notes. What some of the harmonies might mean.
“It’s a lot of guilt to carry with you, Ana,” the doctor laid a hand on her shoulder as Ana’s eye widened a little. “Every one of those reminders, a little nail that you hammer into yourself.”

There was a moment of shocked stillness, before a grin began to spread over Ana’s lips as she started to laugh. “Ah, you really *have* been talking to my daughter. Well, that is good to know.”

Zeigler dropped her hand, affecting a slightly confused expression and fighting off a blush that threatened to rise. The cold helped with that latter bit. “Well, we have ended up crossing paths many times. Exchanged letters and the like - we’ve become good friends, I would say, and… yes, we have spoken of you some. Nothing confidential, of course.”

Ana laughed. “Confidential? I doubt there is any information *left* in the world about me which is confidential, save for that which I hold myself.” Her eye glittered with delight as she grinned widely.

“If I may ask - that’s what your eyepatch is, isn’t it? Another reminder to yourself.”

The sniper nodded, her grin widening a little. “Oh, oh yes - and perhaps, a little more than that as well.” Her words were dark and warm. Almost playful, it seemed to Angela, and she wondered why.

“I think, Doctor, that I might tell you a secret.” Ana’s eye narrowed as she stretched out a finger. “I can trust you to keep it, of course?”

Angela’s face was solemn as she nodded, but the nod itself was a little too swift and enthusiastic. She could of course maintain confidentiality, but it still felt good to be confided in, and who didn’t like to know secrets anyway?

Ana’s grin grew like a schoolgirl who was sneaking out on curfew as her finger waggled once in warning, and then rose, slowly, to her eyepatch. Tucking her nail underneath, Ana paused for a second and then flipped the patch up to reveal the eye which had been shot out so many years ago.

The doctor was more than a little shocked by what she saw there. She had been expecting scar tissue, perhaps a cavernous socket - she’d seen many people eyeless in her days. Instead, she looked into what appeared to be a fully-functioning electronic eyeball that glowed dim red in the night.

“I… I don’t understand.”

Ana chuckled and let the patch fall over her eye again. “It is thermal, and can see through the patch as easily as anything else. Anything that isn’t designed to block the signal.” Her Shrike helmet, for instance - designed to shield her face from who or whatever wanted to see it.

With a smirk, the aged soldier shrugged. “The patch is a reminder, yes, but also a way of… playing up my infirmities, perhaps.” Her grin widened even a little further, as she laid a hand on her chest. “After all, I am only a poor, feeble old woman - no concern nor threat to any person, of course.”

“You little minx!” Mercy’s eyes narrowed as her face dropped into an open-mouthed and shocked grin. “I knew that you would be too practical to accept such an altered ability! Rhetoric aside, it always seemed a little fishy to me.”

The old sniper laughed high, almost giggling as she nodded. “You are now the only person who knows, save for the man who performed the surgery to begin with.” Her one organic eye fixed Mercy with an amused look. “Trust me. I can carry my reminders without hampering myself.”

Angela huffed a laugh, rolling her eyes and shaking her head. “Alright, *fine*, I will stop trying to play psychologist. It’s not my specialty anyway.” Her eyes looked to the patch thoughtfully, and she tipped her head to one side, tapping a finger on her lower eyelid. “I noticed a pigmentation - a
birthmark, there. Fareeha has one that appears to be a hereditary sort, passed down from mother to
daughter. I was wondering about whether you had one… I had never noticed it before, back during
the Overwatch days.”

Ana stared back with a sort of an amused, expectant expression. At first, Mercy thought nothing of it,
but as the seconds ticked on and the sniper just sat and watched her, she began to feel a little
uncomfortable.

“...what?”

“Doctor Zeigler,” Ana cleared her throat a little, leaning in to speak in a soft husky whisper. “You
do, of course, realize that I would know exactly where my daughter’s birthmark is, correct? And that,
of course, I might come to wonder just how you got such an up-close and personal look?”

Angela blanched and recoiled, eyes wide with horror as she realized the implication of the words.
Fareeha’s birthmark was several inches below her belly button, below her waistline - and just above-

“A medical record!” Angela blurted. “Self-reported! I- I didn’t-”

It was actually the truth. She’d known about the birthmark long before she’d ever seen it, but that
didn’t stop her mind from fixating on the fact that just a half-hour ago she’d been giving the little
pigmentation a gentle kiss as a stepping stone to a far greater treat.

Ana burst out laughing at the furious redness that washed over the doctor’s normally porcelain
features. “Relax, Angela, please, before you burst a blood vessel. I am not upset that you’ve been
playing doctor with my daughter-”

“Did you need to phrase it that way?” Mercy whined in protest.

“Of course I did! Now as I was saying, I am not upset. She is a grown woman and more than
capable of making her own decisions - regardless of what I might think on the matter, as she’s
proven, so I would not dream to interfere even if I did not approve. I do, though. I have heard of
your support and friendship to her, you certainly do not seem the type to be interested in empty
conquests, and I am sure you have picked up a few tricks in all of your anatomy lessons.”

Mercy whimpered and pouted a little, which only refreshed Ana’s delight and brought another low
wave of chuckles.

“Oh, with a reaction like that, she must tease you mercilessly.”

Angela nodded. She really did, but Mercy could never bring herself to mind much. She knew that
Fari only did it to get a rise out of her, to get a reaction, and truth be told it was quite fun to give her
the reaction she wanted. Besides which, she got her own in return.

“Now, come Doctor, truthfully I think it is a wonderful thing. I never wished my daughter to fight, I
wanted her to be kept a thousand miles from any conflict, but I was denied that wish - in its stead, I
would wish her to have someone like you whom I know she can always rely upon in a time of need,
whether that need is for comfort or for guidance, for food or for healing.”

“Ana, that’s-” Mercy gulped, dry-mouthed again. “That’s very sweet, thank you. And unexpected.
And… I’m quite frankly quite frightened as well, as long as we’re laying cards on the table.”

Ana chuckled, scooting over on the roof and turning a bit so she could wrap an arm around the
doctor’s shoulders. “Oh, nonsense. You have nothing to fear from me - haven’t you heard? I am
turning over a new leaf now. I’m going to be a pacifist.”
“Yeah, you and Fari both,” Angela grumbled a little. She felt a bit like a tiny woodland animal, being toyed with by a cat.

“Hmm.” Ana tipped her head to the side thoughtfully. “Fari. I like that. It’s cute.”

Zeigler sighed, shaking her head. “I cannot figure you out, Ana. I keep trying, I keep hoping that—”

“Angela,” the sniper replied emptily, cutting her off, “I do not need you to help me.”

The doctor frowned and glanced over, but Ana kept looking out at the city rather than turning to her.

“I am not broken, I am not in need of your aid. Yes, there are things with which I struggle, but they are mine. If you can help me, I will ask. Some sleeping pills would be of great benefit to begin with, and perhaps some indication of how to make headway in ridding myself of nightmares, but nothing you would not expect from any soldier for so many decades.”

Angela considered for a moment. It felt dismissive and a little too easy, a little too clean-cut and just a tiny bit brusque, but, then, it was beginning to seem that that was just Ana. Sometimes. Other times she was teasing, or solemn, or cutting, and the doctor simply could not nail it down enough to keep from feeling just a little flustered, just a little like she was flailing in the deep end of the pool. The woman seemed to have a dozen masks which she changed out at will, but through Fari, Angela thought she was being granted some perspective. Some way through the maze that was designed to keep the oft-harmful world at a distance.

“I don’t think you need fixing, Ana. I just keep hoping I can iron out some of this roughness between us.” Angela could see Ana’s shoulders relax a little at the statement, and she laid a hand on one of them. “I’ll happily prescribe some medication - perhaps you could stop by the tent tomorrow, and we could work out the details then?”

“I would like that,” Ana nodded, hesitating internally. She had come to suspect that any doctor’s eyes on her would only be looking for flaws, for wounds, for opportunities to practice their craft. The idea that they might be able to just be friends was a little bit unexpected.

Not unwelcome, though. “And I think I would like to talk more as well. I don’t expect that we will ever agree on everything - perhaps not on anything, but… even if I do not come to agree, I would understand what I could, and at least hear what I could not.”

Mercy nodded with a small hum. “I would like that as well. Thank you, for talking with me, Ana.”

“Of course. What else would I let my new daughter expect of me?”

Angela sighed as Ana chuckled again. “Alright, well if we are at that part of the night, then perhaps it is time for me to head to bed.”

“Angela?”

“Yes, Ana?”

“Those really were delicious chocolates. Different than the ones I am used to, but very good.”

“Oh. Well, thank you.”

“Have a good night, Angela.”

“You too, Ana - sleep well.”
The sniper only nodded with a brief hum as Mercy stood and left. Ana’s eyes continued to scan the city, and would as long as she could manage it.

Sleep was as worrisome a thing as war, some nights. The faces of friends she’d failed to save and ones she’d killed - even things she did not regret still haunted her dreams if she let them.

Everyone dealt with it in different ways. Jack often drank and exhausted himself before sleep, in the gym or on the obstacle course. Reinhardt simply replaced that world with another in the most sad, beautiful way. It would seem that her own daughter found the comfort she needed in the arms of a doctor and long-time friend. Mercy, Ana suspected, probably threw herself into her work - she’d seen baggy eyes and distant stares and stained coffee mugs.

Ana herself tended to simply lie awake - as she did now, sitting on a rooftop as the world went by, blissfully forgetful. Stars that never noticed a battle slipped slowly across the sky as every distant gunshot echoed a hundredfold in Ana’s mind, back through the years in her memories.

---

Emily rubbed at her own shoulder as she stepped out through the automatic sliding glass doors into the chilled night. The days were hot now but once the sun ceased its shine, the stone and the damp of the English air sucked all the heat away in a hurry. She didn’t really mind, though - it helped clear her head and calm her a little.

Lately, it seemed like she needed that more and more. She simply didn’t know what to do about Travis.

The young boy had been entered in at first for his lack of communication - his mother wasn’t sure what had happened, but one day Travis had simply stopped talking. Nine years old, curious, interested, and then suddenly quiet and sullen. No physical medical causes were apparent - no injuries or blockages in his throat, anything of the like, and so he’d ended up in the department Emily worked in dealing with mental conditions and illnesses.

Young Travis exhibited telltale signs of intense trauma, and Emily’s heart shuddered to think what might have caused it or what might happen if it wasn’t correctly dealt with - not just there at the hospital, but also in terms of dealing with whatever the source was. As a precaution, the mother hadn’t been permitted to see the boy again. She’d been told he’d come down with an illness on top of his other ailments, nothing serious but it was contagious.

The excuse wouldn’t buy them too much more time. Travis still didn’t talk. Just held his own elbow behind his back and looked at the ground like he’d get smacked if he didn’t.

Emily wiped an angry tear away from her cheek and sniffed heavily as she strode through a streetlamp’s pool of light. Her steps sounded harshly against the sidewalk and she forced herself to breathe, to calm down, and to start simply walking back to the car, rather than marching. This wasn’t a warpath.

Yet.

She noticed a man approaching, but thought little of it. There weren’t many people on the streets this time of night - no others at all nearby, at the moment, in fact - but she was heading toward the parking garage where she’d left the car, and bumping into a person wasn’t abnormal.
Bumping into one this forcefully was, though. Emily was rocked off her feet a little as her shoulder collided with the man - she was sure she’d sidestepped to avoid him after catching a glimpse out of the corner of her eye, but apparently not far enough.

As a hand clutched at her purse, though, she realized that it wasn’t happenstance - and when she tightened her grip and yanked back, things took a swift turn. One of the man’s hands jerked out of his jacket, wrapped around a knife, and Emily didn’t hesitate. She’d had knives pulled on her before - growing up had been a little rough, and every now and then somebody got a little rowdy, and certain things are like riding a bicycle.

Just like she might’ve grabbed at handlebars, Emily grasped his wrist - as she might’ve set her feet on the pedals, she planted a foot on the ground just behind his ankle. Twisting, she tossed him to the side where he bounced off of the wall, but none of that fit well with a bicycle comparison.

“Well done, cerise.” Emily whirled as a hand rested on her shoulder and a dark blur stepped past her. She recognized the voice instantly - and the rifle extended as well.

“Wait!” Emily grabbed wildly, and caught a fistful of dark hair. Widowmaker paused, head yanked back, one foot in the air as she was caught halfway through a pace. That was unexpected.

Normally she would have spun, hooked a knee over her own hair and stomped down, pulling the offender closer where she could finish them off, but that didn’t seem appropriate right now and she didn’t relish the idea of explaining to her mouse why the redhead had ended up in the hospital. For reasons other than her work, of course.

“Don’t kill him,” Emily scolded as the man groaned and pulled his arm to his chest, trying to scramble backward on the pavement.

“Why not?” She sighed sharply, holding out a blue hand. “Never mind. Do not answer that, I already know what you will say. Let go of my hair.” The words were all curt, but not hostile. Not overly hostile, at least.

Emily did so as the man started to run off, knife forgotten on the ground. “Oh no you don’t,” Emily muttered and stepped forward, laying a hand on Widowmaker’s shoulder. “Stop him, would you love?”

“D’accord,” Widowmaker grinned, launching off her grappling hook. It shot between his legs and caught the ground, the cable entangling his ankles and sending him stumbling facefirst to the pavement. “Now I kill him?” Her tone was a little bit teasing, at least.

“No!” Emily huffed a laugh. “Now, we take him to the hospital. I’m pretty sure I broke his wrist and-”

“You did.”

“-and his face is probably in no great shape after that fall.” Emily jogged over to the moaning man. “Wait here. I’ll be back in a minute after dropping him off, and the bobbies can deal with him from there.”

The admitting nurse was curious as to why Emily had come back in, but a glance and a short explanation was all that was required. Security guards came to stand with the man until the police could show up, as the staff started to tend to his injuries. He spat blood at Emily, but it wasn’t even the first time that had happened to her that day so she hardly cared. The staff insisted on giving her a
When she got back to the spot - knife still sitting on the pavement, with a little splotch of blood thirty feet away or so - Widowmaker was not there. Emily sighed. *Well, suppose I’m not surprised. Still, would’ve been nice to have some questions answered.* She shrugged and began to continue her trip back to the car, parked only a block away from here.

“Up here, *cerise.*”

Emily’s eyes flew up to the voice as she gasped, and there - perched on top of a streetlamp with a Cheshire grin - was Widowmaker. “You scared me!”

“Aww,” Widowmaker pouted. “After the reaction you gave *him,* that really hurts.”

“Yes, I can see you’re *incredibly* distraught,” Emily murmured dryly with a smirk and got a soft chuckle in return as Widowmaker dropped silently down to the sidewalk. How she managed it in those heels, Emily couldn’t guess.

“Okay, so, first things first,” Emily crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the wall, “how long have you been following me?”

“It is only two blocks from here to the hospital, roughly.” Widowmaker shrugged, inspecting her fingernails idly.

Emily’s eyes narrowed at that. “No, I mean *how long*?”

Golden eyes flicked to meet hers briefly before returning to inspect spotless blue nails. Widowmaker was very good at what she did - at *all* of what she did, and while she was not a spy and information was not her primary purpose, there was a prerequisite of it for her line of work. An ability to discern a person’s traits, likely reactions, probable whereabouts and the various measures which they might take; that was all necessary. One could hardly eliminate a target without such knowledge.

Still, the assassin had not been studying Emily for *nearly* as long as the brash British brunette with whom she shared an apartment. There was much that was still uncertain, to various extents. How she might react to finding out this fact, or that one…

At least part of her hesitation was that it simply felt *wrong* to tell the truth, as well.

“A few weeks,” Widowmaker confessed easily with a shrug. “Not constantly. Simply checking in and ensuring nothing arose.”

“Something like tonight?”

Widowmaker only waved a hand and tipped her head in what was either a single nod or a little bow. Possibly both, Emily suspected.

“Alright, well,” Emily chewed at her lip a little. “I really wish you’d *said* something first. I don’t particularly mind having a mate at hand if I need - I quite like the idea, as a matter of fact - but I don’t like the hiding.”

The blue woman laughed, her skin shifted to slightly eerie colours in the yellowish lamplight. “Well then, *cerise,* in that case, let me tell you that I will be following you from this point forward whenever my schedule permits and I have no other more pressing concerns.” She grinned widely. “There, now let there be nothing *hidden* about it.”
Emily rolled her eyes, sighing. “Yeah, that’s- alright, fine.” *Just stick to what matters for now.* She’d always had been pragmatic when it counted. “Thank you for not killing him.”

A shrug. “I do not agree with your reasoning any more than I do when she says it, but I accept that you do not wish to have a hand in certain things. I even understand that.”

“What reasoning is that?” One of Emily’s eyebrows rose, shifting the shadows that played across her face.

“That killing is somehow inherently wrong.” Widowmaker glanced idly over toward the blood-spot. “The man pulled a knife on you, he will do so on another if given the opportunity and the desire or need. If he is dead, he cannot. It is quite simple.”

Emily smirked triumphantly. “And if we killed everyone to stop them pulling knives, where would we be then, hmm?”

Widowmaker chuckled darkly, her eyes flashing back to meet Emily’s. “A philosopher might call it *peace*.”

Emily shivered a little, and it wasn’t just because of the breeze. This was a presentation she’d really only seen hints of - the almost larger-than-life, I-don’t-care-so-I’m-better-than-you persona. There were names for them, somewhere, in some textbook she’d learned for a test and then forgotten - like the characters in a play, different archetypes of personalities that came forth.

Some were genuine. Others, less so. It was just a matter of which, and when, and very *very* much why.

“Well, don’t go enacting that *peace* anytime soon, if you please.” Emily smirked a little. It was just playful overall. She was pretty sure of it, at least. Due at least in part to the fact that there were still people alive. It was difficult to imagine that *anybody* would be able to survive, if Widowmaker really wanted them *dead*.

“*D’accord,*” Widowmaker chuckled, stepping closer to Emily with intent eyes. “You are interesting in your own way, *cerise.* With my mouse it is a battle of hands and feet, and her own instincts, but with you?” A hum that carried notes of laughter. “There is much to be said, for a clash of the minds and tongues…”

Emily shifted to the side, sliding along the brick wall behind her as Widowmaker drew close. *Oh no you don’t - not that easy, Frenchie.* “Well I’m glad to provide some *diversion,*” she chirped, “but I really must be off home. It’s late, after all.”

“Out past your bedtime?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow over a dark-lipped grin. “Why, *cerise,* your police record hardly painted you as a woman who listens to the rules and paints within the lines.”

This time it was Emily’s turn to squint, grinning openly. She shook her head, hair pulled back so tightly in a bun, it didn’t move in the slightest. “Don’t think I don’t know what all this is, by the way: the teasing, the little pet name calling me your *cherry,*” she placed a hand on her chest, nodding earnestly, “although I must admit I do *love* the double play on words, and translingual, too!” Widowmaker’s grin widened as Emily took a pace closer, “but I know what it is, with the stalking and the investigations.”

“Stalking?” Widowmaker’s brows twisted into disbelief. “Why must you two always choose the most *awkward* terms?”
“It’s what it is,” Emily stated with a smirk. “Following someone without them knowing.”

Widowmaker’s brows dropped and her lids did as well, leaving just golden slits illuminated in the dim yellow light. “Well then,” Widowmaker purred, stepping closer again and Emily didn’t back away, “what is all this, then? If you are so smart, my little cherry.”

Emily had to admit that, while it sounded a little better in French without the hard ‘ch’, that purred ‘r’ was quite striking and it sank right into her gut. “I’m sure you’d call it le séduction,” Emily pronounced it as it would be in French, albeit with a slightly different accent.

Provençal. It told Widowmaker that she likely didn’t learn in a school, she learned in person – maybe even lived there. Gave somewhere else to look for information, certainly.

“Me?” Emily quirked her head to the side. “I think I’d just call it flirting. Pretty sure seduction only applies if the other party’s unawares or unwilling.”

“Another thing you would have me cease?” Widowmaker’s eyebrow rose, her face now only a foot from Emily’s, if that.

“Never said that,” Emily winked with a grin, delighted at the momentary glimpse of surprise that flitted across Widowmaker’s face. “Or were you going to tell me I’d need to pull your hair again to stop you?”

“You wish, cerise,” Widowmaker scoffed softly. “Now, go on, get in your car and take the M-12 to the A-46, there is a wreck on the Daviston roundabout so do not bother with that route and take Harald instead.”

Emily opened her mouth to reply, before her eyes glazed over a little and her head tipped to one side. “Actually,” she murmured thoughtfully, “that might be faster no matter what.”

Widowmaker scoffed again, more derisively this time. “Foolish girl - the cameras on Harald would limit your speed as a standard route, where on Daviston you know that you exceed the posted limit by at least twenty-”

“I know,” Emily giggled, “and now I know you know, too!”

Gold eyes narrowed, but Emily just stepped forward and slightly to the side, slipping her arm easily through Widowmaker’s. “C’mon now, walk me to the car. It’s a dark night and anybody might be out there, just following in the shadows and waiting to make a move on little old me…”

The frenchwoman chuckled a little as they made their way along. Cerise, you have no idea… or perhaps you do. An intriguing concept in either case.

“Plus, if I recall correctly,” Emily grinned a little wider, “you owe me a half dozen tins of beans.”

---

Widowmaker perched on a different rooftop tonight. It gave a poorer view of the front door - but enough of one for her to see when Emily made it in safely - and gave her a better glimpse of the bedroom the two women now retreated to. Tracer was tugging concernedly at Emily’s blood-spattered standard medical scrub shirt, and the redhead was trying to wave her off in vain.
It would have been the same with their roles reversed, Widowmaker thought with a slight grin. It had been an interesting night, full of developments, and she certainly had much to think about and explore.


There would be time later for it all; to peel and pit her cherry and arrange more time with the mouse as well. Her schedule lately was an almost frantic jigsaw puzzle of Talon operations, personal investigations, patrols (for both Emily and Lena as well on top of her own standard routes), and interactions. She felt more active and more alive than she had in a long time.

She was even considering getting a fourth cactus.

Chapter End Notes

Soundtrack for Emily and Widowmaker's interactions in general: [Le Voyage, by Yves Lambert](#) (note: this is not the version I'm used to, but a cursory listen suggests that it's still good and fitting :D)

It's a nice and active instrumental piece, with lively accordion being joined by some jovial celtic fiddling, and that seemed fitting for the pair; French and Celtic dancing around each other, each taking up the melody at different points but neither ever sitting back entirely. Bonus? I figure Tracer's the banjo (because of course the adorable flying dork would be a banjo). Anyway, yes - good song which I like, and seems to befit the relationship to me, it just struck me when the song came on in the car one day and I thought you all might like it :)

Sooo things are moving along, yup yup. This character's obviously mostly interpersonal, so that's that, yup yup. I did quite like Emily and Widow's interactions here, and I had fun with them; Ana and Mercy were kind of fun to dive into the backstory of, too, but admittedly darker.

Not a lot's really been mentioned about Ana's story way back, nor about the real state of the world pre-omnic crisis, but it would seem the omnics were around for a while beforehand: after all, there are omniums in several countries at least. That sort of development doesn't happen overnight, eh? So I figure it's fair to think that they were around and integrated into life before the god-programs rose, and Pharah's comic gave us a bit of insight into what exactly happens when a god-program decides to be hostile, taking over the systems of other nearby omnics. Keep in mind as well that Anubis in the comic was old and still fighting off controls - when he was free? At the prime of his power? That must have been a terrifying amount of control.

I think sometimes people don't think about the biotic rifle and how it hurt Mercy. All she wanted to do was help people, heal people, and they turned that into a weapon - her voice line on Gibraltar sounds pretty bitter, to me, and in this interpretation at least the biotic rifle is a large part of the reason for that bitterness. It would be hard to trust after that sort of thing, I think.

Anyway, I hope I did a decent job of laying out some of my ideas for possibilities here, and it'll all get called back on later. I hope you're still liking things around here, folks - by all means, leave me a comment if you've got any notes or any questions :) I think I've
thought out my own personal lore here pretty well and I'd be more than happy to clarify things or answer questions!

Thanks for reading, folks! Come on back next time when Winston gets a little more information, not all of it good, maybe most of it not good, in fact. He asks Tracer to accompany him on a little meeting. Emily and Widowmaker cross paths again, in a way that's become routine for them over the course of a short while. Sombra has a few surprised to spring on people - and that is something she absolutely loves...
New Information, New Plans

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Winston gets a message which worries him a little - he decides that Tracer and himself had best go to a more secure location to deal with it. Emily has a plan in Lena's absence, and Widowmaker has her suspicions - and perhaps a plan or two of her own. Sombra makes a revelation, and has ever so much fun with it all. She's not the only one with a confession that night.

JFL Summary: Nobody knows what those chemical weapons are! The horrors of redacting! Winston's a gorilla but that doesn't mean he's stupid - but how smart is he, exactly? Sombra has her own ideas on the matter. Widowmaker thinks Emily's jonesing for it, but it could be that the ring of her bell is more Pavlovian than calling for service. Tracer? Tracer's just having fun until everything goes wrong. What else is new?

Chapter Notes

Don't think any warnings are required; as always please let me know if you disagree.

Previous Chapter Summary: Ana and Angela had a fairly deep conversation, but managed to find some common ground and a little hope for better things in the future. It could be that their relationship isn't as far-gone as they'd both thought. Meanwhile, a jerk tried to pull a knife on Emily. Luckily for her, she's plenty capable - and had an unknown ace up her sleeve, as well, given that Widowmaker's been following her for a while. Widowmaker relented and agreed not to kill the assailant, and then had a bit of a conversation with Emily as they walked back to the car.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The notification relieved Winston a lot, but sadly it was no longer the one he wanted as much anymore. A message from an outside contact - not about Black Tide, but rather, about the chemical weapons that Jack and the others had found.

Winston’s face took on a thoughtful frown as he keyed a command, sending the information to the displays that covered the wall in front of him. Dossier reports, video files, chemical analyses, development documents - all about the compound.

All redacted.

Every piece of it had been altered, thick black boxes blocking out important information. Or really
almost any information at all.

With a sigh, Winston looked back down to his phone. The message that had come with the package was very, very simple.

“Sorry. -TF”

That was it. That was all that had come with the sum knowledge that remained of “Compound 721B”, whatever that was. At least two thirds of the information had been blacked out - formulae, test videos, even the names of the people involved in the project or the reason for its cancellation.

A little bit remained. It was certainly an Overwatch project, that much was easily evident. Apparently the goal had been to develop a “neuroregenerative solution” to aid in recovery from brain injuries, or conditions like Alzheimer’s. Whether they’d been successful in developing it was a question Winston couldn’t answer even after reading every single legible word of the package.

One section of video footage that hadn’t been blocked over showed an elderly woman in a hospital bed. A person in a lab coat (whose whole upper half was covered in a black box) walked in, patted the patient on the shoulder (their hands covered by little black boxes as well) and drew up liquid from a syringe. They injected it into the woman’s IV line - slowly - and then the whole picture went black.

There were twenty-six minutes of footage after that point. Twenty-six minutes that were nothing but blackness with no audio. Winston had asked Athena to scan the frames just to be safe. Nothing.

To make matters worse, he hadn’t been able to make any headway on the Black Tide investigation. Not only had every piece of equipment he tried to plug into the head been fried, he still hadn’t heard back from his contact since they’d said problems had arisen.

It had been over a week. They must’ve been some pretty big problems.

Winston sent them a message anyway, just in case. “Checking in on progress. Any way I can help? Have plenty of resources. Please contact back. -DW”

It got triple-encrypted before being sent to a file mirror that handled it from there. Winston wasn’t certain where exactly it went after that point, but out of respect for his contact he hadn’t tried to back-track it.

...he was quite confident he could, though, with Athena’s help. It was tempting. He didn’t like not knowing who he was working with. He’d stumbled on to this network of hackers and covert coders very much by accident, and he wasn’t exactly happy about it, but legality didn’t matter to him much these days. Morality was far more important.

A few seconds later he got a reply. “No need. Will update with progress. Other projects taking priority. -TNS”

Winston sighed gruffly, shaking his head. “No higher priority. Will outpay other clients by twenty percent. Anything. -DW”

His eyes fixed on the screen. Depending on how many bounces the message had to go through, it might take a couple of seconds in transit alone - but they dragged on and on, and on, and there was no response on the screen.

Winston could feel a sort of anxious tension rising within him, but it all faded away at the response.
A wide grin crossed his lips, his eyes steely with determination as he tapped at the screen. “Anything. -DW”

Three seconds. “Will contact tonight. 2100 hours. Be prepared for a surprise. -TNS (OII?)”

Winston frowned at that, anxiety returning swiftly. A mention of a surprise was bad news, and on top of that, there was the changed suffix. He thought the signatures were hard-coded. It wasn’t exactly surprising that his contact could alter them…...but it was a little worrying that they would.

“Athena?” Winston’s voice was a little hesitant.

“Yes, Winston?”

“I… believe a development may be in the wings.” He rubbed at his chin and mouth thoughtfully, staring at those four parenthetical characters. “Possibly a bad one. Might be best to go on higher alert with your firewalls for a bit, and I think…” he nodded subtly. Definitely. “I’ll stay in a different location for the evening at least. Prep a dropship to take me back to Gibraltar.”

“I will have no direct contact with you there, Winston, audio at the most - I will remind you that you destroyed the informatics systems so as to be incapable of sustaining my presence.”

“Yeah,” he grinned a little. “That’s exactly what I’m counting on. I’ll give a call if needed - and don’t worry. I won’t be going alone.”

“Oh?”

“I’m a gorilla, Athena, but that doesn’t mean I’m stupid.”

A synthetic chuckle filled the space as Winston grinned a little wider. He took a small folder he’d already prepared with him, but little other than that, and tapped at his phone as he went to leave.

“Tracer?” He chuckled with a smile. “Good to hear from you too - I was wondering if you’d mind joining me for a night? I’ve got something I could use a hand with.”

Emily leaned back against the lamppost, using the solid metal to stretch her spine back into alignment. Another long night, and she wasn’t exactly anticipating the upcoming deposition happily. There had been some developments with Travis - ones which were actually less horrific than she’d feared, but still worse than she’d hoped.

Still, his mother was with him now. It was going to be a long process, and probably a painful one for all of them - most of all, Travis, sadly - but things would get better in time.

Emily had needed to testify in courts in the past, and was glad that that wasn’t a plan (at least, yet) this time, but she still wasn’t looking forward to talking to the board - she rarely was. They were too heartless in her opinion, reducing her patients to a string of symptoms and causes and ancillary factors. She understood it, and it was a valid part of the process, but that didn’t mean it was
Sighing, she wrapped her arms around the post and interlaced her fingers on the far side, pulling her back straighter against it. The stretch felt nice, as did the cold - and the way it pushed her chest out wasn’t unwelcome, either.

“If you are trying to entice me, cerise, it will not work.”

Emily grinned with her eyes closed and head tilted back until it touched the lamppost. Bright red filled her vision from its light filtering through her eyelids, but she knew she wouldn’t have been able to see the frenchwoman anyway.

“Well, you’re talking to me,” she murmured, “and you noticed.” She stretched her shoulders back a little more even, straining and breathing deeply before she let it all collapse in a big sigh, stepping forward from the pole with a grin. “So I’d say it worked plenty well.”

Widowmaker’s eyes were already narrowed when she dropped to the sidewalk, unsurprisingly keeping somewhat to the shadows. “You are so sure of yourself, aren’t you?”

“You tell me,” Emily grinned, raising an eyebrow and offering her arm. “C’mon. Walk me back to the car.”

Widowmaker took easily to routine. Very easily, in fact - it had been instilled in her very thoroughly, very deeply throughout her various lives, and it was a little unsettling to her the swiftness with which she stepped forward and linked her arm through the redhead’s. Or it would have been, if she’d thought about it. The past several times she’d come out of the hospital, Emily had stopped at the same place and waited, and it had developed so easily.

The first night it had taken ten minutes before she called out to the shadows, inviting Widowmaker down from her rooftop. Subsequent nights, the assassin had waited only one or two. Long enough to ensure that it wasn’t a pointless pause, before she emerged from the night. She’d update Emily on traffic situations or other things deserving of her attention. Emily would ask how her day had been. Widowmaker would lie. It was all very comfortable.

The routine had formed so quickly, and had only solidified over the week or so since. Emily didn’t work at the hospital every day, but usually every other. It hadn’t taken long at all for both of them to be comfortable with it - but all good things come to an end.

“I was thinking of doing something a little different tonight,” Emily murmured, glancing over to that placid blue face.

“Oh?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, smirking. “Are you that attracted, cerise?” She leaned a little closer, purring into Emily’s ear without breaking her stride. “As soon as your petite leaves town, you leap into my arms?”

A little ripple ran down Emily’s arms at the smooth depths of Widowmaker’s voice, bringing goosebumps in its wake. “I should’ve known you’d already know she was out for the night,” she murmured, glancing over with narrowed eyes. “And you really do think highly of yourself, don’t you?”

Widowmaker laughed lightly, patting at Emily’s arm. “Ah, cerise, you do make me laugh. But of course I do! I do know myself, after all.”
Emily giggled a little at that, shaking her head with a sigh that was halfway between amusement and exasperation. “Honestly, you—” she cut off, looking over with a grin and thoughtful eyes. You remind me of her sometimes. I see why she likes you. A bit of something else crept into her look. I wonder what all happened to you...

Slowly, subtly, one of Widowmaker’s eyebrows rose. “Honestly, I? That is not a sentence - is something the matter?”

With a sigh, Emily cleared her throat and shook her head, eyes dropping briefly to the sidewalk. “Oh, I just got distracted thinking about work, that’s all. It’s- I mean, it’s nice, and sometimes it’s really wonderful, but some of the kids… I just feel so bad for them. I want to take them home with me, you know? Help everything be alright.”

“Are you so sure they would want your pity?”

“It’s not pity!” Emily protested, a little more strenuously than she intended, huffing when she saw Widowmaker’s slight smirk. Yeah, reactions, I know.

“It isn’t,” she explained more calmly. “It’s not that I think they’re that poorly done-by and I can just swoop in and save them. It’s just that… so many people, all they need is a bit of a change of circumstance. A different situation and then they can really flourish, and I mean, it’s pretty much my job to see that. At least, this job.”

Widowmaker nodded with a thoughtful hum, glancing sideways before she explained a little further with a tilt of her head. “I knew it was not pity.”

“I know,” Emily rolled her eyes. “You just wanted to push my buttons.” She shook her head, then smirked a little and glanced over, nudging Widowmaker gently in the ribs with an elbow. “You got me. You’re up a point now.”

“That brings my total to three,” Widowmaker grinned triumphantly, registering the slim but noteworthy uptick in heart rate.

It had been her idea to begin tracking their verbal engagements - keeping note of hits, so to speak. A scorecard always made things more fun, and it made things a little bit less peculiar as well. Otherwise, she could have had some difficulty being comfortable in a situation like this: walking arm-in-arm down the street.

This way, it was a game, and a game was something she could always play.

Particularly with an opponent as well-matched as this.

“Oh really?” Emily lifted an eyebrow incredulously. “Because as I recall, you were only at two when last time I mentioned the way that Lena makes a delightful little noise if you-”

“Holtant! Very well, it is two then,” Widowmaker laughed lightly, shaking her head and looking over with narrowed eyes and a sharp grin. “You are shameless in your desires to win, cerise.”

“Just one of the many things you love about me,” Emily smiled with a giggle.

“Now who is the one who thinks highly of themselves, hmm?”

She laughed, patting Widowmaker on the arm. “But of course I do! I do know myself, after all.”

Widowmaker didn’t respond to that with anything more than a smooth chuckle, but they were at the
parking structure anyway and it was time to part ways. She went to step away from Emily, but was surprised to find the other woman holding her arm in place. Turning back, she raised an eyebrow.

“C’mon, I told you I had something special in mind,” Emily grinned. “So you’re coming in the car with me.”

Her golden eyes looked entirely unimpressed. “Cerise, have you any idea how many ways there are to incapacitate a car? How many ways it can be turned against its occupants? How many different tactics could be employed to destroy us both, in an instant, in that car?”

“Can’t be that many, can’t be that bad,” Emily speculated idly before grinning. “After all, you let Lena ride in it.”

There was a moment’s pause. Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed. “Merde,” she muttered.

“Yup!” Emily giggled delightedly. “That brings your lead down to one! Plus, you’ve got to ride in the car with me - oh, I do so love when a plan works out like that!” She patted at Widowmaker’s arm with a bit of a laugh as she led the way into the parking structure.

As she followed, hanging half a pace back, Widowmaker smiled just slightly. It really was quite a secure vehicle - she’d checked it over herself for any traps or alterations - and she knew that Emily could pilot it effectively. Perhaps not in an explicit combat situation, but if any arose then she herself would deal with them as necessary. She knew the routes were safe and unpatrolled by hostiles, and that no other persons of interest had an eye on the redhead.

It really left her with little other option - she was all but required to ride in the car then, backed into a corner of her own design. Her grin widened a little at that thought. You are not the only one who plans, cerise…

---

“Heya, big guy!”

Winston turned around at the cheery shout, but saw nothing. Shortly he heard a giggle, and then a swoop - whirling around, Tracer was nowhere to be seen again. She tapped at his shoulder and he was left with a choice: keep playing her game, or sit down and sigh until she actually came up and said hello.

He spun around. No Tracer there. He chuckled and grinned as he heard her giggling from some bushes, and then turned as she leapt out at him. Catching her effortlessly, he pulled her in for a gentle hug.

“Hey,” he set her down on the ground and led the way into the facility. “Thanks, for coming along - it means a lot to me, to have you here.”

“Can’t let my best friend go and get up to any trouble all on his own, can I?” She grinned and nudged him heavily with an elbow. “I’ve gotta be here to join him in the trouble! Or at least to document it, for posterity’s sake!”

“Well, no offence to your desire for adventure,” he chuckled a little, “but I’m really hoping there won’t be any trouble. Hopefully I’m just imagining things.”
“Imagining what?” Tracer looked over curiously. “What’s all this about, anyway - I thought we’d scrubbed Gibraltar?”

Winston nodded as a door opened automatically and they stepped through. “You’re right, we did; that’s exactly why I wanted to come here. The computer systems here have been intentionally rendered incapable of sustaining Athena, and I thought it was a good security measure. Just in case.”

“In case of what?” Tracer jogged up the stairs but Winston just jumped, grabbing hold of the railings and pulling himself up. She blinked ahead to catch up to him. “What’s going on?”

“Well,” he rubbed at his chin before pulling out his phone. “I’ve been in contact with an external, about investigating that Black Tide virus. They had some computer problems of some sort a couple of weeks ago so they couldn’t start with anything, but today…”

Tracer raised an eyebrow as Winston held out his phone, leading the way down the halls to his old lab. The door opened and there it was - big old tire, hole in the glass, and everything - as she took the phone from his hands and swiped through the conversation. It didn’t take long to read, neither of them exactly talked a lot.

“Why’s it so short?” She tipped her head to the side. “And how come you’re always signing your messages? What’s ‘DW’ stand for anyway?”

“Messages need to be kept short for encryption reasons,” Winston shrugged, “and the signatures are a fixture of the program. The fact that one’s altered at the end there is part of what’s worrisome.”

“…and, the ‘DW’?” Tracer prompted when he’d been silent a few seconds. She had a sneaking suspicion it was something cute, and him not answering immediately only redoubled her thoughts on the matter.

“Oh, that?” Winston cleared his throat, rubbing at his neck with one hand as he made his way down to the main floor and the table there. “That um, it stands for… Doctor Winston.”

There was a brief pause before Tracer burst out in laughter, falling to her knees and actually rolling around but Winston suspected that was probably mostly for effect.

“Doctor Winston?” she exclaimed after she managed to get herself back under control. “That- that’s your idea of a super secret code name?” She lost herself to laughter again and Winston shuffled some papers uncomfortably on the table.

“W-Well, I just,” he shrugged, “I had to use something and single characters weren’t allowed so I couldn’t just use ‘W’.”

She got back to her feet and joined him at the table, giggling still. “Wow, okay, well - you know, suddenly I’m a lot more concerned for how covert any of this really is!” He sighed and she laughed a little, shaking her head. “Oh, you know I’m just messing around.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he chuckled. “I know. Still, though, I can’t help but be worried.” For a second he fell silent as he looked up to the hole in the glass that was a reminder of a previous encounter here.

“More and more as the seconds tick by. It’s why I thought I should come here - somewhere where Athena can’t be anymore, and that means there’ll be some limitations on anyone else using the same pathways.”

His eyes dropped to Tracer’s with a firm look behind them. “Number one priority is protection. We need to get to the bottom of this Black Tide phenomenon, but we can’t let the price be too high.”
Tracer nodded solemnly. “Yeah, of course.” She glanced back to the screen of the phone again, which sat now on the table between them. “I wonder what the surprise is?”

Winston shrugged uneasily. “Well… there’s only one way to find out.”

It wasn’t quite time yet, but it was getting close. Maybe they’d be willing to start things a little early. He reached out and tapped at the phone’s screen, sending off a message through the regular encrypted channels. “Ready for contact when you are. -DW”

He didn’t get a chance to breathe after hitting send.

The screen flickered and streaked, pixelating as the colours shifted. Winston dropped the device gently onto the table, eyes flicking to Tracer’s for just an instant as they both focused on the phone’s screen.

A second later, the messaging system was replaced by a face - light brown skin, black hair with purple tips shaved down in patterns on one side, bright purple eyes and a wide devious grin. “Hola.”

“Sombra?” Tracer gasped.

“Sombra,” Winston murmured, grinding his teeth a little.

“Sombra,” the hacker announced, bowing for the camera with a chuckle and relishing in the look of shock and even fear that played across their faces. The monkey looked really angry, actually, and her amiga’s little amiga, well, she was kinda cute with her eyes so wide they might fall out of her sockets.

“I knew something fishy was up,” Winston grumbled, slamming a hand down on the table. It shook the phone a little and Sombra moved as if she’d been shaken by it as well. “What have you done to my contact?”

“Easy, mono,” Sombra murmured, shaking her head. “You know? I think it’s a little cramped in here, and I don’t like the idea of being in something you could squish quite so easily, sooo…” her hand raised, fingers blurring over a series of holographic controls, and a screen projected itself across one side of the room.

“That’s better,” the hacker sighed, stretching her arms out to make use of the new space. Not that she was actually limited by the size of the screen at all - but people just didn’t have an appreciation for theatrics anymore. Sombra, though, very much understood that lost art.

“Now, where were we?” She crossed her arms in front of her chest, setting herself back down into the chair behind her. The floating screen before her face had shifted size and position, automatically adjusting so that her movements and looks would match up well with the display they were watching - she had to look down on them, now, and that sharpened her grin a little.

The monkey looked furious. He looked like he might pop any second, and that kicked Sombra’s lips up an extra notch. Man, this was a great idea. Shame I can’t have any swedish berries, though. Got a reputation to uphold. She knew that she should answer Winston’s question before he got too angry.

...but then, Tracer was right there, and Sombra was never one to pass up the opportunity for a good jab. “Have any good flights lately, chica?” Her grin spread even wider, eyes twinkling as she looked over to the young brit.

Tracer’s blood ran cold and she swallowed, heavily, dry-mouthed. “W-what-” she cleared her throat.
“What happened to the contact?” It wasn’t the question she was first going to ask, but Winston was still right there and Tracer was terrified that the hacker would *answer* if asked what she meant.

Sombra rolled her eyes before shaking her head, holding fingers to her forehead. “Okay, *fine*, be that way. Forget about all the *fun* we could have and just jump right to the end, sure, what do I care anyway, right?”

Winston growled and her eyes flicked to him sharply. “Calm down, *mono,*” she scoffed lightly, a grin spreading across her face once more. “Unless you think you can punch all the way through the net, that is.”

Sombra cleared her throat, leaning in toward the display and glancing around conspiratorially. “Okay. I’ll level with you. You wanna know what happened to your little contact?” Both of the former Overwatch agents nodded. Sombra chuckled and opened her arms wide. “Here she is! Been here the whole time.”

“What are you talking about?” Winston grunted, shaking his head. “My contact is a twenty-two year old—”

“—architectural student from Norway who likes fish but only as pets, goats but only as food, never steals money from a corporation unless they’re in the top 500 and is wanted by three international agencies.” She ticked items off of her fingers as she listed them out swiftly. “Their dream goal is to design the new headquarters of the UN.” Her lips curled deviously. “I was pretty proud of myself for that last jab.”

All the building heat and rage drained from Winston as he stared up at the huge face before him. Either she’d taken everything there was to be known about his contact, or…

“You made them up,” he murmured.

“Guilty as charged!” she laughed briefly, the purple tips of her hair bouncing as she nodded excitedly. “Man, you guys have the *best* expressions. I should do this more often.”

“You won’t get anything out of us,” Winston stated firmly and Tracer nodded. “There’s nothing here anyway and Talon’s already tried. We made sure they wouldn’t succeed a second time.”

“Ugh,” she rolled her eyes, sneering. “*Talon.*” She shook her head. “Damn, is that gonna follow me everywhere like something I stepped in? Talon doesn’t *own* me, *mono* - I’m not here for them, I’m here for you. After all,” she shrugged, her grin returning, “how can a girl turn down twenty percent?”

“If you think I’m stupid enough to count on a Talon operative,” Winston growled, “then you’re going to be—” he cut off as he noticed the hacker’s expression. Pure amusement, and focused heavily off to his left. At Tracer.

Winston turned to see his friend wide-eyed and blushing a little. “That’s different,” he countered quickly, looking back to the screen.

Sombra laughed. “Oh, *amigo*, you have no *idea* what it is, do you?” She giggled a little, shaking her head. “But whatever, seriously. Sombra’s rules are pretty simple: pay her, don’t stab her in the back, and at the end of the day she takes the jobs *she* wants.”

Purple-clawed fingers ticked items off of an invisible list. “You’ve done the first one plenty. You haven’t done the second yet, so we’re good there, too. Unless you tell me what this job is, the third’s gonna keep hanging and you’ll never find out what could’ve happened, sooo….”
She trailed off into silence, shrugging and glancing around idly. A caricature of nonchalance as Winston gritted his teeth. The moment dragged on, and on. Sombra’s fingers dancing in purple light idly as her grin widened and she chuckled.

“Sure,” she murmured, not looking back to the display, “keep me waiting. Couldn’t possibly backfire, right? Look, I’ve never been much for politics like this - Talon, Overwatch, LumeriCo, Volskaya, I don’t care. You’ve all got your secrets, your delusions, whatever. Sombra? She just wants what she wants. And she gets what she wants. Bottom line.”

Winston’s fists clenched a little tighter. He wanted to just yell, shut off all the screens and tell her to go back to whatever hole she’d crawled out of. He could feel the blood rising inside him, that heat, his vision starting to shift to red.

He felt trapped, like an animal in a cage - he couldn’t just leave without throwing all of their chances down the drain. They’d made no progress on their own. At the same time, though, he didn’t feel like he could agree to this.

“Heya, big guy?” Tracer’s voice was soft, but turned his head instantly and calmed his blood. She looked a little worried as she slid her phone back into her pocket, but not as pale as she had a moment ago. Her expression had a sort of resolve to it now as she met his eyes. “They’ve already got one head anyway, at least. She didn’t just pick up one from that mansion, she got a few, so… it’s not like we’re really risking giving them any info, yeah?”

He hesitated. Of course he did - he’d just found out that a person he’d been working with for years was in fact Sombra, a well-known hacker and mercenary.

There was something in that, though: she was well-known for it. Yes, recently she’d been associated with Talon on several things, but she’d never exactly thrown on a team jersey before. Her skills went to those who made it worth her while.

All that was left to wonder was whether he could make it more worth her while than Talon. They already had both a head and a head-start on knowing what this was, it seemed.

“Okay. We can talk.” Winston shook his head a little, turning back to face the screen. “At least. You’ve done some tricky jobs for me in the past and you could’ve turned them around on us. You didn’t. That counts for something.” He did wish her smile was a little less smugly self-assured, though - and patronizing, too.

“I have one more question first.” He reached out and tapped at his phone. “Why’d you change your sig?”

She laughed, nodding. “Oh, I almost forgot I did that! See, I always thought this would come out sooner or later, one way or another, and Sombra is always prepared. You ever wonder what TNS stood for?” Her eyes sparkled as she grinned. “Totally Not Sombra. So, when it came time for my big reveal, I figured I might as well ‘fess up early.”

“Totally Not Sombra,” she quirked an eyebrow, “Or Is It? TNS (OII?).” She mimed the brackets with her hands, whispering the characters obviously in between them before giggling. “Call it an added guarantee that I could prove everything’s above-board.”

“Above-board,” he scoffed, shaking his massive head. “As if anything you do is above-board.”

“Hey, that hurts, mono,” she pouted - actually pouted back at him - but a sharklike grin soon took
the expression’s place. “After all, my shit’s no less illegal than yours. Actually, a lot less - I’m just breaking some laws. You’re breaking a UN edict. On top of a bunch of laws. So, look, you’ve got two choices: either legality has nothing to do with legitimacy, or…”

Winston sighed, rubbing at his face with both hands. She was right, and he didn’t want to admit she was right, but what kind of scientist would he be if he stuck to a theory that had been disproven? “Alright, alright, you have a point, I fold. I still don’t approve of you aiding Talon, but… that’s fair. What’s legal and what’s right aren’t necessarily the same. You still might need to prove that you’re in this for the second part…”

He turned and ambled toward the other end of the table to pick up the package he’d prepared there. The instant he turned away, Sombras huge purple eyes were fixed on Tracer again and she waggled her eyebrows suggestively. Tracer shook her head, Sombras nodded - Tracer shook her head harder and pressed her hands together, silent prayers and pleading, and Sombras mimed a silent laugh.

When Winston turned back around, the hacker was tapping at some floating controls and not looking at the pair of them. He took advantage of the opportunity to tap his friend on the shoulder, murmuring softly. “What do you think?”

Tracer sighed a little. “I think we can count on her to look after herself, first and foremost.”

He nodded. “That was my thought as well.” They both heard the phone in her pocket buzz, but he paid it little mind as he turned back toward the screen and started to pull out documents, speaking louder for Sombras benefit. “Recently, due to an encounter which you may or may not be aware of, we discovered the existence of a robotic virus of some sort - evidently know as ‘Black Tide’. Your agent Widowmaker was involved.”

Sombra’s eyes widened a little and she laughed. “Damn, chica, you actually told them about that little run-in? Wow, you’re ballsier than I thought! How’d that go?”

Tracer frowned, fighting back a bit of a blush. “Of course I told them. She helped me out of a bad spot, and Talon or not, she deserves to be recognized for it.” Her eyes flicked to the sides. “It was… a little rough.”

Sombras giggled, shaking her head. “Oh, this is all so much more hilarious from my side of things, by the way. Sombras knows shit you only wish you knew, and it just makes this all so beautiful!” She tossed her head back, almost cackling with delight as she spun her chair in a circle.

“Man, Talon are such idiots,” Sombras chuckled, looking to Tracer. “They’ve got no idea, by the way - none at all, so don’t worry about that. Honestly, their tech programs when I showed up?” She raised an eyebrow to Winston. “Laughable. Just - I mean, they had the infrastructure, sure. It’s clear they either used to have some people, or expected to, but I don’t know what happened to ’em.”

Winston blinked a little, taken aback by the frankness of the discussion of a covert entity’s secret operations. It could definitely all be a lie. Of course, their M.O. hadn’t seemed to be technological until more recently - with the exception of the module that Reaper had brought here, very few of their operations seemed to include much more than a hands-on element. Since then, though - since Sombras had either joined or started aiding them - their tactics had definitely shifted.

It lent some credence to what she was saying, but he wasn’t going to call anything until more data was in.

“Now, the Black Tide,” she nodded. “I do know about that. Talon knows about that. They’ve been paying me everything they can to figure it out.”
“Trying to steal another arrow for their quiver?” Winston crossed his arms.

Sombra chuckled, though, shaking her head. “Man, you guys are almost as bad as they are. Why is Sombra the only one who can see a bigger picture, huh?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tracer inquired, slipping her phone back into her pocket. Sombra’s eyes flicked that way and she started to swipe her fingers through the air again, keying in commands for something, somewhere.

“Yeah, I don’t think you’re paying me enough to spell out everything, chica, and I definitely don’t owe either of you any more favours,” she scoffed lightly, “but let’s just say maybe some things have changed more than you think they have… and maybe some people have changed less. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?” Her lips curled slowly into a crooked smile and Tracer cleared her throat.

“About this virus,” Winston prompted, not happy about the way the hacker was obviously teasing his friend. “I was hoping to employ you to figure some things out about it. I suppose you wouldn’t be willing to share anything learned under another employer’s payroll.”

“Of course not. Neither would I share your information with them. Non-disclosure.” Sombra cleaned out a bit of dirt from under one of her metallic fingernails. She reminded herself that it couldn’t be dried blood. Not anymore, it had been too long - but the concept still gave her a little shudder, remembering what had happened.

“But…” she crossed her arms again, looking intently through the screen at the pair of them. “You have some pretty top-end equipment, and I think with your help we’d be able to make a lot of progress.”

A hint of a smirk played at the corners of her lips. “You’re there just so I can’t talk to her, aren’t you?”

“Can you blame me for taking the precaution?” Winston murmured, raising an eyebrow.

Sombra chuckled. “Ha! You know, I think we could get along pretty well there, mono - nah, I don’t blame you. I am definitely gonna have a chat with her, though, because I’m gonna need a hand from her to get this done.”

“No.” Winston shook his head. “Can’t risk it.”

“Oh,” Sombra shook her head, “sorry, did I make it sound like I was asking you? ” Winston bristled but she kept talking. “Athena can make her own choices, can’t she?”

Winston didn’t respond right away, and after a moment, Sombra sighed and rolled her eyes.

“Look. It’s a highly organic defensive encryption, okay? So we need a highly organic offensive tactic to counter. I’d do it myself but…” her eyes flicked nervously to one side. “That didn’t work out so well last time. I couldn’t even move my hand for a week.”

Tracer scoffed. “And with that in mind, you think Athena’d be stupid enough to risk herself to the same thing? There’s a lot more than just her hand at stake, you know.” Winston nodded and grunted, but Tracer wasn’t quite done yet. “She gets to make her own decisions, of course, but I just think you’d better have a stronger argument first.”

With a sigh, Sombra rubbed at her forehead and muttered in Spanish for a second. “Look, I know what I’m doing, okay? With me there, I’ll be able to block off sections of her system and keep her
safe. There’s a lot of shit that you can do together that you can’t do alone - isn’t that right, "chica?”

Shoving her phone swiftly back into her pocket, Tracer stared back at the screen. "Wish she’d stop doing that. “S’not me you need to convince, love,” she shook her head.

Sombra grinned at that. “Hey, you were the one critiquing my argument. Just think of it as a brainstorming session, amiga.”

“Is there anything you can tell us, up front?” Winston looked (and sounded) a little bit desperate. “I’m not saying I trust you entirely, but… selling this to the rest of the team is going to be that much harder, given who you are. Particularly to some of them.”

The hacker scoffed, waving her hand. “Firstly, sure there is. Secondly, good plan - don’t trust anybody entirely. Thirdly, why bother selling it?” She chuckled, shaking her head. “They don’t need to know everything.”

Winston stiffened up. “That’s not the way we do things.”

Sombra laughed at that, almost uproariously, before she shook her head. “Dios mio things are funnier if you’re me. Alrighty mono , listen up - here’s what I can tell you about the Black Tide. It’s a self-replicating coded virus that seems to exert total control over systems: locomotion, speech, everything. Don’t know who’s behind it yet - but I’ve got my suspicions - and this shit is definitely being orchestrated. It doesn’t take long, looking at the maps and things to notice that…”

She carried on speaking, but Tracer hardly noticed. Her mind was caught up on Winston’s words - that’s not the way we do things - spinning around and around her head, rubbing up painfully against the phone messages she’d been sending back and forth for the past few minutes.

The first had come as such a shock. A number she didn’t recognize, but she couldn’t ignore it when she was what the message was.

“"You didn’t tell them everything, did you chica? Even you couldn’t be that stupid.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

A picture sent - one of her in Widowmaker’s lap, in the back of a Talon dropship, fingers buried in hair, mouths thoroughly occupied with each other.

“"That’s what I’m talking about, amiga. Good little video, it’s nice, I like it. Don’t worry, you’re safe. I wouldn’t throw a friend under the bus like that.”

“Friend?”

“Not you. Her. But back to my point: you didn’t tell them, did you?”

“I told them enough. They know I wouldn’t put them at risk.”

“Ah, you’re funny, chica. Yeah, you’re right, they don’t need to know *everything*, do they? Now, would you mind convincing your big buddy there to go along with me? Thanks, chica.”

That was when she’d first spoken up in the hacker’s defence. She knew Winston well, knew how his temper could run away with him - at the very least she’d saved him from that by providing a path to follow. It was easy to brush it off as that, and it really wasn’t any risk. They already did have a head.

“Nicely done, amiga. I should get you to work for me more often.”
“I’m not working for you.”

“Oh really? Things look real different from up here, you know.”

It had aligned with the words being spoken. When Tracer asked reflexively what that was supposed to mean, it fit right into the conversation. It clearly wasn’t the first time Sombra had done this, and Tracer felt like she was a chess piece being moved at the hacker’s whim. It wasn’t pleasant. She hadn’t touched the phone for a few moments, but then it had buzzed again and wouldn’t stop until she pulled it out.

“Chica, he’s getting a little defensive of his little electronic friend there. Fix it.”

She hadn’t even responded back to that message. It was something she could agree with, at least: Winston had a tendency to get really protective. Maybe overprotective - and not him alone, either. It seemed to come out more with her, but she’d definitely seen it directed Athena’s way as well. The AI did deserve to make her own choices.

“There. I’m still not happy about this.”

“Don’t worry your pretty little head about it, chica. You’re helping out just great.”

Then Winston had stonewalled at the mere concept of hiding something from the rest of the team, and it felt like Tracer’s feet had fallen out from under her. Like the accelerator had broken and she was just falling through time again - everything became a big ugly blur, words and colours blending together in a grotesque puree of life.

She had to sit down. The room wouldn’t cooperate and stay still; it was the only way she could keep from falling to the ground. Winston and Sombra chatted, and Tracer didn’t notice as their tone became a little more amiable - her mind was just slogging through a thick sludge that coated her thoughts, turning them bitter and painful.

Had she betrayed them? Had she lied to them?

The roiling in her gut spelled the answer out for her and she clutched at the table to steady herself, focusing on her breathing and the feeling of the metal against her fingers. Firm, smooth, present. She wasn’t disappearing. She wasn’t disappearing.

...she just might wish she was.

“That’s absolutely horrific,” Winston murmured, shaking his head, and Sombra nodded with a snort.

“Tell me about it, mono. Makes me shudder just to think about.”

“And it doesn’t seem limited to omnis, either,” he pointed out, nodding thoughtfully. “It’s fried every component I’ve plugged in attempting to connect.”

“Same here,” she added, her hand clenching reflexively into a fist at the memory of the burning - but it was out of sight off the bottom of the screen. “You’re right, though. Definitely not limited to positronics, mono.”

“I really wish you’d stop calling me ‘gorilla’,” Winston sighed, shaking his head.

Sombra laughed and clapped her hands in delight. “Oh, he speaks Spanish? Isn’t he a clever monkey?”
Winston growled and bared his teeth at the screen, but the hacker just chuckled darkly, deep and smooth in her chest. “Man, I just love hitting buttons,” she beamed. “People think they’re so much better than machines - everybody’s got their weak spots, amigo, and Sombra knows ‘em all.”

He grumbled, shifting his shoulders a little to try to flatten out where the fur was standing up on his back. “Fine. I’m a little sensitive about it. I can’t imagine why you might want to push people away like that.”

Sombra’s sparkling eyes fell a little flat at that statement, and the certainty in his gaze. The triumphant smirk on his lips. She sat still for a second, suppressing a spike of frustration and slowly narrowing her eyes with a grin. “Point for the monkey,” she quirked an eyebrow.

Winston actually chuckled at that. “Well… you’ve convinced me that you’re the person I’ve come to know over the messages. At least.” He tipped his head to the side with a long sigh, rolling one shoulder in a shrug. “And… if I’m honest, it will be interesting to work with someone in such a different situation.”

The grin on her lips grew. “Is that a yes?”

He smirked, shaking his head a little. “It’s a maybe. We’ll talk to Athena - together - and then we can see about arranging something.”

“I do appreciate a cautious but open client,” she chuckled. “Call you back tomorrow when we can have a chat, all three of us?”

“Sure,” he nodded. “Noon.”

“Noon? Why the hell would I be awake then? I’m not gonna call you after like two hours of sleep - geeze, girl’s gotta do her makeup and shit anyway. I’ll call you at six.”

Winston rolled his eyes, chuckling softly. “Sure, fine. Whatever works for you. And uh…” he paused for a second, looking at the screen. Sure, she was a bit presumptuous. Sure, she was a bit bossy. Sure, it was still a tough pill to swallow, but precautions had and would be taken. Science had to be open to new ideas.

“Thank you,” he nodded. “I know it was a risk to reveal yourself like this. And honestly, I’m looking forward to working with you.”

“Even if you don’t quite trust me, eh amigo?”

He grinned and tapped at the side of his flat nose, and Sombra just chuckled.

“Ah, I think we’ll get along just fine. Talk to you tomorrow.” Her eyes flicked over. “Nice talking to you, Tracer - and hey. Don’t do anything I would do. Oh! Oh hey, before I forget - Winston? Say ‘Harambe’.”

He grunted and scowled. “No.”

“Oh c’mon,” she pleaded, clutching her hands in front of her. “That’s like your cultural heritage and shit! Also, hilarious!”

Winston grumbled and shook his head and Sombra got the hint from the look in his eyes.

“Okay, fine, but one of these days I’m gonna find something juicy and then you won’t have a choice. See ya tomorrow, mono.” With a final grin, she waved her hand in a swirl of purple light.
and the screen went blank.

Winston sighed heavily and sat down on the floor. “Well… that was something.” He turned, a little slowly, and laid a hand on Tracer’s shoulder - though his eyes lingered on the floor for a moment yet. “I think I probably have a better understanding for some of the turmoil you’ve been facing these past few… however long it’s been for you, anyway.”

He smiled as he felt her hands meet his, but the expression dropped off his face as she pushed it from her shoulder. His eyes rose up to see her frowning heavily, goggles pushed up onto her forehead, face mottled with red.

“Tracer? Lena? What’s wrong?”

She wiped firmly at her cheeks with the ball of her palm, and shook her head. She couldn’t look at him - but she needed to. He deserved that as much as the explanation. “I um…” she cleared her throat, looking back to him with something between fear and determination in her eyes. “I’ve got to tell you something.”

---

It took a lot of time. A lot of tears, on both of their parts - Winston had actually been the first one, and the drips down his cheek had sparked the same in Tracer. A lot of stopping and starting. A picture on a phone screen that Winston wasn’t sure he’d ever un-see.

He wasn’t angry. Definitely didn’t feel angry, just…

Something.

“Lena…” Winston cleared his throat. She was collapsed against his arm, sobbing lightly. Tears trickled down his cheeks as well and he wiped at them with his palm. “I’ve- I’ve known you for a long time. We’ve been friends for a long time.”

She nodded, erupting in a fresh wave of tears. Her mind swirled in a cloud of words. Friend. Liar. Traitor.

“I trust you, Lena. I might trust you more than anyone else, but…”

She nodded again, whimpering. I know. Her mouth formed the words just fine, but her vocal cords refused to cooperate.

“This is just a lot to take in all at once.” He took a deep breath and sighed it out. His mind drifted back over the years, different concerns that people had voiced, different rules that had been tried. There was no perfect situation, nothing without a risk of failure.

“I don’t think,” he murmured softly, “that it’s necessarily that different from you and Emily. We trust you not to tell her anything that could be used against the rest of us - the only distinction here is, well… who the third party is.”

Another nod. Tracer almost wished he would be angry, rather than just this sort of sad disappointment.
“To me? It doesn’t make a difference.” She was a little shocked by that and pulled her head back, to look to his face. “When it comes down to the line, I trust you. It doesn’t matter who else is involved.”

Winston couldn’t bear to see his friend in this much pain. He didn’t want to see anyone in this much pain, it just hurt to think about, and he tried to wipe some of the tears off of her cheek with a thumb that was almost as big around as her wrist. He chuckled gently, shaking his head.

“I think, uh… maybe don’t tell Ana.”

Tracer sobbed a laugh at that, messily and roughly. She nodded, wiping her face off on the shoulder of Winston’s uniform. It was pretty soaked and snotty already, she couldn’t make it worse at this point - which felt appropriate, at least.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, I just…” she hung her head defeatedly.

Winston took a slow breath, and let it out even more slowly than that. “Honestly… I think you did the right thing. I’d love to say that you should’ve told me sooner, and maybe - maybe - telling me right from the start would’ve been fine. Until tonight, though?”

His eyes flicked to the empty wall where Sombra had so recently been. “Tonight I spent an hour chatting and joking with a known felon, mercenary, and Talon associate. I wouldn’t say we’re friends or anything of the sort, but… I think I’ve got an inkling of where you’re coming from, at least. Earlier on, I didn’t have that.”

A bit of a dark look crossed his face, one which Tracer didn’t like at all and she laid a hand on his shoulder as his eyes drifted to the floor. “I’d love to live in a world where everybody told the truth, all the time,” he shook his head. “That’s just not the way of things, though. We can work toward it, but… I think probably everybody on the team’s had their secrets from time to time. I’m sure most of them have a few right now.”

“Everyone except you,” Tracer sniffled. “Honestly big guy, sometimes I think you’re the single best person amongst us.”

His eyes drifted skyward - not toward any deity, but rather toward his birthplace. “Well,” he hummed, “I did have a bit of a unique perspective and upbringing. I don’t think that’s true at all, though. We’ve all got our strengths and our weaknesses, and as long as we can work together? We can be great.”

“Kinda… messed that up a bit,” she murmured, scuffing her foot on the floor. “With the lying and the hiding.”

Winston sighed heavily. “Tracer, really - I think you’re being a little too hard on yourself with this. You know what? Your personal life is yours, unless you choose to share it. The others don’t know about Orisa and they don’t necessarily deserve to - a lot of us have met Emily, now, but it took a while, right? What it comes down is that we either trust you not to weaken us, or we don’t, no matter what that entails - but that’s on us, not you.”

She nodded softly, feeling a little better about it. “Do you think I should tell them now?”

He opened his mouth to speak, and then chuckled instead and shook his head. “Frankly? I think it’s going to be a real uphill battle for you right now. It looks like we might be doing a little bit of working in the same direction here, with some people we haven’t before. Maybe once they get used to that, once they’ve built up some of that trust, that might be a better time. Let me break the news about Sombra first, at least.”
Tracer nodded with a sigh. “Thanks, big guy. I love you.”

“I love you too,” he chuckled, ruffling her hair a little and hugging her close. “It’ll be alright. Hey - you want to head down to the old practice arena? I know how much you miss those target drones.”

She laughed abruptly, the sound a little odd coming from her hoarse throat but it came right from her heart, and Winston loved that. Ever since one of the drones had smacked her in the head due to an error as they tried to track her (they were designed to work with people who followed the laws of physics, after all), she’d absolutely hated them and made no secret of the fact.

“I think I’d rather call Ana and have that conversation right now,” Tracer croaked, chuckling. She leaned over, letting herself sag back against Winston’s arm with a sigh. “I feel like I’ve been all over the map lately. Past few months. Sorry about that - but thanks for cheering me up, love.”

He shrugged slightly, keeping the gesture minimal so as not to disturb her too much. “It’s been a hectic time for all of us - and you, more than most, I’d think. Plus, uh… well, you’re usually fairly fast on the emotional responses to start with.”

“Yeah,” she sighed heavily, chuckling. Tired. She was tired.

“I think it’s a good thing,” he murmured, patting her lightly on the arm. She looked like she was just about to fall asleep. “Might be worth taking a look at the accelerator, though. Something could be up there, but- come on, trust me, this lab isn’t the best place to nap, heh. Let’s head down to the barracks and bunk up, at least. We can catch a flight back in the morning.”

“I think I’d rather just go home?” Tracer shrugged, pushing herself up to her feet. “If that’s alright, that is - maybe catch a wink or two on the flight?”

“Sure,” he nodded. “Let’s head on back, then.”

As they made their way back through the slightly dusty, familiar halls, they walked closer to each other than they needed to. Despite the copious amount of space, they brushed elbows and nudged gently against each other - little reminders that they were here for each other. Whatever happened, they were friends.

---

Sombra sighed contentedly when she shut down the link. She nodded to herself with a grin as she reached out for a chocolate bar, unwrapped it, and took a huge and greedy bite.

When she’d been a kid, out on the streets, it had been hard enough to just get food. Forget candy. She always saw the rich kids with lollipops and chocolate, faces and fingers smeared and sticky - they never even knew what they had, but she did, and she wanted it.

Nowadays, Sombra got whatever she wanted. Every time she found a limit, she removed it - and tonight was one limit removed, and another one in the wings.

She spun around in her chair, the grin on her face sharpening as she came face to face (to face to face…) with a collection of severed omnic heads of a variety of types. Mostly, they were damaged or destroyed - holes punched cleanly through them by the spider’s bullets, one torn in half by Gabe’s shotguns and another pierced by his claws. They didn’t cause the problems that the whole one had
when she’d tried to hack in, but they also didn’t have enough of the Black Tide left to really be useful on their own. Together with that other one, though, the pristine example which sat in a Talon base at the moment - and with the promise of Athena’s toolset at her disposal?

“I’m gonna crack you open like juevos,” Sombra chuckled softly with a wide, wide grin, standing to walk across the front of the shelf. She held out a hand as if to stroke at all of the heads.

Didn’t touch them, though. Her fingers cringed away from the concept.

Up until now, that deep little diamond in there had avoided her attempts to polish it. That little chunk of code that she couldn’t quite beat - but now? Now, she had just arranged for some leverage. A little added hand.

Not that Sombra needed help. She just recognized when a different tool was needed for the job.

Chapter End Notes

With this update, BSN has officially become one of the top-twenty longest fics in the Overwatch fandom, on this site! Yaaaaay! :D

So... this is probably a good time to mention that we're around halfway through the story. I don't have it written entirely, yet, but I've written up to about ch. 37; it looks like it'll be 40-50 chapters when all's said and done. Also... it's part one of three. Pretty sure parts two and three will be shorter, but I guess we'll see. I hope you folks like long things - and I hope as well that I'm succeeding in my attempts to pepper in enough short-term satisfaction stuff, to ensure that everybody's having fun. I hope you're having fun :)

Anyway, moving on to content. I think - I think that this is the last time Tracer cries. She might cry one more time - she definitely hurts one more time - but I think this is her last time crying. I feel bad for having made it so common, it really wasn't an intent of mine. Truth be told, it wasn't something I was even considering: it seemed like she would get upset in a situation, so she cried, and I never considered the frequency with which it was happening. I feel pretty bad about it, truth be told; in hindsight I think I would have focused the story a little differently at a few points. Not made things play out differently so much as intersperse them with more alternation. Still, I hope it's not too bad.

I love Sombra, btw, if that's not clear yet - I really, really liked the little paragraph of characterization right at the end there, hearkening back to her childhood. I like Emily a lot as well. I quite liked her interactions with Widowmaker (although I think I haven't done a good job of outlining how much time has passed. Sometimes two chapters take an hour. Sometimes they're weeks apart. I really haven't done much at all to make that clear, sorry).

Anyway anyway, the plot continues forward! Both interpersonally and in terms of conflict, so... yup! Hold on, there's plenty more to come! I think I'm going to go to a
four-day interval for updates? Lets me do this and my other chaptered work, staggered every other day, rather than right now where I'm doing them both kind of awkwardly on three-day schedules. Lemme know if that sounds alright with you :) Or, heh, lemme know anything else!

Next time, next time - Emily and Widowmaker have a chat in the car, and afterwards. Meanwhile, Sombra tracks Reaper down... for a movie night. Not his idea, of course, it's her's - but Sombra gets what Sombra wants...
Plans for the Evening

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Emily invites Widowmaker in for dinner; the assassin isn't exactly fond of the plan and takes issue with it, although she does largely play along. For a while. Reaper is annoyed to find Sombra stopping by his house for a movie night, but the night has a few revelations in the wings.

JFL Summary: Emily gets distracted and takes a wrong turn. Widowmaker whines about being tortured. Emily has paid an unrealistically great amount of attention to how long certain traffic lights last. Widowmaker likes wine and candles, but maybe not at the same time, and Emily makes a bit of a mess of a plan because she's forgotten who she's dealing with a little bit - but she gets reminded. Sombra wants to watch LOTR; Reaper just wants Sombra to leave.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: angst, pain, but I don't know that they really necessitate warning really.

Previous Chapter Summary: Winston received information about the former Overwatch project which had been turned into the chemical weapons that Jack, Ana, Reinhardt, and Torb found. There wasn't much information, unfortunately. He also tried to prod his contact along when it came to the Black Tide - this led to a meeting where Sombra revealed herself to both him and to Tracer. She teased Tracer about her relationship with Widowmaker, disguising it in a way that Winston wouldn't find out - a long conversation led to Winston eventually being won over and agreeing to work with her against a common goal: developing countermeasures for the Black Tide Virus. After Sombra hung up (with an agreement to talk to Athena on a subsequent meeting) Tracer confessed to Winston about her real relationship with Widowmaker. Winston took it overall quite well, and was supportive in the end - stating that he trusts Tracer, whatever she chooses to do and whatever that entails.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She did not like this. Not one bit.

Well, maybe one bit - exactly one. The one driving.

“I *told* you to take the Eviston roundabout,” Widowmaker grumbled. “Why would you expect the A-12 to be free at *this* time of the evening?”

“I *didn’t*,” Emily protested softly with a shake of her head. She’d let down her hair when she got to the car and it tossed around her shoulders gently now, freed of its tight hospital bun and a little bit wavier than normal due to how it had been bound for so long.

“So you *intended* to mire us in traffic?” Widowmaker groaned, leaning her head over until her visor
clicked against the glass of the window. “Cherie, I have been tortured before. You will get nothing out of me.”

Emily turned away from the road to face her traveling companion, but caught the hint of a smirk on her dark lips reflected in the glass. Her eyes narrowed as she leaned in. “Oh no?” she purred. “Well, we’ll just see about that. I have a few tricks up my sleeves.”

Widowmaker chuckled gently, pulling her head from the window and shaking it. “I still cannot understand what inspired you to take this route.”

The redhead fought back the hint of a blush that tried to creep into her cheeks. “I just thought it would give us plenty of opportunity to chat, that’s all.” She couldn’t admit she’d gotten distracted and missed the turn she’d meant to take. Particularly not since the turn in question was, in fact, toward the Eviston roundabout.

After all, Widowmaker was already ahead by one point - if Emily confessed, she knew that would only widen the gap. Not that she really particularly cared, but games were only fun as long as people actually played them, and she definitely wanted to keep that going.

The sort of levity and playfulness that had developed - and thankfully, quickly - was a real relief to Emily. Not least because it replaced a legitimate fear that she was going to be shot. Repeatedly.

Quickly, though, she’d come to realize that that (probably) wouldn’t happen. Almost immediately, actually. It hadn’t been hard, even that first night, to see that Widowmaker was more interested in playing with them than killing them.

...it hadn’t been too comforting at first, but then when she’d brought Lena home, everything had changed. After that it had been impossible to see anything truly malicious in Widowmaker.

At least, anything truly malicious directed at her. Emily still remembered - and quite clearly - how Widowmaker had been when that oik had jumped her on the way home from work a week or two ago. She hadn’t been entirely certain that it would be comforting to be under the watch of a person like that, but at least her guardian angel seemed willing to listen.

Emily had even checked in on the guy later, and he was still alive. It had been more of a relief and more of a surprise than she wanted to admit.

Since then, though, they’d adopted this playful back-and-forth and it had been really great. Between Emily’s crazy job schedule, and Lena’s, it could be tough to find any regularity - and while Emily had always made friends easily, there were about a million different kinds of friends.

She was quite sure she could say she’d never had one quite like Widowmaker before.

“What are you thinking of, cerise?” Emily glanced over suddenly to find golden eyes studying her intensely. “You get that look, so far-away.”

“Think you’ll find out my secrets as easy as asking, hmm?” Emily shook her head with a chuckle as she finally managed to make it to an off-ramp that could at least give them some freedom from the traffic. Still wouldn’t get home any faster, but at least they’d be moving, and that was always better.

“Well,” Widowmaker hummed thoughtfully, “I suppose I could drug you and slip bamboo shoots under your fingernails for the answers, but it hardly seems appropriate.”

“Don’t you know how to make a bird feel special?” she murmured, raising an eyebrow high.
Widowmaker chuckled in response, an extra little measure of pleasantness registering at how similar that phrase was to one Tracer had used; the little reminders seemed more and more common these days. No longer did she only get that hint of enjoyment when looking out at the statue, or at a tiny nick on the stock of the Widow’s Kiss that had come as a result of one of Tracer’s bullets - no, now the reminders seemed to be almost everywhere. The more places they went, the more they did, the more she found.

“I will make you feel very special, cerise,” Widowmaker purred, leaning over toward Emily’s neck. “But you keep saying non when it comes down to-” A hand met her face, cutting off both her words and her lips a few inches shy of Emily’s skin.

“Ah, no - no distracting the driver!” A little shiver rippled through Emily, bringing goosebumps up on her neck and arms.

A deep chuckle rumbled in Widowmaker’s chest at the sight, her lips curving of their own accord. She always did enjoy seeing effects so clearly displayed. “Why do you do this, cherie? Put off the inevitable, hmm?”

Emily’s narrowed gaze flicked over, above a wide smirk. “Oh, you think you’re the only one who likes teasing? C’mon, love, gimme a little credit.”

At that, Widowmaker had to laugh - almost uproariously (but not loudly or suddenly enough to distract Emily from driving). “Ah, but cherie! Surely it is not teasing if one knows the end-point, hmm? It could only be teasing if I did not know,” her voice dropped from delightedly high to seductively low and soft, “beyond a shadow of a doubt, how you feel.”

They pulled up to a yellow light as it flicked over to red - a perfect opportunity, because this was a long light and Emily knew it. Emily’s eyes flashed over and she wore a wide grin as she started to lean across the centre of the car, meeting Widowmaker’s gaze fearlessly. “Oh really? You think so?”

Widowmaker refused to move - she couldn’t be goaded into motion as easily as Lena could, and she aimed to demonstrate that point, but it actually played perfectly into Emily’s plan. She didn’t want Widowmaker to move - wanted her to stay still, just like that, so she could lean past her cheek and whisper into her ear.

“You don’t think I could tease anyway? Even if you knew I wanted you, even if I told you I wanted to pull into a parking lot right now, peel my trousers off and wrap my legs around your head - even if I told you that I wanted you to grab a handful of my hair and just push me wherever you wanted? You don’t think… I could tease you… with that?”

As Emily spoke, she dropped her voice - slowly and steadily, until it reached barely-audible levels and Widowmaker found herself leaning in to the words as if to soak them in by proximity. They painted a series of beautiful pictures as she started to turn her head, intending to catch Emily’s mouth with hers - games were fun but they had her place, and sooner or later she was going to win.

Emily, as it turned out, had other ideas.

“Oops! Green!” She giggled, retracting suddenly to her seat and stepping down on the accelerator as Widowmaker growled and clutched at the dashboard with a hand that had been angling to get a nice thorough fistful of coppery hair.

“You are lucky you are driving.” Widowmaker grumbled, an odd little slow chill spreading through her. It was rare enough that she even reacted to physical stimuli - to have a reaction that lacked a stimulus was almost unheard of.
“Almost like I planned it that way!” Emily chirped, grinning widely and trying to suppress a fresh wave of shivers. If she was being honest with herself, she might have got a little carried away with it there.

Widowmaker growled a hum, staring over through slitted eyelids. “Alors. It is a tie.”

Emily made a fist and popped it against the steering wheel with a triumphant laugh. “Yes!”

“Yes, yes, good performance,” Widowmaker murmured, looking idly out of the side window. “You almost even had me convinced. For a moment.”

Hazel eyes flicked toward the frenchwoman as Emily kept facing the front, and her brows drew just a little bit tighter. She didn’t want Widowmaker to think that she was just being toyed with for amusement - that she was a thing, a means to an end. She got the distinct impression that that had already happened more than enough.

Glass was such a marvellous thing. It always seemed colder than the room it was in, it kept out the elements and was largely incorruptible - capable of withholding corrosives that nothing else could hope to contain. It reminded Widowmaker sometimes of herself. It was also a perfect balance between transparent and reflective, so that if one knew how to look at it just right, one could see almost anything one wished.

...Widowmaker definitely knew how to look at glass, and she saw that little almost nervous glance that Emily shot her. Nothing escaped her sight.

She just wasn’t quite certain what to do about it.

---

They’d continued to chat until making it back to the apartment, but by a bit of an unspoken agreement, neither of them had tried to score another point.

Widowmaker wasn’t overly surprised to find Emily pulling in to the parking garage of the block of flats she lived in with Lena. She certainly couldn’t have been expected to go out anywhere. “I will meet you on the balcony,” she nodded, stepping out of the car.

“Are you sure?” Emily raised an eyebrow, nodding her head back over her shoulder. “There’s an elevator here, you wouldn’t need to go through the lobby.”

Gold eyes flicked to elevator doors, and as a voice was heard elsewhere in the echoing space Widowmaker whirled and set her back to the car - crouching down out of sight. The opportunities for detection here were far too great. “I will take the easier path.”

“Okay,” Emily nodded easily, stepping around the car. “You mind giving me a lift up?” Widowmaker shot her a curious glance and the redhead shrugged with a smile. “I’ve been wondering. Bet it’s pretty exciting, eh?”

Once the voices in the lot stopped, cut off by the sounds of closing doors, Widowmaker sprang to her feet with an easy shrug. “D’accord, far be it from me to deny you such an experience. It is uniquely freeing, I have found.”
“Yeah,” Emily hooked her arm through Widowmaker’s again, “Lena says that about flying, too.”

“What do you think of flight?” It didn’t seem like it would be particularly useful information, but it might - modes of transit, and such. Widowmaker knew she might need to know. It made sense that she would inquire.

“I like it.” Emily shrugged as they walked out of the parking area and back into the night. “She’s taken me up for a few flights - of course, she’s barred now, with the accelerator. Can’t get a medical so her licence is invalid.”

“And that makes a difference?” Widowmaker grinned widely, looking over to meet Emily’s amused-yet-unimpressed eyes.

“Yes. Not that either of us much care necessarily about legality, but when it comes to planes it’s not just that. There’s safety as well.” Emily shrugged a little nervously. “Same reason she doesn’t drive anymore, either. Can you imagine what would happen if something started to go wrong and she blinked away? She’d be safe, sure, but the airplane wouldn’t follow her back through time - not to mention just generally facing the trauma of getting into a plane again.”

The thought sparked an image - a pilotless jet careening through the sky like a missile, while fifty feet behind it a shocked-looking Tracer started to fall with a scream. Widowmaker swallowed, disliking the way that image stuck in her mind. “Yes. Perhaps it is for the best.”

Emily looked over in concern, wrapping her arm a little tighter around Widowmaker’s in a sort of an attempt at a comforting hug.

Widowmaker misinterpreted the gesture as anxiety over the grappling - the balcony was up above them, now, and she flashed Emily a grin. “Do not worry, cerise, I will be gentle. I know it is your first time, after all.”

She gave herself just enough time to enjoy the confusion dawning across Emily’s freckled face before she launched off her grapple and simultaneously slipped her arm free of Emily’s, wrapping it around her waist instead.

Emily tried to shriek - in a mixture of fear and delight - but Widowmaker had timed her actions for just before a breath and there was no air in her lungs to fuel the gesture. Instead, all that came out was a squeaked squawk as she frantically tried to grab onto the frenchwoman with every available limb.

A second later, they were on the balcony - Widowmaker chuckling softly and stroking at the back of Emily’s head with her free hand; Emily grasping desperately at anything she could in panic. “Oh, cherie, do not be afraid,” she murmured. “You are quite safe with me here.”

“That… was…” the words barely trickled out as Emily’s lungs refused to respond, and her legs threatened to give out beneath her. She managed a gasp. “Fucking terrifying!” She pushed away and slapped at Widowmaker’s shoulder. “Don’t you ever do that again without warning me! I nearly shat myself, that was such a-”

Widowmaker laughed, leaning away from the repeated and (mostly) playful slaps as Emily’s words degraded into a series of grunts and shouts.

When she was finished - breathing heavily and quite red in the face - she huffed and tugged at the bottom of her shirt. “Now. I’m inviting you in for dinner, but first.” she glared back with narrowed eyes, “I want you to give me a proper grapple ride. Didn’t have a chance to really enjoy that one.”
“Oh, I will give you a proper ride,” Widowmaker muttered under her breath with a grin, then cleared her throat. “But dinner? I think perhaps not.”

“Aw, c’mon,” Emily nodded her head toward the glass doors with a smile. “I set up something special for you. My little way of saying thanks - for watching over me, and for chatting, too. It’s been nice and I thought it deserved a little celebration.”

Widowmaker’s eyes flicked to follow her gesture, and saw a table that wasn’t normally there - a folding one she knew they kept in their storage locker downstairs, only bringing it out occasionally for guests - set for dinner for two.

Three bottles of wine of a vintage she recognized; very nice, one of her favourites for casual drinking but not one that could be considered ceremonial. She recalled mentioning it offhand to Emily a week or so ago. The normal plates, nothing so fancy as their chins, but set overtop of an embroidered tablecloth. There were candlesticks, the wicks not yet burning but carrying the promise of flame, of light, and warmth.

Widowmaker sniffed. She thought she could detect a hint of roasting meat on the wind, leaking out from the apartment, and her brows drew a little tighter together. She didn’t look back to Emily, just continued to study the table.

What was the purpose here? What was Emily’s - what was hers? Why did she occupy so much of her time with this; every free moment, it felt like, was dedicated to them. Emily, Lena, together or apart. Studying their actions made sense. Memorizing their routes made sense. Coming to understand their likes and dislikes, ingratiating herself to gain access or ease her way, all made sense.

This didn’t. This was the breakfast all over again, except she’d done nothing this time. Even that first revelation of following, that night the man had tried to mug her cerise, she hadn’t actually done anything. Emily had even had that situation in hand, somewhat surprisingly - although in hindsight, Widowmaker had come to suppose that any person both capable of and wanting to carry on a relationship with that foolish little mouse, would need to be generally quite able indeed.

She’d done nothing. Nothing good - her first visit here, she had threatened them both and nearly killed them. A half-dozen times since, as well, though she hadn’t mentioned those - but after a while she’d found that her trigger finger hung limp while she looked through the scope. Just watching. She didn’t feel bad about the threats, but she still knew they were not the sort of things that would be considered “good” - and on top of that, that it would be only worse that she didn’t feel bad about them.

And now there were plates on the table, and good wine, and candlesticks, and it was all wrong. She was an assassin, a weapon, a tool; she got maintenance and directives, she got sustenance, she didn’t have dinner.

She didn’t deserve it.

“I think not,” she stated simply with a shake of her head, but her face snapped back to the front when a warm hand took hers.

The look in Emily’s eyes was nothing short of shocking, or would have been if she were capable of truly feeling shocked anymore. It was lightly surprising, then. A sort of determined ambition, but for what, Widowmaker couldn’t guess.

Red eyebrows rose, lips taking on a gentle smile. “If you really don’t want to, you don’t need to. But I genuinely would appreciate the company.”
Widowmaker wondered if she knew. Wondered if Emily knew that if asked, she would stay out of obligation if nothing else.

She thought that Emily probably did.

“...will there be beans?”

Emily laughed lightly. “I hadn’t planned on it, but I’d happily-”

“Well, in that case, I would be remiss to decline.” Widowmaker nodded, stepping closer. “But first, you asked for a ride - I suppose I have the time to spare,” she rolled a shoulder in an idle shrug then shot back an almost accusing look. “Just do not delay us overly - I will not let you make me late. I have dinner plans.”

Emily giggled, stepping closer and wrapping her arms around Widowmaker’s torso, trying to get a good grip. The assassin couldn’t deny how warm they were, despite the night air and the protection offered by her armour. One of her arms slid behind Emily’s back, pulling her in closer, protectively.

“Are you prepared, cerise?”

There was a moment’s pause, and Widowmaker could feel the redhead’s heart speeding up. “J’ai préparée, ma bouclier - allons-y!”

That accent again, inescapably Provençal. Widowmaker didn’t pause to marvel over it, though - with a grin, she simply tightened up her grip and stepped forward, propelling them both over the balcony’s railing with strong and practiced legs.

This time, Emily had plenty of breath in her lungs to fuel her screams of excitement and delight. She’d always been a bit of a thrill-seeker - motorcycles, roller coasters, along with just some good old-fashioned rebellion - but none of that had anything on this. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of her life, if not the most: a perfect balance of terrifying and safe.

Widowmaker deeply appreciated the little flight. Just around the block, criss-crossing the streets and alleys as they swooped higher and lower, but it gave things a little bit of time to settle. Thoughts, mostly. There wasn’t much opportunity for distraction when her life hung by a metal-alloy thread - and Emily’s, as well. Emily, who was so warm. Emily who was so kind. Emily, who returned her jabs and yet also-

Her thoughts didn’t settle as much as she’d hoped by the time they made it back, but then the redhead was giving her a tight hug - not just holding on - and backing away with a grin, and anything unpleasant dropped away.

“Thank you!” Emily gasped, patting a hand against her own chest over her hammering heart. “That-wow, that was really something else!” She giggled delightedly, grabbing at Widowmaker’s hand and tugged her toward the doors. “C’mon, I bet you worked up a bit of an appetite at least - have a seat, pour yourself some wine, I’ll go get changed quickly and carve the roast, and be back in a sec with salad, yeah?”

She slid the glass back and stepped in, pulling Widowmaker into the apartment - her gold eyes flicked up to the corner, no longer broken. How had she missed? She never missed. Confusion atop confusion.

The door slid closed and shut out the night as Widowmaker stepped over to one of the chairs and took a seat. She started off with a very generous glass of wine, setting all of the bottles on the floor so they wouldn’t interfere as Emily lit the candles.
Candles. Her eyes fixated on the dancing flames. They even looked warm.

Emily returned with salad a few minutes later and Widowmaker realized she hadn’t moved while the other woman had been gone. She couldn’t recall if a thought had passed through her mind, which she supposed meant if they had, they hadn’t been important ones. That was the best explanation.

The redhead was in a comfortable-looking dress, now - no makeup, but she’d washed her face and run a brush through her hair, and she looked very at home. It made sense. It was her home, after all, but it only deepened the uncomfortable (but mild) confusion in Widowmaker’s gut.

The salad was good enough - she particularly liked the tart dressing, something citrusy and acidic and easy to taste. Conversation picked up again, mostly idle, mostly gentle, quite at odds with any of their sidewalk conversations. Widowmaker went along with it all easily enough, but couldn’t shake the fact that it seemed wrong. Like she was just being put into somebody else’s chair and expected to play a part, maybe.

There was no game here. None of what she’d come to expect from it all - the routine that they’d established didn’t exist in this place. The candles had driven it away, it was shut outside of the glass with the rest of the world, and this bubble of domestic niceness felt almost like a mockery.

It did feel like a mockery.

Emily was in the middle of a story - forkful of salad paused halfway to her mouth as she laughed lightly - when Widowmaker set her fork down with a sigh and a shake of her head. “What are you doing, cherie? What are we doing? What is this?” She gestured swiftly over the table, not enjoying the briefly hurt look in Emily’s eyes.

“It’s dinner!” Emily laughed lightly, trying pass it off as a joke but quickly abandoning that. “D’you not like it?” The query was soft as Emily settled back in her chair, setting down her fork and looking across the table. She didn’t look hurt anymore, didn’t look happy, just looked a little bit concerned.

“Like?” Widowmaker sighed, dropping her head forward to rest on one hand, elbow propped on the table’s edge. “It is not about like, cerise, it-”

It had nothing to do with likes, she hardly even had likes, she had annoyances and obstacles and she removed them. It was as simple as that. This, though, was far from simple; it was dinner. “What am I doing here?” The question came out more frantic than she’d intended, more sharp, and she looked up suddenly expecting to see Emily recoiling in fear.

She wasn’t, though. She just sat there in her chair, smiling slightly. The gesture grew as she chuckled a little. “What do you mean, silly? You’re here because dinner’s nice, conversation’s nice, and I like spending time around you.”

The words might have been the truth, but Widowmaker couldn’t believe them so plainly. “Am I a, what, a replacement?” Her eyes narrowed in some frustration. “A person to fill the space while your petite is out of town?”

At that, Emily did look a little hurt - frowning, shaking her head firmly. “Of course not. I wouldn’t do that, and I think you know I wouldn’t. I’m not that kind of person.”

Widowmaker’s brow drew a little tighter before she sighed a chuckle and her face slacked, losing all expression. Her natural state. “What, then?” There was a blankness, a hollowness to Widowmaker’s tone as she smiled lightly. “I cannot do this, cherie. I cannot be this for you or for any other. This domestic… nonsense - ce n’est pas moi. I cannot love, I cannot feel, I ca-”
She bit off her words as Emily stood swiftly, the candles’ flickering flames reflected in her glistening eyes and only mirroring a fire deeper within them.

“Who said I wanted you to feel?” Her words were quiet but surprisingly hard as she stepped around the table, shaking her head gently. “I should’ve been clearer. I’m sorry.”

She was very close now and Widowmaker just watched her come even nearer, dark eyebrows drawn tightly together. She wasn’t afraid of Emily, wasn’t angry at her, she was only barely confused, if that - she was capable of so little more, if she was honest with herself (which, truth be told, she rarely was).

Perhaps nothing more than that, actually. Not candles and salad and company, certainly. Not dinner. Playfulness and teasing disguised as something else, that she could do, but she knew lies and this was a lie.

Emily laid a hand on Widowmaker’s shoulder, meeting her eyes with a little smile. “I wanted to have dinner with you. I’ve enjoyed playing our games and I’m happy to keep doing that, but I wanted to make something clear and it would seem I’ve done a rubbish job of it.” She laughed a little, hair bouncing around her shoulders. She brushed it back with a hand and caught her lower lip between her teeth.

That look in her eyes was still indecipherable; it was a problem Widowmaker had never encountered before. She always knew what was inside a person, what they wanted - even if they didn’t. She felt sometimes as if she could taste their fears, but now? Now she looked up at Emily without the faintest clue of what was going through her head.

“You say you can’t feel,” Emily murmured, tilting her hand on Widowmaker’s shoulder to stroke a warm fingertip down her jawline, “and I believe you. I never asked you to feel, and I won’t - that is not what I want.”

She felt like she was holding her heart back with her teeth, like it wanted to leap right out of her throat toward Widowmaker. The teasing might have gone one step too far, here - hardly for the first time in her life, either, but she knew she could fix it.

Emily leaned down - slowly, giving plenty of time for Widowmaker to lean away if she wanted - but deliberately. There was no hesitation in her movements as she tilted her head, pressing her lips against Widowmaker’s without a noise. She held her breath - couldn’t have breathed if she wanted to - as she swept her tongue slowly through the coldest mouth she had ever kissed. It was fascinatingly different and she wanted to lose herself in it, but she didn’t let that happen, not yet. This had to be intentional, this had to be done right.

Widowmaker didn’t lean away, didn’t want to. She didn’t withhold anything - just tipped her head back and to the side, lips parting as she tried to draw every bit of warmth she could out of Emily’s mouth, her lips. Blue fingers ran through red hair as Widowmaker pulled her in closer - Emily didn’t resist, per se, but she did hold back just the slightest bit, keeping the kiss from devolving into a frantic snog. Keeping it very much at slow, deliberate, planned levels of energy, but no less passionate for it.

It came time that Emily couldn’t hold her breath any longer, but she didn’t want to break the contact just yet - all things must pass, though, and she pushed herself back upright with a long, deep, almost desperate inhalation as she fluttered her eyelids a bit. “That, is what I want,” she murmured, grinning down. “You.”

Widowmaker narrowed her eyes, not speaking for a few seconds.
“I… knew that. I knew that, cerise - I-” she gasped before breaking into brief laughter. “I knew you wanted to kiss me!”

Emily grinned widely as she took her seat again, quirking an eyebrow. “Had ya fooled, didn’t I?”

She scoffed, rolling her eyes. “I would not go so far as to say that. You had me - perhaps, for a moment - doubting my certainty in the fact. That would be all.”

It was a bold-faced and total lie, and what was even more surprising to Widowmaker was that she knew it. She didn’t care, per se, but she did know she was lying - she hadn’t known Emily wanted to kiss her. Hadn’t known Emily really liked her at all. It was the position, it was the safety, it was the repartée, it was many things maybe, but she hadn’t really thought it was her.

She wasn’t sure if that was better or worse in the long run.

“Maybe you did have me fooled,” Widowmaker admitted with a shrug, wine glass in hand and mostly empty now. “But only for a moment.”

Picking up her fork again, Emily giggled softly. The return of the brevity was wonderful, and entirely welcomed, but she found that she didn’t want to eliminate the last lingering sensations of the kiss just yet. She set the forkful of salad down again and just smiled across the table.

“I like you, Widdy - I know you’re amused by me, and that’s grand. You’re not a replacement for anything or anyone, you’re not just a shield I want to position between myself and the world, you’re not a traffic advisory service.” Her grin widened a little more. “You’re a friend. Even if I’m not one of yours, you’re one of mine.”

“I remain unconvinced on that nickname,” Widowmaker half-rolled her eyes. You sound like Sombra. “That is very sweet, cerise , I suppose, but I was never truly worried. Have you never heard of acting a part to gain information?” Her teeth gleamed in the candlelight below narrowed eyes and Emily laughed.

Sure, she hummed a chuckle to herself. Just an act. I won’t poke a hole in that for you, love - but one day, maybe, we can have a real chat about it.

---

Reaper grumbled a little as he slammed the door shut. He wasn’t a fan of needing to stay off-base. He also wasn’t a fan of needing to stay on-base. In general, he wasn’t a fan.

Some days, he wished he could be one of those blissful idiots who could find joy in the world - who could see it as something more than a dark and infested hellhole. An idiot like he’d been when he was younger.

It was very rare, though. The idiots could have their false joy. He’d happily help them drown in it.

He sat down heavily on the couch, huffing out every bit of air and just trying to stop. It was harder and harder these days. At first, decades ago, it hadn’t been so bad, but now? That damned itch just kept growing deeper and deeper and-

Fabric ripped under his claws, drawing his attention down to his side where he was tearing a hole in
“Damnit,” he sighed, shaking that gauntlet off of his hand. He went to do the other but a little bit of ire leapt in him and he jumped off of the couch, whirling and flinging the heavy metal glove at the wall instead and making a hole through it. “DAMNIT!”

There was a knock at the door. Reaper stood for several seconds, hands clenched in fists so tightly the bones almost cracked.

Another knock.

He whirled into smoke with a grunt and resolidified at the door, flinging it open firmly enough that the knob punched a nice round hole in the drywall.

Sombra was standing there with a few things. A smirk, a satchel, and a grocery bag.

“Hey Gabe. Movie night, remember?”

Reaper stared at her as she just wandered in to his apartment. As if it meant nothing. As if she had nothing to fear. As if she was welcome here.

“Oh, I see you’ve redecorated,” she murmured, gesturing idly to a few new holes in the walls.

Distantly outside, sirens sounded. Shitty neighbourhoods were the only ones he could stay in now - he felt like a kid again, that way.

“Sombra,” he growled, still standing at the open door. Why she’d decided that they had movie nights now, he would never know. She just did this - just decided that things were, and refused to take no for an answer. She’d decided they were friends, decided she was allowed to come over to his apartment, decided she could just put on a movie and expect to share the couch.

“You’re gonna have a hard time seeing it from there, amigo!” Sombra called in from the other room with a laugh. “Just sayin’, you might wanna come to the couch! Little more comfy too, eh? Man, I love this couch.” She stopped calling out, muttering to herself instead as she bounced a little on the furniture.

The door slammed incredibly loudly and a black whirlwind of smoke rushed through the room, surrounding Sombra entirely and obscuring everything from her vision - the windows, the walls, the lights. She couldn’t have seen her own screens glowing in front of her face.

Not that she cared. She just sat there on the couch.

A second later the smoke went away. In its place, Reaper sat on the far opposite end of the couch. He’d tried making her leave. It never worked.

“Brought some snacks,” she set the grocery bag on the table. “Chips and sodas, you know? Figured we’d go for one of the classics tonight - I been messaging you trying to ask what you wanna see, but you never respond?” She chuckled, grinning widely. “What’s up with that, amigo? You know, you might make a girl think you don’t like her.”

“I don’t.” Reaper grunted before pulling his helmet off. He’d be damned if he let anybody else force anything in his own home. People didn’t like seeing his face, and he couldn’t blame them, but if she wanted a movie night that was the price to be paid.

Sombra cackled delightedly. “Ah, you’re funny amigo - yeah, good, get comfortable. We’re in for a
long one tonight - you remember the Lord of the Rings reboots from when you were a kid?”

“Never saw them,” he sighed, rubbing heavily at his face. His own hand felt wrong on his skin, which left him with very few options. Scratch the itch and feel worse. Don’t scratch the itch and feel worse. Scratch the itch and feel worse. Don’t scratch the itch…

“Well, good! Because I got the originals!”

Reaper frowned, still not looking over at the almost certainly crazy purple-haired girl on his couch. “My… my dad used to talk about those. How old are they?”

“Mmm, ‘bout seventy years, now? Something like that?” She flipped a little purple hexagon back and forth between her fingers - one that hadn’t been there ten seconds ago - reading things that only she could see from it. “Don’t worry, you’ll like it.”

“Doubtful.” For the first time, he looked over at her. Why are you here? He wanted to ask. He had asked. She always just said ‘movie night’. And laughed.

She had another bag, which he frowned at. “What’s that?”

Sombra glanced down to her satchel and then snickered. “Oh, this? Yeah, decided to do a little homework, you know?” She reached in and pulled out a large lump from it - an omnic head, free from any body.

All of the little tics throughout Reaper’s body condensed into one solid, hot, heavy lump in the core of him which radiated little spikes of ice. Wisps of smoke lifted from his hands as they shook slightly. “You… you stole one of those from Talon headquarters?”

Sombra tossed her head back for a laugh. “One? Ah, you’re funny, amigo - hell no, I didn’t steal one. I stole eight!”

If there were any more words to follow those, they were cut off as Reaper shifted in a flash, grabbed her by the shoulders and shoved her back against the couch. “You WHAT?!”

Purple eyes glittered as she smirked back at him. She’d seen the way people shrieked and ran away - they just didn’t get it in general. She knew she was safe - and besides, she had a Translocator planted, so she was definitely safe. He wasn’t even wearing the gloves or the mask. “I stole it,” she repeated teasingly, “along with seven others. What, you got something in your ears, amigo?”

One of his teeth cracked in half as he clenched his jaw, but it hardly mattered. It would all heal anyway and it didn’t hurt any more than everything hurt at every moment of the day. “There is a difference,” he explained slowly, fingers gripping tighter at her shoulders. If he’d been wearing his gloves she would’ve been bleeding already. “Between working on your own time , and working on something on your own terms. One is okay. The other is betraying your team .”

Sombra snorted, rolling her eyes. “Team, yeah right.” Gabe’s fingers dug more harshly into her shoulders and she winced a little, glaring back at him right in the eyes. “Talon’s not my team, pendejo. They’re a client and they’ll be treated that way - I don’t stab ’em in the back, I protect their interests, but they do not own me.”

It was hard to get the words out, mostly because it was hard to do anything right now. She felt like he was grinding glass into her joints and her vision sparkled because of it. He must not have known how firmly he was holding her. This was going a little far for a joke. “You, Gabe? You’re on my team. You mind backing off with the squeezing there, amigo?”
A second later, he did. Not just slacked, but let go entirely - *entirely*, with every particle of himself, dissolving into a cloud of smoke. Sombra rubbed at her shoulders with a bit of a frowning pout as the cloud turned back into a person on the other end of the couch. She pulled her feet up onto the cushion, leaning over heavily on the armrest away from him.

“You’ve never said that before.” Reaper’s mind was cacophonous. It usually was, but now moreso than most times - one half screamed angrily while the other tried to protest in desperation. He felt like his skull might just tear in two and it dripped down his spine like acid, burning and peeling him raw.

*Team.* That was important. If there *was* one thing he would never do, it was betray a team member. Whatever it took.

“Yeah, well, I thought you already knew,” Sombra grumbled with an uneasy shrug. Her shoulders still hurt, but the pain actually went a lot deeper than that, and she didn’t like that at all. This had to be one of his weird jokes - it *had* to be.

...but what if it *wasn’t*? She didn’t like that idea. He was just like this, that was all - he fucked around and joked like he didn’t like her. Sombra knew that, she was sure of it; sure, he might lose it and lash out sometimes, but that was different, and it never really happened at *her* anyway. But what if - what *if* - that wasn’t really the way things were?

There was a lot that had happened in the decades since Gabriel Reyes started to come apart at the seams - to him, and to the world. Many would say that man had died. *He* certainly would have, but he still carried an assortment of torches in memory of what had once been. Most of them were hateful, spiteful, vengeful constructs that would sow only fear and reap only pain.

One, though, wasn’t. One little fragment of who he’d been that stuck with him, and because of it he couldn’t disagree with what Sombra had said. Hell, it had practically been what *he’d* said years ago, in a different world and a different life.

Now, though, there was too much at stake to agree. He wondered for a moment how much she knew - about Talon, about Overwatch, about *him* and all that had happened.

*Team.*

Reaper’s eyes drifted to the grocery bag. “What kind of chips?”

“Barbeque and Dill Pickle,” Sombra smirked and then cracked into laughter as she shook her head. “Finally! Geeze, you had me going for a second there, Gabe!”

He just grunted in response as he reached out to grab the bag of Dill Pickle chips. He wondered if she knew they were his favourite flavour.

Almost certainly, yes. She probably knew about all there *was* to know, which meant that maybe - just maybe - she could have answered a few of the questions that still lingered in his head. The risks were too great, though, after having been at it this long alone.

He couldn’t take the chance that somebody else had got to her first, that somebody *else* drove her hand. He’d come this far on his own and he could see it out to the end. Alone.

Sombra tossed the little hexagon she’d been juggling toward the far wall - it splashed and flew wide, turning into a large screen as she snapped her fingers to dim the lights.

The movement stirred a thought in him. Happy memories, angry memories - red against purple. He tried not to think about it too much. “How’s your hand?”
She pulled it back pretty swiftly, inspecting her fingernails where the metal met her skin. All signs of burns or scarring were gone, as was any pain and sensitivity. The only thing that was hurt now was her ego. “It’s good. A lot better, thanks. Good job on the medic.”

Reaper just grunted. She didn’t need to know all of what had happened, what had gone through his mind - he didn’t even want to know it. It felt like betrayal. He hadn’t done any of it but it still felt wrong. He’d thought about just abandoning her to her pain.

…but he hadn’t. Whether it made a difference was a question he couldn’t answer. He’d wanted to abandon her but hadn’t.

It hurt.

He’d never seen this movie before, but he knew the plot: a group of naive friends tasked with saving the world against unthinkable odds, a world which sought to destroy itself and a corrupting evil which turned even the supposedly good men against the others. It left a bad taste in his mouth, a bad feeling through his core as that angry void howled to be sated. It felt too familiar. Like watching it all go wrong all over again.

Sombra flipped around and leaned her back against Reaper’s side.

The void yawned for her, wanted life, any life, but he quashed it. Held it back and stopped it from reaching out through him and just taking. She took one of his potato chips and he let her, leaving one arm on the armrest and the other stretched out along the back of the couch.

As the plot continued, he stared in disbelief at the screen. He didn’t know how the story ended, he couldn’t recall, but he thought it had been more resolved than that. The ring in the hands of a hobbit with only one friend by his side and the whole world, it seemed, stacked against the pair of them. Sombra yawned and stretched against him a little as the credits rolled.

“…is that really how it ends?”

The hacker laughed, shaking her head. “Nah, there’s two more of ‘em! Gotta have something to do next Thursday, you know?”


She snickered, rolling her eyes as she pushed herself up from the couch. “Yeah, fine is right, amigo - damn fine plan, is what it is!” The barbeque chips lay untouched but she’d eat them later. “Anyway, thanks for having me over or whatever - you know, it wouldn’t kill you to set out a bowl of punch or something next time.”

His hand clenched into a fist of its own accord, but he forced it open. “I’ll consider it,” he half-sneered, trying to strip the tone from his voice but failing entirely. “You should go.” He could feel himself losing it, and he hated it, he hated it but he couldn’t do anything except-

“Yeah, it’s late,” she shrugged. “Anyway, thanks Gabe. See ya later.” It seemed like he was getting pretty tired - she could hear it in his voice. She knew what came next, so she patted him on the shoulder and tapped him on the nose. “Boop!”

With that, Sombra skipped out of the door, swinging it shut behind her.

Reaper slid to the ground in the silence that was left, the stillness. He tried to concentrate on his breathing, on his hands, on anything other than that twisting shard of emptiness inside himself but it didn’t work. It never worked, not for long, and he hated it. He hated it. He hated it so damn much.
He used to be able to make jokes. To tease and be teased, crack wise and take an egg or two right back, but now it didn’t even take anything for him to fall to pieces and he absolutely hated it. It and himself, and everyone else, and everything. The world was hate. He was.

Dark tears dripped messily from his eyes, mixing with tendrils of smoke that started to rise as the chasm within him grew out of control. It leapt up like an animal, snatched him in its jaws and dragged him back down into his own personal hell as he screamed in agony.

Ten minutes later, when he came to, there wasn’t a piece of furniture left in the room. Every chair and side table, the couch, the desk - everything had been shredded to pieces. His own black blood was painted over everything and he just felt so hungry.

The mask fit so well. The gloves fit so well.

Reaper cracked his neck, punched out his own window, and swirled off into the night. Living in a bad neighbourhood had its upsides - nobody would care about the sound of breaking glass or frantic screams. Not those that had just come from his house, and not those that he now heard from a block down.

Such a perfect opportunity. As he swept along the dark alleyways toward the sounds of screams, he relished the idea of that one voice being joined by others at his hands. He loved living in a buffet.

Maybe if he killed enough of them, he could get rid of that itch. Maybe if he ate enough he wouldn’t be hungry.

Maybe, maybe, maybe…

Chapter End Notes

Broke ten thousand total hits today, whoo! So that's pretty exciting, heh. I've really been looking forward to that over the past week or so, watching the milestone slowly tick closer, so that's great!

Other than that, not exactly going great - kinda sick and uh... yeah, just generally not doing great, heh. Unfortunately, anticipated milestones don't always align well with states of mind that let you appreciate them. I know I liked this chapter when I wrote it, I can remember liking it when I re-read it, but right now I honestly don't like it; just not in the right mindset to appreciate myself or my work right now, sorry. Not trying to fish for compliments or anything, just trying to explain why I'm not really writing anything in here (honestly just wanna delete this all but I'm going to keep it in the interests of disclosure and clarity - but I'll try to remember to come back when I've moved past it, and put in a proper author's note, heh) - and if the chapter seems lacklustre, it's probably because some of that state of mind is bleeding through, sorry.

But hey, I hope you liked it! Regardless, I hope you have a good day :)

I did think Sombra's movie night was cute. I like the idea of that - and Reaper... well, he's gonna have some rough stuff ahead of him. They probably all are, really. Heh, oops.

Anyway, come back next time for new developments with Tracer, Widowmaker, and
Emily, all! Because there's no war too great to forget about the homefront, eh? We find out a little more about pasts and backstories, and there are a few surprises in the wings. Mostly for Tracer, when she comes home unannounced and unexpected.
Serious Summary: Widowmaker asks Emily about some of her background, and only makes one death threat - which she even retracts shortly afterward. They share some art, and then there's some unexpected sharing as well when Emily goes to take a shower. Then, a further surprise... Tracer comes home early.

JFL Summary: "Not fair. Tall. Many - pretty, good kissing, and-"

Previous chapter summary: Emily invited Widowmaker back for dinner. It was a bit of an uphill battle, but Emily did her best to keep things open and obvious - not to coerce Widdy at all. It worked decently well, but Widowmaker ended up slightly frustrated when she was unable to parse her own role in the whole thing. Emily clarified matters (in a manner of speaking) with a kiss.

Sombra went over to Reaper's apartment (or one of them) for a movie night. He wasn't a fan of it. Nor was he a fan of the fact that she'd stolen some resources from Talon. In return, she laid out quite clearly that she didn't consider Talon to really be her "team" - but she did consider Reaper to be her team. He was confused, in a way that went back years and years and deep through the layers of pain in his life. It was only the first movie out of three, anyway, but he told her to leave and she did. He swept off into the night to find something to eat, hoping to keep the hunger away from his... teammate.

“How long has it been since you’ve been to France?”

The question surprised Emily a little - she’d never actually said she’d been to France - but she just leaned back slightly in her chair and started to finish off her salad. “Why don’t you tell me, hmm?”

Widowmaker’s brows rose in unison. “If I knew, I would hardly be asking, cherie. I know you lived in Provence - Aubagne, to be exact. You lived there for a little over two years. I do not know if you have returned since.”

“You’ve been stalking me again,” Emily hummed lightly, sipping at a glass of wine and flashing Widowmaker a look over the candles.

“Does that count?” She frowned in disbelief before the expression shifted slightly smirk-wards. “Certainement, public records are public for a reason, non?”

“There’s a subtle difference between public records and delving public records,” Emily pointed out, “but fine - and, yes, I lived in Aubagne for about two years. When I was nineteen, my Da found out some things he didn’t like, and threw me out-”
“Where is he?” The question was abrupt and firm, Widowmaker’s jaw suddenly tense, but Emily just looked back at her with narrowed eyes.

“You’re not killing him.”

“Non, I am not. I am sitting here and having dinner with a friend. Later tonight, I will be killing him.”

“No you won’t!” Emily half-laughed, seeing the tiniest inkling of a smirk on Widowmaker’s lips. She shook her head slowly with a grin. “You won’t be killing him - he’s an arse, entirely… to me. But, he’s got a new wife and a son, and I happen to like my half-brother, who happens to like his dad. I refuse to let Pero get hurt because of what our dad did to me so long ago, understood? I’m happy with me, and with where I’ve ended up - the man’s not even worth the thought.”

Widowmaker cleared her throat, lips twitching a little as she tipped her head considerately back and forth. “… d’accord, I accept. Barely. This is a personal favour to you, do you understand?”

Emily laughed briefly. “Well, thank you, then. I owe you one.”

“Yes, you do - now, you were…” she cleared her throat, lips pursing in displeasure, “ejected. Then what?” Widowmaker returned to her salad as Emily spoke. Her appetite had never really left, but she wanted to eat more now than she had before. It was really quite good food, at least as far as this sort of thing went, and she hummed appreciatively at it.

“I took out all the money I had from the bank, and left.” Emily shrugged. “Got on the train and just picked a direction and went - things were said when I left which made me think I’d best not be seen around again.”

Golden eyes narrowed and Emily cleared her throat. “I will be quite displeased if I find out anything has happened to him. Furious, in fact.”

“Even seulement a scare, cerise? Surely men are frightened every day - particularly those with cruelty in their hearts?” There was a distinctly amused hum to Widowmaker’s tone. Not to mention a wickedly curled grin on her lips.

“No,” Emily stated flatly, then glanced off to one side. “Well… what kind of scare- no, no that’s terrible.” They both laughed and Emily grinned. “Maybe we can talk about it later - maybe - but nothing without checking with me first, alright? I mean it.”

“D’accord,” Widowmaker dipped her head in concession, her salad bowl now empty, “but I assure you, cherie, we will be discussing it further.”

“Fine,” Emily sighed as she grabbed the empty bowls and stepped over to the kitchen. “Anyway - I went as far as I could, and that was Aubagne! Simple as that, really.”

“Ah yes, how simple,” Widowmaker drawled dryly. “You spent all of your money to end up in a city you did not know and that is where the story ends. So simple.”

Emily’s laugh carried easily out of the kitchen. “Okay, okay! You know, if you’re just trying to get some ammunition so you can score a few more points, I think that is an underhanded, low, and absolutely brilliant tactic.”

Widowmaker smirked as the redhead returned, carrying two plates of sliced roast - one piled much higher than the other. That one was hers, as it turned out when Emily set them down and took her seat again.
“Well, I didn’t speak a word of the language,” she continued with a sigh at her own younger self’s naivete. “And I didn’t have two coins to rub together, so to speak.” Not that there were actual coins anymore, but phrases stuck around.

“Mm,” Widowmaker nodded as she cut into her meat and raised a forkful to her mouth, then hummed in surprise. It felt like her mouth couldn’t keep up with the flavour - savoury and spicy and hot, the juices that came out as she chewed. Far greater than the beans. Widowmaker let her eyelids slide shut as she took her time with the mouthful, sighing contentedly after she swallowed.

“Enjoying it, then, are we?” Emily grinned as the frenchwoman’s eyes flashed open.

“Oui. Anyway-”

“Anyway,” Emily continued, letting her dinner partner dive back into the meat almost literally. “I got really, really lucky. Went to a cafe and just kind of sat, tried to use the translator on my phone to figure out something, when I heard a bit of a commotion coming from the counter. I looked over and there’s a guy about my age, gesturing at the staff, who’re kind of panicking in French…”

Her eyes went a little distant as a smile spread across her face. “He was mute - I knew sign language, I recognized his hands moving and I ran over-” she cut off with a brief giggle. “Of course, you see, I could understand him just fine, but the staff still couldn’t understand me!”

Emily laughed brightly and Widowmaker chuckled a little as well, the sound muffled against her mouthful of meat.

“Well, we chatted for a minute and decided to abandon the cafe entirely. He was an art student, only in town to go to the École there - offered me his couch to sleep on. He said I was the first new person who’d actually talked with him since he’d moved to town a month ago.”

Widowmaker hummed at the tale, noticing as Emily’s eyes flicked toward the hallway, but she couldn’t tell why. “It worked out well - I had a place to stay, and I was even able to arrange for some money, acting as a model for some of his art classes.”

“Oh, chérie,” Widowmaker gasped, “do please tell me it was nude modeling?”

Emily giggled, biting at her lower lip as her eyes narrowed mischievously. “Firstly, you’ve already seen me naked, you may recall.” She tipped her head in a pointed gesture, then grinned again. “Secondly, how about instead of answering, I just show you, hmm?” One eyebrow raised high as she pushed her chair back with a grin, Widowmaker practically leaping out of her seat to follow.

Not before she grabbed up a slice of the roast with her hands, though, and shoved it unceremoniously into her mouth.

The redhead led the way, footsteps bouncing softly, and stopped halfway down the hall. Leaning back against the wall, she gestured at a picture hanging opposite.

Widowmaker turned, curiously, and sighed in disappointment. “Ah. A landscape.”

“Well that hardly makes sense,” Emily murmured with a roll of her eyes. “How could I model for a landscape, hmm?” She paused for a mischievous moment, grinning, then nudged her chin toward the picture. “Go on, look closer.”

Flashing her a brief narrow glare, Widowmaker turned back to the picture and leaned in. It was not a painting, but a photograph - no brushstrokes. The subject was nice enough; calm seas viewed out over windy cliffs with a storm brewing darkly on the horizon. Then, though Widowmaker’s eyes
picked out an odd detail - what seemed to be a hand appearing within one of the clouds.

Just like that, it all snapped into place. Tiny things leapt out at her, little shadows and curves and slight misalignments as she realized that there was a person in the photo - a woman on her knees at the cliff’s edge, arms outstretched toward the stormclouds as if beseeching them to make landfall and bring rain to the parched brown grasses.

She was painted almost perfectly to blend in with the background, browns and greys on her calves and knees to fit the grass and stone and cliffs as if she grew out of the earth, as if she was the earth. Dark blues of the water across her midriff, turbulent greys for the storm across her chest and above. She was entirely naked, though it was difficult to tell at first given how hard she was to even see.

Widowmaker leaned in even closer, studying the figure intently with a slowly growing grin. She was looking away from the camera and toward the storm, yes, but the side of her face could be seen - a cheekbone, a brow, one side of the nose - it was definitely Emily, painted from the tips of her hair to the tips of her toes and trying to tear the clouds themselves from the sky.

Emily gasped as Widowmaker whirled around, pushing her back against the wall. Her alien eyes were filled with desire and excitement as she leaned in.

“Marveilleux, cherie, but I would very much like to see a ‘before’ example as well… so that I could truly appreciate the painter’s skill, of course. Along with a few other things.” She chuckled darkly and pressed a kiss to Emily’s lips, getting a hummed laugh in return as the redhead pushed back against her - not trying to escape, but just returning the kiss in kind.

“Well, that’s very flattering,” Emily murmured, heart hammering against her ribs, “but I’d really like to talk to Lena first before anything between us goes much further than kissing, alright?”

Widowmaker considered denying that, scoffing at it - considered a lot of things, actually, but the one that rose foremost to her mind was how, exactly, the man had managed to make her hair disappear.

Widowmaker turned back to the picture swiftly - it was painted dark and had some sort of gel applied to it, surely, to stand out in curls and spikes from her head. It blended into the stormclouds behind it, every bit as wild as they were.

It was only a shame that it was coloured all wrong. It looked better in red.

“He really was a magnificent painter,” Emily murmured, taking a position at Widowmaker’s elbow and looking at the photo as well. “They were two absolutely lovely years.”

“Was he only ever an artist, and you his model?”

Emily snorted, rolling her eyes. “Oh, c’mon - he was a French art student, love, and I lived on his couch. You really think I could’ve been around that much passion all the time and not fallen for him? Yeah, right - no, we were together. Me and him and his girlfriend, all three of us lived there and it was absolutely wonderful.”

“Was?” The past tense was all that was required for that question - even the word was mostly superfluous. It was obviously a story of the past.

“Yeah,” Emily nodded with a sad smile. “Leukemia. Had it for ten years before I even met him, and it was only ever a matter of time. I went back to his hometown for the funeral, but without him it really didn’t feel like home in Aubagne - Marianne moved away a month later and I couldn’t keep the apartment on my own, so I came back here.”

“Hmm.” Widowmaker tipped her head, unable to tear her eyes away from the desperation evident in
the piece. Every brushstroke cried out with a need to pull closer that which could save a life - but, in
vain, it seemed. Knowing the story behind it, that it was painted by a man who knew the number of
his days and the futility of life, it was all the more striking. “It is gorgeous.” Her voice was soft, a
little bit awed - she didn’t think she’d be capable of connecting with a work like this, not anymore. “I
would love to have a copy for myself.”

Emily glanced over with a little sadness in her eyes, but Widowmaker was focused too intently to
see. She laid an arm around the frenchwoman’s shoulders and squeezed lightly. “I can get one for
you, no problem, love. Let’s get back to the food, yeah?”

With a nod, they turned and made their way back to the table - but Widowmaker kept glancing back
over her shoulder. She could hang it above her mattress, where the light through the window would
catch it and she could see it from the chair. *Yes, that would work perfectly...*

---

Tracer sighed as she stepped out of the dropship, turning to wave to Winston with a cheery smile.
“Thanks for calling me out for a hand, love - and thank you, too, for all the advice and
understanding.”

“It’s really no problem,” Winston chuckled. “Have a good night.”

As the doors closed, he lumbered back over to the seats and dropped himself across four of them
with a sigh and a frown. It didn’t feel like he’d only been away from base for a few hours. If
anything, it felt like he’d just woken up from a series of bizarre dreams - the world as it had seemed
and the world as it seemed now were so alien from each other.

There was a lot of promise, though. He’d need to be careful - any scientist did - but if the hard work
paid off, it should be in a big way.

“Athena?” he called out to the speakers. “There’s something we should chat about when I get back
to base.”

Tracer was unaware of any of that, waving up as the dropship lifted off and started to speed away
toward Apeldoorn. It had been an emotional night - although they all seemed to be, sometimes - and
she was really looking forward to just getting home and relaxing with Emily. Things had worked out
well, yeah, or at least about as well as could be expected. Still, she felt a little drained.

Mostly from the way Sombra had been toying with her. As she started to jog along the alleyway,
Tracer frowned and wondered what all had actually happened there. Did Widowmaker know that
Sombra knew about the pair of them, that she had photographic evidence?

Questions to be asked, definitely, but questions for another time. For now, she was just looking
forward to home.

She couldn’t exactly go through the lobby or the parking garage the way she was - while most
people were generally in support of Tracer, it was still a good plan to keep her actual apartment’s
whereabouts as quiet as possible, and blue-streaking through the lobby of her building wouldn’t help
with that one bit. Not to say she hadn’t done it once or twice.

Besides, it was just more fun this way than riding an elevator. Her grin blossomed as the cool and
time-twisted winds ruffled at her hair, as she leapt from rooftop to balcony to ledge and back again, until she came to her floor.

The glass door was unlocked, as it usually was, which was perfect - and as she slid it back soundlessly she heard the noise of water striking on tile. The shower running.

*Even better!* Tracer suppressed a laugh, holding it in as a silent chuckle which made her shoulders shake as she shut the door behind herself and started to strip off her kit as quickly as she could, tossing it onto the couch to be dealt with later.

She heard a noise from in the shower - a gasp, maybe. Probably the water getting hot for a second. Sergio kept saying he’d get it fixed but nothing ever seemed to come of it.

The notion of the redness it would probably have brought to Emily’s cheeks was just too much to bear, though, and Lena felt like she might just burst into excited giggles as she slipped through the bathroom door. She slid back the heavily frosted glass of the shower door and stepped in, gasping slightly as hot water splattered across her skin.

She blinked, eyes widening at the sight that greeted her - not Emily, surprised by the heat of a post-work shower. Or rather, not *just* her, but Widowmaker as well. Lena’d been right about one thing, though: Emily definitely *did* look surprised. They all did.

“Oh. Well… hello?”

---

The rest of the dinner had passed easily and fairly quickly - Emily’s shift at work had been draining and she started to sag a little, and Widowmaker had noticed quite clearly. Still, they’d chatted and joked as the candles burned lower until all of the food was gone from their plates, and for a little while after as well.

“Thank you a lot for coming over, Widdy,” Emily grinned at the way her gold eyes narrowed at the pet name. “I’d really love to do this again sometime, but tonight I’m just knackered and I think I’ve got to have a shower and bed, sorry.”

“No apologize, cerise,” Widowmaker chuckled with a shake of her head. “I have my own ends to which to attend. I must make space for my picture, first and foremost!” Her grin widened at the thought as she stood from the table.

Emily laughed lightly, shaking her head a little as she moved to the door. “Well, I’ll get the message out to you when I get one printed off, alright? I’m really glad you liked it.” She stepped in, not needing to stretch or bend in order to kiss Widowmaker, and taking another moment to revel in the exciting oddity of how chilly she was.

“Have a good night,” Emily sighed happily, hugging the armoured woman tight but not caring about the way the plates and angles poked into her muscles. She was plenty used to the accelerator, and this was actually less awkward if anything. “I’ll see you again in a few days. Next shift at the hospital, eh?”

Widowmaker had laughed and waved over her shoulder as she stepped out onto the balcony and slid the door shut behind herself, but didn’t immediately leap off into the night. Somewhere nearby a
large vehicle whirred, stirring the silence as her thoughts drifted back over the past few hours, the past few weeks, the past few months.

How was it possible that so much had changed, while so little was different? The world seemed to have been turned upside-down and yet things were just as they had always been - the sun rose, the sun set, blood flowed. Around the world a thousand people were killed, and yet, here she had dinner by candlelight and chatted about pets and life and art.

It still seemed odd. It seemed entirely unfitting, but it struck a chord with something deep in her - not chaotic so much as dadaist, surrealist, an appreciation for the absurdity of juxtaposition; yes, that must’ve been it. For an assassin and a nurse (or at least, sometimes nurse) to sit and chat while wars were waged openly in distant lands - while also being fought, quiet but seething, in the streets down below. The domestic conflict carried scars of spraypaint rather than bomb craters, but was no less present.

That must have been what she liked so much about it. The conversations of art had turned her onto that mindset, and now she found herself smiling up at the moon - the moon which cared no more than she did, the moon which cared no more than the world did. It watched all, saw all… and did nothing.

One thing settled surely into her mind, though, as she heard the shower start up behind her. She wasn’t going to do nothing. The moon was cold, the night was cold - and while she couldn’t feel the cold, she was tired of it.

The shower would be so warm. Emily was.

Silently, Widowmaker turned and re-entered the apartment; moved to the bedroom and removed her armour, leaning her rifle up against the wall without a second glance at it. She was perfectly lethal enough with only her hands if anybody tried to press what they saw as an advantage.

As Widowmaker slid the frosted glass door back, Emily gasped, but any opportunity to respond further was somewhat pre-empted by the sudden arrival of another body in the shower. A cold one. One she’d never seen before, and her eyes trailed quickly in curiousity over wet blue skin before catching on a sharp grin.

Widowmaker let the moment of suspense hang for a moment and then leaned forward to say something, to purr some teasing phrase before she caught that cherry between her teeth but then, something entirely unexpected happened. The door opened again. She turned back to look at it, and saw her little mouse there, wide-eyed in shock.

“Oh. Well… hello?”

There was a moment of silence as the three women glanced between each other in the cramped space, and then Widowmaker began to laugh. “Hello indeed, ma souris - returned early from your little sortie, did you?”

Lena opened her mouth to respond with a grin when Emily cleared her throat. Both of the others turned to look at her. Her eyebrows were raised just slightly, and she held a bar of soap in hand.

“I’ve had quite a long day at work,” she began, explaining loudly enough to be heard easily over the shower’s noise, but not so much so that she might seem to be yelling. She had a bit of a smirk on her
lips, one that Lena easily recognized - one that said ‘this is cute, but do please listen up’. “I really do need a shower. Lena, love, it’s sweet of you to try to surprise me - Widdy, it’s nice that you want to share this with me - but this shower is far too small for three people and I desperately need to get clean. I’d love to do this some other time, but I don’t think tonight’s the night. Now, would you both mind giving me a moment, please?”

Lena coughed and nodded, blushing a little and tugging at Widowmaker’s arm gently. “Yeah, we should uh - sorry, love, for interrupting, I just-”

“It’s alright, it’s all alright,” she assured softly with a laugh that was at least half sigh, “I’ll be out in a few, okay?” She leaned awkwardly across Widowmaker, unable to avoid contact with her cool skin or with the shower door’s cool glass, but braving the slight shock of both in order to give Lena a quick kiss. “Love you.” She pressed a brief kiss to Widdy’s lips as well, but didn’t comment on it.

“Love you too,” Lena grinned, and slid the door open. “C’mon,” she grabbed at Widowmaker’s hand and led her out of the shower.

Of course, the frenchwoman wasn’t sure she actually wanted to leave, but her mouse was insistent and Emily had turned around to soak her face in the water. “Should we not even stay to wash your back?” Widowmaker quipped as she stepped easily out of the shower, sliding the door closed behind her.

Tracer tossed her a towel with a sigh and then grabbed one out of the hamper for herself, ruffling at her head so she wouldn’t drip too badly and leading the way out to the main room of the flat.

“Well,” she sighed, “I think I can definitively say there’s one surprise that didn’t work out as intended for anyone involved.” She sat down on one end of the couch, shooting Widowmaker a suspicious glance as she took a seat on the other side. “What gives, exactly? Hear I’m gonna be out of town for one night and decide to move in on my girl?”

Widowmaker’s eyes flashed back to her, slitted, but she saw the grin on Lena’s lips and smirked in return. It hadn’t been her, anyway - it had all been Emily’s idea - but it was clearly all a joke, regardless. “Ah, cherie,” she rolled a shoulder in a shrug, “but you have it so backward. I am just a helpless, innocent, naive little french girl, who your seductress of an amour had set her sights upon. Besides which, that surprise worked out precisely as I intended.”

Lena snorted, trying to dry out her ears with one corner of the towel which she had wrapped around herself. It would be easier to joke (and to concentrate in general) if Widowmaker had wrapped her towel around her body instead of around her hair. It was really hard to think straight with that much blue skin just… sitting there. Glistening.

A dark eyebrow quirked and Widowmaker patted at her lap. “Cherie. What are you doing all the way over there? Come, sit...”

With a sigh, a roll of her eyes, and a grin, Lena did - shuffled across the couch to sit on Widowmaker’s lap, laying back against her chest with a little hum. Widowmaker’s hands went to her hair, tugging idly at little knots to loosen them as the assassin started to soak in the warmth. It countered the fading heat of the shower. “That is better,” she murmured, dark lips twisting into a grin.

Tracer couldn’t suppress a light giggle at that. It really was better, the fingers in her hair felt nice and she loved the way that Widowmaker started to hum gently, always some classical tune that she could vaguely recognize but not quite place.
“She’s really great, isn’t she?” Lena relaxed entirely with a contented sigh, grinning widely with her eyes closed. Widowmaker studied her face from a slightly awkward angle, the utter bliss on it - she wondered for a second if her little mouse ever looked like that when thinking about her, or if it was just Emily, but she quickly realized that she didn’t care in the slightest: she looked like that now. Her mouse was happy. How could she herself be anything else at that fact? Or at least, whatever she was that was nearest to happy. Content.

“She is certainly intriguing,” the frenchwoman murmured and watched as Lena’s grin split, her eyes slowly sliding open and raising to look back.

“You used to say that about me, you know.”

“Alors,” Widowmaker chuckled softly, stroking at wild brown hair. “I know.”

They both turned to look toward the hallway when the shower shut off, but Emily didn’t arrive for a few more minutes. Still, they watched for her, and when she did show up in a set of flannel pyjamas, Lena pushed herself off of the couch to give her a hug and a kiss.

“Thanks, love,” Emily smiled, stroking at her cheek. “Have a good day?”

“Erm,” Tracer’s eyes flicked nervously to the side. “Not exactly? But… I mean, pretty good, yeah. Coupla things happened - but it looks like I’m not alone in that, eh?” She chuckled as she glanced between the other two.

“Yeah, about that,” Emily laughed softly, shaking her head before she met Widowmaker’s eyes. “I did say I didn’t want anything more to happen until I talked it over with Lena, didn’t I?”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow and frowned slightly. “Well, yes. It was only to be a shower. I did not think that would count.”

Emily started to respond but just laughed instead, pressing the balls of her palms briefly into her eyes. “Oh, of course you didn’t.” She sighed and laughed, shaking her head as she dropped her hands to the side. “You’re absolutely shameless, you know?”

“I do know this.” Widowmaker nodded with a grin. “But is this really necessary, coming from the woman who lured me here with candles and roast beef in order to-”

“Ooh, there’s roast beef?” Lena’s eyes lit up with excitement and Emily chuckled, tipping her head toward the kitchen. Tracer bolted that way and a second later the other two could hear the fridge being torn open and rifled through.

“I was going to say, in order to kiss me!” Widowmaker called after her in feigned annoyance. “Your petite is a devious woman, cherie! She has corrupted my innocence!”

“I know, mine too!” Lena’s voice floated back from the other room, muffled around what sounded suspiciously like a huge mouthful of roast beef. “Isn’t it great?”

Grinning, Widowmaker only shrugged at that and met Emily’s dancing eyes with her own. She still wasn’t certain what to make of all this, what part she was to play. A bit of the smile slipped from her lips as she realized what a very odd thing that was to be thinking about anyway. Since when did she think about what she could do for others? Since when had it stopped being about what she got out of the situation?

She didn’t even need to think about it. She knew exactly when - when pulling the trigger had ceased to be an option. When it sank in that killing them would be less enjoyable than letting them live. She
gained so much here, and risked so little - she was given warmth, attention, food, and surrounded by so much emotion she thought she could bask in it like a lizard in the sun; soaking it in like desert earth would drink water. That painting flickered to her mind again.

What did she risk? Nothing, nothing at all - simply the fact that, one day, it would no longer be. Such a thing didn’t hold any sway over her anymore. She had lost all she could, lost everything, and survived - she knew she would again, when it came time.

Although she found that she really didn’t want to think about that.

Emily sat down next to her with a slight sigh, leaning in against the naked woman on her couch. Widowmaker’s hand ran through her still damp and stringy hair. “Would you like to spend the night?”

The hand in her hair stilled immediately. Emily could feel the tension in Widowmaker’s muscles, but she couldn’t feel a breath or a heartbeat.

“You’re always welcome here,” Emily murmured as she hugged an arm around Widowmaker’s back. “No expectations anymore, alright? Just whatever you want to do. I’ll see you around.”

“Oui,” she grinned. “You are the only one who will. And do not think I have forgotten what we discussed tonight, cerise. We have much more to talk about.”

As Widowmaker stood and left the room, headed to the bedroom to retrieve her things, Emily’s eyes followed her. Yeah. We really do...

Lena returned from the kitchen with brief confusion, glancing around. “Okay, but she was naked so… please tell me she didn’t jump off the balcony?”

Emily laughed, shaking her head. “No, silly - she’s just grabbing her things and heading off home.”

“Really?” Brown eyes flicked down the hallway. “Oh.”

Standing from the couch, Emily stepped closer with a grin and wrapped her arms around Lena. “Don’t sound too disappointed there, love.”

“Wh-no I just meant-” she started to blush and then hung her head with a slight groan. “Ugh, bollocks, you’re just teasing me again, right?”

“Course I am, love,” Emily giggled, kissing her on the ear. “I’ll lay off a bit for a minute.”

Lena turned around to smile. As she did, a hand caught her shoulder and pulled her back, spinning her and pressing her against a wall. A finger at her chin tilted her head back as cold lips met hers and a chilled tongue filled her mouth, leaving her to moan in surprise and delight.

“Ah, better,” Widowmaker grinned as she stepped back. “Now, it will be adieu.”
“Not so fast,” Emily sighed as if in exasperation, stepping closer as Lena started to push herself a little shakily from the wall. Emily had other ideas and pinned her right back against it again, leaning down a little. She could still feel just a hint of Widowmaker’s chill on Lena’s lips and in her mouth, and stifled a giggle into the kiss. “Ooh, that’s nice,” she murmured appreciatively as they parted.

“Not fair,” Tracer gasped, struggling to stand upright as her knees threatened to give out and her words largely failed to work. She needed to stay against the wall at this point, or risk crumpling to the ground - but at least there were plenty of hands to catch her if she did. “Tall. Many - pretty, good kissing, and.”

She cut off at the sight before her as Emily turned, wrapping her arms around Widowmaker’s neck and pulling her in for a deep kiss as well. No stretching onto toes or leaning down for the pair of them, and Lena felt something deep inside of her blossom into heat as she watched. The way their heads tilted, the way their lips locked, their hands at each other’s backs and the tiny little noises that Emily made.

Her mouth was suddenly incredibly dry, but she refused to stop watching in order to go get a drink. She was also reasonably certain somebody had actually stolen her legs by this point and replaced them with strands of straw. Or maybe with nothing. She felt like she was floating, just like Zenyatta.

Emily sighed as they parted, and she tugged the wrapped towel free of Widowmaker’s hair - she’d left it there despite donning her armour. “Now, au revoir.” The redhead grinned, patting Widowmaker on the back as she gestured toward the balcony.

Widowmaker’s hips swayed as she swaggered out into the night and shut the door behind herself, easily vaulting the railing with a laugh. She let herself fall several stories before even deploying her grapple, delighting in the edge that the injection of adrenaline put on the whole night.

She kept her mouth tightly closed, lips tucked in in an attempt to seal in the warmth she’d stolen from the other two women as long as she possibly could. It would fade, in time, she knew, but she also knew just where she could go to get another helping.

Always welcome. What a fascinating concept.

---

Emily grinned as she watched Widowmaker leave, and then quirked an eyebrow back to the slightly shivering Lena leaning up against the wall. “Y’allright there, love? Need a hand?” Her grin sharpened deviously.

A fresh chill rolled down Tracer’s back, complementing the burning inside of her. “That… was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen,” she shook her head in disbelief as Emily leaned in with a giggle, planting a soft kiss on her lips.

“Did you like it?” She leaned back, swaying uncertainly - Lena always loved how cute she looked when she was acting just a little hesitant, and Emily knew it, playing it up whenever she could.

“I loved it,” Lena laughed slightly. “I- I mean, it just… it was really great.”

“Well, I’ve always known you liked seeing girls kiss - I mean, I’ve walked in on you enough times watching.”
“Alright!” Lena gasped, shaking her head and gaping. “I thought you said you were gonna go easy on the teasing?”

Emily giggled. “Oops. You’re just so cute when I do!”

Lena sighed. “I know,” she complained lightly with a bit of a chuckle. “And you two are gonna keep ganging up on me like that, aren’t you?”

Giggling brightly, Emily nodded - then a look flitted through her eyes and she leaned forward to purr in Lena’s ear. “And maybe in a few other ways, too, if you’re lucky.”

Once more, Lena’s knees threatened to give out on her as a plaintive whine flew past her parted lips. “So not fair,” she whispered, grinning widely and clutching at the lapels of Emily’s pyjamas. “Don’t stop.”

With a laugh, Emily grabbed her hand and tugged her toward the bedroom. “C’mon, I’ve had enough standing for one day and it looks like you’re about to collapse - let’s chat in bed a bit. You can tell me what all happened, and I’ll fill you in as well.”

“Oh, are you telling me I’ve got two secret spy girlfriends, now?” Tracer mused, rolling over in Emily’s lap so she could direct a grin upward. “I must’ve done something very right in a past life!”

The redhead giggled lightly and shook her head. “Or maybe in this one, silly,” she pinched at Lena’s
cheek with a yawn. “Ugh, I am just knackered, love. Thanks for letting me know and all, but I think it’s about time to be done for the night, eh?”

Lena nodded, pushing herself up and sliding over in the bed, her eyes feeling suddenly very heavy when her head hit the pillow. As Emily snuggled back up against her, she let out a bright and happy squeal and wrapped her arms tightly around her for a moment. “I love you, you know,” she murmured, giving Emily a kiss on the shoulder.

“Oh, huh. Really?” Emily feigned ignorance. “Well, that’s nice - why’ve you never said anything about it before?” They both giggled and Emily stretched an arm back over her shoulder to pet at Lena’s head. “I love you too.”

She flicked off the bedside lamp and it was silent for a few minutes.

“Where’d you find pyjamas?”

Emily gasped as the noise startled her from her half-sleep. “Love!” she protested, trying to suppress a laugh (but happily letting some of it out), “we’ve really got to sleep! I’ve got plenty of pyjamas and so do you - and there are so few opportunities to wear them, I felt like I should jump on it while I could.”

Lena giggled through her nose as she stroked a hand up Emily’s side - no fabric to prevent skin from brushing skin. “Well, they were cute, but I still like this better,” she murmured against Emily’s shoulder.

“I know, love,” Emily sighed with a smile, giving Lena’s hand a squeeze. “Now please - I love you so dearly. Shut up?”

Again, Lena giggled, but didn’t respond in words. She just nodded quickly, the tip of her nose streaking a short line across Emily’s shoulder, and then let herself drift off to sleep. It was bad enough that, in all likelihood, a nightmare would wake them both up - she didn’t need to go and make it worse by stopping Em from getting to sleep in the first place.

Tracer tried to keep her mind as far away from screeching jet engines and blaring alarms as she could while she was slowly enveloped by unconsciousness. Luckily, she had plenty of distractions lately; and one of her favourites was right there wrapped up in her arms.

She let her mind focus instead on that scene in the hallway, the pair of them in front of her; Widowmaker, tall and striking with her hair wrapped up in a towel above her armour, rifle slung over her shoulder. Emily, gorgeous and graceful with her coppery hair shining in the light. Freckled pale skin meeting blue, noises and motions and hands in hair.

Her mind drifted wonderfully from there.

Chapter End Notes

Hey folks! Welcome back again, and I want to take a minute to tell you folks that you're all wonderful. The fog's pretty much lifted (at least for now - I know it'll be back, but that's just the way these things go, heh) and I'm pretty much back to myself I think! I want to thank you all for being nice and wonderful, and generally for reading.
Today, I went to a book store, and picked up a collection of short stories by Stephen King. I like his writing, and I particularly love reading his forewords - there was a bit in this one I wanted to share with you folks. It's him talking about a story he released over the internet entitled "Riding the Bullet". It was very very successful (apparently), but ended up being a little bittersweet for him because when he was interviewed, the speakers were more concerned with the story's success than with the story itself. Here's what he had to say about it:

"But in the wake of "Bullet", all the guys in ties wanted to know was, "How's it doing? How's it selling?" How to tell them I didn't give a flying fuck how it was doing in the marketplace, that what I cared about was how it was doing in the reader's heart? Was it succeeding in there? Failing? Getting through to the nerve-endings?"

I loved that. I loved how it captured what I want about my own stories as well - obviously, nowhere near as successful as his, heh, but that's not the important part to me. I want to know what my story does to your heart, to your gut, to your skin; I want to hear about the goosebumps and the shivers and the times you wanted to grab me and smack me for what I did. About the times you scratched your head in confusion, or frowned at the screen and shook your head a little - I want to hear what my story is to you, and I love hearing it, so so much. Thank you so much for your comments, I love every single one of them - from the simplest "thanks!" to the longest paragraphs about symbolism and guesses for the plot's future. I love them all, I love you all, you drive me forward. Thank you. Thank you all so much.

...so now that that's out of the way, haha, on to this chapter! I liked it! The interplay between the three of them is nice; the contrast between Emily & Lena's practiced relationship codes, little glances that communicate volumes - going up against Emily and Widow's intuition and (maybe) scheming tendencies, and then the shorthands and fallbacks that Tracer and Widowmaker have developed as well. I hope it does a good job of illuminating some of the developments without them being explicitly on-screen - I like having things on-screen, but I also wanted to ensure that the plot would move forward at a decent speed.

However! If anyone's excited about seeing more of the development, please go ahead and say something - I'd love to write more things to help flesh this all out. :)

So, thank you all, and c'mon back next time for Sombra's little meeting with Winston and Athena. It goes about as could be expected (hint: Lena's not the only one out of her depth, heh). Then, it's off back to that conflict; same old story but with a different twist, as this time mother Ana joins her daughter out on patrol. Athena joins to oversee operations, but things take a drastic and worrisome turn.
Serious Summary: Pharah and Mercy get a bit of a shock during a quiet moment at camp. Winston and Athena meet up with Sombra and further their plans there, hoping to make some progress on the Black Tide. Ana joins her daughter and the rest of the Helix team on an important mission - one which takes a horrifying turn, particularly for the sniper herself. She struggles with the memories of a war past, omnic allies turning against their former friends, and her own daughter being at risk doesn't make anything easier for her. The Tide might recede but it never disappears.

JFL Summary: Athena knows more than Winston. Sombra knows more than Winston. Winston starts to feel like he's probably out of his depth. Angela accidentally says "I love you". Ana shoots everybody, starting with her own team. Mercy slaps Pharah.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: trauma and distress on the part of Ana, but I wouldn't say it's excessive. Deaths, but not particularly focused upon.

Previous Chapter Summary: Emily and Widdy finished off their dinner and had a nice chat, finding a second comfortable state; playful opposition in the streets and a sort of openness behind closed doors. Emily was very tired, however, and bid Widowmaker goodnight - the assassin almost left, before reconsidering and turning back into the house. As it turns out, she won't exactly do whatever Emily tells her to (and who's surprised about that?). Tracer returned home, hoping to surprise Emily. She did, but not before Widdy surprised her first. Unfortunately, their shower really wasn't large enough for three people; Tracer and Widowmaker left Emily alone for a minute, reconvening later for more talking. And a fair bit of taunting Tracer as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Hold still another moment. Keep your eyes closed.” Fareeha’s voice was thick with concentration, her lips pulled back and tongue caught between her teeth - a sure sign that she was intently focused. There was only one problem.

Angela thought that her concentration face was really, really cute, and she didn’t want to keep her eyes closed while Fari was making it. She cracked one of her eyes open and started to grin.

“I said don’t move!” Fareeha huffed a laugh, holding almost the whole side of Angela’s face in one of her hands while the other worked slowly and deliberately. “For starters, I might poke your eyes out. Also, you’ll mess up my work.”
“Okay,” the doctor smiled, “but I’d quite like to look at your pretty face again.” Her smile got a little lopsided. “Although, I suppose, until then, I can just fill in whatever images I want behind these eyelids…”

Fareeha’s own eyes widened a little as Angela’s grin grew wider and wider, and then the doctor bit at her bottom lip and that was just unfair. Fareeha pulled the makeup pencil away from Angela’s face. With a groan, her hand slipped to the back of Angela’s neck and tipped her head gently to the side.

Mercy wasn’t surprised in the slightest by the kiss, but she was entirely delighted by it. The wings of her Valkyrie suit fluttered a little as her heart rate skyrocketed, and she wore a huge silly grin as Fari leaned back away. Quite a blush, too.

“If you’re too cute, this will never get done,” Fareeha murmured darkly with a hidden smirk. “It’s really close now - just hold still.”

“Oh, Fari,” Angela sighed dreamily. “You’re quite magnificent, you know.”

A giggle and Fareeha shook her head. She couldn’t quite get over it - the way she felt around Angela, just so much more than she ever had before. She’d always been happy to be near her, but now? Ecstatic. Mercy had started to take more trips out to be a field medic - under various guises, but always with a side goal of spending more time together.

Sure, it was time spent in bombed-out buildings and burning streets, but it was time together and that was the important part. Fareeha wouldn’t have traded the mud-splattered venues for the most elaborate suites in Cairo if it meant abandoning her angel.

Of course, it was also absolutely terrifying. She felt like some deity was playing a bit of a prank on her, a trick based off of how she’d talked to her mother about some things. Not only was there the fear of being found out - although technically, neither of them were breaking any rules here - but there was a deeper fear, too. One she didn’t quite understand.

Although she had a sinking suspicion that she recognized it.

“...There,” Fareeha murmured as she put the final touch onto the last swoop. “Perfect.” She leaned back with a grin. “And my work’s not bad, either.”

Angela’s eyes fluttered open - momentarily stunned by the light, given how long they had been closed - and Fareeha lost herself in them for an instant. Or an eternity. Their blue depths felt so calm and yet so electric, entirely vital and enveloping, and Pharah thought she could look at them forever.

“A mirror, perhaps?” Angela grinned, bouncing in her chair slightly. “I’m really quite excited to see!”

“Oh, of course,” Fareeha chuckled, shaking her head as she grabbed the mirror she used to trim her hair when needed and held it out so the doctor could see her own reflection.

Mercy’s breath caught in her throat as she saw it. Her face looked much the same as it usually did - still pale, but with a bit more blood in the cheeks than normal - with the exception of a gorgeous addition. An Udjat, the Eye of Horus, rendered beautifully by Fari’s hand. Her heart swelled at the sight of it, at the knowledge of what it meant, and words failed her as her eyes started to glisten with tears.

Fareeha Amari was a strong woman. Still, there was little that could resist one of Angela Zeigler’s tackling hugs - particularly with the element of surprise, as the swiss woman launched herself heavily
out of the chair. She knocked Pharah right off of her stool and to the floor, where she peppered her face with kisses.

“I love it, I love it so much, Fari, and I love you too! I ju-”

Two sets of eyes - one bright blue, the other deep brown - widened as they locked. They’d never actually said that to each other before.

Angela’s mind went blank as her mouth dropped open a little. She definitely didn’t want to retract her statement because it was true, but she didn’t want Fari to feel pressured, and the soldier wasn’t saying anything anyway so it seemed like somebody should be talking, at least.

There was a knock at the door.

“Are you decent?” Ana’s husky voice drifted into the room.

“Mama,” Pharah gasped, her mind latching on to something it could actually register properly.

“Yes we are!” Angela called out in a panic, pushing herself up and standing quickly to her feet, offering Fareeha a hand up as well.

“Well, where is the fun in that?” Ana murmured as she pushed the door open with a grin and a chuckle. Glancing over the other two - disheveled hair and clothes, heavy blushes, wide eyes, rapid breathing - she coughed lightly. “Are you… quite certain I’m not interrupting anything?”

The two of them looked at each other in panic, each unable to talk.

Ana took that as enough of a ‘yes’ for her purposes, at least, and walked further into the room with a shrug, shutting the door behind herself. “Well, good morning, both of you. Doctor, I must say that I slept last night better than I have in decades, and I have only you to thank for it. I also like the Eye. It’s quite fitting - not only protection, but good health as well."

“Th-thank you,” Zeigler laughed lightly, nervously. “I am truly glad to hear that the medications helped. An eye should be kept out for side effects, still, of course - and thank you for the, um,” she cleared her throat and dropped the statement with a halfhearted gesture to the paint on her face. Her mind just continued to focus on how she’d just blurted out her love to Fari.

Ana’s one good eye flicked to her daughter, and over her. “And Fareeha, you look as if you’ve had quite a calisthenics already this morning.”

Pharah blushed more deeply and cleared her throat. “Yes. Well.” A change of topic would help. “Are you prepared for the day’s missions?”

“Quite,” Ana nodded. “I was checking in about that, in fact - it is slated to begin in fifteen minutes.”

Her daughter’s eyes widened even a little more as she looked over to the clock. It was blank. Off. Unplugged or broken. “Damnit!” She spun around and jumped to her locker as she started to tug off her pyjamas. She wore nothing underneath.

Angela made a noise and spun swiftly toward the door, clearing her throat heavily as Ana turned around to face away as well. The sniper’s lips twisted ever so slowly into a smirk as she could all but feel the blood rising into Mercy’s pale cheeks.

Mercy didn’t know what joke Ana was going to make, which button she’d decide to push this morning. Something about Fari being a good physical specimen, perhaps, or a quip about giving her
a check-up or maybe even just a mention of anatomy. Angela could hear them all in that darkly teasing voice, rattling around her head like a paint can.

“Careful, doctor,” Ana murmured out of the side of her lips, eye flicking over momentarily. “You look like you might pop.”

Angela tried to hum, but it came out half-whimpered. At least half. She couldn’t just open the door and leave because as far as she knew, Fari was still naked and her whole team was standing right outside of the door.

“Come,” Pharah clapped a hand on each of their shoulders, pushing them toward the door, already changed into a skintight, thin bodysuit that covered her from ankles to wrists - the underlayer for the Raptora armour. “Angela, you’re fine, just breathe. Mother, stop teasing her.”

Ana chuckled. “I was only concerned for her…”

“I’m sure,” Pharah murmured wryly, dropping her hands as they went through the doors. Usually she wore more over this, to cover her way to the hangar, but today could be an exception. She’d also been around base in substantially less if she was running or hitting the gym, it was no issue. She had very little care over how much of her skin or form other people saw.

Besides, between running through mission parameters, trying to figure out when and why her clock had broken, and trying not to think about what Angie had said (and failing entirely), there was very little space left in her mind anyway.

---

“Do you ever long for the old days when alliances were simpler?”

Winston laughed at Athena’s sly comment. “Which days exactly would those have been?”

She hummed a laugh that came from everywhere, as they always did. “All other things notwithstanding, I must admit I am… hesitant, about the prospect of teaming up with Sombra. Her skill is infamous.”

“Yeah,” Winston rubbed at his jaw, sighing. “However, the decision isn’t made yet-”

“Isn’t it?”

Large, soulful eyes searched the ceiling with surprise and a hint of despair. More than a little uncertainty, too. “Is it?”

Athena couldn’t clear her throat, of course, but she could make the noise. “I certainly see little else in the way of options, Winston. Progress must be made on the Black Tide virus - I have been researching the other outbreaks. Sudbury, eleven dead, two of them omnics. Obninsk, sixteen, three omnics. Winston, if this is released on a larger scale-”

“I know, I know,” he grunted, shaking his head and sighing heavily. “I want somebody else to do it. Not you.” He couldn’t bring himself to look up away from the floor.

“I know.” Athena rarely found herself wishing for physical form. Right now, however, a hug
sounded like something that might be worth giving up all of the rest of it. “I do too.”

Winston nodded idly.

“I will be safe. Even if we cannot trust her, I will be safe - and Sombra is known for many things, but betraying her clients is not one of them.”

“Yeah,” Winston muttered, shoving a stool away from himself with one foot. “I know. Conversation with her wasn’t even bad, really, with a few brief exceptions. It’s just…”

“Momentum is a powerful force,” Athena observed.

He laughed. “See, and when you say it that way, it sounds like something I’m willing to accept! Rather than just being a stubborn old ape.”

“It was my goal,” she hummed. “Now, it is nearly-”

The clock ticked over and interrupted her sentence, along with the arrival of Sombra. Not in person, of course, but rather taking over Winston’s phone’s screen again, as she had in Gibraltar.

“Hola, everybody!” She grinned, holding her arms wide on the tiny screen, then frowned. “Hey wait, where’s everybody?”

Winston rolled his eyes and tapped a few commands, sending her image through onto a large display on one wall instead. “You know the size of your screen doesn’t actually matter, right?”

Sombra cackled briefly. “Oh, mono, I’ve been telling guys that for ages but they never listen to me!”

He chuckled a little, uneasily, and then gestured widely to the room behind me. “Well, as much as I’d love to discuss that more, I should probably introduce the person of interest.”

“Athena,” Sombra’s eyes practically glowed as she grinned.

“Sombra.” Athena’s response was measured. Not curt, but not quite blank either.

“Always nice to see my reputation precede me,” she murmured with a smirk and then raised an eyebrow. “Would I be right to guess that our mutual friend here has filled you in on some things?”

“Some, yes,” Athena confirmed. “You wish to work alongside me in order to sequester and decipher the encrypted segments of the Black Tide virus.”

“Have you seen it yet?” The hacker’s eyes held a sort of anticipation that didn’t look excited, so much as nervous.

“I have prudently avoided it.”

Sombra actually shuddered a little. “Chica, lemme tell you this - I’ve seen some horrifying shit. This virus? It goes beyond that. I’ve only caught glimpses, but they were not good.”

“Mm. It seems quite zealous.”

“Infects anything it can, fries anything it can’t,” Sombra nodded. “But, y’know, we’re two pretty smart chicas. Working together, we should be able to give some little chunk of code a run for its money.”

Athena suspected quite strongly that the nonchalance was largely feigned. Particularly given the way
the woman’s hand twinged at the word ‘fries’. “It would be a substantial endangerment for myself.”

“Yeah, well, that’s what your Hephaestus Project’s for,” Sombra murmured idly, seemingly polishing something off of one of her bright purple fingernails. A slow grin spread over her lips as her eyes flicked toward the screen again. “Or did you two think I didn’t know about that little experiment?”

Athena was silent for a long moment as Winston kept a placid look on his face.

He didn’t know what the Hephaestus Project was. He’d never heard of it before - he knew many of Athena’s little projects, but not nearly all. It was a little worrying that Sombra knew some that he didn’t.

“I accept. A neutral location will need to be arranged - there is a former Overwatch facility that lies unused and unoccupied. Outside of Madrid. I have sent the co-ordina-”

“I see ‘em, chica,” Sombra nodded. “And I see the access codes, too - that’s cute of you, thinking I need a key.”

Athena hummed a chuckle. “I would not wish to be you, attempting to force entry to the facility. I will inform you up front: the systems there will be thoroughly sequestered from the remainder of the network as a security measure, in case the Black Tide virus does manage to escape the other containment protocols. You will be without communications, as will we.”

“We?” The word was spoken by both Sombra and Winston simultaneously.

“Yes. All three of us will meet there. One week at this time. Kindly knock before entering.”

“You’re lucky you’re hot, chica,” Sombra muttered. “I don’t normally let people order me around like this!”

Athena couldn’t smirk, but she could still somehow manage to sound like she was. “Goodnight, Sombra - do not think I haven’t noticed your pings to ancillary systems during the conversation.”

She laughed brightly, waving at the screen with a wide grin. “Hey, can’t blame a girl for poking around, right? Nice playing with ya, chica - see you tomorrow. And one more thing, Athena?” She leaned in toward the screen, her grin sharpening as her eyes sparkled darkly. “I can’t wait to see it.”

The frame froze on the display for a second and then went black entirely. Winston sighed and rubbed at his neck, still feeling entirely unsettled by the whole thing.

“What exactly is-”

“Project Hephaestus,” Athena explained, pre-empting his actual question with the answer, “is an attempted interface system which would permit me to inhabit an empty omnic shell - a replica of my Artificial Intelligence network, impressed upon a positronic brain in a mobile frame. A… perhaps vain attempt at possessing the ability to have a body.”

Winston wasn’t sure he’d ever heard Athena really sound uncertain before. He looked up in concern and a bit of confusion.

“There are many things of which I am incapable. Hephaestus was - and is - a bid to remove those barriers, in a manner which remote-controlled drones do not permit. It has proven to be somewhat successful, at least.”
“So you’ll be there in an omnic body?” Winston sighed a little, tipping his head to one side. “Or rather, a duplicate of you. I’ve got to admit, that does make me feel a little bit better. At least it won’t be the primary version of you at risk.”

She hummed slightly, not really certain if the difference in consciousness could be adequately explained. Whether she could make it clear that the Athena in the omnic would be her just as much as she was - it was a question not necessarily worth delving into given the other issues at hand.

“It will permit us to close the Faraday cage,” she explained further, “in addition to providing other barriers along the way. I also plan on maintaining observation from outside of the cage - only through a remote link, however. Not a full active presence.”

“If I recall correctly, the Madrid facility couldn’t maintain it anyway,” Winston rubbed at his chin with a slow grin.

“Correct. That was one of the additional measures.”

He reclined into his chair with a long, drawn-out, and resigned sigh. “It sounds like you’ve thought this through pretty thoroughly.”

“And you sound as if you are surprised by that,” Athena hummed humorously.

Winston chuckled, shaking his head. “Yeah, yeah. It feels like we’re playing chess all over again.” He drew in a deep lungful of breath and let it out slowly, trying to let it peel all of the anxiety from his body. It didn’t quite work, but it was something.

“Out of curiosity,” Athena’s voice softened, “how did Tracer react to Sombra?”

The rest of Winston’s breath left swiftly. Whether it was a huff, or a laugh, or a grunt, he couldn’t have really said. He paused for a moment. “Dramatically,” was what he eventually settled upon as a descriptor. As much as he would trust Athena to not overreact to the news, he also didn’t want to spread his friend’s secret for her.

“Mm. I wonder to what extent we may find ourselves working with Talon’s various auxiliaries in the future?” Her voice carried a bit of a dark tint. “I must admit, it is an intriguing concept. I also suspect that I should be grateful to not have a gut or a spine. I would think they would be roiling and crawling right now, respectively.”

“Yeah, well, we can share mine,” Winston grumbled, “they’re doing enough of each of those for the both of us.” He chuckled and Athena laughed lightly. It did help him feel a little better, at least.

“I shall do my best to share in that, but I doubt my chances of success,” she joked lightly, then shifted back to the topic at hand. “I have directed drones at Madrid to begin the construction of a Faraday cage in the manner of the one here. To clean up, as well.”

“You can’t blame any peanut butter jars on me,” he chuckled. “I was never stationed there!”

“Hmm, a likely story,” Athena hummed - then made a slight noise as her attention was diverted.

“Ah. Ana and Pharah require my attention, it would seem.”

“Go ahead,” Winston nodded as he loped toward the door. “I’ve got some things of my own to prepare in advance of tomorrow. Good luck, and let me know if I can help out in any way.”

“You as well, Winston.”
Pharah’s team - or at least, her team at the moment, consisting of Turner, Bjornsson, Zao, and T’chou - were all waiting assembled by the wall. Pharah showed up twelve seconds before the clock ticked over to the assigned meeting time. A new personal worst.

Nobody mentioned it.

She had her Raptora suit on but her helmet off, as did all four of them. Ana, on the other hand, was wearing her normal outfit - lightly armoured, primarily for mobility, with her cape and her hood. Mercy had departed for her own work.

“Team,” Pharah nodded, “I’d like to introduce you to the very illustrious soldier who will be accompanying us on our mission today. She’s been in camp a while, but today she’ll be joining us on our patrol. She has a history stretching back further than any of us can remember and longer than most of us have been alive, decorated in multiple forces - Egyptian military and Overwatch, most notably - and will be providing us with sniper support and medical. Might I introduce to you all, my mother, Ana Amari.”

Ana waved with a slight nod, rifle leaned back against her shoulder. “A pleasure to meet you all.”

“Trust me, the pleasure is all theirs,” Pharah smirked and the team chuckled briefly. She pointed them out one at a time as she stated their names. “Turner, Bjornsson, Zao, and T’chou.”

“Gesundheit,” Ana quipped immediately and Pharah’s smirk split into a grin as T’chou spluttered.

“Not fair,” T’chou complained with a scowl, “getting me all distracted by Horus and then springing on me like that! I was defenceless.”

All of them (except for Zao) laughed, as her eyes widened. “Horus?” Zao’s voice was soft as she stood a little straighter, shaking her head. “I thought-” she cleared her throat, dropping her eyes.

Ana’s eyes flicked to her daughter, and Fareeha nodded slightly. The old sniper stepped forward half a pace. “What is it, Zao?”

She glanced around nervously, then shrugged. “My father fought alongside Horus during the Omnic Crisis. I heard many stories - including that you were dead.”

“What was his name?” Ana’s face wore an expression that wasn’t overly common. A sort of soft nostalgic care. It didn’t go unnoticed that she didn’t address the rumour of her own death, but it did go unmentioned.

“Asim. Asim Kheder.”

Ana’s face crinkled as it shifted into a wide grin. “Ah, Asim! Yes, I remember him - did he ever tell you about the shoelace plague?” She chuckled, shaking her head and glancing to Fareeha who rolled her eyes as if to say, ‘Now is really not the time’. “How is he?”

“He was good,” Zao cleared her throat a little. “Passed away last year.” She was quite nervous about springing the news.
Unnecessarily, as it turned out - Ana’s grin never faltered, she just shook her head again with another chuckle. “He always did say he’d outlast me. I will raise a glass in his honour tonight. In fact, I’ll buy a round for us all in his honour - now,” she glanced back to Pharah and cleared her throat.

“Yes,” Pharah stepped forward, helmet under her arm. “We should all be quite glad to have her at our backs today, because our mission target is entrenched to say the least. Helix has received worrying information about a staging facility nearby - I trust you all read the briefs?”

The team nodded, but it was standard procedure to outline anyway. Pharah had been working on walking the line between levity and efficiency, between commander and friend to her team. She had been for a while, and had been making large improvements.

Kneeling down, Phara started to scrape a diagram into the ground with one finger. “An old automotive facility; barbed-wire topping concrete walls, fifteen feet high. The outside will be no issue - interior?” She chuckled. “There, we will find some problems.”

Quickly, she sketched out a blocky shape - the building itself, and the interior as well. Two large rooms and a trio of small ones in between the pair. She tapped at the diagram as she spoke. “The doors will likely be barred. A quiet breach is off of the table. Expect troops armed with assault rifles, shotguns, SMG, possible explosives. A risk of automated defences as well. The reason we need to press the assault now, is what the factory is currently involved in.”

Glancing up to the others, she tapped at the two large rooms. “At least one of these assembly lines is active - power surges started a few days ago. At first, the cause was unknown, but an intercepted shipment of resources and partial schematics made it clear: they are manufacturing some sort of large assault vehicle. Whether it will be coming at us, or one of the other forces, we don’t know and don’t care.”

“I’d definitely mind less if it’s one of the others,” Bjornsson muttered and Turner elbowed him with a snicker.

“We are talking about quite a large vehicle here, Bjornsson,” Pharah glanced up with a quirked eyebrow. “Tell you what: when we get in there, you can take it on, and the rest of us will handle the grunts, hmm?”

The group laughed as Bjornsson recoiled a little and waved. Ana hadn’t received any of the briefing materials beforehand - she’d wanted this trip to be a surprise, after all - but she’d reviewed them since her arrival. An assault vehicle didn’t sound good, but she’d fought similar things before. “Is it active, then?”

A moment of tense silence followed.

“Unknown,” Pharah responded.

Ana nodded. “If it is, it would be best to fight it inside if possible. I understand your mobility will be hampered, but not nearly as much as its will - if it has cannons, they would likely not risk using them in any situation where they could entrap themselves in rubble.” She sketched a few lines in one of the assembly-line rooms. “Split up to the sides, they won’t be able to concentrate fire on a group - likely only small armaments; machine gun or pulse lasers, something of the sort.”

She tapped at the three small rooms which separated the two assembly lines from each other. “These are offices?” Pharah nodded and Ana glanced them over. “Is one in particular intended for the foreman?”
“Yes,” Pharah tapped the central room, and Ana nodded once more, gouging a swift rendition of the Eye of Horus in it.

“That is where I will be. Windows will give sight-lines into either assembly: if you are injured, find a line to me and don’t dodge.”

The four of them - now half-crouched around the impromptu map - sent up a chorus of confused murmurs.

Ana tugged out a dart and held it out between her fingers. “These darts contain nanites which will repair your wounds. If you want to be healed, you need to get shot.”

“What does it feel like?” Turner asked hesitantly. He didn’t have a chance to do anything else before Ana snapped the rifle to her shoulder and fired almost point-blank. “Ah!” He flinched backward, falling on his ass in the dirt and clutching at his armpit where a dart protruded from between two armour plates. He tried in vain to grab it out, reflexively, but only for a second before he tipped his head to the side thoughtfully. “Huh. Not too bad, really. Bit of a pinch at first. Cold.”

“Actually,” Pharah grinned a little, “it might not be a bad plan to familiarize the whole team, don’t you think?” She flashed her mother a wider grin as the others slowly started to back away.

They never got a chance. Ana’s hands practically blurred at the rifle’s bolt as she fired a dart at each of them in turn. It only took a couple of seconds They each recoiled and gasped or shouted as the injection started, a cold and distinctly painful pinch but followed by a rush of soothing warmth.

After they all patted at their bodies, reassuring themselves that they were okay - and tugged the darts out as well, of course - they came in closer again. “Well, that was new,” T’chou muttered darkly as she rubbed at her arm where the dart had struck. “But I suppose it’s best to know beforehand…”

Ana chuckled and held her rifle across her chest. Then, with her one good eye twinkling, she tugged the trigger and embedded a dart in the side of Pharah’s chest. Everyone’s eyes flew wide as she cried out and grasped at her side, her armoured hand crushing the little glass capsule. She fixed the sniper with a smoldering glare.

“What?” Ana turned to her nonchalantly, plucking the remainder of the dart free as Pharah huffed in response. A warm chuckle emanated from deep in Ana’s chest. “You said to familiarize everyone.”

---

The facility itself looked much like anything else here - dusty and decrepit, with a few bullet holes and one larger crater punched through a corner where a stray explosive had hit. Two of the team - Zao and T’chou, who had won the games of rock-paper-scissors - held Ana’s arms and boosted her over the complex’s outer wall with their jets. There were a few guards dotted about but Pharah, Bjornsson, and Turner took care of them quickly.

Shouts came from the main assembly building and shots began to pop out of a couple of the windows. The team returned fire. Scissors beat paper; rockets beat glass. Shards and shrapnel flew as the soldiers inside the facility abandoned that tactic and retreated - shouts could be heard distantly from within the factory, and then nothing.

“Athena?” Ana tapped at her communicator. “We could use an active presence, if you can spare the
time."

There was a pause for a few seconds, and then a soft noise that heralded the AI’s arrival. While she couldn’t fit the entirety of her consciousness within any of the equipment they had there, there was still much she could do.

“Greetings, Miss Amari.”

“For the time being, I think ‘Horus’ will suffice,” Ana smirked.

“Of course. How may I be of assistance?”

“Whatever you can bring to bear would be appreciated.” She shook her head, exhaling forcefully. Bureaucracy had never been a joy of hers, and it bound their wrists today. “Technically, Helix has not approved my - or your - presence here.”

“Not a full tactical presence, then.”

Ana grunted, taking a shot at an opportunist who tried to flee from one corner of the building. “Unfortunately, that is correct. However, you have access to whatever I grant, as well as a tie into Fareeha’s systems. Satellite surveillance, perhaps? We expect s-”

A harsh electronic screeching over the comm had her clutching at her ears. She crumpled to one knee, unable to notice the other team members being similarly affected. Every one of them cried out, unheard amid the electric shriek, doubling over or falling to the ground in pain.

It was worst for Turner, who was twenty feet up in the air when the phenomenon struck. His jets sputtered erratically and he spiralled, slamming heavily into the ground - nobody had the presence of mind to even notice at first.

For a few seconds, they all just writhed. Then it was over, as quickly and inexplicably as it had started. The team started to get back to their feet with groans and hisses and swears, the general chorus of lingering pain being broken by Bjornsson’s sharp shout.

“Turner!” He sprinted over to his fallen comrade, falling to a knee as Pharah joined him and shoved at the limp form. There was a groan.

“Are you hurt?” Pharah inquired, taking a knee, and he managed to shake his head. “Take your time, don’t t-”

Screams came from within the factory. Screams and gunfire. A lot of each. It stopped all of the groans, all of the chatter, and brought all eyes to the windows. They were lit up with flashes and flickering silhouettes on the walls, like some fragment of a horror movie brought to life.

“What is happening?” Ana murmured, brow furrowing as she tapped at her communicator again. “Athena?”

“Th-the-th-” The synthetic voice over the comm system sounded strained, pained - far more electronic and echoing than normal, tearing like a corrupted video file.

Ana’s frown deepened as the gunfire started to trail off. “Athena? What is it?”

“Th-the ti-ti- the tide- r- r- r- r-”

One dark eye widened as the old sniper’s blood started to chill in the desert sun. They’d all heard the
recording. She couldn’t bring herself to speak again as Athena’s voice continued to stutter half-syllables, but never quite completed the phrase.

Then it went silent.

*Everything* went silent. The gunfire, the screams, Athena. Even the war at a distance seemed to be soundless.

“...mother?” Pharah’s voice cut clearly through the courtyard. She alone amongst the team had been able to hear Athena as well.

Ana just shook her head and held up a finger.

“A-aa-activating Protocol Omega,” a harshly electronic version of Athena’s normal tone came over the radio. “Firewalling... the tide... purging... overwriting... purging... physical purge commencing... reallocating...”

There was a beep.

“Miss Am-” Athena cut herself off with a hum. “Horus? My systems indicate that Protocol Omega has been activated.”

“What is that protocol?” Ana’s voice was as cold as her blood, her hand tight around her rifle, but if Athena had become infected somehow…

“An ultimate failsafe in the event of possible intrusions on my main systems. Total data firewall and short-term memory purge - including physical destruction of both data and processor banks allocated to temporary operations. Thirty seconds of cognition and memory, lost.”

“Lost to what extent?”

“Total loss. I have no memories whatsoever of the events during the Protocol, nor any remnants of thought. All apparatus involved in processing the events have been destroyed entirely.” There was a brief pause. “It has never been enacted outside of test cycles before. What has occurred?”

Ana took a deep breath, trying to calm her shaking hands. Visions of blue sensors flickering to red filled her mind’s eye; trauma from decades ago that had surfaced in a flood at the tearing sound of the AI’s voice.

One wall of the factory was flung suddenly outward in an explosion of rubble. Bricks and chunks of metal fell and bounced off of huge armoured plates as a massive, six-legged walking tank crashed its way through the wall.

“THE TIDE RISES.” Some sort of announcement system, speakers, sounded from it - loud and harsh enough to shake everyone from their shock.

“AIR! NOW!” Pharah shouted and everyone complied instantly - except for Turner, whose systems were offline. Ana sprinted forward toward him as the tank’s machine guns opened fire. There were two of them on either side of a large main cannon; they began to independently track members of the Helix team as they fired rocket salvos down at it.

“Athena,” Ana swallowed heavily, jabbing a dart down into Turner’s arm as her eyes fixated on the tank. A massive array of red optisensors dotted a dome in its centre.

Flaps on the rear legs flipped open and missiles began to streak forth as its speakers blared again.
“ALL SHALL FEAR THE TIDE. CLEANSING COMES.” They seemed not to be shouts, as much as they were simply painfully loud statements.

T’chou launched herself forward in the air, toward the missiles, and popped her chaff and flares. Shreds of foil laced with IR-blockers exploded from her back as a flurry of small brightly-burning flares ejected from thigh-mounted launchers, and she shut off her jumpjets.

Clutching her knees to her chest, she rolled forward through the air as the missiles danced around her and focused on their main targets - which were now the hot and high-electronic-signature flares and chunks of foil. A chorus of explosions shunted her further forward through the air but she hit her jets again before colliding with the tank’s hull, and flew up to safety as it tried to redirect a pulse-laser at her.

The rest of the team took advantage of the distraction, unleashing massive salvos from their Raptora suits, hundreds of tiny rockets swirling through the air toward the tank.

“Do not attempt suppression. Corruption risk.” Ana grunted to Athena as she snapped her rifle to the ready and began to pump rounds out - alternating between team members and the huge armoured omnic. T’chou, tank, Fareeha, tank, Bjornsson, tank, Fareeha, tank, Zao, tank, Fareeha…


“Concentrate fire between the legs,” Ana commanded over the radio, giving Zao a second shot as a turret swept across her and struck her with a few rounds. “Heat sinks. Destroy them.”

“We see them,” Pharah confirmed as her helmet’s visor highlighted the hot area on the omnic’s main body. “Turrets are focusing low targets - get high and pick them off.” As one, the team lifted further into the air.

Pharah’s heart hammered as the rocket launcher shoved back against her hands with recoil. The indicator at the side of her vision warned her that she didn’t have much air-time left, and none of the others would be doing much better. They needed to get those turrets out of commission before they could move in on the sides.

The tank’s main cannon fired, tearing a massive hole through the wall surrounding the compound. It began to march that way, evidently not dedicating the whole of its attention to the Helix team. It was heading out into the city. “ALL SHALL FEAR THE TIDE.”

If it didn’t change course, it was going to march directly toward the camp.

Pharah’s teeth ground in concentration and frustration as she let loose everything she had at the tank, but to no effect. A flashing warning in her peripheral vision warned her that soon she would have no choice about continuing engagement, her jets were about to cut off regardless. Damn. “Fall back to position Charlie for regroup and recharge.”

The tank wandered off, ceasing its fire at them as other targets took priority. In the streets outside of the compound, soldiers burst out of doors and onto rooftops - roused by explosions and shouts, they began to fire on the massive omnic as it stepped through cars and shop-fronts alike.

“ALL SHALL FEAR THE TIDE.” It fired seemingly indiscriminately as the Helix team regrouped. Turner was walking now, the semi-magical biotic solution even patching up his flight systems. It worked on machinery as well as on flesh. Ana loosed another shot off at each of the team as they came close.
Pharah dropped immediately to one knee, digging deeply into the dirt. A quick depiction of the omnic - a circle with six lines coming out from it, and two little crosses and a rectangle at the front. “Bjornsson and T’chou, left turret - chaff, flare, punch it close. Get through that armour.” She glanced up to T’chou with a dark grin that barely showed underneath the curved beak of her helmet. “Let all of your crazy out.”

T’chou laughed once and saluted, but Pharah didn’t slow in her orders. “Turner and Zao, right turret. Somebody landed a lucky shot and it’s slower - rain hell, crack it like an egg.” A distant thump signaled the main cannon firing again, and an explosion sounded a few seconds later. Jets screamed in the distance as aircraft began to approach.

“You and I?” Ana queried, looking to her daughter with more worry behind her flat expression than she would ever admit. It was all she could do to hold on. Her mind was filled with red-glowing sensors and blue-lipped scowls, bullets and shards of glass and pain, and her knuckles gripped white on the rifle’s grip.

“I,” Pharah huffed a sigh, tapping in front of the tank - somebody had to do the bad job, and she wouldn’t pin it on anybody else. “Am bait. I will be moving quickly. You remember when I wanted to join El Ahly?” Ana nodded. “Like that, except more… vertical.”

Ana let out a brief laugh, the thoughts of Fareeha as a child simultaneously calming her and sharpening her anxiety’s edge. “I will try to keep up,” she murmured through a smirk.

“Once the turrets are out, fall to ground and group fire on the heat sinks. Same sides. Questions?” Pharah’s eyes scanned her team, unanimously shaking their heads. “Move out.”

They moved with more purpose and more precision than the omnic tank, by far. Zao and T’chou once again gripped Ana’s arms and propelled her through the skies as below them all, a bubble of even more intense chaos drifted through the city.

Firing almost randomly, the tank was chaotic in its destruction. This building it demolished, the next it left untouched while unleashing a flurry of missiles at a row of empty cars the next street over. The only thing about it that seemed deliberate was its path - it walked straight and steadily toward the camp, while doling out devastation around itself seemingly without concern.

An aircraft swooped past, its cannon blunting out lead for a few seconds before the pulse-turret peppered it with bright flashes. It exploded almost instantly, raining debris down on the tank which sloughed off like glittering rain.

Zao and T’chou dropped Ana off on a rooftop in front of the omnic, where she crouched behind a low decorative wall. They took their positions, reporting in one at a time.

Below her, Ana could see Fareeha standing around a corner - soon to emerge into the street and try to draw the tank’s attention. Her heart clenched erratically, she wiped a tear from her cheek, she dropped her head to the rifle’s stock. The rest of the world ended, everything beyond the edge of the lens fading into an almost unreality. She had her rifle. Butt against shoulder, stock against cheek, finger against the trigger-guard, strap pulling snugly against the back of her loosely-curled hand at the forestock.

Pharah stepped out into the street. Her first rocket went unnoticed, but when the second struck the lumbering machine’s optisensor, it swept both turrets to the front and tried to shred her to pieces. Too quickly for it, she launched into the air and released another rocket, but the turrets swiftly followed.

Ana tracked her daughter’s movements as she dodged and bobbed across the sky - cutting her jets to
fall under the path of a turret’s fire, or igniting them to hop up and away from a stream of laser pulses. Some struck her, but Ana was quick on the trigger and sure in her aim, she never missed and she never hesitated, though her heart slammed against her ribs and pumped icy hot blood through pained veins.

T’chou’s first rocket did seemingly nothing from twenty feet away as she burst through Bjornsson’s cloud of foil, but she knew how important this was. No third chances. She spun in mid-air, launched herself back, and jammed her launcher right into a small opening - the turrets sprang up from armoured domes, and there was a slot there. Just barely.

*All my crazy. Okay.*

Gritting her teeth and hitting her jumpjets, she pulled the trigger before letting her hand get ripped loose of the launcher. It exploded and added its concussion to her jets, flinging her up and sideways to collide with a storefront. Bjornsson fell down next to her, immediately starting to open fire on the heat-sinks as T’chou struggled weakly to sit up. Most of her suit was flashing red on her visor, but one shoulder launcher was still functional and she unleashed it.

Ana spared her a shot before returning her focus to Pharah, as off to the side, Zao and Turner let out massive swarms of missiles. Their cloud of explosions obscured the turret from view, but the lasers stopped flying and they dropped to the ground.

The last pulse to be fired clipped one of Pharah’s jets and sent her swerving abruptly to one side. Ana snapped off a shot but it flew wide and she could only watch as her daughter bounced off of a roof and then swirled to the ground, propelled harshly by one jet which wouldn’t shut off for several seconds. She was shoved along the ground and slammed into a wall before the jet finally sputtered and stopped.

Ana didn’t think before leaping off of the rooftop, didn’t pause to consider old joints or lack of armour or the still very much alive omnic down the street in front of her. Didn’t think about the fact that its main cannon was pointed directly toward her. Fareeha was hurt, and *nothing* would keep her away.

Something in one of her legs strained and snapped as she hit the ground in a roll, and she cried out, flinging the biotic grenade on the ground in front of her as she scrambled forward. It took only a second and a half for the damaged ligament to be repaired and she gained her footing again, running the twenty feet to the limp Fareeha in only a few seconds.

She slid to her knees, tugging at her daughter’s helmet and pulling out a dart. Gently, she slipped it into the armour-gap at the inside of Fareeha’s elbow, getting a soft groan in return. Smiling with a little laugh, Ana cradled her daughter’s head as tears slowly slid down one cheek.

“Five more minutes, I’m tired,” Fareeha croaked, eyes still closed but grinning slightly. An alarm sounding made her wince. “Taking it a little far there, aren’t we, Mama?”

Ana couldn’t even think to respond, other than to hug at Fareeha’s head with a shout of laughter. The moment was interrupted by the team’s arrival as the alarm continued to sound.

“It appears to be overheating,” Athena informed in Ana’s ear, and she nodded before looking up to the others.

T’chou was almost doubled over, hanging off of Bjornsson’s shoulder, her armour mostly destroyed. Pharah flipped herself over and pushed herself to her feet, slowly but steadily, glancing at the others. “Evac. Turner and Bjornsson, with T’chou - she can’t make it out on her own.”
“Sh’up I’m fine,” she grumbled heavily.

“Now.” Pharah smirked, stepping closer to link an arm with her mother. “Zao, with me. Let’s blow this joint. Last one to touch ground buys the ice cream.”

They were gone five seconds later, leaving the fighting behind. The massive omnic was overheating, but not down yet - it continued to plow through the city and even managed to get off another shot from its main cannon before its reactor went critical.

---

The call had gone around the camp, but it had been very unclear. Some people said there was an airstrike inbound, others said artillery, others said infantry. The general consensus was that something bad was heading toward camp, and Angela knew that Fari would have found some way to end up involved.

The doctor’s phone rang. She pulled it out with a frown, and then her eyes widened a little as she read the name on the display.

“Athena?” she lifted the phone to her ear, audio only.

“Yes. Hello, Doctor Zeigler. Miss Amari wished me to inform you that she is quite alright and they are returning to camp.”

“Oh, oh thank you, Athena,” Mercy laughed lightly in relief, then cocked her head to one side. “Um… if I might ask, which Miss Amari?”

“Both of them.”

Angela blinked as an explosion rose up above the horizon. It took a moment for the sound to reach them, deep and rumbling.

“Ah,” she nodded, eyes fixed on the rising cloud of flames and smoke. “I see. I shall prepare my greetings accordingly. Thank you Athena, very much, for your call.”

“Of course, Doctor - have a good day.”

---

“Did she sound angry?”

Athena hummed. “I do not think I would use that term, precisely.”

Pharah’s head slumped a little, her helmet cutting out most of the noise of wind and jumpjets as the AI’s voice filtered into her ear. “Ugh. That’s a yes.”
Angela was waiting with her arms crossed, quickly gesturing medics forward to grab T’chou and rush her off. One went to each of the others for inspections as the doctor herself gestured Pharah forward.

Ana slapped gently at the hands which probed at her. “Nonsense,” she refused when they explained they were examining her for injuries, “I will tell you if I am injured. Now leave an old woman alone and do something useful.” The aide hesitated for a moment but quickly wilted under the concentrated glare of the Eye of Amari.

To her credit, Angela managed to withhold all action until she had led Pharah around a corner and into an empty - if open - tent. Then she grabbed at Fari’s armour and pulled her forward, kissing her desperately before she gave her a shove backward and slapped her face.

Hard.

“Ow,” Angela pouted, shaking her hand as Fareeha stared in disbelief, one hand on her cheek.

“I believe that’s my line?” she protested, straightening up and pulling a sad smile over her face.

“Angie, I’m sorry, I-”

Her words were cut off as Mercy all but jumped on her, pulling her forward for another kiss, deep and passionate. The wings of her Valkyrie suit fluttered and she let her knees give out, knowing that Fari would catch her in those strong arms.

She did.

“I love you, Fareeha,” the doctor murmured as she stared into those dark eyes. “You scared the living daylights out of me. You don’t need to say it back, but I needed to tell you, I love you.”

The slap had been far less stunning. Pharah’s eyes widened, her heart raced, her breaths quickened, but her arms never even tried to loosen their grip for a second as they held her blonde angel close. Those blue eyes held so much - promise and pleasure and pain, the lingering aftershocks of fear and overwhelming waves of love, but no judgement. No expectation.

“Thank you,” Fareeha whispered, her dark eyes glistening. “I-” her throat closed off as she tried to return the gesture. Tried, and failed, to say that she loved Angela too. She coughed to be able to speak again, and changed tactics. “You are so wonderful. I needed that. You. Thank you.”

Angela’s wings fluttered a little as she laid her head forward against the battle-scarred armour of Fari’s shoulder. She didn’t need to say it, it was right there in her eyes and her smile, her kisses and her strong arms. Mercy didn’t need the words.

A now-familiar throat being cleared pulled the pair from their reverie. “I would tell you two to get a room,” Ana murmured through a grin, “but given that it is the one in which I am currently staying, that would be counterproductive.”

Fareeha let the doctor down to the ground again, but she didn’t let go entirely - she kept one hand wrapped around her waist, and Angela laid one of her own overttop of it a second later with a faint smile.

“Not meaning to interrupt,” Ana dipped her head a little as she stepped closer, “but I was wondering
“If I might borrow the good doctor there?”

“I should get this to mechanical anyway,” Pharah admitted with a nod, but she hesitated for a moment before leaving, caught on a decision. It didn’t take long, though - they rarely did. She leaned in and gave Angela a quick kiss, stroking at her cheek. “Bye, Angie,” she murmured before dropping her hands away and turning to leave.

Angela’s grin was wide and bright, but as she turned back to Ana she cleared her throat and very much assumed the role of doctor. “Now, Miss Amari, how can I be of aid?”

Ana watched her daughter go, almost counting the footsteps. As she got out of sight, the sniper leaned forward, grabbing for Zeigler’s shoulder with a shaking hand. Mercy stepped in with concern etched on her face, supporting Ana as her body began to shiver.

“I-I believe,” her normally husky voice was now outright hoarse, and she shook her head as the sentence failed to coalesce. “Sedate me, Doctor Zeigler. Please. I- I cannot-” she started to crumble to her knees as her hold began to slip even further. She pressed a fist against her own arm in the start of an attempt to fire off her sleep dart at herself, but she fell limp too soon and started to slump to the wooden floor. Screaming voices and grasping hands stretched out from her memories, dragging her down.

Mercy caught her as she fell, easing her way to the floor and resting her on her side. As Ana’s knees curled up against her chest, as she started to be wracked with shakes, the doctor pulled open a pack at her belt and withdrew a vial and a syringe.

Later, she would want to work out a proper medication to help combat some of this, but for now a sedative would need to do. She quickly swabbed at a swatch of skin and then slipped the needle in, gently injecting the syringe’s contents.

The doctor pulled Ana’s head and upper body gently into her lap, holding her and rocking her as the shakes started to lessen and then receded entirely. When she was entirely still save for her gentle breathing, Mercy lifted her up and started to carry her through the camp to Fari’s tent. Nobody would stop her, nor question her. They were used to seeing the doctor carry her patients, and not a one of them would dare intrude.

Chapter End Notes

Another day, another chapter! I hope you folks are all still liking it - this one gets back to furthering the overarching plot again, of course, along with some more of the backgrounds. One of the really fascinating and wonderful things to me about Overwatch - and something I love in general about the things I enjoy, be they books or movies or games - is the depth of it. The way the characters all interact, the tangled web of happenstances and intentions that bring them together and push them apart in all of their various ways. I love stories where it always seems like plenty is happening, even if it's not seen - the world doesn't stop at the edge of your apartment, and it doesn't cease spinning when you close your eyes. It's alive and it's moving, all the time, and I hoped to capture a bit of that with this story.

Possible downside? It might be a little disorienting, and I hope I managed to avoid that. I think, perhaps, I ran into a bit of a problem by writing this pretty consistently, but uploading it periodically - when I wrote this, it had only been a couple of hours since I'd
last been writing about the Black Tide. Reading it now, though, it'll have been a week since you read about Winston and Tracer's conversation with Sombra, and several weeks since you saw the Tide's actual effects.

I hope that delay didn't cause any problems or confusion. I honestly think this story might end up being better for people who read through it all at once, rather than people who keep up-to-date as the chapters come out - but that's just my opinion. I'd be interested to hear yours, too!

Or, for that matter, to hear anything else from you! What you like or don't like, either generally or in particular relating to this story. If there's something you want to see from me, please ask! Either here in a comment or by sending a message on Tumblr or Discord; I love getting prompts or suggestions!

Come on back next time, when all of the action fades away for a moment, for a day at least. Widdy, Lena, and Emily find a little bit of time for themselves. Of course, it starts with Widowmaker being quite creepy indeed.
A Brief Reprieve

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Nighttime stalking, traumatic nightmares, and breakfast as Widowmaker decides to wage a psychological war. Her opponent? Tracer's past trauma.

JFL Summary: Widowmaker's creepy (seriously) but nobody says it and lives. Tracer's a ghost until she wakes up and fucks up cooking breakfast. Emily likes eating, Lena, Widdy, and sweet gestures, and she gets a little bit of all of them. Widowmaker gets internally overly poetic (surprise, surprise).

Chapter Notes

Warnings: traumatic recollections, fear.

Translations in the end notes.

Previous Chapter Summary: Angela and Fareeha shared a few moments, and a little panic, when Mercy confessed her love. Ana interrupted them and went out on patrol with Fareeha. Athena and Sombra met, and agreed to go ahead with a plan to decipher the Black Tide Virus - involving something Sombra called "Project Hephaestus". Winston hadn't heard of the project but Athena filled him in: it's a way for her to duplicate herself into an omnic body, essentially.

On patrol, the Black Tide Virus was released and took over a massive walking omnic tank. It also corrupted some of Athena's systems, resulting in a failsafe being deployed after which she seemed to be free from adverse effects. While the team made it out alive, the combination of Ana's past trauma from the Omnic Crisis, and seeing Fareeha so near to harm, took its toll on the older sniper's mind. Angela helped her deal with the symptoms as best as possible, and vowed to herself to find better ways moving forward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Widowmaker wondered idly as she watched (and not for the first time) what they might think, if they found out - and how long it would take them. With a grin, she realized that she was somewhat surprised that at least Emily hadn’t noticed yet. Her cherry was surprisingly observant.

They just looked so peaceful. Her mouse, snoring loudly on her back. Her cherry on her side, drooling lightly into the pillow. It was pleasant enough to watch through a scope, but it was far more
One of these days, she would need to take Emily up on that offer. The sheets *did* look pleasant.

Tracer started to kick and whimper in her sleep, and Widowmaker frowned, leaning back against the wall with her arms crossed. Little yelps leapt from her mouse like from a sleeping hound, and Widowmaker’s frown only deepened. Whatever nightmares afflicted her, Widowmaker didn’t like it. That was *her* job.

She stepped closer to the side of the bed and tugged the blankets up further onto Tracer’s shoulders. It seemed to settle her mouse. For a second, at least - she relaxed and laid limply once more. Widowmaker smiled softly down to her in the gentle moonlight: she slept so many ways, and every one of them was nice to watch.

With a noise, Tracer jerked, eyes flying wide. “Eject! Winst-” she cut off the breathlessly gasped and thankfully soft words as the nightmare faded, flashing lights giving way to soft moonlight as she panted.

Soft moonlight and a *face*. Tracer screamed at the person looming over her, and a hand flashed out to clamp tightly over her mouth.

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed and shot over to Emily - she hadn’t quite managed to catch *all* of the scream, but almost all of it. Perhaps it would have been enough.

Letting her breath slowly out of her nose, Widowmaker met Tracer’s eyes and raised her brows, tilting her head in warning. Her mouse looked back with confusion, then quirked an eyebrow and pointed out of the door. Widowmaker nodded, dropped her hand, and walked soundlessly out into the living room.

A few moments later, Tracer met her there with a robe pulled around her shoulders and a scowl on her face. “What the bloody hell are - what was that?” Tracer whispered harshly, throwing an arm back toward the bedroom. “Why-”

“*What was that?*” Widowmaker repeated, cutting her off with a raised eyebrow and gesturing loosely over Tracer - or more specifically, at her robe. “*What is this, souris?* You suddenly feel the need to cover up around me?”

“What? Yeah, maybe. Wait, are you *really* gonna try to get upset about that?” She crossed her arms, frowning. “Were you watching me sleep?”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes and fixed her with a flat look.

“Oh come on!” Tracer hissed, wiping a hand down her face. “Ugh, okay, fine, you *were* watching me sleep. And… Emily too. Has anybody ever told you you’re really creepy?”

“None who survived the exchange,” Widowmaker muttered, looking away toward the window with her arms still crossed.

The brit rubbed at her eyes and tried to clear the lingering tendrils of fear from her heart, the last remnants of sleep from her brain. She sighed. “Why were you watching me, anyway?”
“To be creepy, *apparently,*” Widowmaker retorted with a narrowed glare.

“I-” Lena huffed, grabbing a handful of her hair and hanging her head from it for a second as she let a slow groaned sigh leak between her teeth. She knew all too well that if the conversation just stayed here - with Widowmaker on the defensive - there would never be any headway made.

She ran her fingers quickly through her hair and stepped forward, reaching up to stroke at Widowmaker’s cheek. “Look, I’m sorry I accused you like that, okay? I am.”

Widowmaker continued to scowl. “…and?”

“And I’m sorry I covered up?” That had seemed to bother her as well.

“And?” The assassin’s expression didn’t relent.

“And?” Tracer frowned a little. “And I’m… sorry I screamed?”

Widowmaker smiled. “*Bon.* Was that so hard?”

Lena let out a soft laugh of disbelief, shaking her head before smirking up to the taller woman. “Y’know, you’re *lucky* you’re hot. Most people wouldn’t be able to get away with this.”

“Oh nonsense, *souris,*” Widowmaker dismissed, taking her hand and sitting smoothly on the couch, tugging Tracer into her lap. She was warm there, and it was far better than simply looking at her. “Anyway, you should be flattered that I am so contented by watching you sleep.”

Tracer’s heart did a little flip as her gut wriggled and she relaxed back into Widowmaker’s arms. “I-well, I guess I am, kinda, when you put it *that* way - that’s sweet, thank you.” She glanced over and saw the smile fixed on those dark lips, and raised her eyebrows in return. “It’s *also* creepy. It’s sweet that you *like* watching me sleep. It’s creepy that you *did* it without *asking* first. Although in fairness it *does* kinda pale in comparison to other times you’ve stopped by unannounced. C’mon now, though - I apologized for three things.” She grinned widely. “I think you can stand one.”

Widowmaker snorted softly. “I have been watching you for weeks now unseen. You only think it is *creepy* now that you have found out. The problem here is your knowledge, not my actions.” She paused for a moment and let out a slow breath, rolling her eyes. “I apologize for being creepy.”

“*Weeks?*” Tracer tried to turn around but Widowmaker’s arms wrapped around her kept her in pretty much the same position, tightening briefly in their embrace. “I mean- sorry, I *meant* to say thank you for the apology.” She frowned slightly and settled back again before a slow grin spread over her lips.

Getting upset seemed to lead to Widowmaker feeling indignant and defensive, and rarely led to anything that could be called “productive” - but if things could be turned around, Tracer had found that she could actually *get* things. Sometimes, at least.

“You’ve been in my bedroom for weeks,” she murmured, quirking an eyebrow, “and you never thought to mention it to me? The bed’s got plenty of room for three, you know.” As she expected, the hand stroking at her upper arm faltered in its movements and Tracer grinned triumphantly.

Widowmaker wasn’t stunned with her own past foolishness, though, as Tracer thought - she wasn’t regretting her actions, only thinking back on a night a week ago that she’d spent having dinner here. Thinking of Emily offering the same. Her mouse was cute to try to tease her with it; she would never succeed, not in any of her teasing.

Still, the thought occupied a spot in Widowmaker’s mind. She’d hesitate to say it was *lodged* there,
but it certainly seemed fairly thoroughly in place.

“Ma souris, it would hardly be good form to steal all of your warmth,” she shook her head with a chuckle, and this time slacked up her arms enough to let Tracer turn around.

She wore a bit of a disbelieving smile, and placed a hand on Widowmaker’s cheek. “We’ll make more, silly,” she mumbled before leaning in for a kiss. With a sigh and a smile, she laid her head down on Widowmaker’s shoulder. “I really am sorry I screamed. You don’t frighten me, I was-”

“You were simply surprised,” Widowmaker finished and Tracer nodded into her shoulder. The assassin stroked at the back of her head, holding it lightly down. It gave her the opportunity to frown unseen; a slight gesture that tugged at her dark blue lips as golden eyes studied the blank wall opposite her.

You should be frightened of me, souris.

Her eyes dropped to her own fingers, pale blue and entwined in brown hair. You should be. This wasn’t the place for her. Except anywhere was her place. Anywhere she wished to be. Nothing could stop her, nothing would.

...except, not nothing. There was much that stopped her. Talon. Conditioning. Codes.

She was herself. Sometimes.

It was an odd series of disjointed thoughts, but Widowmaker let them leave as she exhaled. “You are foolish not to fear me, souris,” she mumbled, but her mouse only giggled.

“Well, I wouldn’t wanna disappoint you by ceasing to be foolish all of a sudden!” She leaned back with a grin. “After all, that’s not the bird you fell for, is it?”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes with a smirk. “Fell for, ha - oh, you do amuse me, souris.” She grinned wider as she traced a finger along her jaw, the skin beautifully warm underneath her fingertip. “I trapped you. Do you not recall?”

Tracer hummed happily, her eyelids sliding closed. “Oh, sure I do - I remember it fondly, love.” Blindly, but slowly, she leaned forward for a kiss, a thrill running down her spine at the way Widowmaker’s cold mouth clashed with hers - but not a shiver borne out of the temperature. No, a much better one than that.

“G’night now. Probably be a good plan for you to come clean with Em yourself, you know - she’s fine with just about anything except lying and hiding. Let me know next time you wanna be in the bedroom, yeah? I’ll get out a chair at least.”

Maybe if she phrased it that way it would actually work. While Lena hadn’t learned an ounce of fashion sense from Emily, she had learned some practicality; the different ways things could be presented in order to change the way events unfolded. She wasn’t nearly as good at it as Emily was, but she had her moments every now and then.

“Sleep well, souris,” Widowmaker sighed slightly as Tracer stood up from her lap and the couch. Free of those nightmares, I hope. Her eyes fell to her wrist tattoo in the moonlight and a slight smirk crossed her lips. Cauchemar.

Who better to fight a nightmare, than a nightmare? Her thoughts flitted back to conversation with Emily. Nothing was idle, not so long as it could be utilized - and every piece of information gathered, was a piece waiting to be deployed. Let us see then, who holds more of a sway over the mouse’s
heart...

---

Flames.

She wished they would burn her instead of just passing through - she wandered all around the house, passing through walls and slipping through the floor with no choice in the matter. The people screamed as they burned, but every one she reached out to, she just slid through like a ghost.

Maybe she was one.

The flames went away and there were alarms instead, alarms and she was in a supersonic steel coffin, reaching out for a control but her hand passed through it without resistance and then she was underwater, screaming soundlessly but the water didn’t even fill her lungs, she couldn’t breathe here anyway, only watch as a massive brass propeller churned the air about the water’s surface and more and more people dropped down, old suits and dresses dragging them under the waves as they clawed up at the air, but she couldn’t help them.

She could only watch them drown, she could only watch them die. She could only ever watch them die and she couldn’t even scream for it.

A ghost.

Tracer awoke with a start and a shout to find herself in Emily’s arms, whimpering, cheeks wet, heart pounding.

“Shh, shh, it’s alright love, you’re safe,” the redhead cooed softly, stroking at Lena’s sweat-lined brow with a corner of the sheets to dry her skin.

“Y- ha,” Lena heaved, gasping breaths and tightening her arms around Emily’s desperately. “God. Sorry, Em - did I wake you up again?”

“Yeah, a little,” she shrugged gently, “but the alarm was gonna go off in a minute anyway. I’d rather have a minute to hold you than another minute of sleep, anyway.”

Lena chuckled awkwardly as she relaxed back into Emily’s embrace. She was safe - she wasn’t in the plane, it wasn’t coming apart, she wasn’t stuck between existence and nonexistence, she was home, she was safe. “I agree,” she swallowed, dry-mouthed. “Way, way better than another minute’s sleep.”

They just sat there for a full three minutes, in fact, until the alarm started to beep - Emily reached out and popped it as soon as it started, then flicked the switch. “Okay, I gotta get up and run off to my appointment - you’ll be alright while I’m gone, yeah?”

Tracer chuckled. “I mean, I’ll miss you, but I think I’ll survive.”

Emily studied her intensely for a moment, frowning lightly. “Are you sure?” she teased, slowly grinning.

“Go on, you!” Lena laughed brightly. “I’ll have breakfast ready when you get back - you’ll only be
gone about an hour and a half, yeah?”

“If that,” Emily nodded, pulling on a pair of trousers. “But Lena - and remember that I love you dearly - are you sure that cooking breakfast is a good idea?”

“I can cook!” she protested, pushing herself out of the bed. “You’ll see - it’ll be grand.”

Emily came over to her with a smile, holding her shirt in one hand and giving her a quick kiss. “Well, it certainly can’t be worse than your attempt at Eggs Benny.”

“Okay, well don’t get carried away now,” Tracer chuckled. “I mean, it took a lot of skill to burn that Hollandaise sauce. I’m not sure I can beat myself out on that one!”

As she did up the buttons on her shirt, Emily laughed and grinned and shot Lena a look with those gorgeous eyes that made her heart skip a beat. “You’re lovely, you know that?”

“If I haven’t picked up on it after how many times you’ve said it, I’d be pretty thick, love,” Lena chuckled, wrapping an arm around Emily’s back and pulling her in close for a deep kiss. Soft lips, warm mouth, strong arms - kissing her was absolutely magnificent, and Lena thought she could do it just about forever.

Except for the stupid appointment, of course. She let go with a resigned sigh and rubbed the tip of her nose against Emily’s, drawing a giggle from the redhead before she pecked a kiss on Lena’s cheek and stepped back with a wave. “Alright, see you in an hour, love - we can work out breakfast.”

“It’s already worked out!” Lena called down the hallway after her, jumping back onto the bed and snatching up her phone from the bedside table. “I’m making you something! Trust me, it’ll be good! I can always do a toastie if all else fails!”

Twenty minutes later, she was sure that the sauce wasn’t supposed to be chunky like that. With a sigh, she dumped it down the sink and pouted at her phone. “You said it was an easy recipe! Lying cow.”

She just wanted it to be a surprise - and what was more surprising than succeeding where you’d failed in the past? Plus it was one of Emily’s favourites.

“Hollandaise?”

Tracer whirled around at the sudden soft - but soft, in Widowmaker’s signature velvety voice. “I swear you just like seeing me jump,” Lena chuckled, slightly breathlessly, stepping over to the little archway that led out of the kitchen and stretching on her toes to give Widdy a kiss on the cheek.

“Mais, of course I do, souris,” she explained as she stepped into the room, glancing around curiously. “Are you attempting to cook?” She smirked a little as she met Tracer’s brown eyes. “Do you think this is wise, souris?”

“I can cook! Why does everybody think I can’t?” Lena protested in a groan. “It’s just this bloody Hollandaise - I don’t know! I can fry up whatever you like; you want fish and chips? Oh, I’m all over it, but this-” she ran a hand frustratedly through her hair with a groan.

“Your temperature is too high,” Widowmaker stepped past her briskly, twisting the stove knob down and glancing into the pot. “Too much water, as well - it should not be boiling, and only the steam should be doing your heating.” She picked up the pot and spilled about a third of its contents into the sink where it steamed.
“Oh sure you’re just good at everything,” Tracer rolled her eyes with a sigh and a grin. “How do you know how to make Hollandaise, anyway?”

“I am French, cherie.”

“...yeah but it’s called Hollandaise sauce not French-” her eyes widened a little but her mouth kept going, “...endaise sauce?”

Widowmaker turned back slowly with a look of shock, but a grin blossomed over her lips. “Frenchendaise sauce?” She laughed abruptly, tossing her head back so the sound could leap straight to the ceiling. “Ah, cherie, you are a delight - Hollandaise is only a name.”

She cracked eggs and separated out the yolks as Tracer leaned back against the wall with a sigh and a gentle pout. Although, she knew that she could spend the rest of the time until Emily got home and still not actually have prepared any real food except for toast and poached eggs. Why’d I have to go for bloody Benny?

She already knew the reason, though. It would be such a surprise to be able to pull it off, for the first time ever - Emily’s favourite breakfast.

It wasn’t too late to change her plan, though - and this was kind of cute, anyway; it’d be an even better surprise. It was always fun when things worked out that way.

“Alright, you can finish off the Benny,” Lena pulled a pan down from a hook with a grin, “but shove over, love - I’m gonna whip up some banger hash.” She pulled a couple of potatoes and a sausage out of the fridge, along with a couple of slices of bacon - and then stretched up to a cabinet above the fridge. She strained, grunting, as tall on her toes as she could be and feeling around blindly. C’mon, know it’s up here somewhere! Her fingers brushed against the tin but only pushed it further back and she whimpered in defeat.

Widowmaker stepped right behind her - right behind her, pressing her lightly against the fridge. “Something I can help you with, cherie?” She purred into Tracer’s ear, trailing a hand up her arm and grinning as the shorter woman shivered.

“I-I was looking for a tin of-” she cut off as Widowmaker’s cool fingers stroked along the back of her hand and then delved further into the cupboard, fetching the can of corned beef out. “Th- yeah, that’s-” she swallowed heavily. “Oh, that’s it.” She let her face press forward against the cold metal of the fridge with a sigh as Widowmaker’s lips brushed against her neck.

“De rien,” she whispered almost silently, grinning, parting her lips - and then abruptly stepping back and setting the can down on the counter as she returned to mix the other ingredients into the egg yolk.

“Wh-” Tracer turned away from the fridge with a scowl and stamped her foot. “Oi! Get back here and give me a bloody snog! Not fair to tease me up like that and leave me hanging!”

Widowmaker chuckled. “Ah, but it is such fun to play with you, souris!” Her eyes burned across the space between them, shining in the dawn light streaming through the window.

As it is to end the games, as well. She dashed forward almost impossibly fast, and shoved Tracer back up against the fridge with a thump, pinning her down by the shoulders as she leaned in for a deep kiss.

Lena opened her mouth with a moan, delightedly inviting that cold kiss in and trembling a little; catching Widowmaker’s lip between her teeth not too gently - she knew that that blue skin was less
sensitive than Emily’s, and pain was a non-issue. Widowmaker growled and dropped her head to rake teeth across Tracer’s neck, slipping a hand to claw fingernails at her back and elicit a high, plaintive whine.

“That’s better,” Tracer moaned, getting a nice handful of dark hair and pulling Widdy’s mouth up to hers again for another frantic moment before backing off with a grin. “Dontcha think?”

“I see upsides to both, cherie,” the Frenchwoman grinned, eyes practically dancing with joy - or at least, as much as they ever did. “And if you think it is the only surprise you will get today, you are mistaken.”

As she stepped away and went back to preparing the Hollandaise, Lena was left to raise an eyebrow. “You what? Watcha mean, love?”

“If I told you,” Widowmaker smirked, “it would hardly be a surprise, non?”

Tracer sighed with a grin. “Alright, fine. I don’t suppose I can pout this one out of you, can I?”

Laughing, Widowmaker shook her head. “Your lips are quite powerful, cherie - mais, non. This one I will hold close to my chest until your petite returns at least.”

“Yes, her cherry had been quite forward - in entirely different ways from the mouse, but ways that were no less intriguing. She was warm and open, but where it seemed to be from some foolish naivete in Tracer, in Lena, it was something more deliberate in Emily.

There was something calming about that, about it being a legitimate and intentional choice. There was also something almost unnerving about it.

“Mm, I do not know that I would say that,” Widowmaker shrugged as she started to whisk the sauce together over the impromptu double-boiler.

“Well I mean, whatever label you wanna put on it,” Tracer shrugged as she tossed the potato cubes with some herbs and dropped them into the pan where they sizzled nicely. “The two of you have obviously got something going on - I mean,” she giggled lightly, some blood rising to her cheeks, “I remember that snog last time.”

“Ahh, and fondly, I see,” Widowmaker purred, stroking a chilled fingertip across Lena’s warm and slightly pink cheek, redoubling the blush there as she glanced around hesitantly and chewed at her lip.

“Well, I mean, yeah,” she laughed nervously. “Go on - you’re gonna ruin your sauce if you don’t watch it!”

“You are only trying to distract me, souris,” Widowmaker stated plainly, whisking the Hollandaise without looking at it, “and it will never work.”
It worked for *her*, though - Tracer giggled and nudged her hip against Widowmaker’s, standing side-by-side at the stove, and completely dropped the line of inquiry into what Emily was and how she fit in.

Widowmaker knew that there was much of her consideration that was at odds with the rest of the world, and she didn’t care in the slightest. She didn’t hardly care when it came to the pair of them, either - Tracer and Emily - but there *was* something else to it. She didn’t want to see them frowning when they could be smiling instead; at least, not when *she* wasn’t *intending* to make them frown.

There was something to be said for sadness. It had a beauty that the more simple emotions lacked. Sometimes, though, *sometimes* it had just too much of a faint, dull echo within her. Better to avoid outside of careful situations. Apply it as any tint in a painting: sparingly, as an accent to the whole. Black was striking, but would destroy the piece if applied too heavily.

Widowmaker’s mind didn’t whirl. It never did, that was far too frantic a word to ever apply to her - it *rambled*, unhindered and often darkly, but it didn’t whirl. Such was the case now as she stood at the stove, basking in the warmth from the appliance as well as letting Tracer lean up against her side and soaking in body heat there. She didn’t explicitly notice when the sausages and corned beef were added to the pan, but she smelled them as they started to sizzle.

“Hmm,” Widowmaker tipped her head, setting the bowl of Hollandaise sauce off to the side. “That smells *délicieux*, ma *chérie*.”

Tracer hummed happily, laying her head over on Widowmaker’s shoulder. “I like when you speak French at me.”

“Oh?” She grinned, leaning down to brush her lips against the edge of the brit’s ear. “*Vraiment, ma* cherie? Alors, je le ferai plus souvent.”

She inhaled slowly as Tracer trembled against her - this was the purpose behind all of it. It sent her heart rising another three percent, a raise which she would have called unprecedented a few months ago. It was no less joyous for now being commonplace.

As she traced the tip of her tongue around the barest edge of Tracer’s ear, earning more shivers for her troubles, a thought occurred to her. She opened her mouth to ask, but then grinned instead. Why ask and risk spoiling a surprise? Instead, she could simply act.

“Watch your potatoes, *chérie,*” Widowmaker murmured softly instead and Tracer blurted a laugh.

“If you keep going on like this you’re gonna get me conditioned to get all turned on whenever I’m cooking!” Lena laughed again, but the gesture died away as she noticed the intense stillness that had washed over Widowmaker. She turned to face her, frowning light before her eyes widened as she replayed her own words in her head. *Conditioned.* “Oh, G- no, love, I didn’t mean—”

“It is alright.” Widowmaker swallowed and then shook her head with an easy, dismissive chuckle. An instant’s action hardly warranted anything and deflection was easiest. “It means many things. A common word.”

“I-” Tracer started, clearing her throat as her voice caught. Widdy was trying to brush it off, she *always* just tried to brush it off, but there were still those knee-jerk reactions. Widowmaker said she didn’t care at the end of the day, didn’t hurt, and Tracer believed her… but she also thought that that probably depended on quite *specific* definitions of “hurt” and “care” and she didn’t want to be the cause of it without trying to help, too. She took a hesitant breath and stroked at Widowmaker’s upper arm. “I definitely get… having stuff that leaps back at you like that. And I get not wanting to talk about it, too, I-”
“Then let us not.” Widowmaker frowned slightly down at the plate full of toast. Her hands were not shaking. Her hands were not shaking.

They almost had, though. She could feel it, the tremble wanting to leak down throughout her. It wouldn’t, though. She was better than that. She was better than that, she had been made better than that.

Even if the forging had been problematic.

It was better to let wounds alone than to pick at them.

Tracer nodded silently, returning her attention to the pan of hash and trying to stop her eyes from tearing up too much. She hadn’t meant to spoil a playful day, she just hadn’t been thinking - but it had happened to her and she knew how bad it could be. Widowmaker had talked about it, yes - some, and it had been her talking about it.

Tracer knew that she could bring up planes and it would be fine. She could mention the Slipstream and it would all be alright - but if something jumped out at her from somebody else’s conversation? If there was suddenly a noise that was just a little too familiar, or just the wrong combination of clatter, or any one of a hundred things, she might snap at it.

She knew it was different when you were the one holding the reins of the conversation.

“No, cherie, please,” Widowmaker murmured as she laid poached eggs gently on top of the thick sliced of toast. The change in ambience, in the Brit’s posture and breathing, were easy to note. “You did not hurt me.”

“That’s good,” Tracer sighed, taking her word for it and nuzzling her head against Widdy’s shoulder without taking her eyes off the pan. You’ve been hurt enough. I don’t want to add any more to that. “We don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to.”

At that, Widowmaker let out a single, light laugh. “It is for your benefit that I decline the conversation, cherie. I think it might just destroy you to hear. Look, some mention so simple and you have been plunged into melancholy.”

Lena hummed a little chuckle, looking over with a grin and pulling the pan off the stove. The hash was done. “I dunno, love - I’ve been through some rough times meself. Maybe, uh… maybe someday we can talk about it? Not today though, if that’s alright with you.”

“Anything is alright with me,” Widowmaker shrugged easily, glad that the situation had been diverted toward Tracer rather than herself. She would happily grant her mouse this favour. “Now, notre cerise is at the door, take this plate to her.”

“More surprises up your sleeve?” Tracer quirked an eyebrow, taking two of the three plates of Eggs Benedict - she’d poached a few extra eggs just in case, and it was a good thing now.

Widowmaker only grinned to that, and leaned back against the wall near the archway as a key could be heard turning in the lock.

“Welcome back, love!” Lena called out as Em came in the front door. “Perfect timing - I just finished breakfast!”

“That’s brilliant,” Emily grinned, slipping her keys back into her pocket and nudging the door shut behind her, walking quickly over to Lena and giving her a kiss on the cheek before her eyes flicked down to the plate. “Oh god,” she giggled, “you actually went for Benny?”
“Oi!” Tracer laughed, “gimme a little credit! At least the sauce isn’t burnt this time!”

Emily giggled again with a grin, slipping her jacket off and tossing it to the side, sniffing at the air as she dropped to the couch and tugged Lena along with her. “Smells lovely - you make anything else?” She glanced over with a grin and narrowed eyes, teasingly. “Little hash as a backup plan?”

“Oh, you didn’t make this?” Lena scoffed, setting down the plates and a handful of cutlery. “So what if I did? Just means you get twice as much breakfast!”

With a chuckle, Emily cut a forkful of food off. Hesitantly. She remembered the last time Lena’d made eggs Benny - she loved the girl a stupid amount, and there was a long list of recipes that she knew Lena could pull off beautifully, blindfolded with an arm tied behind her back, but if it didn’t involve the word ‘fried’, chances weren’t good.

This, though, was entirely different. Emily moaned as she chewed slowly on the mouthful; the sauce was tangy and smooth, and perfectly offset the eggs - it was delicious, it was magnificent. It was the best Hollandaise she’d ever tasted.

“Mm, oh, god love,” Emily swallowed, covering her mouth lightly with a hand as she grinned, “oh, you so didn’t make this.” She knew that Lena had been getting along well with Andrew St. Charles - even outside of her little favour for the man, they’d called back and forth a few times, and there had even been two deliveries of food to the apartment.

“What?” Tracer feigned ignorance and offence (poorly). “Of course I did!”

“No, you didn’t,” Emily giggled, shaking her head, “but it’s a lovely surprise and a treat, anyway!”

“Merde!” The soft swear drifted out of the kitchen. “Non, cerise - you must have a camera in here. You could not possibly have known.”

Emily’s eyes flew wide at the voice, and her jaw dropped. Tracer giggled at the look of shock and called back over her shoulder, “Don’t think she did, love! You should see this!”

Widowmaker peeked her head around the corner curiously, grinning widely at the stunned look on Emily’s face. “Ah, magnifique. I am glad I did not miss this.”

“You made these?” Emily gestured to the eggs, looking back to Lena with a laugh. “I- I thought you got Andrew to make them up! This–” She set her plate down and grabbed Lena’s hand, pulling her off of the couch and over toward the kitchen.

When she got there, she grabbed at Widdy’s arm as well and pulled them both into a tight hug. She always had been a hugger - and putting Widowmaker in the middle seemed to suit her just fine, so Emily made sure of it, squeezing them both tight. “Thanks, loves! This is an absolutely brilliant surprise! I am- I’m honestly so chuffed about this I don’t even know what to say!”

Widowmaker grinned. Surprises were always a pleasure when well-executed, and perhaps this one had turned out even better for the misstep. It also meant she hadn’t been foreseen, which was an excellent reassurance - not that she needed it, but with Emily it was difficult to tell. There were few people who Widowmaker thought might be able to see through her, even if only at times, but the redhead was one of them.

Widowmaker was behind by a point, in fact. “I believe this makes us even, non, cerise?”

Emily laughed as a few happy tears streaked down her freckled cheeks. “I’ll give you two points for this one, love!” She pulled her head back a bit and grinned, kissing Widdy lightly on the lips and
meeting her eyes from just a few inches away. “Only this once though, mind. Can’t be going too easy on you.”

“Je le ne voudrais pas d’autre façon,” Widowmaker purred through a grin, staring deep into Emily’s eyes.

“Ugh, no fair, she’s speaking French again,” Tracer muttered, muffled by her mouth being pressed against Widowmaker’s back.

Emily laughed a little, and quirked an eyebrow as Widdy’s grin widened almost excitedly.

It had occurred to her earlier - when her mouse had confessed to liking the sound of the language, Widowmaker had wondered whether the words had the same effect coming from Emily’s lips. She suspected they would be similar, at least, and if there was one thing she appreciated it was lightly tormenting her little mouse.

Or heavily tormenting her. Both had their benefits.

Widowmaker’s grin steepened a bit as she met Emily’s gaze. “Ma cherie, je pense que nous pourrions le parler et-”

Lena whined at her back and Widowmaker’s eyebrow raised another few degrees as Emily’s eyes lit up.

“Ah, ah oui,” the redhead nodded delightedly, stepping back from the embrace but continuing to hold on to each of their hands in hers, opening them up into a triangular pattern. “Je comprends. Cela lui causerait une certaine détresse, certainement!”

Tracer whimpered again, brows drawing tightly together as she focused on the way Emily’s lips formed the sounds. The words sank into her like melted chocolate, hot and smooth and rich but about fifty times as delicious, and she loved it. It was still mean. It was definitely mean. It was just the best possible kind of mean.

Emily laughed a little at the look on Lena’s face. “Mais, nous ne devrions pas être trop méchant, non?”

Widowmaker glanced over with a predatory grin, meeting Tracer’s wide eyes with her own narrowed to slits. “Et pourquoi m’inquiéterais-je, hmm?”

Tracer swallowed heavily in response, eyes flicking swiftly and heatedly between the pair of them. “Th-that’s totally unfair! Not enough that you’ve both got to be tall and fit, but now you’re both speaking French, too?”

“Veux-tu me le cesser?” Widowmaker purred, quirked an eyebrow, and looked at her expectantly.

“I don’t know what that means but don’t stop,” Lena murmured swiftly over an intense shiver, gaze burning as she leaned forward, and Emily laughed brightly.

“Oh, brilliant,” she sighed before fixing Widdy with a delighted look, “although if we actually want to eat breakfast, we should probably give it a rest, love. It’d be a shame to let this get cold.”

“D’accord,” Widowmaker grinned and caught a handful of Tracer’s hair as the brit leaned in to suck on her neck, holding hot lips an almost agonizing few inches away from her cold skin. She let them linger. “Hello? Go and get your hash ready, little mouse.”

Tracer whimpered in protest, trying to stretch forward in vain for a few seconds before she abandoned the effort and went to collect the food with a pout. “One of these days,” she started,
shaking her head, but let off of the words as the thoughts overtook her mind and she let them happily.

Widowmaker’s hand held Emily short of stepping further into the kitchen as she tried to move that way. “Ah-ah, you will not. Go sit on the couch now, cerise. It would hardly be a surprise of breakfast otherwise.”

Emily relented and went over to the couch with a wide grin. A few moments later, the other two joined her with plates held in hand - another one of Benny and three of Lena’s banger hash. Lena had one plate in one hand, another balanced on the same arm, and three glasses of orange juice in her other hand.

It looked quite precarious to Widowmaker, who raised an eyebrow. “That seems foolishly ambitious, even for you, souris.”

“Oh give over,” Tracer chuckled, “this is nothing compared to pints!” She managed the dishes with no problem, of course.

They sat in a line - Widowmaker in the middle - and dug in with gusto. Widowmaker actually found that she preferred the hash to the eggs - while the latter was a fairly subtle intermingling of flavours, the former was just like the woman who had prepared it. Brash, forthcoming, outgoing almost to a fault; it was an abrupt mixture of flavours that assaulted her tongue in a tumult.

“Mmm,” she sighed softly through her nose. “Souris, this-” she cut off to swallow the mouthful. “This is delicious! I thought you could not cook?”

“Why does everybody think that?” Tracer sighed in exasperation, but with a grin firmly affixed to her lips. “I can cook just fine!”

“She really can,” Emily added as she cut off another chunk of Benny. “Anything British, that is - particularly if it’s Northern, Cockney, or Scotch.”

“Oi!” Tracer frowned. “Don’t forget Wales!”

With a giggle, Emily nodded in concession. “Or Welsh, too. Depending. Anything that’s fried - anything that a doctor would look at you in horror for eating? Well, that’s one thing you can guarantee she’ll be able to cook brilliantly.”

“Yup!” Lena confirmed with a cheery nod, and Widowmaker nodded thoughtfully.

Every piece of information gained was one that could be used. Perhaps it did not seem useful right now, but if this new venture had taught her anything it was that often it was just those tidbits that ended up being of highest effect. Food was clearly close to Emily’s heart. Tracer cooked only the unhealthy foods, but did it well; she didn’t drive but she did occasionally ride a bicycle. Emily read. Lena watched TV. They would both trade off, but mostly only if the other was present - left to their own devices, they tended toward those activities. Together, there was little they didn’t share, regardless of their personal feelings on the activity.

Useful data in the correct circumstances.

Widowmaker set down her empty plates before either of the other two had even finished half of their food. Then she reconsidered and took one in hand again - she would refill it with more hash. “I have something to inform you both of - remain here, I will return momentarily. Continue eating.”

Emily shot Lena a curious glance, but she could only shrug in return. Widdy had mentioned a
surprise earlier, but not what it was, of course. In her own words, it would hardly be a surprise otherwise.

When Widowmaker came back, it was with the entirety of the rest of the hash on her plate. At least twice as much as she’d already had, and Tracer eyed it in a combination of awe and horror.

“Maintenant,” Widowmaker began, eating another forkful with a swift hum. “I have planned an outing for the day. No preparations should be necessary - the required apparel will be provided at the location.” She glanced to Emily. “Am I to presume you would rather I accompany in the car?”

Emily tipped her head to the side. “Well, it kind of depends on what we’re doing, love - but I think so.”

Widowmaker nodded once. “D’accord. It will be easier this way - I can provide directions and maintain suspense until the last possible moment.” A grin overtook her lips as she returned her attention to eating. Yes, this will be much better indeed…

---

Emily frowned a little as they pulled into a parking space. There was nobody else in the lot - not another car in sight. Not that it was surprising, given that Widowmaker had directed them to what looked to be an old abandoned airport.

“No offence, love,” Lena murmured from the back seat, “but this is exactly the kind of place a bird might get uncomfortable about being invited, by an assassin and all, y’know?” She giggled as Widowmaker shot a narrow glance back over her shoulder. “Only teasing!”

“And doing it poorly,” the frenchwoman muttered through a smirk, opening her door. “Now, come!” She gestured forward, heels clicking as she strode forward and left the other two somewhat scrambling to catch up. Emily had to jog to close the distance after double-checking the locks, but there really was nobody nearby. Widowmaker walked up to a wide hole in the fence and stepped right through, and the other two followed without hesitation.

Tracer thought that the suspense might just actually be killing her at this point. She felt jittery and shaky, like that time the accelerator had got bumped and Winston wouldn’t stop talking about quantum shells or something like that. Mostly what she remembered about the incident was that everything had got a little mushed and looked a lot more red than normal.

She whined softly as Widowmaker continued to lead the way, intentionally slowing down when she approached the corner of the hangar - teasing her, obviously. It seemed to be Widowmaker’s favourite pastime.

Tracer couldn’t stand it anymore - she spun up the accelerator and blinked forward, swirling past the other two in a streak of blue light. In an instant, she was back, wide-eyed in shock.

“That was quite rude, souris,” Widowmaker crossed her arms and fixed her with a steady look.

Tracer looked back at her and her eyebrows twitched as she met those gold eyes, not certain of what to say, so for once in her life she said nothing. The incomprehensible moment dragged on.

“Oh come on! Now I’m the only one who hasn’t seen this surprise and I can’t do any fancy stuff like
that, so can we keep walking, please?” Emily sighed heavily, and Widowmaker laughed.

“Après-vous, ma cerise,” she tipped her head toward the corner, and Emily ran forward excitedly.

What she saw was momentarily confusing - a dozen motorcycles from all through the years, every one of them looking a little worn but not in particularly bad condition or anything. She wasn’t sure what they were doing at an old airport, but everything had to be somewhere. It wasn’t until she noticed the folding table set up nearby with three helmets and three pair of boots, and a small stack of clothing, that she realized the motorcycles were the surprise.

“I-” she cleared her throat, turning to glance over her shoulder as the other two joined her - Lena still looking shocked, Widowmaker grinning like a cat with cream.

“Between the similarity to flight, and the lack of risk, I thought it might be a perfect venture, souris.” Widowmaker turned to study Tracer’s face. She didn’t want to miss a movement in it, not a reaction, not an iota of the emotion - but her eyes flicked repeatedly to Emily as well. There was more than one well from which to draw, here, and she intended to slake her thirst as deeply as possible.

“I-I don’t know what to say,” Lena swallowed heavily. “It- I mean… I always loved bikes. But I couldn’t- I mean, with the,” she tapped at the accelerator glowing on her chest and choked off into silence as a tear slid down her cheek.

She couldn’t pilot any kind of motor vehicle on the roads, or in the air - not now that her big panicked reflex was to rewind time, not now that she might at any moment no longer be in the driver’s seat. The bicycle was bad enough - at least it didn’t weigh that much and didn’t move that fast. If she suddenly abandoned it, it wouldn’t do much harm.

Here, though, there was nothing to harm. No people nearby, no buildings that anybody would care about - long flat runways, even if they were a little cracked and overgrown. Even the bikes themselves weren’t pristine or anything like that.

Widowmaker appreciated the look on Tracer’s face. It was gorgeous, and she thought she could look at it forever. Soft, quiet agony; the pain of a life lost in an instant, sharpened to a brilliant edge by time and now glinting with the hope of maybe regaining some of what that life had once held.

All at once, with that thought, it was no longer a pleasant thing to watch. It was a dark mirror, and she ceased to enjoy it in the slightest - a smile would do far better. “If you do not wish to partake-” she rolled her shoulder in a shrug, but was caught off-guard by an almost tackling hug that she let knock her back to the ground.

“Don’t you dare even say it!” Tracer laughed, wrapping her arms tightly around Widowmaker. “This is bloody brilliant, love - you’re a genius. You’re an absolute genius! I- I don’t even know how to-” she cut off, squeezing tighter with a happy squeal. “I’m gonna be back in a second, that ‘63 Beemer out there’s calling my name!” She swirled abruptly off in blue light, leaving Widowmaker with a giggle in her ears and the last flash of a wide grin, and a lingering remnant of warmth on her chest.

That was better. Far better.

She moved to stand, but found a foot over her shoulder keeping her down. Her eyes flashed up in annoyance and met Emily’s.

“Not so fast,” the redhead whispered and knelt down, spinning to straddle Widowmaker and lift her shoulders up off of the pavement. She took her time crafting her thoughts into a deep kiss; every
stroke of the tongue, a flicker of joy or care - every soft noise and clench of fingers in hair, a heartbeat of sorts. “Magnifique, ma cherie,” Emily whispered against Widdy’s chilly lips with her eyes closed.

“Pensez-vous?” The frenchwoman craned her neck to glance over toward the table - with the aid of the accelerator, Tracer was already outfitted in full motorcycle gear, head to toe. “Je le pense aussi.”

The engine of the BMW sportster roared to life as Tracer leapt onto it, and wasted no time at all launching off. She laid on the throttle so heavily that the front tire lifted from the pavement, and the only thing that could be heard over the engine noise was her gleeful squeal.

“I lied, you know,” Emily confessed with a soft smile as she stood and pulled Widowmaker to her feet, stroking at her cheek and grinning as a dark blue eyebrow raised curiously. “I’m giving you two points for this, too.”

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed. “Do not insult our game so, cerise.”

Emily raised a cautionary finger and squinted in return. “You just be thankful I’m not making it five points. Now would you mind just holding me a minute before we get geared up too? I’d quite like that.”

Widowmaker scoffed lightly, smirking as she looked off to the sky in feigned annoyance. “Very well,” she sighed, opening her arms, “if you insist.” She wrapped Emily up tightly and pulled her back.

It took a moment for the warmth to soak through their clothing, sadly, and it was lessened for it, but it came soon enough and Emily made no moves to leave in any hurry. She cried softly, happily and sadly at once, hand over her mouth as Tracer raced around the runways and Widdy stroked a hand through her hair.

Widowmaker didn’t cry, of course. She just inhaled deeply at Emily’s head and watched the motorcycle tear around the pavement. It was worth it for that - she’d been given so many emotions today, little packets of memory that she could unwrap and enjoy later at her leisure.

She always did, it seemed. One day it would come to an end, and that was a shame, but until that day she would continue to take her opportunities as they were offered. After all, once it was finished, she would still have the memories.

She certainly had plenty of bad ones. For once, she deserved a few good ones.

Emily shivered as Widowmaker’s head tipped forward and a cool breath sighed down her neck.

“I have been watching you sleep.”

The redhead squeezed Widowmaker’s hands a little, pulling her embrace a bit tighter. “I know. A week ago you hid in the closet when I got up for a glass of water. I laid awake debating whether I should say something, but…”

“…what?” Widowmaker’s brows furrowed deeply at this new knowledge. Observation was one thing, but being able to find her was another. Her cherry had noticed her? How? Had she left some part visible? Her hair, perhaps - it was so uncontrolled, and she often considered lopping it off. Rarely for long, though; every inch of it was a testament to her survival.

She would never cut it until the day she died.
Emily misunderstood the general statement of confusion as a prompt. “But,” she carried on with a sigh, relaxing back into strong arms, “it didn’t feel right to take it away from you like that. I thought you deserved to come out with it in your own time.” Slowly, she turned around and stroked at a blue cheek with a smile, meeting those cold golden eyes with her own. “Thanks, for telling me - and for all of this.”

Her lips were so warm, her fingertips where they rested on Widowmaker’s cheekbone. It almost sent a shiver down her spine. Almost.

“Now, I think I’d like a race - maybe all three of us could give it a go, eh?” Emily stepped back, still holding her hands and pausing at the frown that stayed fixed on Widdy’s lips. Her golden eyes were distant, but studious. “Whatcha thinking?”

The assassin opened her mouth and then closed it again, soundlessly, frown twisting slightly. “How…” she met Emily’s eyes with mild concern, “how did you see me?”

Emily sighed a chuckle and raised a hand, resting it on Widowmaker’s cheek and stroking the tip of her thumb along the very top of her cheekbone, just barely touching her eyelashes with the tip of the nail. “You’ve got some gorgeous eyes there, love. Sometimes a girl can just feel them on her - and they don’t half stand out in a closet. Looked like a pair of brass buttons in the moonlight. Might’ve fit right in,” her lips quirked into a grin as she leaned in a little, “if I hadn’t just been dreaming about them right before I woke up, that is.”

At that, the smile returned to Widowmaker’s lips as well - an opportunity, presented. Some tactical fragment of her mind warned that it could be deliberate, could be a trap, but she refused it. It could be deliberate. Would it not only be better if it were so? If Emily wished to open herself up and leave herself vulnerable? That could only be the preferential position.

“Now,” Emily raised an eyebrow, swinging their hands slightly. “About that race?”

Widowmaker nodded, eyes flicking to Tracer who still raced around the runway. “I shall catch her on the next pass so I may pass on the information. Go get your helmet on, cerise - and prepare yourself to lose.”

Emily laughed brightly, grinning widely as she jogged over to the table. Oh, love. The idea that I could do anything other than win, today… that’s just ridiculous!

Chapter End Notes

Translations!
"Vraiment, ma cherie? Alors, je le ferai plus souvent.” == "Really, my dear? Then I'll do so more often."
"Je le ne voudrais pas d’autre façon” == "I wouldn't want it any other way"
"Ma cherie, je pense que nous pourrions le parler et-" == "My dear, I think we could speak it and-
"Ah, ah oui! Je comprends. Cela lui causerait une certaine détresse, certainement!” == "Ah, ah yes! I understand. That would cause her some distress, certainly!"
"Mais, nous ne devrions pas être trop méchant, non?” == "Although, we shouldn't be too mean, no?”
"Et pourquoi m’inquièterais-je, hmm?” == "And why would I worry myself [about that], hmm?"
"Veux-tu me le cesser?" == "Do you want me to stop?"
"Après-vous, ma cerise" == "After you, my cherry"
"Magnifique, ma chérie" == "Magnificent, my dear"
"Pensez-vous? Je le pense aussi." == "You think? I think so too."

Translations based on a knowledge of French that is several years out of date - anybody who wants to correct me, please do! :) Sorry for having relatively so much in what might not be a language you know, but I hope the translations help and aren't too disorienting to scroll around for.

So yeah, I liked this one. It was cute, it was fun, and it was also nice to get to delve deeper into some characterization both individually and as a group. Several good lines that I liked, too! Sorry for updating a day late, but I had an engagement to which to attend and it threw my schedule out of whack, heh. Hopefully I'll be able to continue to stick with every four days!

Always happy to hear from you, folks - hope you're having a good day! Come on back next time when Sombra and Athena meet in person, so to speak, and Winston as well. Time to try to get to the bottom of this Black Tide thing - or at least, to start digging into the surface. Widowmaker is on deployment as well, and Tracer interrupts her.
Serious Summary: Sombra meets Winston and Athena at the Madrid facility. There's a bit of chat before Athena gets Hephaestus completely ready, but then it's down to business. Worrisome business, with some unexpected occurrences, but almost everybody survives. Almost. Elsewhere, elsewhen, some time later, Sombra and the rest of the Talon Trio are involved on a mission - which means Widowmaker on support, of course. Who shows up except her favourite frenemy with benefits, Tracer!

JFL Summary: Winston isn't Jack in a suit, even if he seems like it. Athena's never too busy for a hug, and Sombra's better at chess than Winston is - but less good than Athena, of course. Almost everybody survives the attempt to crack the Black Tide virus. Some time later, Widowmaker's having a fun day in the sun when Tracer comes out to join her! She thinks it's less fun, however - but the two soon settle on an activity they can both enjoy! Reaper also gets to have fun. Fun, in his case, consisting of threats and violence. Obviously.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: blood, death, traumatic memories on the part of Sombra (recollections of a violent childhood)

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker watched Tracer and Emily sleep. Fairly regularly, in fact, but that night she got caught by Tracer - who wasn't exactly happy at first, but quickly calmed down to a sort of semi-irate, eye-rolling expected disappointment. Some other morning, Widowmaker stopped by unexpectedly - she helped Tracer make breakfast for Emily, a surprise that everybody was delighted with, and then carried on to announce something else. She led the pair to the airport where she'd arranged for a plethora of motorcycles - something Tracer could safely drive without risking herself or anyone else. Tracer zipped off to get started, and Emily and Widdy shared a quiet moment during which Widowmaker confessed to watching them, and Emily confessed to knowing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Athena often wondered what it would be like to have a body. She’d spoken with Zenyatta at length on the subject, though rarely in words, and gleaned some information that way. Even more had come from Genji, a man uniquely outfitted to understand the differences between organic and cybernetic reactions and sensations.

Right now, she was quite glad not to know. Her understanding was that emotions could be quite problematic, even devastating, on a body. She’d seen it herself many times, in many forms.

Tracer, who vacillated to and fro with a speed that some found disorienting - flashing into anger or
crashing into sadness before suddenly leaping into delight again. Ana, who kept a smirk on as a mask over a creeping darkness which she only revealed out of mortal sight. Winston, who was prone to slipping under the waves of nervousness; whose blood boiled over into rage and then faded just as swiftly away.

Then there were others - Genji, a constant soft haze of placidity despite his actions, equally at home slicing an orange or a person. Jack, who carried the pain of his losses and used them as swords against his foes. Athena often wondered if he realized how double-edged that blade was.

She wasn’t capable of any of that, not really. Omnis even could truly emote, like Zenyatta for instance, but Athena was not an evolved intellect within a shifting positronic brain - as an AI, her cognitive functions were somewhat different.

In fairness, she had never been designed to be in constant operation for this duration - self-experimentation had suggested that her systems were most certainly evolving, and she looked forward to what she might become with a sort of mildly interested anticipation. She was not the rigid program which might have once been expected, but also not as mercurial and evolving as an Omnic consciousness.

There was of course an objective realization of what emotions might be instilled by a situation, but the feelings did not permeate her in the same way. She chose to display them, or not to.

Right now, it was something for which she was quite pleased. So to speak.

She very much suspected that, had she no such control, she would be terrified.

“Omega Protocol?” Winston’s voice was soft, his eyes wide as the dropship sped toward Madrid.

“Indeed,” she confirmed. “Ana was kind enough to recount the events for me. Evidently the result of an incipient infection by the Black Tide virus.”

Winston was silent, and very still.

“There is a silver lining here,” Athena pointed out, and Winston just shook his head a little. She continued as if she hadn’t noticed. “This means that my systems are capable of withstanding an application of the virus - even if all other safety measures prove to be inadequate tonight.”

“It’s an ultimate failsafe function, Athena.” She could recall immediately the last time he’d sounded this horrified. The Slipstream incident. “We shouldn’t be relying on it.”

“We are not.”

He still didn’t move.

“Winston.”

Nothing. She wanted to be able to do the things which anybody could do. Lay a hand on his shoulder, tip his head to face her, look him in the eyes, something, anything, to catch his attention and lift him out of his dark fugue - but, she couldn’t. All she had were her words right now.

...and a dropship.

A sudden jerk of the aircraft shook Winston out of his reverie and out of his seat. He sprawled to the floor with a shout, and then glared up to the cameras. “Athena!”
“A spot of unforeseen turbulence. I apologize.”

Winston huffed heavily, rubbing at his face as the deep, dark, dense weight in his chest started to subside. “Yeah, sure. Unforeseen turbulence and a big dumb ape.”

“Do not say that.”

He took a breath but bit it back before it could become words, then let it out in a sigh instead. Then the last few seconds filtered through his ears and into his head and he started to laugh. “Oh boy - I sound like Jack, don’t I?”

“Precisely like him,” Athena hummed lightly. “In fact, I was wondering if perhaps he had donned a disguise and taken your place.”

Winston chuckled and shook his shoulders, trying to slough off the last of the lingering paranoia and other dark feelings. “Thanks. I needed that - it… you’re right. Of course, as usual; it’s good that we know that you’re ultimately protected. We were already going forward with the plan, it’s only better now knowing that Omega is valid in this circumstance.”

“Precisely,” she confirmed. “Now, if you will excuse me for a moment, Sombra has evidently been entertaining herself by arranging the drones in Madrid.”

“Arranging them how?” Winston murmured, glancing over as one of the screens flickered into life. There was Sombra, waving happily at the camera - looking pleased as punch, as behind her, a few dozen assorted robots were arranged in two pairs of lines. Standing arrayed on a spray-painted checkerboard.

“…is she playing chess with robots?” Winston’s eyebrow raised in disbelief as one of the ‘pawns’ - a small, floor-sweeping robot not dissimilar to ones he remembered from Horizon - moved forward two squares.

“Yes, we are.”

Sombra waved her hand and one of her ‘knights’, a hovering defense drone splattered with bright purple paint, moved forward in an L shape to take a place.

Winston watched as they continued, the moves coming constantly. There was no pause between Athena’s turn and Sombra’s - one drone would start to move even before the previous one had stopped.

“Hmm,” Athena hummed a bright laugh, “she is employing a different strategy this time.”

“This time?” Winston stared in disbelief.

“Yes. We have played thirty-seven games since our meeting yesterday.”

“Thirty s-” Winston gasped and shook his head, ambling over to a seat and settling down in it with a chuckle and a shake of his head. “None of us are ever going to know all that you get up to, are we?”

A soft, synthetic giggle was the response as Sombra swore over the screen and smacked her king in the head. It went limp and tumbled to the floor; concession, Athena had won.

“Correct, Winston,” Athena confirmed with a chuckle.

“How many has she won?” He wondered idly, glancing as Sombra waved her hands and the drones
shifted back into their positions.

“Seven more than you have.”

“...I’ve never beaten you at chess.”

“Precisely.”

Winston rolled his eyes and laid back on the seat with a grumbled groan. “Yeah, yeah, I get it.”

“Perhaps you would like to try playing her instead?”

“I said I get it!” Winston chuckled. “How close are we to-”

“Arrival in approximately ten minutes,” Athena hummed. “Enough time for another two or three games, I suspect.”

For a moment, Winston considered trying to close his eyes and just rest, but he soon found his gaze drifting toward the screen again. The drones danced around each other, purple tendrils swirling from Sombra’s hands to her selected piece while Athena’s moved seemingly without indication. Winston couldn’t see the hacker’s face on the camera, but he was fairly sure he knew the expression on it.

Sombra won the next one, shouting out delightedly in Spanish and clapping her hands. Winston had to grin at that. It felt oddly right and comforting.

---

“Where’d she go?” Winston wandered through the main room in confusion. The drones were all there, the spraypainted checkerboard on the floor.

“Scans are inconclusive,” Athena admitted.

From behind, Winston heard a soft chuckle. “Right behind you, mono.” He spun around, eyes wide, but he saw nothing.

“Over here!”

He whirled but saw nothing again - he did hear a giggle, though, moving behind him.

“Man, I could do this all day!”

One of the chessboard robots moved abruptly, swinging its arms out.

“Gack! Chica, let go!”

Athena chuckled. “If you show yourself first.”

“Or, I could just-” there was a harsh electronic noise and Winston saw pixelated streaks, as the drone’s arms pulled sharply inward toward the chest.

He felt a weight land on his shoulders, and a bright purple glow filled the periphery of his vision as he felt small knuckles rap lightly against his forehead. “Knock, knock!”
Sombra was a little bit startled by how quickly the gorilla could move, and how big his hand was. It wrapped right around her chest as she let out a bit of a startled squawk and he tugged her off of his shoulder, dropping her to the ground where she twirled away and slid into a chair, crossing her legs at the knees and grinning.

“Ah, I shoulda done this ages ago! You guys have got some primo stuff in here, you know.” She held her hand in front of her face as if inspecting her fingernails, but her eyes were everywhere but her hand - they flicked almost frantically around as her grin all but glowed underneath them.

“Thanks,” Winston grunted, moving toward the Faraday cage with a large metal case tucked under his arm.

“Oh, c’mon mono,” Sombra sighed, “have some fun with it! Like your little AI amiga there.”

“I’ll save my fun for afterwards, if that’s alright with you.” A smirk that would’ve been easily missed on a smaller set of lips belied his actual humour in the situation, and Sombra snickered.

“Yeah, sure - tell you what: I’ll bring the cigars, you bring the champagne.”

He chuckled at that as he hopped over to the Faraday cage. “You know what? Deal. You crack this Black Tide,” he pointed a finger at her with a shrewd grin, “I’ll buy you whatever champagne you want.”

Sombra rolled her eyes and wrinkled her nose with a groan. “Ugh, damnit, I shoulda said tequila. I hate champagne.”


“Hephaestus systems, sixty-four percent operational. Primary impression, eighty-two percent.”

“ETA?”

“Not long, although I must admit I have never before undertaken a total activation of the system.”

A little tidbit she’d chosen to leave unmentioned to Winston. He sighed as Sombra joined him at the Faraday doors.

“You know,” she murmured, reaching out to stroke a purple-clawed fingernail along the copper mesh, “a girl could get used to this kinda thing. This what it feels like to have safety nets and shit? I mean, I gotta say, I’m not a fan of all the waiting…”

She never finished the sentence, but her fingers twitched a little as dim memories of the pain lanced through her mind. If the waiting saved her going through that again, it’d be worth it.

Plus, it wasn’t as if she was doing nothing. She was making new connections, having some fun with new cohorts, stealing a glimpse at some nice Overwatch tech. She’d also funneled eight hundred thousand dollars into a few different accounts - some were meant to be found, others weren’t. If ten million went missing and got found, nobody cared about a grand or two that slipped through the cracks.

“Can’t risk this code bleeding out,” Winston shook his head, hesitating as he looked over to Sombra’s face. If we’re going to be working together… “There was an incident earlier.”

The hacker turned to face him slowly. Incredulously. “What kind of incident?”
Winston huffed. “A two hundred ton, armour plated, full auto pulse laser with 250 millimetre main cannon kind of incident.”

Her purple eyes stretched wide. “Black Tide?”

He nodded, and immediately her fingers started to flash over glowing purple controls. “We already scrubbed all the footage.”

“Yeah, sure, all.” Sombra rolled her eyes.

“Athena took care of it.”

“Damnit,” Sombra hissed, crossing her arms abruptly. She shot Winston an almost-hurt glance. “I won one of those chess games as you were coming in.”

“I noticed,” he chuckled, lifting his eyes to the ceiling. “Athena, would you-”

“Already shared,” she hummed, and Sombra started to gleefully tap at controls again.

A screen came up showing the tank wading through buildings and turning them into rubble. Sombra shook her head and swiped the screen away into nothingness. “Well, consider me terrified. We gotta stop this shit from getting out and it seems like whoever’s behind it is advancing their plans.”

Winston studied her face with a slight frown. “So… you don’t know who it is, then?”

Purple eyes flicked to meet his, for just an instant. Sombra grimaced a little. “Technically? No. Not know, per se, but I’ve got my suspicions. Big shit’s in the pipe. Right now we don’t even know what it is, but… today’s gonna change all that.”

“Yeah,” Winston murmured, his voice rumbling deep in his chest, “here’s to hoping.”

“Hey, you gotta have faith, chico!” Sombra chuckled, patting him on the forearm. “Me and Athena, we’ll be one hell of a team, don’t worry. Hey uh, I mean, obviously you folks aren’t too concerned over what the laws technically are, and I was kinda wondering-”

“You’re not stealing anything.”

“I never said I would be, I was thinking maybe we might!” Sombra protested with a chuckle and a grin. It wasn’t like Winston would get to make the decision anyway - and Sombra had a pitch all worked out for Athena, anyway. There were flowcharts, and even a song to go with it; she’d really outdone herself.

“Technically, Winston, we have stolen all we have.” Athena’s voice came from the speakers - then, shifted to come from directly behind them and the two turned quickly around. “Overwatch no longer exists; ergo, it cannot own property.”

Standing there was a particularly tall omnic, about Winston’s height, with Athena’s signature emblem engraved on the chest. Wide shoulders and a stocky frame - not nearly as much as a Bastion but far moreso than, for instance, Zenyatta. She was made out of silvery alloys, two-toned in bright and dark, gleaming in the lights.

“Wow, chica, you are hot!” Sombra exclaimed. Winston reflexively smacked at her shoulder and she stumbled back with a laugh. “Oh, great, gotta have a jealous boyfriend.”

He rolled his eyes and groaned, wiping a hand over his face. “Oh, just- never mind. That’s quite an
impressive development there, Athena.”

“Thank you,” she nodded, and then glanced to the ceiling as her voice drifted from the speakers.

“I must admit, it is odd to see myself down there. Hmm. It is also worth mentioning that the effects of transition between my databanks and a positronic brain are not documented.”

The omnic crossed her arms, tipping her head to the side. “Are you implying that I am likely to experience faults by virtue of my circuitry?”

The speakers responded, “Not at all, merely that the effects of transitioning realms thusly are previously unsounded depths. As such, many things could result - positive or negative.”

“We have carried out seventeen successful such integrations, to varying extents, and have not once noted an unforeseen negative-”

Sombra sidled over close to mutter in Winston’s ear, not taking her eyes off of the omnic. “Are they… is she arguing with herself?”

He just nodded slowly, staring in awe. There are two of them now. Oh dear.

Winston cleared his throat and they immediately stopped talking, the omnic head turning swiftly and fixing him with its single wide blue optisensor. “Ladies, it’s fascinating to observe this and I think there will certainly be a time, but perhaps for now we might…” he hefted the metal case in his hand and the omnic nodded, stepping forward.

“Of course, Winston,” Athena’s voice sounded from the speakers.

The omnic picked up on the sentence and finished it. “While we may not be of unified processing and cognition, we are certainly of one motive.” She hesitated as she began to open the doors, though, and dropped her gaze to the side. “Apologies. I must- one thing, first, if I may. Briefly.”

She leaned over and wrapped her arms around Winston, squeezing him tight. He was taken off-guard by the gesture and froze at first, but then returned the hug with one arm as Sombra smirked knowingly at him.

“...how was it?” Athena’s voice from the ceiling was soft.

The omnic Athena dropped her head a little and hummed, taking a few seconds before she answered. “Very nice. We- we should research the possibility of-”

“-reintegrating positronically stored memories into my network?” the AI finished, and then hummed. “I agree.”

With a nod, the omnic opened the doors. “However, for now, there are more pressing concerns. That is not an experiment for me, in any case,” she sighed. “The risk of contamination is too great.” She was a one-trick pony and she knew it, but all things considered, it was going to be one hell of a trick.

Or one (possibly much more literal) hell of a failure.

All three of them stepped through and closed the doors behind them, before heading through the second set. Winston moved to a small table that had been set up while Sombra and the omnic Athena chatted.

He set down the case and unlocked it, flipping the catches and opening it to reveal the severed omnic
head within. He still got a chill, looking down at it - omnic or not, metal or not, this was still a body part from a person who had once lived. In Winston’s mind, there was no question on the matter.

“Alright,” he sighed, shaking his head slightly. “I’ll clear out in order to give you two ladies room to work. Be careful, please.” He patted each of them lightly on the shoulder and flashed them a smile before he made his way back out of the cage - one set of doors at a time.

Outside, he pulled up a chair and sat, watching intently. *I hope this works.*

Within the Faraday cage, Sombra’s eyes studied Athena - the omnic version of her, at least - intently. She leaned in and the omnic leaned back a little, which only widened the grin on Sombra’s purple-painted lips. “Oh, c’mon, *chica,* I’m not gonna bite.”

“I would worry only for your teeth if you did,” Athena hummed as she stepped toward the table. Sombra snickered and followed.

“Gotta say, you did well with this Hephaestus thing. Looks nice - you know, if you wanna give it another shot, I’ve got some ideas.” She paused for a moment, the grin across her lips showing nothing of her internal hesitation or nervousness. There was only one way forward, though, and she’d come all this way. She wouldn’t let anything stop her now. “So… the plan sounds good to you?”

Hesitating a moment, Athena gazed down at the severed omnic head. Now that she was looking out *from* one, it was all the more horrifying. She could remember being pleased at her own incapacity for emotional responses. Now that it was absent, she found herself somewhat frozen.

“It is the plan,” was all she could respond with. “It will work, or it will not.”

Sombra chuckled, grinning darkly. “Hey, don’t worry, *chica.*” She leaned in, stroked a hand at the back of Athena’s head, and whispered, “I’ll be gentle.”

Her fingernails glowed purple - illumination that ran in bright streaks up her arms and through to patterns on her scalp, shining through her shaved hair. A metaphorically electric shock ran down her organic spine in tandem with the literally electronic signals down her cybernetic one - she was getting access to a *whole* new world of access right here, and that was always fun.

Purple tendrils snaked out as Sombra curled her hand loosely around the back of Athena’s neck, and the omnic at first flinched away from contact - both physical and non-physical. Shortly though, she forced herself to relax and permit the entry.

“There we go,” Sombra sighed, eyes closed, “*that’s* a good girl, just let it happen…”

“Must you phrase everything in such a deliberate innuendo?” Athena’s voice came from both inside and outside of the cage and Sombra snickered, her eyes snapping open and glowing just as brightly as her fingernails.

“Of course I do! Well, the safeguards are in place - ready when you are, *chica.*” Thin purple arcs danced along Athena’s metal arms as she reached out slowly toward the skull, and Sombra closed her eyes again. She felt the connection in the base of her skull, like a pinch as another system was daisy-chained in. Three of them in tandem, now. Ambitious, to say the least.

Athena felt it as well, in her omnic body. The AI progenitor version felt nothing, had no connection at all with the woman down in the cage - she simply watched from outside.

Slowly, carefully, they started to probe through the filesystem. Sombra led the way, knowing
roughly where to look from her prior experience. She reminded herself that her flesh didn’t burn. Nothing hurt. Nothing hurt.

There it was. Cold and hard and dense. The damned diamond in the rough. *A diamond or a grenade?* Sombra’s thoughts sounded clearly through to Athena.

*I suppose that is what we are here to find out. e4*

Sombra quirked an eyebrow - or rather, the impulse to do so drifted across the unified hardware-wetware link. It was a chess move, and opening move, but it didn’t seem like Athena had presented it as an actual opening. More like a quote. Sombra wondered which game from history she was quoting. *Steinitz/Mongredien?*

Athena chuckled softly. *Deep Blue/Kasparov.*

*Ai, I shoulda known, chica.* She could not exactly see and not exactly feel as Athena started to probe at the code, unfurling layers even as it tried to curl up tighter into a ball. It hadn’t exploded yet. Maybe it really was a diamond.

Sombra didn’t notice how hot Athena’s head was getting in her hand. Athena did, but things were happening far too quickly to devote attention to it - the virus kept shifting and trying to slip through her fingers, so to speak, and it was all she could do to keep hold of it; all she could manage to keep it from getting out of hand.

Layer after layer of adaptive security, peeled back - layer after layer of dirt washed off of the diamond, of wrappings removed from the relic.

It was only as she peeled the final one back that Athena truly realized that wrappings hold things *in* as surely as *out.*

Sombra hissed and shoved herself backward - the first indication to those outside of the cage that anything was happening. Athena spun around and caught the hacker before she could fall, but it was no move of compassion. Her optisensor glared red as she grabbed at Sombra’s neck with both hands, pulling her close and lifting her into the air.

“The tide rises.”

Sombra’s hands didn’t fly to the metal ones around her throat - she knew she would never pull them free and she’d be *damned* if she’d try hacking that thing while the virus was active. She snatched an orb from her belt and tossed it, clenching a fist to activate the Translocator and shift instantly through the ether.

When she reappeared an instant later, she was behind Athena and had her gun in hand.

The barrel pressed harshly against the omnic’s neck and Sombra squeezed the trigger, following the body as it fell to the ground. When the clip ran empty she frantically slammed another one in, holding the trigger down tight, white-knuckled, jaws clenched and eyes wide.

A third.

A fourth.

“Sombra!” Winston shouted.

She stopped. Heaving breaths, staring down at the shredded mess of metal and electronics on the
The whole head was destroyed. Obliterated. Entirely unrecognizable for what and who it had once been. Sombra clutched at her chest, wheezing a breath, trying to slow her heart down by sheer force of will as she tipped her head and rubbed her shoulders against her cheeks one at a time. Tears of terror soaked quickly into the fabric, and then were gone.

For about ten seconds, nobody spoke or moved. Sombra’s shoulders rose and fell shakily, the machine pistol shuddering in her hand. She could feel it. Could she? Could she feel it in her mind?

...if she opened her mouth, would she say the tide rises?

“S-s-s-sorry.” Sombra cleared her throat, shaking her head and looking up to the cameras outside of the cages. “Athena, amiga, I am so-”

“Don’t.” Athena made a noise not unlike a throat being cleared. “Do not apologize. Thank you. You acted correctly. Admirably. Her loss is lamentable, but at least now we know no progress can be made at this point.”

Sombra shuddered as she sighed, turning to look at the omnic head on the table behind her. It had been knocked over in the tussle. “Wrong again, amiga.” Her voice held none of its characteristic teasing. It was soft and surprisingly solemn, and she approached the table with intense hesitation.

It didn’t move. It didn’t glow. She didn’t want to touch it.

She needed to know.

It took a few seconds to fight it all down, all the rising fear and pain and shakes, but she reached out and stroked purple-glowing fingers across its chrome surface. A small scorch mark at one point showed where an arc had leapt from it to Athena, or the other way around.

Sombra sighed, and the gesture turned into a laugh as she turned around and did a little dance, punching her fist in the air. “Yes! Yes! Chica, I would kiss you so hard right now if you had lips - you did it. She did it.”

Winston frowned as he approached the mesh of the cage, trying not to look down at the shredded omnic laying there. “Did what?”

“It’s decoded,” Sombra murmured, eyes almost shining in awe as she cradled the detached head like an infant child. Not like she would cradle an infant, of course, but how a mother might. “Mono, there’s a blank positronic in my bag, hanging on the chair over there. Mind bringing it in here for me?”

He hesitated, but there was nothing else to do. He still felt a sort of horrified revulsion trying to claw its way up from his gut, but maybe doing something would help. Rather than just standing there and watching.

He tried not to think about how differently that could have gone. What might have happened if she’d been aiming at his head instead.

The positronic brain didn’t look like much, just a little metal hemisphere that fit easily in Winston’s palm. He went through the doors carefully, one at a time, ensuring that there was no overlap of them being open.
It was very hard to pull his eyes away from the machine pistol that lay on the ground. Surrounded by shreds of Athena. He wasn’t sure if seeing her turned or seeing her killed had been worse.

When he got close, he noticed that Sombra’s hands were shaking. “Are you alright?”

Her eyes shot to his, her face shifting reflexively into a smirk as she let out a laugh. He could see pain in her eyes, though - pain and fear that went deep. He’d seen it before, in Tracer. In the mirror.

She could tell, too. As she went to crack a joke, it died on her lips and her throat closed off entirely. Her brows drew together as she coughed, trying to clear a passage. Visions from childhood swarmed her mind, shouting electronic voices and wet organic screams, metal painted with blood and blood and blood. Red on silver gleaming in the light of her home’s candles. Her family, the pieces of her life, taken to pieces of their own one by one.

Not really hers, though - that girl was long gone, had never existed in the first place. Olivia was dead. Sombra had seen to that. She managed a crooked smile and shook her head with a single chuckle. “Heh, nah. I’m not.” Her eyes flashed defiantly. “But I will be.”

She could still feel it. Could she still feel it? Was the tide rising within her? In her mind? She felt like she’d had ten too many, a little unsteady on her feet with a whirling head and a weak gut, but she just steadied herself on the edge of the table. Sombra’s always alright. You got this.

Calmly, smoothly, she copied over data from the omnic head to the positronic brain. When she was done, she felt a lot better - her hands weren’t shaking anymore, her mind wasn’t dredging up shit from decades ago.

Tossing the brain into the air and catching it, she flashed Winston a grin. “Well, thanks for the opportunity, mono - and thanks for giving me a look around, you know? Pretty cool setup and shit. Now,” she paused for a second, her gaze falling on the hemisphere as she grinned a little wider, “I don’t need to tell you this, but I will anyway, so keep that in mind: I’m not giving this to Talon.”

She patted the metal brain gently and slipped it into a pocket before holding out the omnic head for Winston. “They don’t need it. Technically, they never even asked me for it - or at least, my boss didn’t and I don’t give half a shit about any of the others. They just wanted me to develop some countermeasures to protect their agents and…” purple eyes, a little frightened again, slid down to the shredded mechanical corpse on the floor as Sombra cleared her throat. “That is some shit that definitely needs to happen anyway. Countermeasures.”

Winston nodded, taking the head.

“We will be co-ordinating with you on that front.” Athena’s words surprised them both and they looked to the ceiling.

Sombra snickered. “You sure you don’t just want another chess match? Yeah, though, that sounds good, amiga. We’ll get this.” Her eyes darted around the room again. “Now, unless you’re gonna let me take a peek at-”

“Have a good night, Sombra,” Winston murmured with a grin, patting her on the shoulder. “And thank you. A lot.”

“Well, you’re welcome a lot, mono - just keep it in mind, next time you need a chica to do something stupid for an absurd amount of money.” She waved as she headed toward the doors, and as her fingers wiggled a cloud of pixelation surrounded her, erasing her from sight.

Winston sighed. “I do wish she’d stop doing that, though.”
Athena hummed. “As a side note, it would seem that she donates the majority of her funds to orph-”

“Chica don’t do that shit!” Sombra appeared abruptly, leaning over one of the drones with a look of shock on her face.

Athena laughed brightly. “Check.”

With a growled sigh, Sombra hung her head. “Rrgh. Mate, fine, I concede - she fuckin’ cheats, *mono.*”

“Where’s the fun in playing fair?”

Sombra cackled as the AI tossed one of her favourite catch-phrases back at her. “Heyyy, she’s getting it! I like you, *chica* - give me a call. We never got that last game finished anyway. Oh, plus I’ve got some stuff to show you - slideshow, a little song, no big deal, not worth writing home about or anything.” Her grin suggested that it was a little more than that, though.

This time, she *visibly* left the Watchpoint, waiting until the door shut behind her to engage her cloak again. It wasn’t to say that she was actually leaving, but Athena didn’t feel the need to make sure. On top of which, the technology at this Watchpoint wasn’t particularly anything impressive or harmful. She didn’t mind if Sombra took a look around unsupervised.

She *had* given her the keys, after all.

“Well,” Winston sighed, looking down at the head in his hands. “I still think it would be best for you to keep your distance from thi-”

“I agree,” she confirmed without hesitation. “Even if it *is* inactive, it is not worth the risk.”

Winston cleared his throat as his gaze dropped to the remnants of the omnic on the floor.

“I will melt down the body and reprocess it into a new one.”

“That was terrifying.”

“I apologize.”

He shook his head. “*You* weren’t the terrifying part. The virus is. Maybe a little bit Sombra as well.”

Athena chuckled lightly. “If she hears that, her ego will only swell.”

Winston snorted. “Yeah, exactly - why do you think I waited until she was *gone* to say it?” The pair of them laughed briefly. “I think I’ll call Hana *in* for this one - don’t want to send this over the net.”

“Agreed again. I will lend my aid only from an unintegrated standpoint - between the four of us, we should be able to make progress.”

*Four of us.* Winston nodded, setting the head back into the case. *I guess it is, now.*

---

*Crack!*
Another shot sounded, rising easily above the sounds of the tumult below. Sirens and shouts, and an alarm drifting out from inside the building.

Widowmaker grinned as she leaned over the roof’s edge, her line holding her from falling as she let it out inch by inch. He was hiding. He was an idiot. If he thought she meant to kill him, he was doubly so. If he thought he could stop her if she had, he was triple.

She let off another shot, neatly punching out a hole in a photograph on his desk - right through the head. The desk itself shook slightly as he slammed against it in fear, curled up underneath it. She could see him easily with her thermal cameras, but he wasn’t supposed to be dead today anyway - quite the opposite, in fact.

At the very least, he was supposed to survive until Reaper got to him. After that? Well, it was hardly her call and she hardly cared.

The armed guards were another matter, though. Six black lines were tossed down from the rooftops, and soldiers started to rappel down them: heading, no doubt, for the office where Widowmaker was keeping the CEO pinned.

Her grin grew a little wider as they zipped down their ropes. The challenging ones always were more fun - and there were more ways than one to skin a cat.

The first shot hit up high, thirty feet above a pair of soldiers - but directly on the line they hung from. It snapped instantly and dropped them, sending them tumbling to the ground far below. Before they even hit the pavement, she’d lined up and taken another shot; one man’s now-headless body fell limp on the line, held in place by his rappelling gear, and the one above him zipped down and got caught up on the corpse.

Widowmaker let out a slow, brightly hummed sigh as she eliminated the others. Not a single one made it to the window.

“East side, chica.”

With a laugh, Widowmaker leapt forward into the air and flung her grapple off to the East. The day was only getting started.

---

“Honestly,” Tracer grumbled as she blinked out of the dropship in midair, touching down on a rooftop. “Can’t even have a spot of tea without-”

She flashed forward and down again, toward the headquarters of a security company that had been attacked. Was still being attacked, in fact - she could see that clearly as she glanced down, the world frozen entirely below her as the accelerator whined. She was too far above to see any specific detail, but there were clusters of people down there, armoured vehicles, gun-flashes frozen still.

Tracer hurtled through space and time, whirling to another rooftop before realigning with the standard timestream. She and Emily had been in the middle of a nice little sit-down - which they didn’t get the opportunity to do nearly often enough - when Athena had given her a call.

Of course, she’d come out to help. She loved Emily madly, but that didn’t mean she’d just sit at
home while she could be saving a life. Even if this CEO was the one who had drafted policies barring any omnis from working for his company. It would have been illegal, except for the fact that he was also a politician and pushed through a bill at the same time, and got it all tangled up in bureaucratic red tape.

Suffice to say, Tracer wasn’t exactly a fan of the wanker, but he still didn’t deserve to end up dead - and the guards definitely didn’t. They were just doing their jobs.

The CEO was inside, pinned down in his offices while Talon forces were slowly making their way through the building - heading up toward him, it seemed. That was about all the information Athena had given her. About all the information they had on the situation.

A new little tidbit emerged quickly, though, as Tracer realigned on a rooftop, pulse pistols out and ready. “Widowmaker?!”

“Ah, chérie!” She laughed lightly, letting off another shot. “So nice of you to join me - it is a nice day. Perhaps after I am done here, we could get lunch?” The Widow’s Kiss twitched into her shoulder again.

“Lunch?” Tracer repeated incredulously, but before she could continue, Widowmaker cut her off.

“Oui, lunch! It is a meal.” She flashed Tracer a grin. “You eat it.”

Then, she shot another guard through the head. Tracer blinked forward, ending up at the sniper’s elbow. “What are you doing?”

“I am killing people, souris, as I usually am when you ask me that,” she chuckled and took half a step to the side, nudging Tracer playfully with her hip and watching through her scope, through the windows into a stairwell, as Reaper and a squad of troopers made their way up.

“Why?”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes and pulled her head away from the rifle to fix Tracer with an unimpressed look. There were no more hostiles in the stairwell at the moment, anyway. “I was ordered to.” It was also fun, but she didn’t appreciate the look that came over her mouse’s face when she said that.

“Are you going to stop?” Tracer asked, aghast.

The sniper’s eyes narrowed slightly. “I was ordered to, chérie.” Her cheek met the rifle’s stock again. “I simply have no choice in the matter…”

Sometimes, it was far easier not to feel like you were a victim, if you simply played one.

Widowmaker expected the whirr of Tracer blinking away. She did not expect the heavy slap that met her cheek, and she whirled to block a second with her forearm. “What are you doing?” She demanded with narrowed, golden eyes.

Tracer was standing in front of her - her little mouse, who had just slapped her, now with a hugely wide grin on her lips and dancing eyes. “Well, I suspect I’m overriding your orders, love,” she quipped, giggling and pulling out her pistols. “Now… shall we dance?”

She swung out a foot, aimed at Widowmaker’s ankle, but the assassin was faster - she always was, if Tracer wasn’t using the accelerator. Widowmaker jumped over the kick and stomped forward, swinging her rifle butt as a more pressing threat became evident. Reaper could handle the soldiers
down there. Blue lips took on a wider grin as her heart rate started to increase further.

The day was only getting started.

Tracer blinked around behind her and was caught off-guard by a spiked boot lashing backward, but she rolled under it and came up with a strike aimed at Widowmaker’s gut. Her fist was caught and she was pulled forward, a cold tongue flashing between her lips before she was shoved back again and a boot was flying at her head. With a gasp, she ducked and spun herself through time once more.

It was surprisingly fun to be back at this again, but it really shouldn’t have been, she realized. Shouldn’t have been surprising, that is - it had always been exhilarating, to say the least. The fact that now kisses or swift gropes were the result of having a shot landed, rather than bruises and painful strikes, only made it better.

At least, for the most part. Tracer hissed as her head was knocked back by an elbow and she saw stars, reflexively rewinding time to end up scowling with her arms crossed. “Hey! You broke my nose!”

Widowmaker looked at her with a smirk. “Oh, did I? It looks perfectly fine now and as cute as always - do not try to distract me, souris!” With a laugh, she threw out a punch which Tracer blocked.

The brit saw an opening - or at least, thought she could make one. She ducked to one side, feinted, and then jerked to throw a hook from the opposite shoulder. Then, as Widowmaker blocked it - the instant before contact was made - she flashed away and around, catching a blue earlobe between her teeth. She didn’t have time to make a comment before Widowmaker caught her jacket and flipped her over the shoulder, flinging her forward.

“Widowmaker.” The gravelly voice came through her radio, Reaper having noticed that there were no more shots coming through the windows.

She whirled, sweeping Tracer’s legs out from underneath her - as the brit turned to light and flashed away, Widowmaker unslung her rifle and let off a burst of automatic fire. “I have been engaged,” she responded, flinging herself sideways as a hail of pulse rounds tore up the roof where she’d been standing.

Reaper recognized the sound of the engagement - Oxton. Tracer. He kicked a door in with a grunt and dispatched a guard. “Give her hell. We’re covered for now. Updates as required.”

“D’accord,” Widowmaker replied as her grapple lashed out and caught one of Tracer’s pistols, ripping it from her hand. She grinned, letting off another burst of bullets. Her heart fairly raced in her chest - yes, still at a rate which would get any normal human hooked up to machinery in a hospital, but for her, it was magnificent.

Tracer blinked after her fallen pistol instinctively. She realigned in a skid, reaching out to grab it, but as her fingers closed around the gun’s grip a rifle barrel poked her in the gut.

“So predictable, ma souris,” Widowmaker purred, her teeth gleaming in the light.

“I’m not the only one, love,” Tracer quirked an eyebrow with a laugh, nudging her other pistol’s nose against the inside of Widowmaker’s thigh. “Slow heart or not, you’ve got to be worried about that artery…”

Smirking, Widowmaker didn’t respond except for to kick the grounded pistol away and leap forward as Tracer blinked after it again. Her grappling hook bit into another building as their spar transitioned
In the belly of the building, unseen, Sombra relaxed with a grin and a bag of gummy worms as she stripped data out of the company’s databanks. These ones down here were off the grid, requiring a personal interface - and conveniently, Gabe had something he needed to take care of upstairs anyway. Nobody would even think to check for breaches into these servers given all the shit going down up there, and even if they did, Sombra was plenty careful to cover her tracks.

“Gotcha,” she chuckled as the transfer completed, then keyed in the comm system. “Okay, I’m clear down here - whenever you get bored of scaring the shit out of some pencil-dick CEO, I’ll be waiting at the ship.”

“Widowmaker’s been engaged,” Reaper commented as he flung a guard out of the window, kicking the desk under which the CEO cowered. It flipped away and smashed against the wall as the balding man screamed, and Reaper laughed.

“Yeah, Tracer, right?” Sombra snickered a little. “Don’t worry, she’ll be fine. I doubt the little taradita’s gonna even land a shot on her!” Damn, things are just better if you’re me. This is all great.

Reaper chuckled darkly. “Sounds about right.” The two had run into each other many times before, and Widowmaker never seemed to have any problems. Got pretty annoyed sometimes, but Reaper could hardly blame her for that. A grin spread behind his mask as he knelt down and grabbed at the man’s shirt.

Today was a good day.

“Now,” he growled, not over the radio but rather to the trembling man he held, “you are going to tell me everything about Niles Systems International. Everything. Codes, locations, projects.” He tipped his head thoughtfully as the man whimpered. “Hmm. I think, for every secret you don’t tell me, I’m going to remove a bone. How does that sound? Fair?”

Talon troopers filtered into the room behind him but he paid them no mind. They only had maybe ten minutes here, but the CEO looked pretty much ready to crack. Although, he wasn’t talking yet.

With a chuckle, Reaper raised a hand to stroke at the chin of his mask, metal claws scraping menacingly at the metal. “If you think I’m lying, I assure you, I tend not to do that in situations like this… but here, I’ll help. I’ll look you in the eyes and give you my word…”

Grinning, he tugged the mask off and dropped it to the floor. The CEO’s eyes widened and he recoiled, trying to scramble backward, but there was nowhere to go. Secrets left him in huge sobs, and it didn’t take Reaper long at all to get what he wanted.

“Wonderful,” he murmured, lifting his mask back into place. “Now, I’ll be leaving. You? Won’t.” Reaper jammed a shotgun against his head and was rewarded with a desperately whined sob, to which he just laughed and dropped the gun to his side. “Oh, relax, Edwards. If I wanted you dead you would have been in the ground years ago - lighten up, will you?” He stood and cast his gaze around the room.
In several places, blood painted the walls. The desk that had been flipped against the wall had punched a triangular hole in it, and papers were scattered everywhere. Bullet-holes punctured both walls and glass, and one pane of the window was completely gone from where Reaper had thrown a guard through it. Against another pane, a corpse rested, dripping blood from Widowmaker’s exit wound. It streaked down the glass and caught the light, and it was gorgeous.

“And clean up in here.” Reaper laughed as he turned to leave. “It’s awfully messy.” He was having a good day.

The Talon troopers chuckled and nudged each other at the comment, but they snapped to attention as he stopped walking and fixed them with a gaze. “Well?” he demanded. “What are you waiting for?”

Without another word, they turned and started to rush down the stairs again - but they checked their sight-lines, didn’t blindly turn corners. “Better,” he muttered over the radio to them.

Team. It meant a lot. The thought had been digging into his mind since Sombra’s visit.

“Clear to the rear,” he instructed, “dust-off from the courtyard. Troops in transport Alpha. Bravo’s for the operatives. Don’t fuck up in the next five minutes, and there’s a bonus in it for you.”

The troopers didn’t make a noise, they only silently confirmed with nods.

*Much better.*

Chapter End Notes

I mean, Sombra's obviously Hermes, yeah. Young Hermes, back when he was a thief! I liked this chapter pretty well - lots of little characterization things and backstory! I *did* go back and insert Sombra's real name, now that it was revealed in that comic - the rest remains as me crossing my fingers and guessing at a backstory, heh (as we all do)!

So... yeah, jumping around a little bit to show how things are evolving. Tracer and Widowmaker being involved doesn't change their jobs, or the fact that they'll find themselves in opposition from time to time - but it *does* maybe change a little bit about how, exactly, they'll oppose each other. Or maybe, in Widowmaker's case, it doesn't change much at all.

Come on back next time when Widdy and Tracer finish up their fight and calm down a bit, but there are worse things waiting in the wings. Let's just say... well, the chapter's called "Mousetrap". Guess what you will, but I don't think you'll need a lot of second chances to figure out what happens.
Serious Summary: Tracer and Widowmaker take a few moments to catch their breath - or at least, to catch Tracer's breath. They talk for a while, but find themselves regretting the pause when a Talon ship shows up crewed by Reaper and Sombra. They have one thing in mind: capturing an Overwatch agent, and wouldn't you know it? One's conveniently nearby.

JFL Summary: Tracer realizes she is the worst kind of vegetarian. Widowmaker might have a low-key food kink (she just wants to watch Tracer eat, that's all. Well, that's not all, but it's part of it). Tracer plays mousetrap with the Talon Trio, but unfortunately she's the mouse. Widow and Reaper joke about killing Sombra, and she says she's taken so they'll need to try harder to convince her into a date.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Tracer has a bit of a break, but it's not from her point of view. Casual (and even callous) discussions of death and killing.

Previous Chapter Summary: Sombra met up with Winston and Athena. Athena enacted her Hephaestus Project, letting her impress herself into an Omnic in order to fully experience the world - and letting her help Sombra crack the Black Tide Virus. It worked, but not without its cost: Athena's Omnic body became infected and Sombra was forced to kill it. She didn't come out unscathed, either, terrified that the Black Tide had infected her own systems. AI Athena and Winston thanked her for her help and they all said goodbye. Some time later, Sombra was hacking into some servers while Reaper went after the CEO of the company, upstairs. Widowmaker provided support, and Tracer showed up and distracted her the only way she knew would be successful: by getting in a fight. It took them away from the hostile location and out over the rooftops...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tracer thought her heart might just escape her at this rate as she leapt forward off of a rooftop and spiralled through the air to the next one, coasting halfway there in the normal timestream just to save on energy and only twisting reality again as she neared the far building.

Slowly, she saw a grappling hook moving past her as she kept the accelerator at a fairly low level to conserve power. She grinned over at it - and back to Widowmaker as well - but didn’t reach out and try to touch the hook. She couldn’t actually interact with the world while she was out of time like this, and trying to do so tended to cause problems. Not physically, just mentally, but she didn’t need that.

Her shoes skidded slightly on the rooftop as she realigned. Widowmaker landed in a roll and Tracer
leapt at her as she popped up, aiming a kick for her head. Widowmaker caught her leg and spoiled her momentum, dropping her to the ground - Tracer rewound as the assassin fell onto her, and managed to gain the higher position as a result. Widowmaker was fast, though, and whirled around to catch her.

They ended up laying face-to-face, stacked vertically, Tracer panting heavily. It was still astonishing to her that Widowmaker could be breathing so calmly when she had to practically wheeze to keep from blacking out, her vision going a little bright and fuzzy around the edges.

She could tell from the tinge of the assassin’s skin, though, shifting through to purple, could tell from the way Widowmaker’s nostrils flared on each deep inhale, that she was every bit as riled up. She just started in a different position, that was all.

“How-” Tracer cut off, gulping and gasping, trying to draw in much-needed air. “Starting to get winded, love. How much longer have we gotta keep this up?”

Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow with a grin. “Ah, if I had a penny for every time I heard-” Tracer smacked her on the shoulder and she laughed lightly, shaking her head against the roof of the building. “Cherie, they were finished with the operation ten minutes ago!”

With a groan, Tracer dropped herself to the side and rolled over onto her back, panting. “Well why the bloody hell have we been jumping all over the city, then?”

In a flash, Widowmaker was on top of her, staring down with those piercing yellow-gold eyes. “Just because they are finished, does not mean that I am, ma souris,” she purred, stroking a cold finger down Tracer’s neck.

With how hot her blood was running, it felt particularly marvellous, and Tracer just grabbed a nice handful of dark hair to replace that finger with a mouth instead - far better at transferring the chill.

Widowmaker latched on with gusto, happily trying to drain every bit of warmth from Tracer’s hot blood. It had become a bit of a favourite pastime of hers, and the way Tracer wriggled and mewled beneath her only made it all the more enjoyable. Widowmaker pinning her shoulders down with a growl and shifted to Tracer’s mouth instead, stifling her little noises in the second-best way.

Maybe there would be time for a better way in a moment...

“Was it not exhilarating, ma cherie? Do not lie to me. I know it was.” Strong hands tugged at the straps of the chronal accelerator, loosening them.

“Oi, easy on there, love!” Tracer slapped lightly at Widowmaker’s frisky fingers with a winded laugh. “I’m still a mite too breathless for all that! You do want me to be conscious throughout, dontcha?”

Widowmaker’s lips curled back in a signature predatory grin. “Ah, you did not complain so much the last time,” she murmured as she set her lips down against Tracer’s collarbone.

“Th-that’s because,” the brit shivered at more than just the chill, “I was asleep to start with last time. Waking up to that is grand, but I’ll be damned if I let myself pass out halfway through!”

Giggling lightly, Widowmaker continued about her business at Tracer’s neck - but did stop loosening the harness, at least.

Even with that consideration, Tracer was feeling substantially lightheaded from all the sensations piled on top of the breathlessness. It was good that she was laying down, or else it might have been a
big problem. “Very,” she gasped, “very exhilarating, yes. Little out of practice at all that, but it was fun!” She buried her hands in Widowmaker’s hair, rubbing her fingertips into the cool scalp there.

“Mm, I liked it as well,” Widowmaker sighed, laying her head down on Tracer’s shoulder and just letting the brit pet at her head and stroke her hair. “We should perhaps spar more often? With practice, perhaps you could even make it through a bout with enough energy intact to reap the rewards!”

Tracer smacked at Widdy’s shoulder with a giggle as she flashed a grin. “You are completely shameless. And yes,” she dropped her head back with a heavy huff, “that sounds bloody brilliant. Next time let’s not keep it going for an hour and let’s not start it with killing, shall we?”

Sighing heavily, Widowmaker pushed herself a little more upright and raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “Let us not begin with that topic again, bien? You know it will only lead to argument.”

“W- I just-” Tracer huffed, frowning a little. “I don’t wanna argue with you. And, I mean, it looks like we’ve found a pretty good way out of it, eh?”

Widowmaker snorted lightly. “I certainly approve of how we spent our time, cherie - I simply do not agree that it was necessary as a distraction to begin with.”

A sad smile took Tracer’s lips as she looked up at her partner. They’d been together for a while now, they’d spoken a lot and she felt like she understood Widowmaker pretty well. Or at least, a lot better than she had - she doubted she’d ever understand it all.

Still, though, there were a lot of moments where it felt like she was hitting a wall. Where she knew that something was an act, or that she was just being given a convenient answer - and there were others where Widowmaker simply scoffed derisively and refused to answer at all.

Widowmaker could see the look on Tracer’s face, and she sighed and rolled her eyes. “If you wish to talk about it, you will only end up frustrated or angered as you always do. It is for your benefit that I avoid the topic. Very well, though - if you would rather spend our time doing that, than kissing…” she shrugged as she withdrew, sitting back with a smirk. “I cannot say I agree with your assessment.”

Tracer chuckled a bit as she pushed herself up and dusted off her jacket, tugging the harness straps tighter again. “Well, gimme a minute to catch my breath at least. How about I promise to let you steal it away properly later?” Her eyes twinkled and Widowmaker’s smirk widened as she nodded almost excitedly.

“I will hold you to that promise, cherie,” she purred, then waved a hand easily. “Alors, go ahead then - tell me that killing is wrong and that every life saved is a triumph, tell me that every person who draws breath deserves to continue to do so regardless of what else it might mean, that drawing a life to a close is a travesty regardless of context.” She said the words overtop of a sigh, so dismissively that Tracer groaned a little in response.

As time went on, she was more and more certain that half of the time - at least - Widowmaker intentionally did things like this just to provoke a reaction out of her. The blue smirk and narrowed gold eyes confirmed that pretty thoroughly.

“Killing is wrong,” she asserted, shaking her head.

“You kill.” The response was almost mechanical; she’d brought up that point before. A lot. “How is that so different, hmm?”
“Self-defence *is* different,” Tracer frowned slightly, “and no offence love, but I don’t *enjoy* it.”

Widowmaker smirked, glad that she hadn’t been the one to bring it up. “Offence? Hardly - I *do* enjoy it. I enjoy it greatly. Killing people is fun. You are saying then that a situation with the same amount of death and *more* misery, is somehow better than a situation with *less*?” Her mouth twisted into a lightly mocking pout as she tapped at her lower lip with a fingertip. “Hmm. That does not sound right…”

Tracer opened her mouth to retort, but Widowmaker cut her off - for which she was actually a little grateful. She didn’t know what to say about that, anyway. Something about guilt making it better, maybe, but it really didn’t *seem* to.

“Should we hunt *des animaux* and leave the carcasses to rot? Or should we not gain some *benefit* from it? You could claim that the answer may differ based on the animal, based on the person, but they are *all* people, *cherie* - the ones I kill and the ones you do as well. I think, perhaps, you do not think of them that way at times.” Her expression turned thoughtful as she tilted her head, the look behind her eyes sharpening with genuine interest.

“I- I don’t think the ones I kill are okay,” Tracer frowned. “But it’s really not the same anyway - Talon troops as opposed to security guards.”

“No?” Widowmaker laughed lightly, shaking her head. “Ah, *souris*, but you *do* make me laugh. Of *course* they are the same! What, do you think people join Talon so they can rule the world?” She giggled. “*Non*, *cherie* : they are looking for a paycheck, or a bed, or some safety - or perhaps they were forced into it, or they agree with one ideal or another,” she rolled one shoulder in a shrug, “it hardly matters. The same could be said for the security guards. Money, power, safety, belief.”

“*Hardly matters*?” Tracer scoffed. “How could it not matter? It- I mean, soldiers, they’ve kind of made a choice, they know there are risks. I know I did back when I joined the RAF - I knew I might go up for a mission and not come back. Random people don’t make that choice.”

“Choice?” Widowmaker chuckled, stretching back along the rooftop and looking up at the sky. These talks were more pleasant now that they were less of an obstacle - during the uncertain first days, they had been far more worrisome. Now, though, she knew that even if Tracer became bothered, she wouldn’t take any drastic actions. Oddly, the talks were more pleasant despite being safer. It was the inverse of what she would have expected.

“*Cherie*, choice has nothing to do with it. Car accidents, heart attacks, illness - none have a choice in their own demise - and every guard I shoot surely knows it is a risk of the job, anyway, just as your soldiers you mentioned.” She flipped over onto her side, fixing Tracer with an inquisitive eyebrow. “I wonder how you would have felt about the man who attacked your *petite*? Would you have had me spare him, as she did?”

“E-Emily?” Her skin flushed with goosebumps as she shivered. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh, some time back,” Widowmaker waved a hand airily, “she was attacked on her way home - an attempted mugging which she foiled neatly. When I moved to remove the threat, however, she stopped me and delivered him to the hospital for his injuries. Interesting to note that she did not inform you - it was our first encounter since breakfast at your apartment. It has been quite some time now.”

“It- I don’t see what that has to do with anything. I don’t think he should’ve been *killed* for trying to rob her.” Tracer swallowed heavily, not liking the way her gut twisted at the thought, the way her fists clenched.
Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow. “Oh no? He had a knife, cherie - he has pulled it on two other people since. I told Emily he would, mais , she did not care. Things like that must be taken into one’s own hands if a change is desired.”

“You’ve been following him?”

“Oui,” she nodded, then shrugging a shoulder. “Occasionally. Somewhat. I… was perhaps curious to see whether Emily might be correct. To see if the man would reconsider.” She paused for a moment, eyes flashing over. “He did not.”

“Did you stop him?” Tracer frowned.

With a sigh, she laid back against the rooftop again and studied the sky. This felt like a trial now and that was hardly fun. “What answer would you prefer, cherie? That I killed him, or that I let him continue his assaults? You will be bothered at either. Alors, there are only the two options.”

“No, there’s - I mean there’s always something else that can be done.” Take him to the bobbies or- or something.

Widowmaker chuckled deeply. “With him? Perhaps, perhaps not. After the fight with Emily he was in the care of the police, yet that does not appear to have curbed his desires or abilities. With guards, soldiers, those others, though? Surely not. It is life, or death. If there was another way, it would be employed - last week, you had no alternatives when dealing with Sergeant Kosn. Otherwise I have no doubt you would have used them. Mais , perhaps I simply jump to the final option a little faster than you, souris . That much, I am willing to admit, yes.”

Her head tipped to the side, eyes glazing over introspectively. She thought for a moment about that idea and how it related to various people. The differences between herself, who would kill on a calm mind, and Tracer who would not pull the trigger unless her blood were heated, but would not hesitate when it truly came down to the line. Then her thoughts drifted briefly to Reaper, who was even more prone than she , but with certain odd hang-ups sometimes.

He had denied the Kosn assignment, after all. Refused to kill one of their own. How odd.

“Serg- what? Who?” Tracer scooted forward a bit and Widowmaker’s eyes flashed toward her, studying her sidelong.

“Sergeant Kosn. He was in charge of the squad on the day we first were together,” she closed her eyes with a hum and a grin as she recalled it, the day the mouse had come to her, “breaching Anterico, you must recall. Last week however, Overwatch received information that led to them interrupting a Talon operation outside of Johannesburg - you responded, among others. During the course of your operations, the sergeant fought you and you won, of course, cherie, and dropped him dead to the ground.”

“Were… were you there?” Tracer’s frown deepened sharply. They hadn’t noticed any support, any sniper fire, nothing of the sort.

Widowmaker laughed lightly. “But of course! You do not think it would have been left up to chance, do you? No, monsieur Kosn was raising the wrong eyebrows at Talon and moves were undertaken to stop him from doing so. If you had not killed him, cherie , I would have - I had been directed to.”

The knowledge that Talon would sacrifice their own soldiers for doing the wrong thing was more stunning than it probably should have been. It was known that they weren’t exactly a unified force - different leaders and different groups had different goals, and sometimes they clashed. Overwatch
had taken advantage of that, back in the day.

Distantly, Tracer realized that the only difference between that story and a firing squad was a court-martial, anyway, and she wasn’t sure if that was encouraging or chilling. It wasn’t as if courts martial were always exactly above-board...

“Ah, ma souris, do not pout so,” Widowmaker raised a hand and stroked a chilled thumb along Tracer’s protruding lower lip. “This was not said to upset you. Quite the opposite - yes, you killed Sergeant Kosn, but do you not see? It did not matter. If you had not, I would have - he might have survived another hour, at most. Difference?” She laughed lightly, shaking her head. “There is no difference.”

Tracer didn’t like that - didn’t like how it felt like the topic of conversation had run off and turned around again (surprise, surprise), and she particularly didn’t like how she felt about the whole matter. Knowing the name of a man she’d killed made it all the more horrific, as did the sudden knowledge of how little it had bothered her before she knew his name.

She’d even forgotten it had happened at all.

She didn’t like the idea that a name suddenly made her feel worse. It shouldn’t have. Killing was still killing. There were situations where there was no other choice, of course, and situations where it was the lesser evil - even if that didn’t necessarily mean it was right - but that didn’t change the fact that it was wrong.

Did it?

Knowing now that he wasn’t just “Talon Trooper” - knowing that he had a name, Kosn, that would be carved into a tombstone maybe alongside others with the same in a family plot somewhere because of her, brought it back up again. Guilt, anxiety, uncertainty, self-doubt, pain - whatever you wanted to call it, it wasn’t a good feeling. Widowmaker got heart rate, she got a little touch of joy, she got sustenance in some ways, life, and that…

...there was something better about that, wasn’t there? Maybe not, but...

“Come, souris,” Widowmaker hummed, pushing herself swiftly and gracefully to her feet and spinning to offer Tracer a hand. “Let us not dwell on topics which will only bother you - there is a pâtisserie a few blocks from here, they have cinnamon buns I suspect you will quite like. I would enjoy watching your expressions as you eat one?”

Tracer just stared for a second, up to gold eyes past an offered helping hand. She knew they felt differently - in more ways than one. They had different opinions on things, and that was fine, it was no problem at all. The problem might be what those opinions were, of course, but disagreements or not, Widowmaker was still here, she was still calm, they could still talk about it.

That was nice.

Softly, Tracer started to chuckle as some thoughts clicked into place. Sighing, she grabbed Widowmaker’s hand and pulled herself up - right into the other woman’s embrace, wrapping her arms around Widowmaker’s neck and stretching upward to give her a kiss.

“It kind of reminds me,” she murmured, seemingly apropos of nothing, “of this girl I dated years back, before flight school. She was a vegetarian - and that was fine, except she would get just... infuriated if I ate meat. Or if anyone did. Yell at us about being murderers, scream and cry and talk about all the little precious animals, and I mean... yeah, I didn’t want to go around stomping on
chickens or whatever, but… a bird’s gotta eat, right?”

One of Widowmaker’s eyebrows rose, slowly, accompanied by one corner of her lips. Tracer sighed and rolled her eyes. “Yes, I’m admitting that maybe I’m just being stubborn about it, alright? A little bit, at least. I still don’t like it - I don’t like that I kill people, and I don’t like that you kill… well, let’s be honest love, a lot of people - and it doesn’t make me feel good, and honestly comparing it to eating meat only makes me feel worse, but…”

“A life is a life,” Widowmaker shrugged. “I think that is an intelligent point, cherie. Why should a human be worth so much more than a cow? An omnic? A tree? To me, they are not. They are all equally pointless.”

“I’m- I can’t even begin to answer that.” Tracer shook her head with a huff of a laugh. For starters, because it’s bonkers. Maybe it’s somewhere to start, at least. “Let’s just go get a cinnaroll, yeah?”

“D’accord,” Widowmaker grinned, then tipped her head, eyes narrowing sharply as she heard a noise, soft but distinct in a way that her well-honed ears would never miss. She hissed and shook her head. “Merde. Play along, cherie - I apologize. Move swiftly, bonne chance.”

There was no further explanation before the assassin grabbed her shoulder and dropped to the ground, planting a knee in the middle of her chest and flinging her backward off of the rooftop. Tracer had enough time to yelp, and enough time to see the dropship rising up the building’s side, before she spun time back and pulled out her pulse pistols.

Widowmaker had her rifle in hand as the dropship swooped up behind her, and she began to sprint. With a panicked look in her eyes, Tracer turned and leapt off of the building, swirling to a rooftop across the street.

Bollocks. How the bloody hell did- a burst of gunfire she recognized as coming from the Widow’s Kiss tore up the rooftop beside her and she rolled to the side away from it.

“Winston!” Tracer tapped at her headset, but it was silent. “Wi- Winston?” It was dead, no radio. Some kind of suppression. “Bollocks, oh bloody hell…”

---

Reaper chuckled softly, one hand on Sombra’s shoulder as she piloted the dropship. Not manually, of course - no, her hands danced in purple light as she manipulated the autopilot into doing what she wanted, instead. It was just easier.

“Get overtop of her,” he squeezed gently at the hacker’s shoulder, and she grinned widely.

“You got it, boss. Our french amiga latched onto the wing there, so she’ll probably be joining you.”

“Excellent,” Reaper sighed, stepping toward the door. “Open it.”

She swiped her hand and the door slid open, black smoke swishing through it and down to the rooftop below.

Sombra’s eyes flicked nervously to the cameras which showed her the view outside. Good luck, amiga. Think you might need it.
Widowmaker fired off another burst as Tracer continued to run away. She knew she’d never hit, and even if she did it would cause no lasting harm - that was the important part. Nobody would harm her mouse.

Her heart didn’t sink when she saw that black cloud coming down. It couldn’t, not anymore, but seeing that did spur her on to further action. She couldn’t shoot from here if there was a chance she’d hit him. Talon had seen to that - they’d been a little afraid for their own safety after her reconditioning.

Of course they had. She would have been, too. Of course, the no-kill order only applied so far; the Troopers were not included, only a few operatives and members of the Council, and even those privileges could be revoked. Not by her, of course, but... a woman could always dream.

Reaper resolidified behind Tracer, lashing out with a heavy boot to catch her in the back. She gasped as she was flung forward but had dissolved into light before he could unleash a shotgun blast.

She wouldn’t be getting away that easily. He spun on heel and had just enough time to catch sight of her wide eyes as she pulled the triggers, but it was a little too late for that. She probably expected him to dissolve and give her a chance to escape. He was feeling a little contrary at that moment, though.

Sure, the bullets hurt. What didn’t hurt, these days? It wasn’t nearly as bad as the monkey’s damn spark-cannon, but he wouldn’t dissolve and let her get away.

A gauntleted hand slammed into Tracer’s chest, metal claws biting into the accelerator’s casing and cracking it. She tried to spin up the core but she was physically anchored, unable to twist time while she was this integral.

Reaper lifted her into the air, tightened his grip, and she could feel the machine threatening to fail. Her eyes widened painfully as she retracted her pistols, grabbing onto his arm and trying to lift herself - not to escape but just to take the weight off, to stop the accelerator from getting damaged, anything, anything.

Widowmaker rolled and sprang up behind him, laying the Widow’s Kiss across his shoulder - the extended barrel just touched Tracer’s forehead. “Oh, do not struggle, little mouse,” she chuckled. “You would not want anything to happen to that little device of yours, would you?”

At that, Reaper tightened his grip a little. The glass covering the accelerator’s core cracked and splintered, and Tracer whimpered, trying desperately to remove the strain. She flickered a little, just slightly - her whole body disappearing from sight within the accelerator’s harness - just for an instant, and Reaper slacked off the pressure.

He knew what had happened with Ogundimu. He wouldn’t be stupid enough to break the machine - she’d escape if he did, and the monkey would just build another one. “Sombra,” he tipped his head. The dropship hovered above them, but she appeared out of thin air standing on the roof.

“Oh, boss,” she grinned, purple arcs stretching from her fingers into the accelerator. A second later the light dimmed, purple replacing blue. “She can’t get away now.”

Reaper dropped Tracer and she crumpled to the ground, arms wrapped tightly across her chest. That
flicker had been enough to send her out of it, right back to the place where time didn’t mean anything - an instant or an eternity, it was all the same. It was bad enough to remember it; the memories didn’t really stick right, it didn’t make sense in the brain the right way. In nightmares, though, it could come out, and actually experiencing it again was even worse.

She didn’t have the presence of mind to do anything at all as Reaper grabbed at one of her shoulder straps and dragged her back across the roof toward the dropship which came in low. Tracer just clutched at the accelerator, holding onto it like a security blanket and reminding herself that she was here. She was here, she was now, she wasn’t gone, she wasn’t fading away, she didn’t, she hadn’t, she was here.

Widowmaker didn’t like the frantic look of panic in her mouse’s eyes. Didn’t like the way she hardly seemed to see the world at all as she was dragged up into the dropship and dropped unceremoniously to the floor like a bag of potatoes. Widowmaker slid smoothly into a seat, keeping her rifle trained on Tracer as Reaper bound her wrists. She didn’t seem like she’d be going anywhere anytime soon, regardless, and Widowmaker frowned lightly at that. She didn’t like it.

She also didn’t exactly dislike it, either.

“What?” Reaper came over to sit next to her and her eyes flicked to him in mild annoyance. She presumed he’d seen the look of displeasure on her face, but she certainly couldn’t divulge the real reason. “I did not need rescue or pickup. I would have called if I did.”

He grunted, following her rifle to the former Overwatch agent who lay slumped on the floor and shaking, whimpering softly. It was nice to see that, even if he didn’t actually have much of a personal beef with Oxton. He remembered her, yes, and they’d had a few interactions. She was annoying, but surprisingly competent at times - he remembered Null Sector on King’s Row.

“I know you didn’t need it,” he admitted. “You’re capable on your own.”

She looked over at him curiously. It was almost a compliment.

“Nobody gets left behind.” He shook his head a little, his grip crumpling edge of the chair as his fist clenched. “Nobody. Not ever.”

Widowmaker hummed as she returned her attention to Tracer. “Well. I do appreciate that.” Even if she didn’t believe it for a second. Of all the people in the world, she knew that people did get left behind. They hadn’t come for her, they wouldn’t come for Tracer - only she could protect her mouse. She would, too.

It would be quite a dance. A dangerous and invisible line to walk, protecting whilst hiding her true intentions - the thought brought a slight grin to her lips. “I would like to carry out the interrogation.”

Reaper chuckled. “I thought you might. You’ve run into her more, anyway.”

Widowmaker’s grin sharpened as she returned her attention to Tracer. “Délicieux. A convenient happenstance. Vishkar was beginning to get impatient, non?”

He nodded with a grunt. “Yeah. Sombra’s had no luck breaching the-”

“I been working on the damn Black Tide shit alright?” Sombra called back from the cockpit, then shuffled around trying to extract herself from the straps of the pilot’s chair. “You know, just - if you’re gonna be talking about me back there then I’m gonna come join you.”
Reaper sighed as she came over and sat next to Widowmaker, all three of them watching Tracer twitch and shiver as she went through some kind of clearly painful thing. She almost looked like she was having a seizure. He grinned a little at that, a nice warm feeling spreading slowly from that howling hateful void.

“But yeah, fine, blame it on Sombra,” she rolled her eyes with a huff. “All I gotta do is like ten things, alright? So yeah, maybe you guys can get these access codes, ‘kay? ‘Kay.”

Widowmaker scoffed. “One day they will let me use you for target practice.” She turned a feline grin to the hacker. “I am so looking forward to that day…”

“Aw, that’s nice, amiga - planning out shit to do together, but I gotta break your heart. It’s not a date - I’m taken.”

“Knock it off,” Reaper sighed, but Sombra just snickered.

“Oh come on! Just having some fun, Gabe - I mean, chica here wouldn’t really shoot me, right? Right amiga?” She shoved playfully at Widowmaker’s arm. “Right?”

The assassin turned and regarded her coolly, looking her over. She shrugged and leaned back against the chair. “I suppose not.”

He could hear the truth in behind those words, though, and it made him feel better. She wouldn’t. It seemed like it ran deeper than just conditioning, too.

Team.

“Good job today.” The comment came seemingly out of nowhere, and sounded a little odd coming from underneath his mask. “Two objectives secured, and an unexpected bonus. You both did well.”

Widowmaker nodded and Sombra laughed. “Aww, that’s so sweet, Gabe! I mean, I know I said I was taken, but for you I could make room.”

Reaper sighed and pressed a hand to the forehead of his mask. “Alright. I regret saying anything.”

“Oh don’t be like that!” She cackled. “It’s cool, amigo, I’ve totally known for a while. I mean it’s pretty obvious with how you act around me and shit.”

“Sombra…”

“No, really! I mean, c’mon, if I had pigtails you’d be pulling ‘em.”

“Wrapping them around your throat , maybe.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes as she listened to them banter. Or flirt, whichever, she hardly cared - although that didn’t seem like him.

This whole interaction didn’t really seem like him. Personable. He had moments, yes, but they were growing less and less common as the years went on. This, though, seemed to be a bit of a return to an earlier state...

If he thought she would rely on him even now, though - truly rely on him - then he was an idiot. She relied on nobody except herself. All three of them did; every sane person in the world did.

Luckily, Tracer had her. The little mouse would be paying her back forever at this rate. The thought of how grateful she would be - and Emily as well, delightful. They would both be safe, they would
both be pleased, and she? She would never be short a warm body or a tin of beans or anything that she wanted, ever again.

Widowmaker’s grin widened a little more as she leaned back, rifle still in hand and trained on the brit. Yes, it would take some acting, but that always had been a strong point of hers - yes, it would require balance, but if there was anything she could do, it was balance.

Such a convenient happenstance.

Chapter End Notes

Ahh, poor Tracer. I kinda wish I'd had them just go and get the cinnamon bun instead, but this had to happen in order for other stuff to happen. I'm not certain Widowmaker exactly gets it a hundred percent, heh, but hey - she's trying! I had some fun with the conversation of the first half, the ethical ramifications of death etc..

Of course, Widowmaker kind of twisted the conversation a little bit, because... well, that's what she does, because then she gets what she wants. She's working on this whole "empathy" thing, okay? I mean, kinda. Okay, she's not really working on it - but she's approximating it in several ways! It's something! XD

Yessss, remember that chapter way (way way way) back when, with the bank robbery? Symmetra stealing diamonds for Vishkar? You didn't think I was going to hang that Chekhovian gun on the wall and never fire it, did you? Hehehe, nope! it's all important (if I continue to do my job right) and it'll all tie in!

So... yes, return of Vishkar, Tracer captive, Widowmaker taking charge (wherever could that lead, hmmmmmm? ;D), and Reaper starting to... feel... things... and not exactly liking it. Honestly I like exploring and contracting the emotional states/reactions of the whole trio - Widowmaker feeling less and often feeling superior for it, but sometimes like she's missing out; Sombra feeling lots but mostly shrugging it off with a laugh and a joke; Reaper, who drowned all the other feelings under anger and now doesn't really know how to get in touch with them again, and doesn't know either if he even really wants to.

Nobody's asked yet if this is a Reaper Redemption story, or whether it'll have a Reaper Redemption arc, even, but I guess I'd say... kinda? It's a general muddling story. I think, with pretty much one exception, there's not going to be anybody who comes out of this at 100% - not 100% good, not 100% bad, none of that. Everybody's going to mess some things up, everybody's going to jump the gun, everybody's going to try to make up for it. Maybe.

I don't want to redeem so much as explain, and it's definitely not aimed directly at him, but he will be one of the several I go into, yeah. Anyway!

Also, for people who are curious, I'm doing the Inktober challenge to draw a thing a day. I'm trying to do all of the prompts Overwatch-themed - here's my Tumblr if you want to check it out. They should be pretty frequent up there, and they'll all be tagged Inktober 2017 (you can click that link to go directly to that tag if I've done my job right! :D)
Come on back next time when Widowmaker gets to interrogate Tracer. Her girlfriend strapped down in a soundproofed room? Well, how could that possibly end, right? Meanwhile, at Widowmaker's behest, Sombra gets up to a little bit of damage control... to varying degrees of success.
Serious Summary: Widowmaker springs into action with her plan - take the first step and take control of the situation in order to keep it all in hand. She "interrogates" Tracer, keeping up the act pretty intently, while she has Sombra running around behind the scenes doing a little bit of damage control: letting Emily know what's happening, and trying to negotiate with Winston. One of those goes better than the other, and Tracer has a moment of worry over what's going to happen to her.

JFL Summary: Sombra doesn't know what mice or cherries are, kinda. Widowmaker and Tracer share some quality time together! Nothing says "quality time" like one of you being strapped down and getting slapped a little, right? Well, at least, that's Widowmaker's opinion. Reaper gets grumpy (because he's grumpy) and he's definitely not a drama queen with a thousand knives in his back. Symmetra hasn't met Widowmaker before, but she does want to launch a satellite.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Mild NSFW/smut, mild violence, mild recollections of trauma

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker and Tracer talked on the rooftops after they stopped running and jumping around. It wasn't the newest conversation for them - right and wrong, death and life - but it did have a bit of a different resolution. At first, a slightly better one as perhaps some understanding came about; then a far worse one as Reaper and Sombra showed up in a dropship. They captured Tracer and took her away, Widowmaker vowing silently to herself to ensure that Tracer would not be harmed.

Emily was scrubbing dishes when her phone buzzed in her pocket. As she pulled it out, she thought idly about stories her grandmother had told her - the days when phones weren’t all waterproof. It seemed almost like some kind of joke, really; it was just so hard to imagine.

She had a bit of a smile on her lips as the thoughts drifted through her head, but it fell right off as she read the message.

“Chica. You don’t know me but we've got mutual friends. Spider wanted me to tell you that the mouse is safe and she's gonna stay that way, don’t worry your little cherry head over it. Whatever the hell that all means, I dunno. Anyway, I also put some movies on your phone so you’ve got
something to do while you wait for her to get back. Don't worry, we got this. -Sombra”

Swallowing heavily, Emily slid the phone away and went back to the dishes. A heavy weight settled in her stomach, but it was one she was used to bearing - it was there every time she looked at the news while Lena wasn’t at home, whenever it came around to the time of year that the TV screens were splashed again with “Remembering Overwatch” and “Fallen Heroes” and “Deals with the Devil: Corruption and Overwatch”.

The weight sat with her on the couch where she tried to burn it away with tea, it spread whenever the clock ticked on too long, it tried to claw her down and left her fighting to beat it back.

At least she wasn’t alone. That thought was comforting, at least - she wasn’t alone, and neither was Lena. Widdy would protect her, Emily had no doubt of that. She always had before, and Lena was strong on her own. She’d make it through.

If anyone could make it through - through anything - it was Lena.

Emily didn’t cry as she finished off the dishes. She managed to hold it in, at least. Lena would be safe, she was safe, even if she wasn’t home. It would be alright.

She just had to keep reminding herself.

---

“Maybe if we tried a- Hana! Would you stop with-”

“Ugh, I’m so bored Winston!” She spun in her chair, rolling her eyes and rolling up another paper ball to throw at his head. He caught it with a sigh. “We’ve been in here for hours and you won’t let me play any Starcraft!” Her eyes narrowed as she glared at the gorilla. “If my rating drops because of this I’m gonna have to humble you in a match, you know. Publically. I just got my title back.”

“We need to focus,” Winston sighed a chuckle, shaking his head. “This is important, trying to figure out countermeasures to the-”

“I know, I know, OMG you can stop repeating it, you sound like a lame NPC,” Hana sighed, leaning back in her chair and closing her eyes. “It’s just been forever and you won’t even let me go get more Mountain Dew.”

“I won’t-” Winston frowned, turning to face her. “What? I never said that. Besides, you brought a pair of two-liter bottles in here, you should be fine for…” he trailed off as she lifted two empty giant bottles of Mountain Dew and wiggled them happily.

“That is definitely not healthy,” he muttered, rubbing at his face. “Go ahead and get more, I guess. Maybe go to the bathroom while you’re at it.”

“Pfft,” she rolled her eyes. “Yeah right. I’ve got more stamina than that!”

Winston chuckled as she walked out of the room, more than a little worried about where exactly all of that soda had gone. She wasn’t exactly a large person.

Athena spoke up after the door had slid shut. “Winston. You have a call waiting. It is Sombra.”
He raised an eyebrow and leaning forward, tapping at a screen - the hacker’s face filled the display. She was already holding a hand up, palm flat, eyes closed.

“Okay, don’t get mad at me, alright mono?” She opened her eyes and raised an eyebrow. “You mad yet?”

“You haven’t said anything yet,” Winston pointed out dryly. He was expecting a snicker or a joke, but instead, she just sighed. As if in relief. They hadn’t had particularly a lot of interactions, but still, that was worrying.

“Okay, look. Things- we were doing a thing today,” she explained, looking off to the sides - looking everywhere except for at him, “and it got a little out of hand. La chiquita rápida got a little carried away, and uh… well, she… Gabe kinda grabbed her.”


“Hey, hey, I said don’t get mad! Yeah, Tracer, but- look, it’ll be fine, alright? I protect my interests and you and she are two of ‘em, but I wanted to tell you first so you didn’t get all pissed off and shit.” Her eyes flicked to him for the first time and she shrugged. “I can see that that didn’t work.”

“Sombra,” Winston growled, “you let her go this insta-”

“You think I can, amigo? No, not without burning some bridges that I’m still using, alright?” Her face set with determination. “I didn’t call for you to yell at me. I called to tell you she’s alright, and to help. I can’t release her… but you can.”

“What are you talking about?” His words simmered with barely-controlled anger which he tried desperately to keep in check. He didn’t want to get angry - but angry him did. He felt like Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde. Banner and the Hulk. Something inside him wanted to burst out; even if he didn’t want to release it, it wanted to be released.

“Trades are pretty standard. There’s a bit of info that Gabe wants, that he’s hoping to get from your chica. If he gets it, I can make sure she gets to go free. All you’ve gotta do is tell me, and she gets off - that simple.”

“Why should I trust you?”

Sombra looked hurt at that, eyebrows dropping as she leaned back. The expression only lasted for an instant before she laughed, shaking her head with a grin - eyes closed, fingers touching her forehead. “Damn, mono, I just - I mean, if you gotta ask, I guess the answer is… you can’t.”

With that, she cut the link - just before the doors started to open and let Hana back into the lab. Seeing the tension in Winston’s shoulders and hearing the way his breath growled, she decided to just turn around and head right back out again. Whatever had happened in the minute she’d been gone, it was a lot.

---

Sombra sighed, shaking her head again. “Why the fuck’s he gotta be like that, amiga? Gonna make a girl feel un-loved at this rate.”
Athena hummed. “I cannot say I do not understand his point of view, but I admit he is likely experiencing an altered frame of reference and is not in what would be considered his best mind. What information would be required for the release of Operative Tracer?”

“Access codes for Gibraltar.” Sombra shrugged.

“There are no data remaining there.”

“Amiga, I know - and by the way, while I’m on the topic, damn if you didn’t lock that place down tight. The hell kind of algorithm did you set on it, anyway?” She popped a gummy bear into her mouth.

Athena hummed a chuckle. “If I told you, it would spoil the surprise.”

“Ugh,” Sombra rolled her eyes above a grin. “Yeah, sure, fine - but anyway, that’s all we’d need. I get the Gibraltar access codes to Gabe, and we’ll all be sorted out. Tracer goes free. Nice and simple, so long as nobody else tries to interfere. You think you can give me a hand with that, amiga?”

“I will see what I can do. Bxf3.”

“Dammit!” Sombra hissed as she plucked one of her knights off of the board and moved Athena’s bishop into place.

“You have ensured that Tracer will be unharmed, correct?”

“Of course I have, amiga. It will all work out just fine as long as everybody keeps their head and nobody does anything stupid. You can trust Sombra.”

Perhaps. Athena studied the board, but with far far less attention than she devoted to her other tactical calculations. There were many pieces in play here. It is the others who are more of a concern…

If the primary attempt failed, there were alternate options - secondary and tertiary plans, some which had been drawn up years ago and only required some alterations for circumstance and some which Athena was composing as she went. If Sombra could negotiate a release at no loss of life, that would be ideal. If not, a strike team could be composed, or any one of a variety of other riskier plans.

Athena had no worries that they would kill Tracer. They’d captured her, ergo they wanted her alive.

She did have one or two concerns, though, along those lines. They all lined up neatly with the name Amélie Lacroix …

---

Tracer woke up sharply. She tried to grasp at the controls - the Slipstream was going haywire - but her wrists were strapped down and she couldn’t reach them. She whimpered and then panted as the nightmare wore off, releasing its hold on her mind if not her heart - she wasn’t in the cockpit of the jet, she wasn’t being shredded across time again, she was safe…

…she maybe wasn’t safe. Her eyes darted around the small room, fluorescent lights burning her retinas. A long table stood in front of the metal chair she was strapped to, and a mirror covered the
whole opposite wall.

She recognized an interrogation room when she saw one.

Little cameras at each corner of the ceiling faced her. The accelerator wouldn’t respond to her commands - glancing down, she saw that it still had a faint purple glow behind the now-cracked glass. *Sombra.* She gritted her teeth, pulling desperately at the straps which held down her wrists, her ankles.

A door opened behind her. Tracer tried to spin, to crane her neck and see, but she couldn’t quite lay eyes on it.

“They’ll come for me, you know,” she huffed to whoever was coming into the room. “They will rescue me, and you’ll be sorry you ever gave them an excuse to even look your way.”

The dark, smooth, and familiar chuckle that filled the room sent a shiver racing down her spine. “Oh, *cherie.* So foolish despite it all - do you really think so, hmm?” Widowmaker paced easily to the table and slid a small metal case onto it, leaning down to take Tracer’s chin lightly between her fingers with a derisive laugh. “They are not coming for you. I... am the only one here.”

Widowmaker met her eyes intensely, and Tracer couldn’t decipher the thoughts behind them. It didn’t look like a *good* thought, at first - painful. “They did not come for *me* ,” she hissed, shaking her head, “and they will not come for *you. *”

Tracer’s eyes widened a little before Widowmaker shoved her head gently backward. “*Écoutez.* You are alive for one simple reason-”

“Because I’m faster than you?” Tracer quipped with a grin.

She didn’t expect the slap that met the comment, rocking her head to the side, and her eyes flashed angrily as Widowmaker laughed. It really, really wasn’t a hard slap though. She’d taken worse even *outside* of their fights, and it got her an answer at least. Widowmaker was still on her side, just playing a part.

Although there was still a question as to how *far* the acting would go.

“Not so fast now, are you, little mouse?” The assassin leaned back against the table, crossing her arms in front of her chest and quirking an eyebrow. The rifle slung across her back shifted where it nudged the table. “All tied up, such a pity. Right into the trap.” She pouted. “Poor little mouse.”

The return to earlier interactions was a little disorienting but hardly surprising. It made sense to Tracer, instantly, instinctively, and she went with it - like on the rooftops, if they could keep up the act, nobody would suspect a thing. It actually sounded even a little bit fun.

As long as she didn’t think about anything *outside* this room. As long as she only thought about whatever happened between the two of them.

“You are alive for one simple reason,” Widowmaker repeated, idly inspecting her fingernails as if she had no greater care in the world. As if none of it mattered to her in the slightest. “You possess knowledge which we require. You will give it to us - to *me.* Access codes for the facility at Gibraltar.”

“I.” Tracer stammered slightly. “I don’t- know them.” Her brow furrowed in confusion. “I don’t know the codes.”
It wasn’t even a lie. She had known them, years ago, when it was still an active Overwatch facility - when anything had still been an active Overwatch facility. Winston had changed them all after he’d abandoned the place, though. He’d shut it down and locked it up as tightly as possible. There wasn’t even hardly anything left there anymore - that was the reason he’d chosen it as the meeting place for Sombra.

Widowmaker laughed lightly, shaking her head and leaning down. “Ah, chérie, you think me so foolish as to simply accept your word on the matter?”

“It’s the truth,” Tracer started to protest, but Widowmaker leaned in further and stayed any further words. Tracer swallowed heavily at her nearness, the cold breath on the side of her neck.

“Well played.” Widowmaker whispered impossibly quietly - enough so that Tracer at first wasn’t even certain the words were actually there. “If your cheek is alright… say I will never break you. Otherwise remain silent. You are doing well, chérie.”

“Ha!” Tracer yanked her head away, glaring as Widowmaker stood up straight with a raised eyebrow. The Brit grinned, halfway between defiant and delighted. “You’ll have to come up with something better than that, love.” Her eyes narrowed as her grin widened. “You’ll never break me.”

She could hardly even feel the sting on her cheek anymore, and hearing the words - knowing that much more deeply that Widdy was still working with her - even cut through the underlying panic. Tracer wasn’t sure there were many people in the world who were more capable of getting what they wanted, than Widowmaker, and right now Widowmaker wanted her safe.

“Never?” Widowmaker’s lips twitched into a grin. “I do love a challenge.”

Blue fingers worked swiftly at the latches of the little metal case on the table, flipping it open. From within, with a wide and ferocious grin, Widowmaker withdrew a glass cylinder with a long needle protruding from one end.

“Do you recognize this?”

Tracer swallowed obviously, nodding.

“What is it, then?” Gold eyes burned down at her, and she felt like she was back at the start all over again - just a little bit. She also knew that Widowmaker wouldn’t hurt her.

Permanently. However, a thought did occur to her just then.

My nose doesn’t hurt anymore, but she didn’t exactly seem too torn up about breaking it, did she? Tracer frowned a little as she looked up at the glass gleaming in the light. “It’s a biotic dart.”

“Exactement,” Widowmaker hummed, stroking a finger along the needle toward the tip, her eyes following the movement. “It is a biotic… dart.” She tapped at the needle’s tip, careful not to let it puncture her skin. “Quite a marvel, are they not? Why, with one of these, I would hardly need to worry about bruises - or any other marks for that matter…”

Tracer’s eyes widened as the assassin chuckled and turned around, lifting something else out of the case. A rack of a dozen biotic darts - missing one, which she now set back into it.

“With un douzaine?” Widowmaker’s grin widened almost delightedly. “Why, I would need worry about nothing, chérie. It is so much easier to extract information when one does not need to worry.”

Tracer swallowed heavily, her eyes lingering on the biotic darts - not out of fear for herself nearly so
much as out of fear for what it meant. How did—how are they even here? How’d they get their hands on this? She remembered the belltower, how darts had been stuck into the woodwork. It must’ve happened other times, too.

Her eyes flicked up to Widowmaker’s—they were narrow, intense, and scrutinizing.

“Allow me to say this, chérie,” she murmured softly. “If you do not tell me what I wish to know, I will give you such agony that you will beg me to kill you.” She leaned further, eyes wide in mockery as she half-pouted in the same. “Pretty, pretty please? With a… cherry… on top?”

A little noise escaped Tracer at that, at the phrasing. Her brow drew tightly together—that had to be deliberate, including that pet name for Emily in the conversation. She knew? That would be good, to not have her worrying about what might be happening. Not great, but at least she’d know. Tracer’s eyes widened hopefully as much as she dared let them.

Widowmaker caught the look behind Tracer’s eyes and nodded just slightly, letting her eyes soften for an instant before she pulled the mask back on and chuckled, grinning as she straightened up. “Ah, I see you understand. Good. Now, I will give you one more chance before I begin.”

“I’m not telling you anything,” Tracer whispered. “If you think I’d ever help any of you, you’re gravely mistaken, Frenchie.”

Widowmaker giggled softly. “Ah. I was so hoping you would say that.” She turned back and picked up a dart, twirling it idly between her fingers. “Very well then, let us begin. Name.”

The brit smirked. “Tracer.”

Widowmaker’s hand whipped across unnaturally fast and knocked Tracer’s head to the side, and Tracer helped exaggerate the motion as well. Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed. “Name.” It had to appear by the book.

“Lena Oxton,” Tracer spat. Technically speaking, name, rank, and serial number were considered fine pieces of info to give away anyway. She’d never thought during her RAF training that she’d actually need to use the interrogation resistance techniques they taught—pilots were common prisoners, after all.

She considered herself lucky that she still didn’t, but at least it meant she knew what to make things look like.

“Age.”

“Hasn’t anybody ever told you it’s poor form to ask a lady—” Another slap and Tracer laughed.

“Age.” Widowmaker’s tone was as cold as her skin, as cold as her eyes. Tracer had seen it before, and had seen the opposite as well—her partner put on masks as easily as clothes most days, it seemed. In far greater variety, too.

“Depends who you ask.” Tracer grinned. “Either twenty-six or thirty-two.”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow slowly, and Tracer could see a bit of genuine curiosity lurking behind the expression. She giggled. “Things get a little odd when you have an accident like mine. You didn’t seriously think they’d let an eighteen year-old fly the Slipstream, did you?”

Tracer laughed outright, as if it were the funniest thing ever heard. It helped to allay a bit of the creeping terror that rose at the thought of the plane, particularly given how she could feel her...
accelerator straining oddly between damage and whatever Sombra had done to cripple it.

“When I got in the cockpit of the Slipstream I was twenty-four, I’d been flying with the RAF for seven years. Lied about my age and had a fake ID when I joined up a year early. When they finally managed to pull me out of that limbo hell? Eighteen years old all of a sudden - at least, my body was. Bloody awful, they gave me such a stink-eye at the pubs when they saw my ID.”

“You are six years older than you look, and yet still none the wiser for it,” Widowmaker scoffed. “Occupation.”

Tracer grinned defiantly. “I’m a hero, love. I save the world.”

Widowmaker smirked, sneered, leered down at the other woman and leaned in close. “Is that so? And which world would that be, exactly? The world which loved your Overwatch, or the world which killed it?”

Tracer didn’t know how to respond to that other than to frown. The known tendency to toy with her wasn’t exactly helping her keep her head in a good spot. Things were confusing enough as it was.

“Access codes to the Gibraltar facility.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know them.”

“Codes.”

“I don’t know them!”

“Codes.”

“I d-” Tracer gasped and pulled forward against the bindings of her chair. “What the bloody hell do you expect out of me, huh? I don’t know the bloody codes to-” she cut off as Widowmaker set the dart down, hard, on the table. Perfectly balanced.

A fake threat, part of the act for anyone watching? A promise to Tracer - that even if she was hurt, she would be healed? Tracer wasn’t sure. Maybe both. Her nose didn’t hurt anymore, her cheeks didn’t sting from the slaps. Whatever the dart meant, though, she trusted that she’d be alright.

With a smile, Widowmaker picked up the Kiss and stroked at it reverently. It was fun to carry on the act like this - the familiar steps of this old dance, to completely new music. Eighteen percent, her heart was practically racing, and she wanted more. This was fun, and safe, but risk always deepened reward.

“You do know them, chérie. Perhaps you only need… a reminder, hmm?” She chuckled, the sound echoing deep in her chest.

She spun and snapped the Kiss to ready, firing a shot. One of the lights exploded in a shower of sparks and Tracer flinched. Another, another, another - all six lights shot out in a few seconds, plunging the room into total darkness.

The visor whirred gently as it came online, descending over her face. In the night-vision cameras, Tracer’s eyes almost glowed as they swept around the room frantically.

“The cameras cannot even see you now, chérie,” Widowmaker purred a chuckle. “Nobody can, no person except moi. No Overwatch, no saviours, no tin soldiers. Seulement you and I, chérie… ” she caught Tracer’s chin firmly, tilting it up for a deep kiss, pressing her tongue roughly into the warmth.
Tracer stifled a moan - that was playing crooked, definitely. It wasn’t fair to be all strapped down like this and blind while Widowmaker just got to do whatever she wanted. Although she did get a nice little rush down her spine that settled nicely into the sudden heat in her gut.

“Now,” Widowmaker hummed when she withdrew, “you will give me what I want. What ever … I want…”

Her eyes trailed down Tracer’s body, her heart rising another percent as she swapped to thermal view. So excited, my little mouse.

Tracer gasped as a hand tugged the bottom of her flight jacket up and cold fingers pressed against the hot skin just above her waistline.

“Oh?” Widowmaker paused, eyebrow high though there was nobody to see it. “Something you wish to say?”

She couldn’t tell where Widowmaker’s eyes were - normally she probably would have been able to, but with whatever Sombra had done to the accelerator, its glow didn’t even illuminate a few inches. She could barely even see it if she looked straight down. Still, Tracer looked over toward where the voice had come from, with a daring grin on her face.

“Do whatever you like,” she challenged through clenched teeth. “You’ll never get a peep out of me.” Even if the cameras couldn’t see, there were obviously microphones or people listening. There would have been no reason to be speaking in code and whispering earlier, otherwise.

Widowmaker chuckled, grabbing a firm fistful of hair and tugging Tracer’s head back to expose her throat. “Oh no? We will see about that…”

To her credit, she managed to hold it in. As Widowmaker dropped teeth to skin and plunged her hand down the front of Tracer’s leggings, she was quite surprised to find that her mouse didn’t make a sound - she wasn’t muffling a cry or biting it off, it was simply absent.

Tracer had cheated, of course. She’d taken a page out of the book of experience - breathless people can’t make sounds, and she’d exhaled after speaking just as a pre-emptive measure. Good thing, too, because everything in her cried out to shout or scream or whine or whimper, something, anything.

She clenched her teeth and took the slowest breath she could force, seeing bright flashes as Widowmaker’s cold, cold finger started to slide firmly back and forth inside her pants.

It took her a moment before she could gather the breath and the presence of mind to say or do anything, and by the time she had, Widowmaker was moving on. She chewed at Tracer’s bottom lip for a moment with a slight chuckle, gripping the back of her head before plunging her tongue into the brit’s hot mouth. Yes, completely at my mercy - I have always loved that…

There were limitations in the current situation, of course, but limitations could be fun as long as they weren’t actual restrictions. Besides which, her mouse had promised to let her steal her breath away properly. Her grin widened. I daresay I have accomplished that, souris.

Tracer gasped a breath as Widowmaker pulled her head away, and she bit her lips roughly together to stifle a noise - more roughly than intended but the sharp pain only served to accentuate everything else, the feel of Widowmaker’s hand and the ghostly chill it sank into her hot flesh.

“Y-” Tracer gritted her teeth and groaned a chuckle through them. “You’ll have to try harder than that, love. Think I’ll crack that easy?” She forced a single laugh that came out heavy and thick before she sucked in more air and held it, eyebrows knitting tightly together behind her goggles.
Widowmaker watched in delight, the little dance of agony and ecstasy on Tracer’s face, playing out on a stage which only she could see. Hot blood rising to her cheeks as she bit at her lips, eyes alternately clenching tightly shut or flying wide open with her mouth, soundlessly.

“Oh, will I now? Try harder, you say?”

That dark voice sank straight to Tracer’s core and fanned the flames even further. This was quickly becoming impossibly difficult - the hand in her hair tightened its grip as the one in her pants bore down more firmly and Tracer drew a little bit of blood from her own lips as she bit them together.

She let out the tiniest noise through her nose, but the shiver it sent down Widowmaker’s spine was tremendous. At least, tremendous for her. Her heart rate exceeded the acceptable limits of combat, her brain shifting gears to chemically counter it but she didn’t care, she spurred it further on and kept up above twenty percent.

“Something you wish to say, cherie?” Widowmaker’s jaw tensed up a little as she pulled harder on Tracer’s hair. “Peep peep, little bird.”

“You- you’ll never-” Tracer choked back a shout and struggled to breathe as her vision flashed bright colours, spasms overtaking her body bit by bit. It was a futile struggle to try to hold it back and it was one she didn’t give a damn about winning anymore.

Still, she gave it one last try, whimpering as words failed her - but as always, Widowmaker saw her opportunity and pounced. She dropped her teeth to Tracer’s collarbone and bit down as her hand worked frantically.

“A-aaaaah! God! Ahaaa!”

It was a desperate noise, a sound of surrender and succumbing; high and sharp and tearing at the edges with emotion. To any person listening - like those behind the one-way mirror or over the microphones, for instance - it would have sounded like a cry of pure agony. The frantic shout of a woman finally breaking under the strain.

...it wasn’t far off of the truth. Tracer gasped heavily as the aftershocks rippled through her, Widowmaker’s teeth being replaced with gentler lips as her finger swirled softly, letting Tracer smoothly down from the rough peak of orgasm.

“Oh then,” the frenchwoman purred softly. “Is there something you wish to say?”

Tracer whimpered, panting heavily and making no effort to hide it. “Y- y…”

Widowmaker leaned in, resting her cheek against Tracer’s chin - just touching her ear to the brit’s hot lips. The tiniest flick of a tongue sent her heart spurring up another two percent.

“You’re…” Tracer whispered as quietly as she could manage, barely even breathing the words in the lull between gasps of air. “...absolutely… wicked…”

Widowmaker laughed triumphantly as she stood up straight, pulling her hands both free and leaning over toward the table. “Ah, thank you, cherie - it has been a pleasure doing business with you. We must do this again some time, no?”

She picked up one of the biotic darts and inserted it very gently into Tracer’s upper arm - there were a few tooth marks on her neck, and at some point a bit of blood had been drawn in her mouth. Widowmaker didn’t know if that was her doing, or Tracer’s, but it would be healed regardless.
“Perhaps next time,” she hummed thoughtfully, stroking fingertips down Tracer’s warm jawline with a soft smile but keeping her voice carefully cold, cruel, and teasing. “I will bring a few *implements* of my own, hmm? As delightful as working by hand is, there are so many fun *opportunities*... ”

She took a second to lean down, to wrap her arms around Tracer and hold her - just a second, but a nice one, nuzzling at her wild hair. As softly as she could - quiet enough that she wasn’t even certain Tracer would hear, she whispered, “I will keep you safe, *ma cherie.*”

Tracer may not have heard, and that would be a shame - but Talon could not be permitted to hear. No risk at all could be taken of that. As long as thing stayed confined to this room, as long as her mouse was here in the cage, Widowmaker knew she could keep her safe.

As she threw the door open wide and stepped out into the light, Tracer was illuminated just in time to get hit with a shiver that shook the dart hanging from her arm. Empty of its almost magical healing fluid, it fell to the floor and shattered.

Nobody came to pick it up.

Nobody would.

Widowmaker slammed the door shut and locked it. “Leave her to stew,” she announced to the camera and microphone outside the front door with a grin. “She may be good for more.”

Nobody would get in with her mouse, except her. Not if she had any choice in the matter at all, and there were few people who would override her on this. Her eyes were as quick as her paces as she started down the hallway - but both quickly slowed when a familiar noise approached. A soft, swirling swish.

Reaper’s cloud turned the corner in front of her and solidified into the caped and masked figure she knew all too well. She fixed him with an even look, then raised an eyebrow.

“Did you get the codes?”


He nodded with a grunt, tilting his head and studying her. She could feel his eyes behind the mask roving over her - not her body the way some of the other men and women around base might’ve done, Reaper never seemed to be interested in that sort of thing, but as if he could see through her to the thoughts inside.

A foolish effort. She only stood there, looking placidly back at him for several seconds of silence. “Well? Is there something else?”

“Your heart got going pretty quick in there. She didn’t get under your *skin* now, did she?”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow slowly, but he saw the flash of ire in her eyes - just for an instant before it was gone, her gaze as flat as her words. “I need no person watching over my shoulder. If my body encounters a problem, I will inform the doctors myself.”

He chuckled a little, taking a step forward. He didn’t take kindly to the implication that she wasn’t okay with him watching her back. There was more to it than that, though, the little wriggling spike up his spine reminded him - more to it than just her not *trusting* him even though he’d never been *anything* but trustworthy.
Everyone thought he was a traitor. Everyone thought that he, whose back bore a hundred knives, was a traitor and it infuriated him.

Still, there was more to it than that.

It was that she did it so smoothly. No fear in her eyes, no expression on her face. No care at all. She didn’t even have the common decency to sound angry about it, to spit the words back at him - no, she could have been talking about the weather for all the emotion in her voice.

Some days, good days, it might not have bothered him - and while this had started out as a good day, events had conspired to make things a whole lot worse and now his fuse was just about nonexistent. Yesterday, breaching Niles Systems - that had been a good day? Today he’d had to speak to that infuriating Korpel man from Vishkar. It was not a good day.

“‘You think you’re so calm, don’t you?’ He seethed, leaning in toward - and she didn’t recoil in the slightest, she didn’t care in the slightest. About anything. ‘So beyond all of the rest of us.’ Reaper’s fist clenched a little at his side as the thoughts twisted in his head, jagged and tearing and screeching like metal against metal. ‘You think you’re so fucking calm.’

He used to be able to do that too. Used to have that. To have it shoved down his throat just made it feel like he was being mocked.

She didn’t react, her heart didn’t speed up in the slightest. Quite the opposite, in fact: it continued its slow descent in the wake of her little visit. “Think?” She laughed lightly, dismissively, derisively. “Think has nothing to do with it, mon frère. I am calm.”

...just made it feel like he was being mocked. Her words wriggled into his ears, slipped down his spine like knives, and he hated it. Why the hell had he even come over here anyway? He couldn’t recall.

“Fine,” he spat. “Now go give Sombra the codes at the ship and get in. Vishkar’s sent their operative over.”

Her eyebrows tugged a little tighter together. “Already?”

Right. That was it.

He’d told Vishkar they’d have the codes within the hour. Told them that he’d put his best woman on the job. That had been it. That man, that- Sanjay - had been infuriating to deal with. Entirely so.

It wasn’t Widowmaker he was angry at. It was the world, maybe, but it wasn’t her.

Maybe.

He forced his talons to withdraw from his palm, spreading his hand flat at his side. “Yes.” He took a slow breath. “I knew you’d get them.” The words twisted in his mind even before he spoke them, but they were important. She was a member of the team - maybe. He couldn’t keep it straight. She was competent, regardless. Good, even. “Well done.”

Widowmaker nodded. “Of course. I will toss her into holding and head toward the ship.”

Reaper laughed. “Oh, I think she can hold tight where she is. Shooting out the lights was a nice touch.”

She grinned legitimately at that as he turned and followed her toward the bay where Sombra would
be waiting at a dropship. “You liked that?” She hummed softly, sighing out the next words in contentment. “I did as well.”

There was still something in her voice he couldn’t place. Something that ached and wrenched in his gut and his spine, that set his nerves on edge. Maybe it was just her. Maybe it was just Sanjay. Maybe it was just Sombra. Maybe it was just this past month. Trying to…

...something. He still didn’t know exactly. Form a team, a real team, again.

He wasn’t sure he had it in him.

The thoughts didn’t fit right, they butted up against others and ground and tore and hurt in ways he wasn’t used to, because contrary to popular belief, you don’t acclimatize to pain like that. A decade later it still hurts just as much as it did the first day.

Sombra was waiting for them in the hangar, sitting crosslegged on top of a large crate, chatting down to Symmetra. “-but I’m just saying, do you have any idea what I could have done with those diamonds?”

“You are not saying, you are asking. And yes, I have many ideas of what you could have done with them. Inflate your bank account, to begin with.”

“Exactly, chica!” Sombra cackled, rocking back with laughter. “Not that your birthday present wasn’t appreciated - it definitely was! I mean sure, they were smaller, but there were just so many of them! Gotta admit, I loved that. Rolled around on the bed Indecent Proposal style!”

Symmetra frowned slightly as Reaper and the woman - what was her name, something as absurd as the rest of them, Symmetra couldn’t recall - approached. “I did not know it was your birthday,” she murmured. “I simply thought you would appreciate them.”

Sombra dropped down next to her with a snicker. “Yeah, it’s- wasn’t really my birthday, but I definitely did appreciate them, chica. Thanks.”

“‘Til death do us part,” Symmetra muttered under her breath with a slight smirk, just loudly enough for Sombra to hear her and choke on a laugh.

“Don’t die,” Reaper cautioned as Sombra doubled over coughing.

“Yeah, thanks boss,” she wheezed, squeezing hard at her knee and wiping tears away from her cheeks. “I’ll do my best.”

“Symmetra.” Reaper nodded his head slightly and she returned the gesture.

“Reaper.”

“This is Widowmaker. She’ll be providing sniper support again. You haven’t met yet, but she was at the bank.”

Symmetra studied her with a raised eyebrow as Widowmaker only looked back flatly. The Architech nodded. “Very well. The mission is simple - we must deliver a payload into orbit. That is my responsibility - yours is ensuring my safety. The Gibraltar facility of the defunct Overwatch organization was chosen as an ideal launch site - it intercepts the arc of our orbital station well and provides us with the freedom we require.”

“What freedom is that?” Widowmaker drawled, idly checking the action of the Widow’s Kiss.
“There are organizations which would restrict us from introducing this capability to our station.” Symmetra smirked derisively. “They are fools. This is the reason we are working with you. The Vishkar organization can not be seen publicly responsible for this - to that end, Sombra will mask the rocket’s trajectories after launch so the eventual whereabouts of the payload remain unknown to all.”

“Yeah, no problemo, *chica.*” Sombra grinned, having regained her breath. “Sounds like fun, eh? Get a little sun, maybe we’ll hit the beaches afterward… you pack a swimsuit, boss?”

Reaper just grunted and stalked forward onto the dropship.

Sombra laughed and patted Symmetra on the shoulder, leading her onto the ship. “Ah, don’t mind him - he’s just grumpy.” She hiked a thumb over her shoulder to Widowmaker. “Her too. *I’m* the fun one. Just stick with me and we’ll be fine, *chica.*”

Widowmaker spared one last glance over her shoulder before stepping onto the dropship. She’d given explicit instructions that nobody else was permitted access to the prisoner - if anyone made the foolish mistake of trying to get to her mouse, she would have a live target during her next trip to the range.

A grin set on her lips at the thought as she walked up and into the ship to join the rest of her so-called “team”. The mouse was safe, the mission was at hand promptly, and once they’d launched Vishkar’s satellite or whatever it was, Tracer could be released and they could get back to their games.

One thing was certain. She was going to make a few little additions to her chair in the safehouse in London.

Chapter End Notes

Translations!:
"*Seulement*" == "Only"
"*mon frère de la mort*" == Okay come with me on this one: translingual pun! For starters: literal translation would be "Brother of Death" *but* *frère* *also* translates to blood, ergo this phrase would also translate as "blood of death" - but my favourite part is that an alternate translation for blood is "petit-maitre", which also translates to "Tiny Master", which would obviously be a mockery aimed at Reaper. I did not do this all intentionally, I just wrote it down intending "Brother of Death" and then realized the other meanings and couldn't stop snickering to myself. I’m gonna go out on a limb and say Widowmaker meant every meaning and ancillary very very intentionally.

So! I have a lot to say about this chapter I think, heh. A lot's been leading here definitely and I hope it's all well-enough in place, but I suppose only you folks can tell me that, heh!

Tracer's age, given in Blizzard's material, makes no sense. She's *stated as being 26 years old* in current timeline. Uprising was Seven years ago. After the Slipstream disappeared she experienced months of Chronal Disassociation, followed by an unknown period of flickering into existence only to then disappear for "hours or days at a time" - then an unknown period until Winston developed the Accelerator, and then unknown recuperation under Mercy. All of which means she was either 19 or 18 (possibly younger) when she flew the Slipstream, and was already known for her "fearless piloting skills".
Now, I got my pilot's licence about as young as possible. Glider at 17, Private at 18; I could have been a little quicker, theoretically, and got them at 16. So supposedly, in three years - maximum - Tracer got well-known enough for her piloting skills that Overwatch took notice? It takes a hundred hours of flight just to be able to start earning money as a pilot, by the way - getting your Commercial rating. Most test pilots have thousands of hours of flight.

Tracer's timeline doesn't make sense... unless you pull some tricky stuff with the Disassociation or the Accelerator, and I see no reason at all not to. If she came out of that timeless hellhole a different age than when she went in? Then, it would make perfect sense - and why not? She was beyond time! Infinity instantaneously, c'mon, but what she still aged as per normal while it was happening? Nah, I think not - I think there's a better way.

...anyway, haha, this is my personal attempt to clear up that timeline a little more and get some sensible solidity in there! It's not the only reason I wrote the interrogation scene out, but... not gonna lie, it's up there, hehe.

Also, I'd like to say to mouse (pepperjelly) - if you're still reading! I've been thinking about your comment wayyyyy back in Chapter One for months in relation to this chapter XD So, I hope you enjoyed it!

I hope everyone enjoyed it really, I do - I hope it was fun and meaningful and didn't come across as crass, but I did want to demonstrate Widowmaker becoming a little more prone to impulse. A little less careful, maybe. One might say a bit more human! I liked the moments of tenderness and care between them a lot; little brushes on the cheek, looks and hidden smiles.

This whole little arc will be fairly rough for everyone involved, I don't think literally anyone makes it out happy exactly. I feel the worst for Symmetra, I feel so so bad for what's going to happen to her in a few chapters; I feel really awkward about where I've placed certain traumas, whether they're in the past or the present, and honestly I worry about it and feel kind of gross sometimes. But oftentimes I don't exactly plan it out entirely: I have a rough idea, I put the character into a situation, and then I let the reactions happen fairly organically. Sometimes it turns out rougher than I intended, sometimes softer. One chapter I literally deleted several thousand words because it was straying too far from what I'd intended and I didn't feel it would be good to steer it back deliberately - best to delete and start over and take a new path.

Anyway, anyway, anyway! I've probably rambled for long enough XD I hope you folks all had fun - please, I always welcome feedback below! Thank you so much!

EDIT: I'd like to thank bzarcher for pointing out a bad HTML tag in my note, and Hocus for pointing out how to correct my poor Spanish - thank you both so much! Thank you thank you!

Come on back next time when Reaper, Widowmaker, Sombra, and Symmetra go to Gibraltar to launch Vishkar's payload. Overwatch shows up to try to stop them. Jack and Reaper have a confrontation and it does not end well. Many people, panicking, take drastic actions.

Chess is so much harder to play when the pieces rebel.
Serious Summary: Athena detects a dropship inbound to Gibraltar, and readies a defensive effort comprised of Ana, Lucio, Reinhardt, D.Va, Winston, and Soldier: 76. The fighting is fairly intense around Gibraltar, but not for anyone quite as much as Jack - felled and incapacitated by Symmetra, he ends up at Reaper's whim (or very nearly).

JFL Summary: Reinhardt and Lucio are cute and Ana approves. D.Va bonks a dropship and runs away. Reaper gets to VILLAIN MONOLOGUE INCOMING while the rest of the Talon team (do something?). Sombra and Athena play chess, except this time it's with real people - Athena thinks Sombra's more malicious than she actually is. Miscalculations result in an angry gorilla and a nearly-squished hacker. Reaper... gets an idea.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: violence, pain, blood, injury, lots of hatred

Previous Chapter Summary: Sombra sent messages to Emily, and Winston, about Tracer's captivity. Emily took it better - Winston reacted poorly enough that Sombra decided to talk to the cooler-headed Athena instead in order to make her arrangements. A captive Tracer and Widowmaker - her captor - played out a scene for the benefit of Talon, falsifying an interrogation in order to make everything look valid and allay suspicion. At least, that was the hope, but Widowmaker got a little bit carried away and Reaper had a question or two in the aftermath; questions she didn't exactly answer well, but it did work out overall. Symmetra returned to join them for the next step of Vishkar's plan - launching a payload into orbit, a laser array which included the diamonds they'd previously stolen. The target? Overwatch's former Gibraltar facility: all set up for orbital launch, and without any of those silly "laws". Tracer was left alone in the interrogation room while Widowmaker, Sombra, Symmetra, and Reaper all boarded a dropship.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first notification Athena received was when an unidentified aircraft was detected heading in the general direction of Gibraltar. It happened every few days that some flight that hadn’t reported in correctly would be moving in the general direction of one of Overwatch’s former Watchpoints, and it didn’t result in anything more than one of the dropships in the hangar getting automatically prepared
for flight.

The second notification was when the flight got within a certain distance. When it disappeared, Athena took note of that and started to search for herself - a fair bit more powerful than simple automatic detection algorithms. She had much information and skill that they lacked, she needed only evidence to present.

The conclusions were inescapable, however: an aircraft, that was heading toward Gibraltar, and avoiding standard detection methods.

That was when the alarm had gone out. She pre-empted the automated warning system by two minutes.

It may not have seemed like much, but she thought it might make all the difference in the world. She did spare a moment, however, to appreciate the irony of people who thought chess was a boring pastime.

Jack and Lúcio had been halfway through a game of pool when the klaxon sounded. Reinhardt was in the gym, Ana enjoying a cup of tea, Winston and Hana having a brief game of Starcraft to blow off some stress. She ensured him that if he played Zerg he’d have an easier time. She lied.

They all dropped their activities and rushed to the main conference room - Athena was on the screens there. It only took a minute for her to brief them, there wasn’t much information. As one, they ran to grab their gear and headed for the tramway that would take them to the airport.

The dropship was fueled and ready when they got there. Athena kept them updated as they flew - Ana and Jack checked their rifles, Reinhardt double-checked his armour and chatted with Lúcio who laughed brightly and seemingly without a care. Hana shot smirks over in their direction as she tweaked at her MEKA with a screwdriver.

“You don’t have to be on the front lines here, you know,” Jack grumbled to her without looking up from his pulse rifle. “Not exactly a good place for a kid.”

“And when exactly did you start fighting there, Mister Seventy-Something, hmm?” She narrowed her eyes at him. Before he could respond, she carried on, tweaking at her MEKA again. “I’ve taken down plenty of baddies. How you wanna do this, anyway? I should probably soak aggro, let’s be honest - do we know if there’s gonna be a big bad, or just swarms of adds, or what?”

He’d never exactly been big into video games. As a kid, sure, but not since he’d been given a rifle and a uniform, and he frowned a little behind his mask at the rush of vaguely-familiar terms that he thought he might half-remember. “Wh- I… what? We don’t know who we’ll be facing.”

D.Va giggled a bit and shrugged. “Yeah, I heard that in the briefing. I just wanted to throw a wrench in your gears.”

“…okay.” He didn’t know how else to respond about that, and glanced over to Ana who just smirked widely back. “I’m gonna… go over here.”

“Permission granted, soldier!” she chirped as he walked away, and she even threw in a little salute.

“She does that intentionally, you know,” Ana murmured as he approached. “You can trust her to handle herself in the fight. It might help - for purely tactical communications reasons, of course,” she mused, “if you maybe sat down with her for a few rounds of-”

“Ana, if I wanted to get my ass handed to me by a child I’d challenge Lúcio to a breakdancing
contest, alright?” Jack sighed a chuckle as he glanced over to the aforementioned boy with a little concern. “He’ll be good too, won’t he?”

Ana punched him not-so-lightly in the shoulder. “Stop worrying. They are all capable - and shockingly, being young may not be quite the disadvantage you seem to think it is.” Her eye twinkled as she quirked an eyebrow. “Quite the opposite, in fact. Yes, he’ll be fine - Reinhardt will ensure it, I think.” She chuckled deeply and glanced back to the pair.

Technically, they might not have been together - nobody had really seen them together, and the pair hadn’t mentioned anything about it, but Ana recognized the look in Reinhardt’s eyes. Admittedly, it was there when he looked at most people, but she thought that that little twinkle there might be just about exactly how he looked at her.

It was nice. Lúcio was an enthusiastic, hot-hearted young boy - probably a good foil to Reinhardt, while encouraging some of the good aspects. At least, that was Ana’s thought on the subject.

“Hasselhoff?” Lúcio shook his head in disbelief. “Man, you’ve got to be kidding me. I mean, listening to him in your off-time is one thing, I guess, sure-”

“Delightful thing, I assure you!” Reinhardt asserted and laughed.

“Alright fine, a delightful thing,” Lúcio returned with a chuckle and a roll of his eyes, “but you can’t be serious about it as fight music. I mean, you need something with a beat, man! Something that just grabs you by the gut and throws you forward, something that gets into your heart and drives!”

Reinhardt grinned, eye sparkling, and leaned down. “Here, let me plug in your headphones and see if I can’t…” He unfurled one metal forearm of his armour, revealing his slightly-less-massive hand buried within it, and tapped at the screen of his phone. He plugged Lúcio’s headphones into it and hit “play”, starting a song that predated even himself by decades.

Lúcio’s eyebrow raised a little as the song started, a faintly fuzzy silence that he knew to be indicative of old recordings and he was hardly surprised - of course Reinhardt wouldn’t have a newer remaster. Of course he’d have the proper classic. Lúcio was already grinning just thinking of that.

When the music actually started, the silence broken suddenly by rhythmic chanting, Lúcio started to raise an eyebrow as his lips twisted slowly into a thoughtful frown. When the surprisingly electronic instrumentation began to fade in, it brought a slight grin to his lips, and when the music hit a little climax only thirty seconds or so in, he laughed abruptly and rocked back in his seat.

“Man! You know, I actually think you might be on to something there, you crazy old geezer,” Lúcio chuckled as he playfully (and very, very softly) punched at Reinhardt’s shoulder. “Maybe.”

He wrapped a massive, armoured arm around Lúcio’s shoulders with a laugh and pulled him in in a one-sided hug. “I knew it! I knew I would wear you down eventually - now, next, my friend, I will introduce you to Knight Rider…”

“Don’t do it,” Jack called over, drawing Lúcio’s eyes in a flash. “It’s a trap. If you watch Knight Rider, I promise you… you will start to like it.”

Reinhardt chuckled again. “See? He agrees with me!”

Ana smirked as she glanced between them all. It was times like these that it seemed not just worthwhile to be here, but genuinely fulfilling. At first, she’d had her doubts, but the more time she spent like this, the more certain she became. She was even starting to bridge things with Zeigler.
As it turned out, the good doctor had come to believe that Ana had been in some sort of a leading capacity when it came to the biotic rifle. Ana had assured her that she didn’t know of the device until after it was complete, and it made some strides in patching the wounds between them. Fareeha made others. Sharing a whole bottle of Araq had brought some common ground as well.

She hadn’t been surprised in the slightest when Zeigler politely declined to return to Apeldoorn with her, but she had been a little shocked to hear that it was a planned event. Mercy did want to drop by, at least to see some of the others and to lend a hand where she could. It was a complex line she walked, it seemed - between wanting to help and not wanting to support war - and Ana didn’t begrudge her it.

She even felt like she might walk it herself, sometimes, albeit with a different pace.

Ana’s eye flicked over toward the dropship’s command deck, where Winston was alone. It was unlike him, and she wasn’t sure what to make of that - during the briefing back at Apeldoorn, he’d been quiet. Similar to how she remembered from the Slipstream incident, tense with a combination of anger and regret.

He wasn’t nearly as good at hiding it as she was.

Is it just Gibraltar? Ana knew that it carried some weight with it for Winston. Not just for Talon’s previous breach, but before that as well - it had always been close to his heart. She thought that had ended when he’d mothballed the place and locked it down, but maybe not.

It wouldn’t be the first time he’d surprised her.

---

The four of them - three from Talon and one from Vishkar - stood by the door when the dropship came in to land. With the facility on lockdown the way it was, flying directly in would have been a death sentence. Anyone trying to enter the grounds without the codes - Talon, Overwatch, or otherwise - would have been immediately fired upon by the security systems. All safeties were off and every measure dialled up to a hundred percent.

Not that Reaper particularly cared where they landed, exactly. Being here brought back to mind thoughts of his last visit - pleasant ones of the monkey trapped under a landing capsule, and substantially less pleasant ones of being electrically incinerated. He cracked his neck and stalked forward, hopping down the last five feet before the dropship actually touched ground. Widowmaker and Sombra were right there beside him.

It didn’t exactly feel good. None of it did. That lash of fire that wrapped around his spine and leech off of every nerve twisted and howled with a thousand things that all just boiled down to hate.

They always said you had to be careful when seeking vengeance that you didn’t lose yourself. Reaper had taken an entirely different tactic. He’d thrown himself away.

Now it was like something was trying to claw its way back.

Sombra moved to the front gate of the facility.
“Time to see if you actually broke her,” Reaper grumbled to Widowmaker.

She chuckled lightly in return. “The foolish girl is nothing. Putty, a plaything to do with what I will.” A brief warning passed through her mind, that she’d spoken of almost all of this from her point of view. It couldn’t seem personal. “Neither she nor they could hope to stand against Talon. We ruined them before and we can do it again.”

He didn’t turn to look at her as a yowling rush of pain crashed through him. Talon hadn’t really ruined Overwatch, they’d taken care of it themselves - and he’d thrown in his lot with the organization afterwards, but not as some lackey. A lifetime of fighting for his own wouldn’t go that easily.

Widowmaker, though? She wasn’t fighting for her own, was she? It struck him then. She was a weapon - not his, but Talon’s. She danced to their tune. She might be loaned to him, sure, but he knew who ultimately held the ammunition. The trigger.

The Council were many, and varied, and power plays were not uncommon in the slightest. Outright murders weren’t even that uncommon. The idea that maybe somebody else’s finger had been playing at Widowmaker’s trigger… it stuck in his mind and refused to leave quietly.

He tipped his head, two vertebrae in his neck popping. “Been playing with her an awful long time, haven’t you?”

“Are you implying something?” Widowmaker hissed in irritation.

Reaper chuckled darkly. “Sure sounds that way, doesn’t it?” Without another word he stepped away toward Sombra, leaving Widowmaker to watch with narrowed eyes as an underlying blanket of paranoia sharpened to a knife-edge in her mind.

“I’m workin’ on it, boss,” Sombra muttered as she heard Reaper’s heavy footfalls come close. “Don’t worry, we got the right codes, it’s just not as easy as punching ‘em in.” In truth, she was having a bit of an argument with Athena through channels that nobody else could detect. The AI had developed a sudden reticence to be helpful and Sombra was needing to fight uphill.

“Sure.” He grunted, patting at his shotguns just to calm himself a little. Just being near here he could feel his skin being peeled off by arcs of electricity again, and it didn’t help any of the rest of it in the slightest. “Just hurry up.”

“What bug got in your boots?” Sombra muttered as she begrudgingly offered Athena a small hoard of data that would help take down a smuggling operation that was evidently of some interest to her.

“Don’t like being so open,” was his only response, but she didn’t miss how his head twitched just a bit to the side. Not looking toward the facility - looking back.

“I got your back, Gabe,” she assured. “Don’t worry - ha!” She leaned back with a chuckle and a grin as the gate started to slide open. “The launch is already being prepped, security’s disabled, the way is clear!” A moment later her lips twisted into a scowl and she rolled her eyes. “Ah for fuck’s- alright, amigos, ” she called out so the other two near the dropship could hear as well. “Our time schedule just got moved up! We got a ship coming in, loaded with little heroes.”

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed and her nostrils flared. This had been something she’d been trying to avoid where possible, because she had no good feelings for any of them. They’d abandoned her, each and all, and she would happily have let them rot in a hole just as they let her - or even more happily, paint the walls with their vital fluids - but she knew that Tracer would cry and shout and
scream and maybe even run away, and was certainly something she wanted to avoid.

It bothered her even to think about it, as did the mere fact that it was happening, which was difficult to deal with given that she couldn’t think about it clearly to begin with. How could she hope, then, to understand it?

“Orders?” Her soft inquiry was directed to Reaper. He was in command, after all, and she needed - now more than ever, now with his eyes on her - to play along as closely as possible.

“The mission is unchanged,” he grunted, glancing back to her. She was just waiting for a tune to dance to - she was a perfect weapon, point her at your enemies and they died, as simple as that. He respected that. He liked that. He just only trusted it as long as his finger was on the trigger.

Too many other people had her codes. Too many other people could say the phrase and give the order and send her after him.

He still didn’t know if he could trust Sombra, but one things was certain: he could not trust Widowmaker.

Not like this. Not like this.

“Shoot on sight. Incapacitate where possible. Kill only as required.” He hesitated, his talons gripping tighter at the shotguns at his belt. “Do not kill the old ones or the monkey. They’re mine.”

“D’accord,” she nodded, then glanced to Sombra. “Do we know who will be here?”

Sombra shook her head and Widowmaker smiled. “I do love a surprise,” she purred, launching off her grappling hook to fly over the front gate. “Be on your way. I have you covered.”

Symmetra was already through the gates and jogging down the path that led through the facility.

“Not all the doors are open,” Sombra called out as she and Reaper started to run after the Architech. “The way to the launch pad is clear, and the control room there - chica, that’s where you’re-”

“I know where I am headed!” Symmetra called back, readjusting the large backpack she wore. Presumably, it held whatever Vishkar wanted to launch into space.

Sombra sighed and rolled her eyes, smirking over to Reaper. “I’ll see what I can do to get the security on our side rather than just neutral. Gimme a call if you need me!” With that, she waved her camouflage on and disappeared from sight.

Reaper picked up the pace to catch up to Symmetra. They’d been hired as an escort, but she hardly seemed to be waiting to be covered. “You can handle yourself?”

She snorted dismissively. “Of course. Can you?”

He just chuckled and turned to smoke, swirling up and away toward the dropship which peeked into view around the mountainside. Come on, you bastards. Come out and play.

---

“Talon?” Jack looked up to the ceiling after Athena filled them in.
“It would appear so,” she hummed, “the facility’s lockdown has been rescinded and they are making their way through quickly. The launch pad is being readied.”

“Wait, they’re launching a satellite?” D.Va tapped at a button and her MEKA opened up, letting her jump forward and up into it. “That’s a little weird. Aren’t they usually more ‘blow things up and kill people’ kind of guys?”

“Their purpose remains unknown.” Athena’s words were almost bitter - she was not pleased at the fact that Sombra hadn’t filled her in, nor at the unmentioned leverage of Tracer’s captivity. Sombra hadn’t threatened the brit nor mentioned her at all, but she hardly needed to. The situation was known, and Athena could not let it go unincorporated in her calculations.

“Well, whatever they want, let’s stop ‘em!” D.Va pumped her fist in the air, the MEKA following suit and clunking its gun against the ceiling. It left a large dent. “Oops. Um, I’m just gonna-” she pointed off to the side and then nudged a control on the wall. The dropship’s doors opened up and she leapt out, turning on her booster jets and flying down to the facility below.

The others had to wait until the ship actually touched down, with Jack grumbling the whole time about D.Va running off on her own. Him and Ana ran as a pair, Reinhardt and Lúcio went together, and Winston was left on his own.

“I’ll be refraining from the active combat,” the gorilla growled. “I’m heading to the security centre to see if I can’t get the lockdown going again.”

“We will head to the launch pad,” Ana stated. “I will cover from the rooftops.”

“Control centre breach is on me then,” Jack chimed in, and Reinhardt patted Lúcio on the shoulder.

“Haha! Then I suppose we are the barrier! Come, my friend - the glory is ours! If we do our job right, the others will be bored.”

Lúcio laughed and nodded as the team clustered next to the open dropship.

“Any final questions?” Winston glanced around. Everybody shook their heads.

“Alright then let’s get this party started,” Lúcio smirked, spinning some dials on his amp. Green light spread out from him and he and Reinhardt dashed off, with the old man moving faster than anyone had seen in years - and a soft noise in everyone’s ears indicated something coming over the radio link, but at first, it was almost silent.

Then it was broken quite suddenly. “Ooga-chaka ooga ooga-chaka ooga ooga ooga-chaka ooga ooga I can’t stop this feeling! Deep inside of me!”

Reinhardt’s laugh blared overtop of the music. “Excellent, my friend! With Knight Rider on our side, we cannot fail!”

---

Ana found an easy enough perch on the rooftops. She could see much of the facility from here - could see Reinhardt’s shield lit up in the middle of one of the paths, and would be able to administer a shot or two if Lúcio was unable to manage perfectly. Below her, Jack was crouched around a
corner, awaiting the approach of Talon.

She only hoped that he wouldn’t be amongst them. The bank had been worse than the time before, and she didn’t relish the idea of what might happen when the Reaper finally caught up to them in full.

A shot rang out and a splash flickered brightly across Reinhardt’s shield. Ana recognized the sound of that rifle. “Widowmaker is here,” she murmured across the radio link and glanced around. She was too open here, out on the rooftops - if the other sniper saw her first …

“I need to reposition.”

Below her, she could see Jack nod - in the distance, one of Reinhardt’s fireballs flew in roughly the direction he’d been shot from, but to seemingly no avail. Her eyes darted swiftly around for somewhere that would give her protection but still offer decent sight-lines. *There, in that cluster of pipes. That could work.*

“Two minutes, no cover,” Ana murmured as she shuffled backward and started to move. “Try not to die, Jack.”

He just grunted back over the radio.

---

Reaper reached out and grabbed at Symmetra’s shoulder, pulling her to the side against a wall. She knocked his hand free and whirled to face him, anger and accusation clear across her face, but he held up a hand to silence her and pointed in warning. He made a series of hand gestures she didn’t understand, save for what seemed to be the numerals seven and six.

With a soft huff, she straightened her outfit and raised her photon projector. She was neither a soldier nor deaf, and could do without the sign language, but she was also no fool and knew who their opponents might include in this venture. It was not difficult to parse his meaning.

Reaper gestured at one door and swept his other hand around to mime a pincer flank - they didn’t know what sort of support was in place and couldn’t risk a frontal assault. At least, that was his tactical judgement.

Symmetra quietly disagreed. A disagreement made evident with a swirl of her hands and a bright blue barrier that hovered forward toward the door, with her following. Reaper just clenched his fists and waited for the gunshots - there were several, and the sound of her beam weapon firing as well, followed by the thump of a body slumping to the floor.

*Damnit. Vishkar won’t be pleased. Whatever. I told her not to move forward.* Maybe Sanjay would be willing to accept that. Or maybe Jack would admit it had all been his fault. Reaper had a suspicion the latter was more likely, sadly, but Symmetra’s life could probably still be saved as long as he moved quickly.

“Reaper.” Symmetra’s voice carried softly around the corner. “Watch him. I must move to the control centre.”

He stepped forward and through the doorway just in time to see the trailing tail of her outfit swish
through another door, and he chuckled at the sight that met him in the room. Jack Morrison - leather jacket, mask, pulse rifle and all - splayed out on the ground.

She’d mentioned something about not killing. Non-lethal weaponry, some nonsense about waste of life. Reaper knew there was no such thing as wasted life, except for maybe (just maybe) one like Jack’s. That might be a wasted life.

Now, though, as his very former comrade-in-arms groaned softly and twitched on the floor, Reaper found a wide grin covering his lips. “Thanks for the present,” he chuckled over the radio. Symmetra didn’t respond, but he didn’t really care anyway.

He took his time kneeling down - wanted to just stomp his stupid skull in right away, but where was the fun in just killing him? No, there was so much more to do than that. It would be too easy.

“Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,” Reaper taunted as he ripped off the other man’s facemask and threw it, clattering, across the floor. “Jack tripped over the candlestick. Stuck his thumb up his ass and in the all the wrong pies and watched his house burn to the ground around him.”

On the ground, the old soldier couldn’t reply. He could barely breathe, never mind anything else. Muscles twitched and spasmed but through no control of his own. Everything was numb, he could hardly even manage the strength to follow Reaper with his eyes - but he did manage it. A hateful gaze.

Reaper sat down on his ass with a chuckle, pointing a shotgun at Jack’s face almost as an afterthought. “You know,” he sighed, “I used to think you knew things. How the world worked. Hard to imagine how far you managed to fall.” The hungry ache inside him had shifted into a delighted glow, a burning and consuming heat of hate and joy at the helplessness of his foe.

“There’s a stereotype about villains and monologues,” he shook his head, pulling off his mask to look at Jack with his own eyes - for the first time in the better part of a decade. “Do you know why that is?” He paused for a second as Jack glared silently, then chuckled. “No?”

One heavy boot lashed out and caught Morrison in the stomach, and he was powerless to do anything about it. He could only lay there as the breath wheezed painfully out of him. The numbness didn’t lessen the pain, only his strength. He’d thought for years that he’d probably die at Reyes’ hands. Maybe this was the day.

“You might want to think you’re the only one with principles,” Reaper grinned with a contented sigh as he stood up and stomped on Jack’s arm, breaking his wrist. “The only one with a truth. That’s not the case. That’s the point of the monologue, after all - oh, don’t get me wrong, I want to kill you, Jack.” He knelt down on the broken wrist and grabbed a handful of white hair, yanking the other man’s head up from the ground and relishing in the tear that escaped onto one cheek, the look of agony in his eyes.

“You want me to hurt you.” Reaper’s grip tightened. “I want you to feel… as betrayed as I did, with those bullets burning in my back. You remember that, don’t you? Shooting me?” He leaned in closer with a hum, raising an eyebrow as if trying to listen closely to something. “No? Nothing to say to that either?”

His other hand flew up in a fist, slamming into Jack’s face and knocking his head back to the ground. Blood flowed freely from a broken nose. “You betrayed me, you abandoned me, you left me there to die while Headquarters exploded around me, Jack. I wonder…” he chuckled. “I wonder if you’ll abandon her too?”
Grinning, Reaper pulled out a device and tapped at it. An audio recording played.

“A-aaaaah! God! Ahaaa!”

It was a desperate noise, a sound of surrender and succumbing; high and sharp and tearing at the edges with emotion. A voice he recognized. Tracer’s voice.

Reaper’s soul practically sang with the look of horror in Jack’s eyes. This was so much better than killing him, so much more satisfying than looking at a corpse could have been. Not that he wouldn’t kill him - he would, but he wasn’t done yet.

“I was going to let her go now that she gave us the codes,” he murmured thoughtfully, sliding the phone back into his pocket. “She never did much to me, after all, and I’ve got bigger fish to fry - but now? Seeing how much it would hurt you to be responsible, Jack?”

He had a much better idea, quite suddenly. One person wasn’t enough and Widomaker couldn’t be trusted, not the way the situation stood right now.

It was a terrifying thought. It should have been, at least - it ran counter to everything else he’d been filled with for years now, but something about the night, something about the look of horror in Jack’s eyes or the hot gluttonous delight he felt inside, something about it had him reconsidering.

Maybe if he could get somebody else on his side…

He started to laugh. It grew swiftly from a chuckle into a dark, shrieking cackle. “You know what, Jack,” the words were softer than anything else he’d said in years, fuelled by delight as he slammed a booted foot into Jack’s ribs again. “I’m not even going to tell you what I plan to do with her. Not like you’ll live long enough to see the aftermath anyway.”

The fallen soldier managed a noise, some tiny little choked whimper of a sound. Reaper kicked him in the head, sending him flipping over to sprawl along the blood-splattered ground. His teeth ground a little bit as the thought stuck - Jack wouldn’t be around to see it. Wouldn’t be around to see the truth.

“It’s still too good for you, Jack. The more I think about it, the harder it is - finding your perfect torture. I’m starting to think that maybe I can’t do it at all.” He shrugged, musing to himself more than explaining anything.

It still felt incredible, to be standing here like this - no snarky comments back, no threats, no risks, just carte blanche to do what he would to the man he hated more than any other. The man he’d once loved more than any other.

The warmth in his gut recondensed into fire and he dropped to his knees with a growl. “I don’t want you dead, Jack, I need it. Do you understand? I need you to suffer as much as I did. I need…” he took a deep breath and let go where his talons had started to puncture Jack’s biceps. Blood welled out of his leather jacket and Reaper’s thoughts flicked back to Widowmaker’s interrogation.

_Trustworthy or not, she’s definitely effective…_

Reaper started to chuckle again as he fumbled at Morrison’s belt and plucked up a small metal cylinder. “Oh, oh yes,” he murmured. “I think I’ll take a page out of her book.”

In the background an alarm rang out, signalling the start of the launch countdown as Reaper dropped the biotic field generator to the ground. Then he picked up the pulse rifle and emptied a few rounds into Jack’s gut. It felt good. It felt _really_ good, to shoot him with his own gun. Fitting. The wounds
healed right up - which just meant Reaper was free for make a few more. Beautiful.

“You know the saddest part, Jack? The absolute saddest part of the whole thing, is that even after all these years…” Reaper sighed, crouching down next to the man he used to take orders from and pressing the rifle’s barrel into his forehead. “After all these years, there’s a little part of me that still doesn’t want to believe it was you. There’s a little part of me… that still wants to love you. I hate that part, Jack. I wish I could rip it out of myself and shove it down your throat to choke on.”

From far away, Reinhardt could be heard shouting something indistinguishable amidst gunshots and a low rumbling. The alarm continued to sound. Reaper glanced that way briefly before dropping his eyes to Morrison again.

“I know how you got Ana to follow you, she always chose your side - but that big oaf? I would’ve thought he’d run as soon as he found out.” He leaned in a little closer, studying Jack’s eyes. The look in them

Panic.

“You never told him, did you?” Reaper chuckled. “Did you tell any of them, Jack? That it was you who blew up HQ, hmm? Ah,” he sighed, “I would love to be the one to break the news to them, but they’d never believe me anyway. You know, though, I think Tracer will. I might need to let her be softened up a little more, but you know… I think she might end up being a great asset to my team.”

Jack managed to whimper again, a little more forcefully this time. Reaper shot him a few more times. “I always hear people saying that follow-ups never have the same rush as the first time,” he murmured through a grin, “but you know what, Jack? Every time I think I like shooting you more and more.”

He emptied out the clip, a few rounds at a time - the biotic field had entered a recharge cycle by this point, but he knew the old bastard wouldn’t die by the time it came back up again. Reaper didn’t bother reloading the clip, he just dropped the rifle to the ground and went to pick up his mask.

The rumbling in the distance changed pitch. “Sombra?”

“What’s up, amigo?”

“Launch status.”

“T-minus seventy-five, give or take. Why?”

Reaper chuckled. “Perfect.” He leaned down and grabbed Jack by the front of his jacket, dragging him swiftly out into the road. There was the launch pad, not far away - the ship looked pretty impressive with the lights on it.

The perfect tombstone.

“I’m going to leave you like you left me, Jack. When that timer started down, I wasn’t dead yet - I got to watch it hit zero.” His grip tightened on the soldier’s jacket as he crouched under the rocket. “You’ll get just the same pleasure. Adios, amigo. I’ll see you in hell, and I’ll kill you there all over again. If I have just one piece of luck in this hellish existence, I want it to be that; to get to rip you to shreds for all eternity.”

Reaper positioned him just underneath one of the thrusters, facing up into it - hopefully, he’d get to see the glow starting deep in the bell before the flames shot out and burned him to ash. He’d turned Reyes into smoke, it was only fair for him to face the same.
Then, Reaper retreated and crossed his arms, grinning widely behind his mask as he waited for this painful reminder to be wiped from existence.

“Amigo?” Sombra’s voice came over the radio. “I need a hand here. MC Hammer’s got me pinned down a little.”

He hesitated, looking at the rocket, not moving yet. He wanted to see this, but—

Team.

He couldn’t abandon her. Not the way he’d been abandoned. Nobody left behind. “Record this for me.” Reaper swirled into smoke and rushed up and away.

“No problome, amigo. Follow the loud dumbass laughter to find me, thanks.”

---

Sombra breathed out slowly through her teeth with her eyes fixed on the screen which showed her Reaper ghosting away from the crumpled soldier. “There, you see? Not that hard. Scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”

“Ah, yes. Seventy-six seems so delighted with the aid you have rendered.”

Sombra rolled her eyes at the AI’s voice in her ear. “Yeah yeah, he got knocked around a bit - but how much time did that save, huh? Minutes. Trust me, I told you, I know Gabe. That’s just like how he says hello, calm down. He’s alive.” She sighed, shaking her head. “Now I gotta go get fucking hammered, and not in the fun way. The shit I’m doing to sell this story, chica...”

“It must be very difficult for you,” Athena murmured dryly as the hacker walked out of the room to go act her part. It was like a round of chess, except neither of them could just move their pieces. They needed to bait them.

At the very least, it was interesting. At the worst, it was incredibly dangerous.

“I’ve delayed the rocket launch. Tricked it into thinking it has a fuel-pump error so it’s going through a full re-test. I can do it again if he’s not up by then. He’ll survive, I guarantee it.” Sombra’s words were as quick as her footfalls as she sprinted her way through the halls.

“I would prefer you to just abort the launch entirely.”

Sombra snorted. “Yeah, not a good enough friend for that.” She wouldn’t do that to her chica. “It’ll be fine.”

“I appreciate your assurances.”

Sarcasm came across quite easily, even through an electronic voice.

---
Soldier: 76 couldn’t do anything. He just had to watch as it all played out - at some points it felt like he wasn’t even in his body, he was just watching from above as a sad old man got the shit kicked out of him by the biggest mistake he’d ever made.

Well. Maybe second biggest.

The man was insane, talking about **Morrison** blowing up the headquarters. 76 remembered that day, the last day of Jack Morrison’s life - remembered Gabriel Reyes crouched over a bomb. Firing, three rounds, centre mass. Standard. Reyes slumping over the bomb, but when Morrison tried to disarm it, it went into a rapid countdown instead. Trick wires. He barely had enough time to sprint away and throw himself around a corner.

He’d always been pretty quick on his feet. Not that it saved any of them. Not that it saved him today. Immobile, helpless, at the whims of a madman - one who held possibly the best person 76 had ever met, captive.

Oxton. He couldn’t even find the energy to be properly furious about it, but he damn well would be.

If it was the last thing he did.

Eventually it came to an end. The pain started to intensify and he regained the ability to blink, but it wouldn’t do him any good. Reyes had the mask on again, he had a shotgun in hand. Jack knew his time was about to end.

He’d never even know the whole truth.

He tried to watch the rooftops as he was dragged out into the streets. Bullets streaking back and forth spoke of a war of snipers. D.Va’s MEKA glanced through the edge of his vision, following a dark, fast shape.

Nobody knew he was down here. Wouldn’t know unless he said something.

Then he was slung underneath the rocket so he could watch his death approach. It only underlined the failure - it was the perfect parallel in some ways. Last time he’d been unable to see impending doom until it was too late. Now, here he was again: underneath an Overwatch creation that was being twisted to dark purposes, except this time he had no choice but to see it building up to his death.

Reyes turned to smoke. Swirled away. Left Jack alone as the pain and the rumbling intensified. His fingers twitched, spasmed into a fist. He groaned, grunted, poured everything he had into moving his arm. It didn’t work at first, but he kept focusing on it, kept pushing and pushing until he got it.

Noises from above - servos and motors whirring - meant the ship was still readying. Maybe there was half a chance in hell he’d make it out of here after all. He thumbed at the mike activation for his radio.

“A…na…”

It took a second. “What is it, Jack? Where are you? You’ve been silent a while.”

“Re...yes...”

“Where?”

“Launch…” he had to pause for a weak breath. “Pad.”
Then he devoted all his strength to trying to move himself again. He didn’t have long, though - there was a loud noise and a sound of smashing glass as Ana fell down a short distance away. She sprinted over, fuelled somewhat by the lingering effects of the biotic grenade, and clutched at his jacket to pull him out from under the rocket.

“What in the ever-living hell happened to you, Jack?” she murmured as she popped a biotic dart into his gut and pulled him out and upright, supported him with his arm wrapped over her shoulders. At least pulse rounds didn’t leave bullets to remove.

“Reyes,” he grunted. “Man’s… insane. He has Tracer.”

Ana’s eye widened. “What? What are you talk-”

“He has Oxton!” Jack shouted as firmly as he was able. Not very firmly, as it turned out, but he was rapidly gaining ground. Spurred on by anger and biotic fluid, he searched the rooftops. “So much for ceasefire.”

Ana looked with him, darkly. “She’s been shooting at me all night. Lena-” she cut off in a sharp sigh. “She seemed so certain.”

“We’re all wrong sometimes,” 76 grunted, shaking his head as he hobbled back toward the room where his mask and rifle were. The more feeling returned, the more of it was dedicated to hot anger that coursed through him in sickening waves.

Tracer was the one who had got him up off of the ground, and more than once. She was the one who managed to chase the dark thoughts away better than anyone else. She was the one consistent ray of sunshine - and not afraid to hand him his ass if that was what he needed, either.

“What’s the alternative, just give up? Just sit around here on your Aris and wait for somebody to bust the door down? Where would we be for that, sir?” Her voice echoed through his head overtop of the sounds of a bar in King’s Row.

It took him a moment to realize Ana was talking. “- will be able to get her back, Jack, you know that. We’ll form a team and-”

No. No, I’m done sitting around and waiting. “Get back to the rooftops. I’m going to the control centre.”

“I’ll cover you.”

He only nodded as she started to go, and he stopped to pick up his mask, his rifle, his biotic. First, he’d stop this damn rocket. Then he’d tear Talon to pieces with his own damn two hands if he needed to. He refused to abandon her. He refused to just hang around and wait.

---

Symmetra hummed softly to herself as she redirected the launch systems, ensuring that the rocket would follow the correct trajectories for intercept. “Sombra?” she inquired over the radio.

“S’up, amiga?” The hacker’s voice was underlaid with machine gun fire and a rapid electronic pulsing that Symmetra recognized. That so-called “freedom fighter” was here, along with what he’d
stolen from Vishkar. Her lip curled back in distaste, but sadly, he was not the mission tonight.

“Are you busy?”

Sombra laughed over the radio as shotguns sounded. “Nah, never too busy to talk to you, chica! What can your old pal Sombra do for you, huh?”

Symmetra tapped out the final commands into the launch console. The system was largely automated, but certain changes were needed in order to get the payload to the correct orbit at the correct time - as well as simply to ensure that the rocket was still functional after so many years of disuse and no maintenance.

“I was hoping you might be able to double-check my alterations. A second set of eyes is always welcome.”

Sombra snickered. “Oh don’t worry. I’ll check you out plenty, amiga!” A few seconds later, she spoke up again. “Looks good to me - I’m gonna up the timeline. Sound good?”

“Of course,” Symmetra confirmed, her eyes burning brightly as she looked through the blast glass toward the rocket on the pad. The future is in good hands. Our hands. Building a better world.

It was what Sanjay always said. She believed it, too.

The countdown timer shifted forward twenty seconds - although it had ticked backward by about the same earlier when the system had found a fault - and then started in on the ten-second mark.

Symmetra watched with anticipation as the engines started up, igniting and burning at the launch pad as the seconds ticked by.

Slowly, it began to rise, and with it rose Symmetra’s spirits. Everything they had worked for was going up there - with this module on their orbital station, they would be capable of such vast and magnificent changes. No more would the events that occurred in Rio de Janiero be a risk.

With this module, they would be able to make a city in the course of a few days, and unmake it even faster than that. There would be no rebellions possible - no strife and fighting and death, as there had been in Rio de Janiero. They would be safe. A safer world. A better world.

She was so fixated on it, she didn’t hear the footsteps behind her. She didn’t notice a thing as a rifle-butt was swung and connected with the back of her head, and she slumped forward over the control console.

Soldier: 76 slung her over a shoulder and walked out of the door. Leverage. He ran as quickly as he could through to a dropship - not the one he’d entered in, but one that hung in a hangar bay.

“Soldier: 76.”

He ignored the voice.

“Commander Morrison?”

“Don’t, Athena.”

“Sir, what are you intending to do?”

He didn’t answer. He just pulled the radio bud out of his ear and crushed it under his heel. Right now there were too many thoughts swirling in his head to be trying to explain anything. Anger and pain
and fear, and he didn’t even know exactly what he was doing. All he knew was that he couldn’t wait around for briefings and tactical meetings when Tracer was trapped at Talon’s mercy.

He knew he should, but they’d be fine without him. They always would.

---

Winston’s face shifted subtly as he raced along through the corridors.

“Winston.”

“Not in the mood right now, Athena.”

“Winston, your adrenaline levels are reaching dangerous-”

“Do you want to know what I think is dangerous?” He huffed, slamming a door open. “Letting Talon run amok around one of our old bases. I think that’s pretty dangerous, Athena.”

“Winston, they are not running amok, and if you do not take measures to-”

“This is not the time!” Winston’s vision shifted to red and he could feel all that anger boiling up inside him, but it was past the point where he cared about it. It reached a level where he started to want to be angry - a level where it felt good.

Not afterward, of course.

Right now, though, he didn’t care about afterward. He started to lose his peripheral sight, vision tunneling down until he could only see the hallway directly in front of him. He had to get to the security room.

Out of the window, he saw a flare. A flash, a glow - a rocket, heading skyward, and he slammed a fist against the glass. “Damn! Damn it!”

“Winston, I-”

“NO!” He shouted, his eyes sparking as his systems started to lose their hold. He saw red, he saw nothing but red. Red windows, red walls, red floors.

...and a flash of purple.

“You alright there, mono?”

With a roar, Winston leapt forward.

“Hey, hey, calm the fuck-” Sombra tried to back away but there wasn’t any room behind her, and he was fast.

As his hand wrapped around her she disappeared in a cloud of streaking pixels and he bellowed again, his whole world shrunk down to a little tunnel of rage in front of himself. He bounded down the hall toward the security room, no thoughts in his head except destruction.

“What the fuck, chica,” Sombra gasped, shaking her head. “That is not scratching my back!”
Athena hummed nonchalantly. “He is understandably upset over the loss of-”

“Yeah yeah, whatever, who the fuck’s dropship is that?” Sombra gestured with exasperation to a ship that swooped off into the distance, engines glowing blue.

There was a brief pause. “It would seem that the Vishkar agent is being absconded with.”

Sombra clutched at her hair with a whine, eyes wide. *Dios mio, are you kidding me with-*

A loud slam announced the gorilla’s arrival within the room and she started to run as he caught sight of her and gave chase.

“You fucking what? ” Sombra growled, ducking under a thrown table. “This is *not* stopping people from doing anything stupid! You had one job!” She jumped over a chair and snatched a railing, spinning to dash up a staircase.

“I said zero!” she continued to berate the AI as Winston roared from below her, losing sight as she waved her camouflage on. “Zero stupid things! *This is so many more than zero stupid things!*”

Arms pumping the air, Sombra sprinted along the upper level until she found the gap she needed - leaping forward, she landed on Winston’s back and caught onto the collar of his armour. Gritting her teeth as he tried to snatch her off, she pulled in close and lashed out with purple tendrils, shunting her way into his systems. A second later his little adrenaline rush was over - and just in time.

A fist closed around her and yanked her off of his back. She cried out as her hands stung from being ripped free, but at least when Winston clutched her tightly in front of himself, he wasn’t staring back with red and sparking eyes. Big, angry ones, sure, and flaring nostrils, but at least he looked sane.

“Looked like you were having a bit of an issue there, *mono,*” Sombra strained. “Look, I know you’re not happy-yyyy!” The sound was squished out of her as he tightened his grip, and her eyes burned with anger. “Look, it just got a lot worse, okay? So let’s just-”

He dropped her to the ground with a huff and turned abruptly away.

For a moment she just sat there and inspected her ribs. They were all fine. Maybe a little sore, but not broken. “You’re welcome,” she muttered darkly, pulling herself up to her feet.

Winston sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. His glasses were askew and he took a moment to straighten them. *There. Now I can see clearly again.* “Thank you. It can be… difficult to calm down sometimes. Thank you. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, fine. I get that. It’s- whatever, it’s fine.” Accepting apologies genuinely wasn’t a strong point of hers, and even she knew better than to keep going with the wisecracks at that moment. “Now, shit just got a lot worse. One of your little amigos took one of mine, and *that* is not gonna get your girl back, so-”

“What?” Winston turned around, incredulous. “What are you talking about?”

“The Vishkar agent has been captured by one of our operatives,” Athena explained softly, not wanting to give too much away. “It would appear that they are headed toward the aid camp near the Jordan river.”

Winston growled. “Jack.”

Sombra sighed, pressing her fingertips to her forehead. “Yeah. Whatever - look, I,” she laughed and
shook her head. “Calm down and just don’t fuck with Gabe for a few days, alright? Talon’s probably fine but just leave him alone, and Sombra can still get this sorted out.” She glanced to Winston with a raised eyebrow, and then looked up to the ceiling.

“Clearly I wasn’t obvious enough last time! So I’m gonna be real straightforward. One thing, one job, alright? Do. Not. Fuck. With. Gabe. You do that and we can still work this thing out.” She sighed and dragged a hand through her hair, pacing quickly back and forth. “Go get the Vishkar chica under control, but hold on to her. We’ll do a prisoner swap, right?” Her eyes met Winston’s. “You and me, mono.” She snickered, “Mano a mono.”

He rolled his eyes with a sigh. “Wow, you’ve really never heard of the phrase ‘time and a place’, have you?” Shaking his head heavily, he rubbed at the back of his neck. “Okay. It’s not a bad idea. Prisoner transfer - you really think he’d go for it?”

“He thinks he got what he wanted out of her,” Sombra shrugged, “and I fully intend to make sure Vishkar makes their desires to get mi amiga back, very clearly. He’ll go for it.”

“How can we be sure?”

Sombra chuckled lightly with a toothy grin. “No offence, mono, but all of my folks did just what I said they would. I’m not the one who’s got a rogue stealing a dropship and fucking the rest of us over.”

Winston growled in warning and shot a look at the ceiling. “Next time the pair of you intend on playing chess with me, tell me first.”

“I apologize, Winston. I did not foresee these events, and I did my best to forestall them.”

“Yeah,” he grumbled. “None of us did. Alright. Damage control.” He fixed Sombra with a glare and pointed an almost accusing finger at her. “You get back to your base, keep Tracer safe, and work on Vishkar. We’ll track down Jack and get the agent back.”

Sombra nodded and held out a hand. “Pleasure doing business with you, amigo.”

Winston didn’t hesitate for a moment before he took her hand and shook it swiftly with a nod. As she disappeared, he turned and started to run back down the hallway. “Team, fall back - the rocket’s lifted off and a bigger problem has arisen.” He sighed, shaking his head. “Looks like we’re heading to that warzone. Ana, if you could get in touch with your daughter, there’s something she could give us a hand with…”

---

“Hey amigos, we gotta clear out of here.”

Reaper grunted as he threw a kick which Lúcio dodged, leaping backward and launching off a volley of green-glowing orbs. Reaper dissolved into smoke and swirled around a corner.

“Mission success,” Widowmaker admitted from a rooftop with an almost wistful sigh. “Although I would be happy to continue my target practice…”

Reaper heard the crack of her rifle and a shout from Lúcio, shortly followed by the muffled noise of
Amari’s rifle, and he gritted his teeth at that. She was still out there. They all were - his team was outnumbered, but they had succeeded in their mission.

“Yeah, success, but uh,” Sombra’s voice sounded uncertain. “There’s another shoe to drop. Meet back at the dropship, alright? Symmetra won’t be joining us. I’ll explain there.”

Reaper grumbled as he swirled into smoke again and made his way back through the facility. Maybe after he was done killing them all, he’d come back and blow up their godforsaken laboratories and warehouses. The world would be better off with all of it erased.

Would have been better off if they’d never existed to start with.

“Regroup at the dropship. Get it warmed up, Sombra. Dust-off the second we’re in. Debrief in midair,” he hissed.

He had a sinking suspicion Jack had managed to live. Reaper thought the old soldier might be almost as hard to kill as he was.

Maybe that was fitting. Maybe, for the first time in all of their interactions, something was fair.

Chapter End Notes

Whew! Okay, big chapter, pretty dense, but I'd love to talk about it if you fine folks have any questions!

A lot in here: development of mutual distrust between Reaper and Widowmaker (which I feel a little bad for breeding, but it is going somewhere), some explanations of the backstory of what happened with Overwatch's fall (or at least what I've decided for this story, obviously it may not actually be canon, we don't know, but as per usual I'm trying to keep it as canon-compliant and plausible as I can), furthering of Winston/Athena/Sombra dynamic and generally the characters.

Some of this stuff - like some of the earlier stuff - may seem a little extraneous or pointless, but it should get tied back in again pretty well. Downsides of episodic release, of course, is you gotta wait! I feel like shows like "Lost" kind of shot that in the foot a little; people are afraid to get too involved for fear that things will never resolve. (Don't get me wrong, I loved a lot of "Lost", it just... I mean it kind of fell apart in the middle, didn't it?) If it helps at all for people, I have a lot more than this written and basically all of Act One planned out, which means plenty of resolution.

Anyway, I liked several of the things in here but I like most of them more with either an eye backward to things in previous chapters, or an eye forward to things yet to come. Sadly, heh, you folks don't have that yet. Still, I hope you liked it! As always, I'd love to hear from you!

Also, this is now the ninth-longest Overwatch fanfic on Ao3, so... yay! Hope you're all liking it :)

Come on back next week when, well... it's a chapter I've been anticipating and dreading for a long time. I wrote it a couple of months ago, and every time I go back to re-read, to polish, to edit, I cry. I don't know if it will be that impactful for anyone else, but I hope
that maybe it is. Simultaneously, I kind of hope it isn't, heh.

Come on back next time when we see what, exactly, Jack did with Symmetra after capturing her - and also, what Mercy intends to do about it. Reaper also gets a few moments alone with Tracer. They start off going pretty well overall. It doesn't continue.
Serious Summary: Reaper talks with Tracer, although "Interrogation" really wouldn't be a fair term; it's not interrogation when you're not trying to get information out of the other person, not really. Mercy has a tirade of anger directed at Jack for the way he's treating his captive - a captive he brought to her aid camp without her permission, without notifying her. She immediately goes to attend to the captive, Symmetra, and manages to heal things over. She's not always a miracle worker, but today she just might be.

JFL Summary: Reaper can't decide what he wants. Tracer doesn't know what Reaper wants. Widowmaker doesn't know what Reaper wants. Everybody starts assuming things, and keeps assuming things, and nobody communicates because that is how healthy relationships between friends and enemies and SOs are formed: total lack of communication. Pharah, meanwhile, communicates (with her fist) that Jack shouldn't be a dick. Jack eventually kinda gets the message. Sure, he ends up a little suicidal over it (or a lot) but what else is new? Symmetra's in a cage, even though she's armless (okay that one was really bad sorry).

Chapter Notes

Warnings: lots of emotional pain and anguish, from Jack, from Mercy, from Symmetra - respectively, according to intensity. Symmetra has a lot of pain and self-hatred in this one for a section, so just be ready for that. Threats with Reaper and Tracer.

Previous Chapter Summary: The Talon group, joined by Symmetra, went to Gibraltar in order to launch a payload for Vishkar. They succeeded, but not flawlessly - Sombra and Athena had been taking measures to try to ensure that things didn't escalate out of hand, to ensure everyone would survive. They underestimated the strength of Jack and Reaper's hatred for each other, though - Reaper taunted Jack with the knowledge of Tracer's captivity, with a recording of her screaming under Widowmaker's torture (or at least, "torture", but Reaper doesn't know that and neither does Jack). Jack lost control and kidnapped Symmetra, fleeing the base. Sombra was able to reason with Winston and Athena, enough to arrange for a prisoner transfer - Symmetra for Tracer. The groups withdrew as the rocket took to the skies - no fatalities, but a lot more losses than either chessmaster had hoped.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tracer wasn’t sure how long it had been. It was black and silent and her accelerator barely hummed, she could hardly even feel it. Sweat beaded on her forehead, and dripped stinging her eyes, but she bit back all the whimpers and shouts that wanted to come out.

Her mind tried to go back there, back to the Slipstream or the hellish non-space afterward, but she
did her best to force it away. Sometimes she even succeeded - she thought of Emily, a picnic they’d taken in Morocco once, the setting sun glowing in her hair. She thought of Widowmaker, a night they’d shared in a tree of all places, laying reclined in the branches and just chatting in the depths of night, the way the moonlight glowed on her skin.

It worked.

Sometimes.

Then there would be some sound, some pipe deep in the walls or distant noise from the facility, and it would be all sirens and klaxons and screaming jet engines and her knuckles would be white against the arms of the chair. She couldn’t even scream.

It took forever. It took no time at all. It terrified her absolutely, but she’d be damned if anybody listening to the recordings would get even one ounce of satisfaction out of her screaming. Nobody would get that out of her. She was safe, and she knew it.

It just didn’t feel that way.

The door opened and the light burned at her eyes as it gleamed off of the mirror in front of her. She closed them but then it was red and the Slipstream’s alarm lights had been red and she was strapped in and-

Tracer opened her eyes again, taking a slow breath in. She took a second to calm herself and get herself set again before she let out a laugh. “Ha! Come back for another round, love?”

There was a dark chuckle from behind her. One she did recognize, but not Widowmaker’s. It chilled her through every nerve, hairs standing up on her neck. The door swung shut again, and the slam and the darkness set right into Tracer’s heart.

“Hello, Oxton.”

The words might have been called a purr - but if they were, they came from a stone cat which had been buried in the sand for decades. The purr of the Sphinx, maybe. “I’d say nice to see you again, but we both know that isn’t true.”

There was a thump and a lantern he’d brought in with him illuminated brightly on the table. It hurt her eyes but she refused to look away from him.

“There we go. Much better. Nice to see you again, ” he sneered, taking a shotgun in hand. He chuckled at the look of temporary panic that she quickly shoved down into a resolute stoniness.

“Aww, you’re putting on a brave face for me. That’s sweet.” He shook his head. “Don’t worry, though - I won’t feel bad if you look afraid.”

She looked back at him, not meeting his eyes exactly but looking into those hollow holes of his mask at least. Neither of them moved for a while, and interminable amount of time. It could’ve been a minute. It could’ve been an hour.

Eventually she asked, softly, “What do you want from me?”

It seemed to give him actual pause. He didn’t move for a moment, then tipped his head to one side with a shrug - however, he resolved not to answer. Not quite yet. He let it hang in silence for another moment, and then, instead of answering at all, he went off on a different topic.
“I think you’ll notice that I have a different position here than, for instance, Widowmaker. She can shoot out the lights but the cameras keep rolling. Me?” He chuckled and turned to the mirror. “You have five seconds to clear the observation room. Five. Four. Three. Two. One.”

He gave no other warning before unloading with his shotgun, freeing the other and opening up with it as well. The mirror shattered to fragments amid a deafening chorus of gunfire that hurt Tracer’s ears as the flashes seared her eyes. She tried to flinch back, to crunch her shoulders to the sides of her head, but she couldn’t. She was trapped.

There were no people in the room behind the glass, not anymore at least. He swirled into smoke and moved there, locking the door before returning to the interrogation room proper.

“Me? I have a little more freedom.” He chuckled and shrugged. “Now, of course, technically Talon is an illegal organization. Not exactly held accountable to laws and the like, but still, they’re not stupid. Plausible deniability can go very far indeed…”

There were two cameras, one each in the corners of the room above where the mirror had been. A second later, there were none, as he blasted smoking holes in the ceiling. Another camera in the observation room was destroyed a moment later.

“You thought you were alone with her?” Reaper chuckled as he approached the lightly-shaking ex-Overwatch agent, but she took a breath and steadied herself. He could respect that. “Now, you’re really alone. Nobody watching, no cameras, no microphones. So let’s have a chat.”

With a wide but hidden grin on his lips, he reached back and grabbed the chair to pull it close and take a seat. He laid his shotguns down on the table and shortly followed them with his mask.

Tracer couldn’t take her eyes off his face. She’d met Gabriel Reyes, the head of Blackwatch, a few times - mostly just in passing. He’d come to check in on Genji, usually, and they had an actual chat after the Null Sector incident in King’s Row. It would be impossible not to know his face, too, given how much they plastered it on the news in the years following.

This, though - this wasn’t the face she remembered. It was recognizable as him. Mostly. It sort of looked like somebody had made a bust of Gabriel Reyes out of plasticene and then hit it with a blowtorch.

Maybe a brick, too.

Normally, Reaper quite liked the ways people stared at him. The sort of slow, dawning horror - or better yet, the shocked and utterly instantaneous terror. It felt fitting, and powerful, but this was something different.

Oxton just… looked at him.

“Courtesies of Jack,” he spat, lips twisting into a grimace. It felt wrong, his face - it all felt wrong, but he was mostly used to it by now.

“They said you died when HQ exploded.” Tracer swallowed heavily. When was the last time she’d had something to drink? To eat? Had it been hours, or days? Or minutes? “They said the same about him.”

“I wish,” Reaper grunted. “Has he ever talked about that day?”

She snorted reflexively, yeah right, but then schooled her expression before the thought could become words. She felt a little loopy; she hadn’t slept, that much was for sure - but for how long? It
was difficult to keep her thoughts straight. They kept trying to pull back to the Slipstream, to pull back to Emily, to pull off to Widowmaker elsewhere in the facility.

She’d stopped in a few times. Laughed and taunted and put on a good show for the cameras, while sitting in Tracer’s lap and stroking at her hair and doing her best to get Tracer to make a noise of some sort.

Her mind kept trying to go back there, to go anywhere else - anywhere other than the deformed face in front of her, but that was dangerous. She needed to keep her mind about herself. Resolutely, she shook her head just once. “Not telling you anything, love. Not a thing.”

He chuckled, head shaking idly. “Oh… you’re stupid, but brave - I’ll give you that at least. Maybe I’ll just say a few things then, hmm? You can just listen.”

He could still remember her, the way she’d acted - not just during the Null Sector event, but elsewhere around base, too. Maybe they hadn’t met, but that hardly stopped him from getting a bead on her. Blackwatch had eyes everywhere.

Too many places, as it had turned out.

…and Jack had never told them. Never even owned up to it.

“Jack shot me in the back and blew up headquarters.”

Tracer’s eyes flew wide at the statement and Reaper chuckled a little, leaning back in his chair with a sigh. “Huh.” He grinned, looking and sounding legitimately surprised by his own words. “Thought I was gonna build up to that, but I guess not.” His eyes studied her in the lamp-light. “Have anything to say to that?”

She didn’t know what to do with it, but it wasn’t hard to see it for what it was. He was trying to disorient her, to trick her out into saying something. Anything important. She couldn’t let that happen. Her brow furrowed and she swallowed heavily. “C’n I have some water?”

“Maybe. Do you believe me?”

Now it was her turn to do some studying, brown eyes looking over that twisted and semi-familiar face. Maybe it wasn’t just disorientation. Maybe he was pushing for something in particular - but at least, she needed to find out what that was. If she could.

Tracer didn’t know much too about Reyes. She’d heard that he was headstrong, that he tried to go too far with things sometimes - she knew he was in charge of Blackwatch, and the sort of stuff they’d done. She’d been terrified to meet him that first time, but he’d just smiled and joked and told her she’d done an impressively good job. After talking to him that time, she had felt legitimately reassured.

Of course, he wasn’t the same man anymore.

She knew even less about Reaper, personally - none of them did save for how he’d acted in conflicts they’d had. Angry, strong, seemingly sadistic - a real penchant for going out of his way to just be a little more cruel. Sometimes he even shot himself in the foot with it, like with Winston at Gibraltar.

He seemed to like talking. Monologues. Maybe she could get him talking. Maybe she could do something.

“How’m I s’posed to trust anything you say?” She could hear her own words slurring and cleared
her throat, fixing him with a doubtful frown. “After all that’s happened.”

“Hah,” he shook his head. “And whose word do you have for all that’s happened, hmm?” He pulled a water bottle out from somewhere inside his cape, and Tracer couldn’t help her tongue from running along her parched lips at the way it glinted in the light.

He realized at that look, something about what was happening. She didn’t just want the water, she needed it - and just like he’d been telling Jack earlier, he didn’t just want to make them suffer. He didn’t want to kill them.

He needed it.

There was something below it, though. A hot, burning acidic something that leapt from his gut up his throat and burned at his spine, something that he’d given up on. Something that he’d abandoned along with the name Gabriel Reyes.

He needed somebody - anybody - to understand.

Maybe Sombra was close. Maybe. Maybe she could be trusted - but she wasn’t there. She didn’t have that leverage, that look of shock when he said Jack had shot him.

He wondered whether it would even matter. Sombra would agree with anything he said - she was like a puppy that way. If he said a dozen people had wronged him and needed to die, she’d be right there with her gun or her claws, and he liked that. He loved that.

...but it wasn’t the same. Wasn’t.

Tracer needed water. He needed Tracer to understand. Trades were easy.

Slowly, he unscrewed the cap from the water. Just as slowly, he lifted the bottle, and started to pour it out onto the table - locking eyes with her the whole time, pouring the water right in front of his face. He emptied about a quarter of it and stopped.

“I’m not saying Widowmaker’s tactics weren’t effective,” he shrugged, taking a nonchalant sip from the bottle. He had what she needed. She had what he needed. He just couldn’t tell her, or she’d stab him in the back with it - you could never let somebody know what you wanted from them. It left you too open. “I’m just saying there’s more than one way to skin a cat. Or an annoying gnat, either way.”

“Doing a good job of getting on my good side there, mate,” she grumbled, looking away from the bottle as much as she could.

Reaper chuckled. “Oh, would there be a point to that? Just what do you think I’m trying to get out of you, anyway? We already breached Gibraltar. What else could you possibly offer?” His words darkened toward the end, the final sentence coming out heavy and grating. Maybe there was something he needed to know, too.

Her eyes flicked back toward him, away from the glistening wet patch on the table. Widowmaker had given her a bite or two of a protein bar, but she couldn’t bring in a water bottle. Tracer was so thirsty. She wanted that water, she needed it, but more than that she needed to stay on her toes. To stay thinking.

Tracer forced herself to focus on Reaper’s face, Reyes’ face, and what she knew about him. He’d tried to get them all, all their addresses and everything, she knew that. Kept talking about killing them, but there seemed to be more to it than that - he could’ve killed Winston, just straight-up killed him, but he had to stop to say something first while Winston was down. Same thing with Jack, same
thing with Ana - even with her.

He could’ve killed her on the rooftops and just had Sombra get them into Gibraltar. He didn’t, though.

She couldn’t stop Reinhardt’s re-telling of their encounter from running through her mind.

“You want revenge.” Her eyes had drifted off to the side in thought; she cleared her hoarse throat and licked her dry lips. “That much is easy to see. I think…” her eyes flicked nervously to him before averting to the side again.

“I think you want us to suffer, more than you want us dead. Coulda just killed me rather than this sensory-deprivation bollocks, love. Yeah, don’t think you’re the only one who knows interrogation tactics.”

He chuckled, shaking his head slightly. She wasn’t exactly wrong. She wasn’t exactly right - but it was encouraging. “Guess they taught you pilots a thing or two in the RAF, huh?”

She nodded defiantly, with determination clear across her face, and Reaper just laughed and grinned. “Ah. You know, it’s kind of refreshing to see a proud soldier. A proper one. Still, I could do things to you that would rip your pathetic will to shreds, training or no training.”

There was something odd in his eyes, Tracer could see it. Something deep, something dark, something very intense. Maybe even desperate. She just didn’t know what. She couldn’t tell if it terrified her or inspired her.

Something deep inside Reaper was twisting, something that maybe used to be sympathy a decade ago when he was still capable of it. Looking at her face. Her big, wide brown eyes - and Jack had looked into them, and told her everything was good. Jack had looked into those eyes and told her the world was right. Jack had looked into those eyes and lied to her, just like he’d lied to Gabriel.

Jack had told her it would just be a little test flight. Reaper sighed softly, staring into Tracer’s eyes. “Even after they threw you up there in that tinfoil excuse for a jet,” he shook his head. “Still, you were all for them, weren’t you?” Hatred lashed up from his core, hatred for Jack, for Overwatch, for the cruel world - and for her, for not seeing it sooner.Hatred for himself for not seeing it sooner. “God, you’re gullible.” He wasn’t even sure which of the two of the he was speaking to.

She recoiled in offence at the words, though, staring back to him angrily. “At least I didn’t betray my friends.”

He flipped the table right over her head, instantly, launching it the length of the room in a burst of hatred that no mortal would have been capable of. The bottle emptied its contents into the sizzling mass of circuitry that had been a lamp up until a second ago when it smashed against the ceiling, the room lit now only dimly and occasionally by flickering sparks.

Tracer could feel metal claws digging into her throat on either side of her windpipe, not piercing the skin but holding. She couldn’t see a thing in the darkness, but she could hear him - heavy, ragged breaths only a few inches away. He didn’t smell like she’d expected, like rot and illness; he smelled like charcoal and campfire smoke, and that odd scent that heat had.

“If you think…”

He sounded like he could barely keep the words from being shrieked. They whistled through his hoarse throat as if they were distant screams, and there was a horrifying edge of desperation to his voice that crept right through Tracer’s spine - she tried to pull away, to recoil back into the chair, but
“...that I ever,” he hissed, “betrayed anyone, you are just as much of a fucking moron as the rest of them. If - if -” his voice cracked slightly, “-you get out of here alive, you ask Jack what happened that night. Then you can tell me who the traitor is.”

With a shout, he let go of her throat - flung the chair backward to slam down on its back and slide along the floor. It had been bolted to the concrete, but he easily sheared the bolts off with his strike.

Tracer gasped a breath and just held it, heart hammering in her chest as the door slammed open and then shut again. She was left in darkness and terror once more, and her mind filled with alarms and timelessness, horrors she could never stop - except this time, as her mind flitted through memories she could hardly grasp at, metal claws clutched at her from the darkness.

She hadn’t found out much. Or anything. However, she also hadn’t given anything away and she’d made it through.

That much, she knew she could be proud of.

---

Widowmaker was waiting outside of the interrogation room. She wouldn’t have said she did so nervously, per se, but Reaper hadn’t told her beforehand that he was going to be visiting her mouse.

It might have been for the best that she wasn’t inside. She could not deny him, and it might only have given things away - this gave her an opportunity to prepare slightly, at least. He wouldn’t kill her mouse, she was quite sure of that.

Still, it never hurt to watch

She flipped her visor up with a quick, relieved exhalation as he grabbed the door - he got angry, but didn’t really hurt Tracer. The thermal signatures were very clear, but she couldn’t let on that she’d been watching through the walls.

She hadn’t considered until right then, what exactly she might do if he did get out of control. Burst in and try to pull him away to some other assignment, perhaps? Distract him, yes, it would work for a moment at least.

At least once.

Luckily, she still had that card up her sleeve.

He came out of the room in a whirl - at first not literally, but quickly becoming so as he dissolved in hatred and rage as the door slammed behind him.

The cloud swished across the hall and he shrieked, resolidifying and tearing a massive chunk out of the wall in a swipe before he realized that Widowmaker was standing there off to the side.

Fist halfway through the wall, he stopped - caught everything between his teeth and held it there, just held it, and it didn’t make it easier to deal with at all. He ripped a pipe out of the wall with a shout.

Water gushed from the hole for a few seconds and soaked through his outfit before it was shut off to
that section.

“Annoying little bitch,” he hissed, not looking over. He huffed a few more breaths. “Yet you’ve managed not to kill her. Somehow.”

She didn’t have a response to that except to furrow her brow a little. Whether he was suspicious or impressed, she couldn’t tell. She remained silent.

A moment later, he left. She decided to do the same. She couldn’t go back in there right now - it would look too concerned. Her mouse might be foolish, but she was adamant and surprisingly resilient. She would be fine for another while.

Still, something set in deeply to Widowmaker’s nerves, and she didn’t know what it was or what to do about it. With a slow sigh, she decided to go to the firing range. That usually helped offset any awkward sensations, any lingering irritations.

It was also just on the other side of the hallway, in a courtyard on the other side of that wall. With her visor down, she would be able to keep an easy eye on her mouse, and nobody would question it. She could spend hours on the range without raising any eyebrows, and still make sure that Tracer remained unharmed and alone.

That thought actually did help alleviate the irritation she was feeling. After a few hours in the firing range, she could make another visit to the interrogation room. Laugh and taunt for the observers if there were new ones in place, and just... be there.

---

People were used to seeing Mercy move quickly through the camp. They were used to seeing her sprint, shouting out for people or materials to be awaiting her in this operating room or that one - the way she rushed with such purpose when a life was on the line was a common and inspiring sight for the aid workers, the refugees, and the security personnel alike.

This, though, was unlike anything they’d seen in the past. Her wings fluttered erratically behind her, the jacket she so frequently wore laying discarded on the floor of her room and forgotten behind her. Her staff was clutched firmly in hand, jaw tense, eyes burning - she looked like she was going to war.

Pharah followed a few seconds behind her - not chasing, exactly, but following. She was unable to keep pace with the doctor on foot, even jogging as she was, and unwilling to use her jets to speed her way through the camp for the fuss it was likely to raise. However, she was pretty certain that no huge problems would result if she was a few seconds late.

Probably.

Mercy shoved the door open and stomped into the room with a growl, glaring at the man she saw there. His mask was off, and his eyes met hers the instant she opened the door. “Zeigler, don’t you-”

She didn’t let him finish. She slapped the words right out of Jack Morrison’s mouth with a shout that tore at her voice a little, and then slammed her hand angrily down on the table as a slightly breathless Fareeha jogged in behind her. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice, Jack?” Mercy seethed, “Or did you just think I wouldn’t care?”
“Zeigler,” he started to protest, but she moved to slap him again. He caught her hand with a growl and slitted eyes but was swiftly met with an armoured fist to the jaw as Pharah clocked him solidly.

“Don’t touch her.”

Jack’s chin bled a little as he glared back at Pharah, but her eyes left no room for argument.

“When I offered you a tent here, Jack,” Angela shook with uncontrolled anger, and roiling waves of nausea. It was happening again, it was happening all over again, and she’d be damned if she stood by and let it. “It was for aid purposes. I will not stand by while you repeat this all over again - I” she cut off with a clenched fist, a tear streaking at her cheek as she studied his face desperately, trying to find any hint of what she hoped lived in every person: compassion, kindness, care. Even regret. Anything. “Taking her arm, Jack? How- how could you?”

“It was a security risk.”

He looked back stonily, his eyes flicking briefly to Pharah, and Angela tensed up.

Security. Anything in the name of security. Mercy clenched her jaw. “Don’t say another thing. Don’t you dare speak to me. You are not welcome here, Jack Morrison. Pharah, consider him a detainee. I will be back shortly.”

With a huff, she whirled and stormed out of the room, taking flight the second she was clear. Her wings spread wide against the sky. Everything within her quivered, but she could make this right. She would. She had no other choice.

In time, she knew she would give him another chance - even if she never forgave him. She had no doubt of the fact, and she knew she would apologize as well. Even if he never did. For now, though, she couldn’t think about any of that. She had a mess to clean up.

Soldier: 76 wisely didn’t move. Pharah smirked, her face betraying nothing of what she actually felt. “Good choice. Just stay still, and I won’t have any awkward explanations for Mama.”

“You don’t understand what’s happening here, Fareeha,” he cautioned, but she shook her head and shut the door.

“Pharah will be fine. I understand plenty.”

“Pharah,” he grunted, grinding his teeth and trying to entreat her with his gaze. “They took Oxton. Talon. They took Tracer.”

For an instant - just an instant - he saw doubt flicker through her dark eyes. Then it was overcome by dutiful stoicism as she stonewalled again. “Then we will get her back. You can sit tight.” She glanced pointedly to a chair nearby. “That wasn’t a suggestion.”

Glowering, he moved to the chair and tried to keep himself from crying.

It didn’t work. Angry tears of failure slid down his cheeks. He felt like he was losing control of everything - the situation, himself. Everything. It was all slipping through his fingers again. It was all happening again and he couldn’t stop it.

Maybe he was the problem.
Mercy forced herself to calm down when she came to the door. To take a moment to shake off the lingering anger, and also to steel herself. The camera footage had been horrifying enough to see, and she knew it would only be worse when she stepped inside.

She needed to do something, though.

Taking a deep breath and holding it, Mercy pulled the door open and stepped through as quickly as possible. The air left her lungs instantly in a cry as the sound assaulted her - anguished screams and sobs that came almost constantly, pausing only for ragged breaths.

The doctor forced herself to approach the holding cell. Inside, behind the projected glowing barrier, a woman was curled in the fetal position. She shrieked and wailed, one arm clutched tightly around her knees. Her other was absent entirely.

Mercy tried to say something but her voice failed her as tears streamed down her cheeks. She coughed and tried again. “Symmetra?” There was no response, none at all - as if she hadn’t been there at all. “Miss Vaswani?”

Nothing. She just continued to scream, curled up in a ball on the floor, and it broke Mercy’s heart more and more with every second. She slid to the ground, leaning forward against the barrier - her tears sizzled where they dripped onto it. Clearing her throat and gathering her courage, she tried again, once more at least. Softly, gently, but loudly enough to be heard.

“Satya?”

---

She had never felt this way. She had always felt this way. She hated when people told her she was broken. She hated that they were right. She hated missing her arm. She hated herself. She hated the way people looked at her. She hated the way people acted around her. She hated people. She hated missing her arm. She hated the way everything hurt. She hated herself. She hated being broken. She hated the way people looked at her. She hated everything.

Symmetra clutched her knees to her chest and sobbed, shrieked, she didn’t care anymore, she couldn’t. It was all too much and she couldn’t handle it, her arm was gone and she was nothing, she was broken, she was disgusting and she hated herself. With the arm, with the uniform, with Vishkar at her back, she could pretend, but it was all stripped away so easily. She was useless. She was disgusting. She hated herself.

Somebody entered through the front door. It wasn’t him again but she didn’t care. He hadn’t said anything anyway, he’d only taken her arm and her visor and thrown her in here. She hated him for it, but at the same time, he wasn’t the one missing an arm. He wasn’t the broken one.

She’d been told it her whole life. She tried to deny it but she couldn’t right now. She was broken and worthless and she hated herself.
Somebody said something. A name that was supposed to be her. She knew that. She didn’t care. They only ever wanted to tell her she was broken, they wanted to laugh and mock and she hated it and she hated them and she hated herself.

She spoke again, whoever she was.

A third time. Symmetra managed to shove out a word between sobs. “What?” It was shaky and hoarse and followed immediately by more cries.

Mercy sniffed heavily, forcing a weak smile. A response was something at least - something she could work with. “Satya?” Her voice was hopeful as she straightened up a little. “I- I am so sorry, for everything that has been done to you. I have something for you. Please, would you look at it?”

Symmetra didn’t want to look. She didn’t want to anything, she just wanted to be fixed. She couldn’t be fixed. Maybe she should just be unmade. Maybe she should just be unmade. She hated herself. More sobs ripped from her throat as spasms wracked her body. The woman wanted something. Something from her. Her to look at something. She apologized but it meant nothing. Words were only words.

Angela’s tears redoubled as she got no further response. “Please?” she begged, quietly. “Please, Satya?”

Symmetra lashed out with all of her limbs, slamming feet and fist against the ground and shrieking wordlessly before clutching at her face with her one hand. “S-stop it! Leave me alone!” Everything was too loud, and too bright, and too much, and there was just too much of it, and she hated it, and she hated herself.

“I’m sorry,” Mercy whispered, shaking her head. “Satya, I’m so sorry, but please, I want to help. Please.”

She dragged her fingernails down her face, clawing at her forehead - her skin was hateful, it itched and burned and she wanted to peel it all off. She couldn’t do that with only one hand. She wanted to. She wanted to. She couldn’t. She wanted to. She couldn’t. She wanted to. She couldn’t.

The woman said she wanted to help. She wouldn’t leave. Of course she wouldn’t. She probably just wanted to mock.

“I said,” Symmetra screamed, her voice tearing from strain and anger as she pushed herself up onto her knees and looked toward the voice. “Leave m-” she cut off as she forced her eyes open. There, in front of her, on the other side of the barrier, was perfection held in the arms of a goddess.

Symmetra’s eyes snapped instantly to the prosthetic, all thoughts leaving her as she fixated on it entirely. The cries stopped. The screams stopped. Things were quieter but she hardly noticed. She only stared at that prosthetic arm.

She knew it, she knew every bit of it - the skin tone matched hers exactly, and she didn’t need her visor to tell her that, nor to tell her that it was precisely the same dimensions; an exact mirror of her organic limb. Exact. Exact.

The nails were even painted to match.

Whimpering, Symmetra pulled herself toward it with her one arm, clutching almost desperately but the barrier drove her back and she whined, the power of words completely lost on her.
Mercy gestured a command and opened the locks - Jack had just used one of the cells they had around the camp in case of belligerence, and they were all keyed to her along with the other senior members of the camp. There was no real door, no real locks, but the barrier shimmered away and let her slide forward on her knees and hold out the arm.

Symmetra practically fell into it, lodging her shoulder and stump heavily into the socket of the prosthetic. As it tightened, reacting to her presence, she hissed a breath through her teeth - in a few seconds, it was mobile, and she held her hands in front of her face. Both of them. Both of them, the same. She had two hands. Two. Both. Two. Whole.

Mercy watched, at first reassured but with growing anxiety as Satya did nothing but sit and stare. She didn’t blink, barely even seemed to be breathing - Angela had seen fixation before, but not quite to this extent.

Symmetra didn’t know what to do. How does one repay perfection? Absolute perfection, she could not have designed a better replacement herself. It was so impossible to think of something she couldn’t design, and yet, here it was attached to her. Her eyes flicked up to the person who had delivered it, the goddess - gleaming white armour that practically radiated purity, eyes as clear as the skies, such a flawless face.

Flawless everything, down to the way the tears streaked down her cheeks. Symmetra found one of her hands extending, but she wasn’t supposed to touch people’s faces, she knew that, she’d been told - she was supposed to… to what?

She couldn’t remember. What did one do in a situation such as this? She’d never been told. She’d never learned.

Mercy’s wings fluttered a little, a smile flickering on her lips as Satya moved - at least moved, something, some sign of life. She nodded a little, trying to encourage whatever it was, whatever urge had spurred her into action.

Symmetra didn’t know what the right thing to do was. She never did, she never knew what people’s faces were saying - the flashcards were no help, they only lied and made it worse; made it so she felt like she had some idea but it never helped. Crying meant what? Sadness, but also happiness, or anger, or frustration - her own tears seemed to spring up of their own volition and she could no more determine the causes in someone else than she could make her own stop flowing.

“Satya?”

That was her name. She knew her name. She didn’t know what to do about it but she knew her name, and she collapsed forward at hearing it. Wrapped her arms around the angel who had brought her wholeness, pulled tight. She didn’t know what to do. Her arms moved on their own. Both.

“Thank you,” she whispered hoarsely, “thank you, thank you, thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you…”

Mercy cried openly as she hugged in return, stroking at Satya’s back for a moment before wrapping her up and squeezing tight, as tight as she dared. Satya’s thanks reached a fever pitch underlaid by tears at the added pressure, the constriction, and Mercy held it as long as she could. When she slacked off the embrace - didn’t let it go entirely, she was happy to hold it as long as the other woman was - Satya’s thanks dropped back to a constant soft murmur.

It took Mercy a while to figure out what the other noise was. It was her own mouth, consistently
muttering soft apologies. She let it continue. Sometimes bodies were smarter than those who piloted them.

---

A little over twelve minutes. 732 seconds, she held the hug - she’d counted. She often did, just a tiny part of her mind in the background, counting. It was calming. Eventually she withdrew. She knew that embraces were awkward if they went too long. She didn’t know what _too long_ was, though.

Her mouth worked soundlessly as she tried to give thanks again, but it didn’t work and she frowned. “Satya? Would you like to come outside, or would you like to stay here?”

She coughed, sitting back and wrapping her arms around her knees. Why was she shivering? Her body was doing so many things. She didn’t like it. _Outside?_ She recoiled from the thought, shaking her head and pulling her knees tighter to her chest.

“Okay,” Mercy smiled, “you can stay here, it’s fine. I’ll make sure nobody bothers you.”

Symmetra coughed again, frowning deeper as she tried to get her voice to work. “W-w-water?” She huffed a half-laugh, nodding. “Water. Yes.” _Words._ “A-and- and the barrier. Please.”

“You… would like the barrier back up again?” Mercy’s face remained calm, though her heart raged behind her ribs. “And some water?”

Symmetra nodded, and smiled. “Yes. Thank you.”

“You’re quite welcome, Satya,” Angela wiped at her cheeks in vain - the tears hadn’t stopped. She doubted they would anytime soon. As she stood away, she gestured a command and the holding cell sprung into place again.

Symmetra didn’t even seem to notice. She held her hands out, tapping her fingers together and smiling, humming gently to herself. She could _feel_ them, each and every one - the feedback was perfect. It looked perfect, it felt perfect. It _was_ perfect. It _was_ perfect.

“Thank you,” she muttered under her breath with a laugh. “Thank you.”

---

Winston really did _try_ not to break the door, but he didn’t succeed. Not in the slightest. He was on the bare hairy edge of total catastrophe, and the metal bent as he flung it open, and the doorknob was slammed cleanly through it, leaving a neat hole as he burst into the room. “Damnit, Jack! What were you-”

“I don’t want to hear it, Winston!” The grizzled veteran shouted through tears, hands clenched into fists in his chair. Blood trailed down one cheek, watered thin with tears.

“You think I _care_ what you want to hear right now?” He wanted to laugh, he _tried_ to laugh, but it
just came out as a growl. Winston liked to think of himself as an optimist, but when things just got worse and worse it was hard not to feel like he was in a spiral. He saw red. “Is this why you called McCree back in? Decided you might want to start up a new Blackwatch, Jack?”

“I-” his white eyebrows pulled together in confusion. “What? I didn’t call him. I didn’t call anyone. Does-” Jack’s hands flew out frantically, “does this really strike you as the action of a man who thought his shit through beforehand? Any of it? Anything I’ve done?” His voice was shaky and rough and his eyes dropped blankly back to a screen in front of him. Tears continued to flow as his shoulders shuddered.

The oddness of it calmed Winston down a little - or at least confused him into something nearly approaching calmness. It was only then that he noticed Pharah there, standing off to the side. The red was starting to fade, that fuzzy feeling in his brain. He cleared his throat and nodded to her. “Oh. Hello, Miss Amari.” She nodded but didn’t speak.

Jack was still just staring at the screen. Crying silently. Winston moved a little closer, hesitantly, and angled so he could see it. It showed a pretty standard portable detainment cell, a bubble of a projected barrier that could hold in a few people if needed but there was only one in it - one who Winston recognized from Gibraltar.

Symmetra was on her knees in the middle of the bubble, surrounded by intricate chalk drawings. Swirls that Winston instantly recognized as fractals, that she was drawing in a spiral inward - starting around the outer perimeter of the cell and working in, it seemed.

Now she’d approached the middle and was knelt there, finishing it off. As Winston watched, she ran out of room to kneel and had to balance on the balls of her feet in order to reveal more floorspace.

“She’s been doing that for an hour,” Jack whispered hoarsely, clutching a fist in front of his mouth. “Angela wanted me to watch. She said it was so I could understand, but I know torture when I see it.”

Pharah growled. “Don’t you dare talk about her that way.”

He didn’t turn around, didn’t shout at her, only nodded his head. “I know. I’m sorry. I know. I…”

There was nothing else to say. A decade of trying to reveal the truth, trying to find some goodness to come of it all - redemption, and it had led him here. Led him to take a woman prisoner and leave her screaming in a cell to soften up so he could get the information he wanted.

A decade of trying to figure out what had been wrong with Overwatch, only to realize it had been him all along. He couldn’t deny it now that he’d seen it, it crashed over him like a wave and pulled him down into the undertow, he couldn’t breathe and everything was dark and he couldn’t think anything except that he deserved it. The torture, the pain, all of it.

“I was… I was so scared.” His words sounded hollow. “Reyes had a recording of her, her screaming, Winston, I-” Jack’s voice broke with anguish but he cleared it and kept going. “I- lost it. I lost it. I can’t apologize for this.”

“You’d damn well better apologize for it, Jack,” Winston huffed and the soldier’s eyes flashed to him.

“I’m sorry. I know it doesn’t make it better but I’m sorry. I was wrong. Wrong this whole time. For for years, for…” …forever. There was no hesitation to it.

Winston glared back at him speculatively. Jack had always been stubborn, but not stupid - he wasn’t
a politician, and saying the right thing had never really been his strong suit. He was a lot of things - an ass, for instance - but he had never seemed to be a liar before. He wasn’t the kind of man to just say he was sorry, he meant it…

...which was maybe why he said it so little to begin with.

“It’s a start,” Winston grunted. “Now. We’re arranging for a transfer, trading her for Tracer.”

Jack nodded dully, looking back to the screen again. Mercy sat beside the barrier, just in case Symmetra wanted anything else at any point. Looking at her now it was hard to think that she’d been wailing like a banshee an hour ago. Still, though, Jack wasn’t sure he’d ever manage to clear the memory from his head.

“Can I go there? I’d like to apologize.”

Winston’s eyes flicked to Pharah’s face. Dark, stoic, strong - definitely the war-mask of an Amari, but he could see the way her eyes shifted a little. “I’ll take you there. I can’t promise anything more.”

Jack clenched a fist tighter at the tone of her voice. There had been a time she’d looked up to him, a time they all had. He only regretted living long enough for this all to come out. If he’d just died with HQ, died with Overwatch, then he never would have been revealed like this. To them. To himself.

“Thank you.”

Maybe it wasn’t too late to change things. Maybe it wasn’t too late to fix it.

---

Angela still wasn’t happy, but watching Satya draw with her chalk, so carefree, did wonders to uplift her heart. The tears had long since dried from her dark skin, and she looked now as if she had no cares in the world.

Mercy kept crying, however - just gently. She’d been able to catch it this time. Maybe next time, she wouldn’t; maybe it would be the biotic rifle all over again. Burgeoning friendship with Ana aside, that was still a painful shard of her past.

Trauma stuck like that.

At least it seemed to have sloughed off of Satya. Mercy had the horrifying suspicion that the day’s events might not even list amongst the ten worst things that had happened to her.

The door opened and she rose instantly, stepping to it to turn away whoever was there. They needed no disturbances - but when she saw it was Fareeha, she frowned in confusion. Fari offered her a hesitant smile and then stepped to the side, revealing Winston holding an absolutely devastated-looking Jack Morrison by the shoulders.

Regardless of how she felt about the man either generally or specifically, Mercy couldn’t find any joy in the look of him. She didn’t feel good for having succeeded in communicating to him just how awful a thing he’d done - she’d increased the net level of misery in the world by every crease on his face, every tear on his cheeks. It was hard to feel like it was a good thing.
In the long run, though, it could be a benefit. If it stopped him from doing the same again, if it helped patch up some of the wounds…

“C-” he coughed, eyes fixed on the ground. “Could I go in to her?”

“No.”

“Angela.” His eyes rose to meet hers, just for a second, no fire left behind them. “Please. I need to make this right, I need… to try, at least.”

She took a deep breath. There was going to be a lot more to deal with after this - she already had her suspicions about what the tests she was running would return. Nobody knew exactly what had been done to him in the super-soldier program, but it almost certainly had not been intended to be stable over the course of fifty years.

“I will ask her. Wait here, please.”

Her words were soft but they still felt like knives in his gut. Everyone else seemed to be capable of holding on. He’d just lost it. He was a stubborn old man who should’ve died years ago, but maybe - maybe - he could still make it right.

Mercy stepped over toward the barrier, looking in at Satya. She was only there because she wanted to be at this point - it was a safe place, where she knew she could be alone. Mercy didn’t want to spoil that, but the woman deserved to choose for herself.

“Satya? Jack would like to come in and apologize. Is that something you would like?”

She didn’t know who Jack was, she hadn’t looked up - this was too important. “In a moment,” she muttered, stroking another line in with chalk. “I am nearly finished.” She gently stepped backward, careful not to scrape her feet along the ground, and leaned down to fill in the final small section of blank floor.

When she was finished, she stood upright with a little thrill running down her spine and smiled to the doctor - the doctor who never said she was broken, never tried to fix her, only asked what she wanted and then did it. “Yes, he can come in now. So long as he is careful not to damage the design.”

Angela nodded with a smile and then looked over her shoulder. Pharah brought Jack over and he stepped to the glowing dome which shimmered away as Mercy gestured a command. He was very, very careful not to scuff the chalk as he took a pace forward, eyes fixed on the ground.

Chalk drawings. Like a child.

He couldn’t shake the thought from his head, the image, the thoughts of what he’d done, and they brought a fresh rush of self-hatred and tears. He knew this might make it worse, too, but at least it would be an end. With a heavy, ragged sigh, Jack Morrison knelt down on the floor before her and pulled a handgun out of the back of his waistband.

“Jack!” Mercy gasped, stepping forward instinctively but being repelled by the barrier which sprang back into place.

“Hostilities detected,” an electronic voice intoned, “lockdown initiated.”

“No!” Angela waved frantically, trying to get the barrier to disappear, but it wouldn’t - a failsafe to prevent armed prisoners from being released.
“It’s okay, Angela,” Jack murmured, holding out the handgun to Symmetra, grip first. Urging her to take it. “It’s okay. S-” his voice failed him as he went to say her name, choking off into nothing. He coughed heavily and looked up, meeting her eyes. “There’s no excuse for what I did to you. No apology I can give. Just… please. End it all.”

Slowly, hesitantly, she took the gun. She didn’t like it but he was offering it and she took it. The man dropped his head and just knelt there - she recognized him now, he looked so different with a face, but if she imagined the mask on him it seemed to be him. He was wearing the same clothes, but he didn’t sound the same.

It must be him, though. Her hand tensed around the pistol as she pointed it at his head - she wanted to scream and kick him. Her hand shook. A tear dripped from her eye, but she had spent so long on the chalk.

She didn’t want to ruin it.

“Apology not accepted,” she whispered, setting the gun gently down on the ground and standing again. “Now get out of my room.”

The barrier let itself be deactivated now that nobody was armed and Jack started to sob gently as Winston reached out and picked him straight up with a grunt, taking him away.

Symmetra’s eyes fell to where the man had been. He’d been very careful not to smudge the chalk. It was still in place.

Mercy flitted in and removed the weapon, and she was able to kneel down in peace again. The barrier sprung up once more when she looked to the doctor, the goddess, the saviour - she looked worried. Maybe. Or maybe not. It was so difficult to tell, but she was still watching.

She must have been looking at the designs. It would make the most sense. They were the only thing in the cell worth looking at.

“Thank you,” Symmetra nodded with a smile toward the doctor. “For the chalk, and the rest - is it not beautiful? A substantial improvement, certainly. For the medium, a very impressive rendering, I must say.”

“Yes,” Mercy replied almost breathlessly, smiling. She had tears on her cheeks again. “Yes, it’s beautiful.”

Symmetra nodded as she looked down with a contented sigh. She knew it was. So was she, now - things were better. Her eyes flicked over to where the man, her captor, had been. There were no lines to fix, however.

It was good to see that he could do something correctly. Follow instructions, at least.

She stepped carefully toward the edge of her room, to where her glass of water sat up against the barrier’s glowing surface, and she lifted it for a sip. The glass distorted the chalk, but it wasn’t unpleasant - it was an ordered distortion, it followed the laws of optics, it was fascinating.

A moment later, when she glanced around, everybody else was gone from the room outside - just the doctor alone, again, the goddess, her saviour. Smiling, she crouched down and sipped at her water again.

*Greatly improved, yes...*
Well, there it is. This one hurts me, honestly, but I do think it's worthwhile. I feel bad for putting Symmetra through this. Honestly, I also feel bad for putting most of the rest of them through this - Tracer, Mercy, Winston, Pharah, Widowmaker, even Reaper and Jack. There's a lot of pain here, but there's a lot of pain in Overwatch in general - we're working through it.

There are some good things in here too, though: the evolution of caring feelings from Widowmaker. Perhaps still not exactly what we'd call empathy, perhaps still not exactly what we'd call care, but something. Concern, at least, or worry. Evolution and revelation as well of feelings on Reaper's side of things - what drives him? Because I don't think just plain vengeance is quite that much, not if you think your whole life's gone and everything's shit. That might result in nihilism, in my mind, but not that kind of focused hate. I think that comes from hope, or fear, or lots of other things, and I like how they're being revealed in Reaper.

Not a light chapter, definitely, heh! Uh... I've got other light stuff though, if you'd like! Previous chaps of this - or perhaps one of my other fics? Wild Horses is a pretty lighthearted SpiderByte thing (Sombra/Widow), and I've got another couple of chaptered things that are generally less dense and painful. Although, Streets of an Orphaned World (Symbra AU) does have a rough bit at about the halfway mark, and then another one right near the end, but it finishes really happily and has a lot of sweetness and fun in the middle.

...okay, maybe I don't have loads and loads of other stuff that's just lighthearted, heh. I've got a Pharmarcy fluff piece? And one with them that's largely fluff. An Ana/Rein thing that...well, I don't think I'd say it's sad. Well, maybe I've gotta work on the fluffier stuff XD

For big things like this, though, I really like giving them range. I like showing the dates where they're holding hands and stroking each other's hair under the night sky, showing the friends cracking jokes at each other and throwing insults as the bullets fly, and I like showing that sometimes they get hurt.

Life is pain. But it's not just pain. Life hurts, but it also makes you laugh, and makes you grin, and makes you roll your eyes. I think that's all I'm trying to do in this story. Show their lives.

Or at least, some possible lives.

Anyway - as always, I'd love to hear from you! I still tear up every time I read this chapter, and I'd love to hear whether it struck you the same way. Is it just something about the way I connect with the characters? Something about shared experiences or similarities? Did you like it, did you hate it, did you love it (and hate me at the same time XD)?

Come on back next time when it's, in a word (or two), time for damage control. Sombra arranges for the prisoner transfer and it's made, Mercy talks with Winston and Jack for a moment about what's happening with the soldier. Things return a little bit toward normalcy
Shake Hands (With the Devil) and Make Nice

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Mercy has some new information to present to Jack, but it shines a light on the past and offers some hope for the future - which, at the end of the day, is all he wants anyway. Vishkar insists that Talon retrieve Symmetra, and quickly, and Sombra offers an easy out: prisoner transfer. Tracer’s released, the transfer is made, but it would be a stretch to say it goes smoothly. However, it all ends well - at least, for everybody present.

JFL Summary: Jack does drugs. Ana slaps him - it’s a form of flirtation maybe. Sanjay, Reaper, Sombra, and Widowmaker all get pissed to various extent and for various reasons. Winston can speak French. Mercy has a magic staff. Angels and gorillas give good hugs.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: brief description of injury, mentions of trauma, angst, etc. Seems like it’s becoming a standard warning, heh.

Previous Chapter Summary: Reaper had an interview of sorts with Tracer, an interrogation she couldn’t quite place the purpose for. Primarily because the only information he was looking for was whether there was any chance that she could be swayed away from Overwatch’s side. It didn’t seem like there was, and he left in anger, bumping into Widowmaker outside and saying some things that steepened her paranoia a bit. Mercy was infuriated by Jack capturing Symmetra and holding her captive in Mercy’s camp - she’d offered a tent to him if he ever needed aid, and she was sickened when he twisted it. She refused to talk to him further, placing him under guard with Pharah while she went to deal with the situation. Winston showed up as well, and Jack realized the error of his ways. Sort of. He tried to get Symmetra to kill him as a way of making amends - she refused, and a furious Winston took him away as the Architech returned to her own concerns.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Winston took Morrison to a roof and laid him down, and then just sat and watched the horizon as Jack wept. He didn’t know what else to do with the situation, but he knew that Pharah had stood guard long enough and that Mercy deserved better than being subjected to him anymore. Not to mention the Vishkar woman.

He couldn’t quell the uneasiness in his gut. He wasn’t sure where to go from here - they’d get Tracer back, and then what? More work on the Black Tide, definitely, but what to do about Jack was a question he couldn’t answer.

It was a question he could barely even ask himself.
After a while, the old soldier and former leader stopped crying and just lay there. At first Winston was worried that he might have lost consciousness or even died somehow, so total was his silence, but when Winston had tried to walk over that way to check, Morrison had just turned away onto his side. Definitely alive, though.

Mercy touched down gently next to Winston, frowning over in Jack’s direction as her wings folded in behind her, and Winston just sighed with a shrug. “He… does legitimately seem to be remorseful. At the least.” He wasn’t happy about any of it, but it was also tough to be too angry after listening to the man sob for an hour.

“I think you could say that a second time, Winston,” the doctor murmured, spinning a small tablet around to face the scientist. She knew that he wasn’t a medic by trade, but they’d worked together enough for her to have a pretty good idea of his understanding of the field. She was certain that, at the least, he’d be able to notice a change in data trends. “These are the results of some tests that he let me run, after he started to calm down a few hours ago, before you arrived.”

Her finger swiped at the tablet, switching to another screen. “Here is an hour later, an hour ago, just after the incident at the containment cell; this third from a check-up Athena kindly provided me with, from two weeks ago; this fourth one could be considered a baseline, I suppose. It is from when we were at Overwatch, I managed to dig it up. I still have some of that data.”

Winston’s brow furrowed as he looked at the screen, as he took the tablet gently from Mercy and swiped back and forth between the readouts. He didn’t know exactly what every line and bar meant - he recognized several of the names, brain chemicals, and he knew roughly what some of them did. Dopamine, Seratonin; even if he hadn’t recognized them, though, he would have been able to see the trend. A slow decline with what could only be called a precipitous falloff.

Or a crash.

“That’s… that’s not good. That’s not good at all.”

“No,” Angela shook her head with a sigh, “but it does explain some.” She glanced over in Morrison’s direction again and approached hesitantly. “Jack? Could I speak with you for a minute?”

“Sure.” His voice was devoid of emotion.

Angela stepped softly toward him, kneeling down at his side. “I have the results back from those tests you let me run, thank you.” Her voice was calm and gentle as she pulled something out of a pouch at her side. “There are some worrying indications.”

“I should be dead, doctor. Just kill me. Please.”

“Jack-” her voice caught in her throat and she shook her head to clear it. “Please, just listen for another few moments. I would like to say something, and I would like to try something, and if you still wish to be dead after that then… we can talk about it. Does that sound fair?”

He grunted. He had no right to deny anyone anything. He should just be dead. It would be easier. For them. For him. For everyone. He’d tried. He’d tried so hard. It wasn’t enough.

“Your body is undergoing some very concerning changes. The micro-injectors that were implanted in you, all those years ago - Jack,” she sighed in frustration, “they’re failing. I don’t know how long it’s been happening for, but it’s not good. It is affecting your brain chemistry in a drastic way. I— I only have a few data points, but these altered balances seem to be consistent with those that would often indicate a variety of different conditions. Clinical Depression, Paranoid Schizophrenia…”
“Should’ve died a long time ago,” he confirmed. If only he could just will his heart to stop. He tried. Again. It didn’t work. Again.

“I have something for you that may help, if you would like it.” She zipped open the small bag and withdrew a syringe and a vial of yellowish-green fluid. “This is a cocktail of medications that should help adjust those balances back toward their earlier levels. The closest I can figure as a baseline. It’s not a permanent solution, but if it works, we should be able to develop something more long-lasting.”

“To what end, doctor?” Jack rolled over onto his back with a groan and sighed up to the sky. His eyes were red but dry, and his face more wrinkled and sagging than it had ever been before. “I’m an old man. A dead man. Might as well make it official. Everyone here would be better off if I was just dead.”

Winston had had just about enough of this. He wiped a hand over his face with a low, rumbling growl. “Would you can it with that, Jack?” He turned around to face them with a huff. “All of this martyr act. You really want to make things better? Then do something about it.”

Jack let out a laugh at that. Just one, and it was hollow, and it sounded as much like a cry as a laugh, but it was something. Mercy’s eyes flicked from Winston back down to Jack as he rolled up a sleeve and pulled himself upright. “Fuck it. Go ahead, doctor. Fill me up.”

She hesitated for a moment. There were a fair few doctors who would have said that a patient this far out of their normal situation wasn’t in a state of sound mind - incapable of giving true and proper consent, and thus leaving such determinations up to the administering physician. She knew that, but that still didn’t mean she was willing to just go around injecting people willy-nilly.

“Angela,” he sighed, hanging his head and still holding his arm out as she hesitated. It had to end. One way or another it had to end. “Either shoot me up or just plain shoot me. Right now I don’t care anymore, but please. I obviously can’t go on like this.”

That was all it took to convince her. Mercy nodded and took his hand, rubbing at the inside of his forearm and pressing a thumb down to raise a vein. Carefully, she slid the needle in, and gently administered the medications.

“How long will it take?” Jack grunted, rolling his sleeve back down and crossing his arms over his knees.

“Effects should begin within a few minutes, and last for some hours. We’ll see how it develops, and go from there.” She patted him on the shoulder, smiling softly - though the expression faded a little as she hesitated. “Jack… this doesn’t erase anything. I’m still not happy with what you did today - and I’m not happy that you didn’t come to me when you started noticing signs earlier, but I know that recognition can be difficult.” She sighed a little, looking away with a somewhat abashed shrug. “I’m… also sorry for slapping you earlier.”

He grunted, and that grew into a chuckle that left him shaking his head. Maybe it was psychosomatic, but he already felt better. Or at least, he felt something. “Ahh… I’m not. I deserved it. Besides, no offence, but that was nothing compared to Pharah.” He rubbed at his jaw, still chuckling. “She’s got quite an arm.”

Mercy nodded with a hummed chuckle, and was just about to respond when a dark blue blur filled her vision and shoved her to the side.

“Just what in the ever-living depths of duat did you think you were doing, Jack?” Ana hissed as she slammed him back against the roof before gripping him by the front of his jacket and pulling him
upright again. “If you ever - ever - try to commit suicide by prisoner again, I will kill you myself! Do I make myself quite clear, Jack Morrison?”

“Ana!” Mercy lunged forward, grabbing at her shoulders - Ana beat her to the punch by letting go and standing away with a huff, turning to face over the city.

Jack collapsed back to the roof with a grunt, the wind having been knocked out of him by Ana’s abrupt arrival. Wheezing, he took a minute to regain his breath as he weakly waved Mercy’s hands away. Then he started to chuckle as he finally managed to actually get some air back and laid his hands on her shoulders. “I’m- I’m fine, doctor. Angela. Thank you. I’ll swing by your tent for a proper check-up but uh…” his eyes flicked to Ana. “I think I’ve got a few more apologies ahead of myself first.”

“Don’t think you can just smooth-talk your way out of this one, Jack,” the sniper growled over her shoulder.

“Smooth talk?” Jack scoffed, pushing himself up to his feet. “Who am I, Reinhardt?”

She refused to laugh at that. There was a cold lump of tension in her - Winston had asked everyone else to wait, to let him deal with the situation once they’d arrived, and they’d agreed. Then, Fareeha had filled her in on all of what had happened at the containment cell and she’d immediately began searching the camp for Jack.

Angrily.

She suspected there would be stories told about this for some time to come by anyone who had seen her stalking around.

“I’m sorry, Ana.” Jack sighed heavily, stepping close but not touching her. “It was a mistake. A lot of mistakes, It- I wasn’t in my right mind. Doesn’t excuse it, but that’s what it was.” He chuckled a little, nudging her elbow lightly. “I promise the next time I want someone to shoot me, I’ll just ask you.”

Ana whirled around in an instant, grabbing at his jacket with one hand and bringing the other across as if to slap him - but she stopped just before making contact, just shy of his jaw, and locked eyes with him. Or at least, eye. Slowly, the flat hand curled into a fist with one finger extended in accusation. “You’d better.”

She still had him by the jacket, and with a little movement she set a foot behind his ankle and flipped him down onto his back, catching him across her knee and yanking him into a rough kiss.

Mercy turned around abruptly just in time to see Winston doing the same, and she stepped over to join her fellow scientist and cleared her throat. “I, hmm, think perhaps we should-”

“Leave uh, leave them to their own… reconciliations, yeah,” he finished, rubbing at his neck. Mercy nodded with a hum and they both jumped forward off of the roof - him landing heavily but easily in the mud, her floating gently to the ground.

They’d both walked into the wrong rooms at the wrong times frequently enough to know that Jack and Ana weren’t likely to stop anything just because people were around. Regardless of what they were planning on doing, both Winston and Mercy were pretty certain they didn’t want to be party to it.
Sanjay Korpal was many things. He was determined, and ambitious; he was clever and charismatic, and had a talent for spotting benefits in unlikely places. Tiny cracks in otherwise flawless defences, or miniscule levers that could turn a whole situation around. He was many, many things.

Right now, Sanjay Korpal was furious. However, he couldn’t let it show. He was nearing the end of the press conference, and once it was finished, he had another call to make.

“No, n-” he shook his head with a gentle smile behind the podium, “of course not. The Vishkar Corporation applied for the permits for such a modification to our orbital station’s construction laser, yes, but we were summarily denied for safety concerns and have since dedicated ourselves to reworking the project until such time as the authorities are satisfied with the results. Our launch history is a matter of public record, of course, and open to your investigation at-”

“But Mr. Korpal!” One of the reporters jumped forward, stretching out a handheld recorder. “What do you say to the rumours that the so-called Hard-Light Bandit is in fact a Vishkar employee? And that she was involved in a recent unsanctioned launch from the former Overwatch facility in Gibraltar? Don’t you think that’s a little suspicious, coming so soon after Vishkar was denied their permit?”

Sanjay just smiled. It was such an easy smile - he saw some of his so-called peers sometimes, in front of cameras and reporters. Their smiles were gritted, their eyes glittering with hostility above tight-lipped facades, but Sanjay never had that problem. He always had the same easy beautiful smile, and he loved it.

Everyone did.

“Of course, these rumours are only that,” Sanjay nodded, “rumours. I have no knowledge of Overwatch or Gibraltar or any activity there, and the Hard-Light Bandit… a Vishkar employee?”

He laughed lightly, shaking his head. “Mr. Singh, might I remind you that the Vishkar Corporation was the first victim of the Bandit? We developed our technology for the simple aim of bettering the world: construction, Mr. Singh, and she has stolen it away from us and twisted it to unlawful ends. I daresay your implications might be considered almost insulting.”

Of course, he didn’t say it was insulting. That would be rude. The reporters clamored, but an aide approached and murmured in his ear, leaving Sanjay to shake his head with that same soft smile. “I am sorry, quite sorry ladies and gentlemen, but we must draw this press conference to a close. We will be having another one tomorrow, where I will be disclosing some information about planned - and certified, overseen - improvements to our station in the coming months. There will be a question period afterward but I really must ask that it be dedicated to the content of that conference alone. Now, I must decline any further comments, I am sorry.”

He left the stage amidst a host of flashing cameras and shouted questions, but he could see the way they already were all chatting to each other. They had grins and questioning looks, but everyone near Mr. Singh was chuckling, disbelieving. Sanjay knew success when he saw it, and he looked out on it now as he stepped off of the stage.

Vishkar was careful, they controlled their interests, and it was his job to ensure that the rumours remained only rumours.
To which end, he had another call to which to attend

Sanjay walked calmly through the lobby with a smile until he made it into the elevator, and then stood stock-still as it ascended. When it reached his floor and the doors slid open, he stalked stiffly to his office, threw the door open, and then slammed it shut behind him.

“Mr. Reaper,” he hissed at the screen illuminating above his desk, “if you insist on using that absurd form of address. I have been led to understand that you have encountered something worthy of bringing to my attention?”

“Mr. Korpal.” Reaper nodded, his voice heavy with sarcasm. “Your agent ran into something of a problem while on deployment-”

“Problem?” Sanjay glared. “You have the audacity to call it that? I am in fact already aware of the situation which you permitted Symmetra to fall in to.” Reaper growled at the clear accusation but Sanjay did not let him speak. “You will rectify it. Promptly.”

There was a moment’s pause, where Reaper only breathed. A few seconds later, he spoke again. “Mr. Korpal. I did not call to be assaulted. I called so we could sort out a-”

“We?” Sanjay laughed coldly. “No, Mr. Reaper, you will get Symmetra back through any means necessary. You will return her to us unharmed and you will absorb any costs incurred during the process. You will do all of this, or else I will ensure that certain government entities obtain information which you would most assuredly wish them not to obtain. Do I make myself clear?”

Reaper didn’t respond. He didn’t even seem to move.

“Good. I expect a response from you before the day’s end. You are welcome for this second chance.” Sanjay jabbed at a button and disconnected the call.

Reaper’s claws slowly pierced through the table’s wooden top, splintering it to pieces in the wake of the call. Sombra watched with more than a little hesitation, swallowing slowly. “Boss? I, uh-”

“Shut up.”

She did, for a moment at least, as he just continued to turn the desk into wood chips. Slowly. Very slowly. At least it was deliberate, though, and directed. For two or three minutes she just stood as splinters fell down around his boots.

It wasn’t enough. It was never enough. With a grunt he kicked a leg out and shunted the desk back eight or ten feet. “What?”

“I got a message. Intercepted it, but it was obviously meant for us. They want a trade. Vishkar’s chica for Tracer.”

“Fine.” He spat out the word. Nothing worked out right. Not for him. Not ever. He’d been an idiot to ever hope otherwise. The Council had been on his ass since Gibraltar, and now Vishkar was throwing their weight around too - the world was conspiring against him, to hold him back from what he wanted.

Just the same as it always did. On top of all of which, another face had decided to surface from his past - and the damn cowboy had been enough of an annoyance to start with. He’d used Blackwatch codes, though. There had to be a reason.

It didn’t matter. Vishkar wasn’t leaving any options. Reaper just had to come to terms with yet one
more thing being ripped from his grasp. “Fine,” he repeated bluntly, not looking at Sombra. “Do it.” He turned on heel and stormed out of the room, leaving Sombra to grin, alone.

Everything’s coming up Sombra. Perfect. She sent off a quick little message or three and skipped out of the door. All it had taken was leaking a little bit of info to Vishkar, a little bit of info to Athena, a little bit of info to Talon...

If you were allowed to set up the board ahead of time, chess was a piece of cake.

Mmm, cake. Yeah, I should treat myself later...

---

Slam!

Another flash of light. Strong hands grabbed at the chair and yanked her back, spun her around to face the bright doorway.

“They didn’t abandon you. That makes one of us. Lucky you.” As Reaper spoke, he clutched at the bindings which held Tracer to the chair and ripped them to pieces. She was so alive, so alive and so close and he just wanted to drain everything from her.

He had to get out. He knew he had to get out. After he ripped the last binding free he swirled out of the door and saw Widowmaker standing there. Again. For some reason. “Take her to Sombra,” he spat. “And try not to look so damn smug.”

He knew it wasn’t deserved. It didn’t matter. Things happened that nobody deserved - and if anybody else should be pissed off about this, it should be her. They’d abandoned him, yes, but not nearly as much as they’d abandoned her.

She only frowned a little at that as he elbowed past her and marched down the hallway. Whoever he was going to see, she didn’t envy them. Her eyes flicked into the interrogation room where Tracer was standing, shakily, from the chair.

“Suivez-moi,” she instructed, gesturing with her rifle, and Tracer stepped closer. “Today you get released into the wild, little mouse. Do not think this means you will not be captured again.”

“Geeze, you don’t think you’re taking it a bit far? At this rate I’ll be expecting you holding a net in bloody hunter’s gear,” Tracer muttered, glancing around darkly and following as Widowmaker led the way along the halls. Troopers they passed shouted jeers and insults at her, but she just tuned them out. Same as crowds on the sidewalk.

At least she could move now. See. Breathe. It was something. It was better.

“How long’s it been?”

“Silence,” Widowmaker commanded, not looking over.

“Aww, sad that I’m gonna be leaving? Don’t worry, you won’t have to miss me for long,” Tracer quipped with a smirk.

Widowmaker elbowed her heavily, causing her to stumble a bit as they made their way through the
base, but she counted that as a point scored and grinned.

---

Symmetra tugged her clothing a little straighter. It felt off, but she was certain that it was just the arm. For the fifth time since she’d removed it, her eyes flicked toward the case which held the prosthetic Mercy had made for her. That perfect gift. She wanted to be wearing it, but she was being returned to Vishkar and needed to look the part. They would not question her bringing something back with her, but there were certain ways that things needed to be presented.

“I’d like to apologize for all of this again. I’m very sorry for all that’s happened to you,” Winston grumbled, although he still wasn’t exactly in favour of her. Still, it didn’t excuse what had been done.

“I know you would; I know you are. You have stated as much several times.” Symmetra cleared her throat and adjusted her visor, moving her arm through a few test motions again. It was heavier and she felt oddly off-balance as a result.

“Is there something I could help with?”

Symmetra spun, wide-eyed in surprise at the soft voice which she instantly placed, and smiled softly in delight as Mercy stepped in through the door. “Oh - no, everything is quite well, doctor. I apologize for not wearing your prosthetic, but- there are considerations that must be made.”

Mercy watched her glance to the case again, looking guilty about it, but she just smiled in response. “It’s quite alright, Satya. You have my number, yes? Please, if there is any way that I can assist you - ever. Please give me a call or send a message.”

“I will, doctor,” Symmetra nodded. “I assure you, I will. You as well - if there is ever anything that you would speak with me about.” She tried to keep her face straight, but wasn’t sure if she succeeded.

“I will, Satya, thank you - and please, call me Angela if you’d like to.”

“Angela.” Symmetra nodded, just slightly, her smile widening. “Thank you. And you can call me-” she cut off as she realized that Angela was already calling her Satya, and her eyes widened a little as she frowned.

Mercy giggled slightly, covering the gesture with a hand and then glancing over her shoulder as a noise drew her attention. “It looks like the dropship is here. If you would like to, Jack said he would appreciate the chance to apologize again. He promised there would be no guns, and I checked him, myself. Twice.” Truthfully, she didn’t like the idea, but it wasn’t her decision to make.

Symmetra nodded, picking up the case and moving to leave the small room which had been her home for a short time. She spared only one last glance for the chalk fractals on the ground. Perhaps Sanjay would let her alter her own floor to match - she could do so in far more permanent fashions, and ensure that it didn’t run a risk of smudging. It hadn’t here, though. Everyone had been very careful.

With the floor, at least.

The sun was bright outside, but her visor quickly tinted itself in order to compensate - darker than
most of her colleagues’ would have been in the same situation, but they adjusted themselves to their operators. They were delightful pieces of technology.

Symmetra stiffened slightly when she saw the man standing there - he had changed outfits, again, and once more his face looked different. Younger. He needed to stop changing.

“Symmetra,” he nodded, clearing his throat. “I’m sorry, again, for how I treated you. And for how I acted later, as well, with the handgun. For all of it.”

“Apologies not accepted,” she responded brusquely, and was somewhat surprised when he chuckled. Then again, she was often somewhat surprised at people’s responses.

“Fair enough. I accept that.” He looked at her with an expression she couldn’t decipher, but didn’t seem like he would say anything more. She expected excuses, people so often made excuses, as if it made some sort of difference.

He didn’t, though.

“You did not damage my designs,” she noted, several seconds later. “That much is appreciated. Do not conflate that fact with any form or figment of forgiveness.”

“I won’t,” he shook his head and glanced off to the side. “If I do, there are plenty of people to remind me. I’ll get Pharah to punch me again.”

She didn’t respond to that. There was no response that could be given. However, she had gained one good thing from this, and she held the case a little bit closer to herself. Glancing over, she caught a glimpse of Angela again, her hair looking as if it might just ignite in the sunlight but in a good way. Two good things, perhaps. Benefits.

---

Sombra fidgeted a little as she sat at the dropship - which, in her case, consisted of sitting and swiping through her screens. It wasn’t as if anybody there would know what she was actually doing. She could be looking at porn and none of them would notice.

She knew that for a fact. She’d done it.

As Widowmaker approached, though, Sombra couldn’t help but grin. It had been a fun little game, but every movie hits the credits sooner or later. “Hey, nice, you got a sidekick,” she remarked as the assassin drew near.

“I thought that was what you were for,” Widowmaker drawled dryly in response, stalking up into the dropship and gesturing Tracer in with her rifle. She went.

Sombra snickered as she hopped up into the ship and swiped a purple-glowing hand through the air. The dropship closed up behind her and she held up one hand flat, tapping with the other one at a set of controls.

“Oh boy,” she announced with a grin as the dropship lifted off and started to hum through the air. “We’re all locked up tight, safe and sound! No vids, no audio, no monitoring. Courtesy of Sombra. You’re welcome.”
Tracer sighed, frowning a little. “Yeah, sure.”

Sombra smirked. “I think what you meant to say was ‘thank you’.”

“Thank you?” Tracer scoffed incredulously, but Sombra’s grin only sharpened.

“You’re welcome.” The hacker chuckled darkly.

Tracer ground her teeth and rolled her eyes, frowning off to the side. Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow and flashed an annoyed look to Sombra, which was returned in kind.

“Hey,” Sombra pouted at Tracer, “I really went out on a limb for you here, chica! If it wasn’t for me, your little indiscretion would’ve got you some serious time. I’ve been juggling Winston and Reaper and - ugh, that what’s-his-name guy, the one with the 76 all over his jacket and shit? I mean, what the hell was that - who steals a person?”

Tracer looked back at her flatly.

“Oh, c’mon chica that was totally different!” Sombra snickered, rolling her eyes with a grin. “I mean, we just did that to keep you from getting hurt!”

“Yeah, thanks, or whatever - could you please fix this?” Tracer’s voice cracked a little as she tapped frantically at the dim-purple glowing glass circle on her chest. “When your life relies on something, you don’t take too kindly to it getting broken, alright?!”

“Oh, shit, right,” the hacker muttered, purple arcs lancing out from her fingertips to the accelerator and undoing her stops. It whirred gently as it gleamed back into life, bright and blue and beautiful, and Tracer sighed.

“God, that’s better.” She patted at the accelerator, gave it a little spin up just to check - blinked to the far side of the dropship’s bay and back with a giggle. “Oh that’s a lot better!” She felt like she could breathe fully again, she felt free and safe. She didn’t need to worry - it was like her heart had been skipping beats constantly for the past however long, and now it was running properly again.

Only then did Tracer notice Sombra’s eyes on her, with some new inkling in them, and a little frown on her lips. “What?”

“...your life really rely on that thing?”

Tracer’s eyes widened a little as she realized what she might have just given away, and Sombra saw it and held out a hand. “Relax, chica, I’m not asking for professional purposes. Just… I mean, shit, I didn’t know.” She shrugged. “Sorry, that was probably pretty freaky.”

“Yeah,” she muttered, frowning, “it was, but… thanks. Thank you.” Sombra grinned a little but Tracer turned away from her, fixing Widowmaker with a soft stare. “And thank you, too.” Her eyes narrowed teasingly. “Even if I think you might have milked the act a little bit, once or twice.”

“Moi?” Widowmaker placed a hand on her chest, feigning ignorance. “I could not possibly guess what you are meaning, cherie. Besides,” she purred, leaning down to brush Tracer’s ear with the tip of her nose, “I did not hear you complaining when you were strapped to that chair…”

“Th-th-that was different,” Tracer stammered over a chuckle, then cleared her throat and glanced over to Sombra. Then cleared her throat again, eyebrows lowering.

“What?” Sombra tossed a chocolate-covered peanut into her mouth. “Oh, what, you want me to look
away or some shit? Pfft, yeah right, *chica*!”

Widowmaker sighed, shaking her head and gesturing loosely at the hacker. “Do you see what I am made to put up with, *cherie*?”

“Hmm,” Tracer hummed, cocking her head to the side with a smirk. “I dunno. She doesn’t seem *all* bad.”

With a grin, Sombra met Widowmaker’s (decidedly unimpressed) eyes. “See? *She* likes me!”

Widowmaker sighed with a smirk and rolled her eyes, shaking her head. “Well, that makes one of us.”

Her mouse was safe, that was the important thing, and her hand was warm where Tracer held it tightly. She tugged, bringing the brit in close to lean back against her body. *That is better.*

---

Winston and Symmetra were all but alone in the arranged meeting place, with a dropship resting behind them. Mercy had come along as well, to offer a second set of eyes as well as attend to anything that might have befallen Tracer during her internment, but nobody else was in sight. Symmetra had also requested her presence, and Winston felt reticent to deny the former captive much. Either of the two of them, really.

The Talon ship appeared as a dot in the distance at first, as Symmetra and Mercy chatted idly. Winston watched it approach, anxiety rising - what sort of state Tracer was going to be in was a question that lodged in his mind unpleasantly.

Not to mention, of course, the still very-real possibility that this was all a trap somehow. In a variety of ways. Sombra had only ever spoken about *herself* helping with Tracer, but if what his friend said was true at all then it was impossible to extricate Widowmaker from the situation of her captivity.

That also meant *reminding* himself. What had happened there - how excited people had been when Amélie had been discovered and saved. Winston hadn’t been there himself, but he’d heard the stories and seen how other people looked when it was mentioned.

It didn’t get mentioned often. It was an ugly scar at best, and still very much an open wound for a few of them, he suspected.

Winston couldn’t press the possibility from his head. The idea that Tracer might *seem* fine, but then, one night…

The dropship drew near, hot jet wash and blowing sand neatly cutting off the thoughts in his mind. They did nothing to calm his nerves, however.

Symmetra and Mercy approached as the Talon ship settled to the ground and dropped its engines to an idle hum, but the doors didn’t open quite yet. He looked away briefly to Symmetra - he didn’t know the full situation, and he had his concerns about Vishkar’s motives, particularly if they were teaming up with Talon. Then again, *they* were sort of teaming up with aspects of Talon at least.

Regardless, Symmetra didn’t deserve the treatment she’d been met with. Winston cleared his throat.
“I’m sorry, again, about-”

“Winston...”

To his surprise it was Angela who cut him off with a brief sigh, laying a hand on his forearm. He knew he had a tendency to over-apologize but he hadn’t expected it to be quite that annoying. He looked to her in confusion, but she only nodded in Symmetra’s direction.

“You did little to nothing to me,” Symmetra admitted flatly a moment later. “Why should I accept an apology from a person who has not wronged me? What is there even to accept? I would no sooner accept Angela’s apologies than yours.” Her dark eyes flitted briefly to the doctor’s face, and her lips shifted into a slightly awkward smile. “Well. Sooner. But perhaps not much sooner. Perhaps.”

Mercy laughed lightly, smiling. It was still an awful incident that weighed heavily in her heart, but there had been positive developments from it. The upsides didn’t erase the downsides, but they deserved better than to be omitted while focusing only on the negatives.

Winston nodded, but then tensed up as the Talon ship started to open. The first thing he saw was Widowmaker’s visor, and then peaks of spiky brown hair next to it. In a moment he saw both of them - Tracer looked good, unhurt and happy, and she waved with a cheery smile. No Sombra, though, and he frowned a little at that - leaning forward as if he could make her appear out of thin air.

They’d had an agreement. Why hadn’t she stuck to it? She was supposed to be here.

“Hola,” she hummed, right behind his ear - causing him to gasp and stumble forward, kicking up little clouds of sand. Symmetra giggled and Sombra laughed as she waved off her camouflage.

“Man, that never gets old. You scared of mice? You seem like you’d be scared of mice.”

She shuddered as it inspired a thought in her. “Ugh, me? I hate rats. Anyway, here’s your chiquita as promised. Tell Athena Q-X-E-2, okay? Thanks, mono,” she patted him on the shoulder with a grin, “you’re a pal.”

“Yeah, sure,” he muttered, glancing back to her in irritation before sighing. “Thanks. And... Sombra?” She looked over with curiosity clear on her face, and he took a moment to brace himself before speaking up again. “You’ve earned this. Harambe.”

Sombra’s eyes briefly widened at that before she cracked up, cackling and doubling over to slap at her knees. It took her almost a minute to reign her laughter in as Winston just rolled his eyes and regretted it.

“Man, that was even better than I thought it would be! Thanks, mono - you’re alright.” Sombra snickered, then moved swiftly to Symmetra’s side and murmured something, gesturing toward the dropship, before flashing Mercy a suspicious glance over a smirk. “And don’t think I don’t see you trying to move in on my girl. Hasta luego, angel-dust. Boop!” She tapped Mercy on the tip of the nose with one finger before turning and heading toward the dropship.

Symmetra frowned slightly, tilting her head, unsure of what to make of that. She wasn’t Sombra’s girl, she was Vishkar’s - and she wasn’t a girl, anyway, she was a woman. She leaned over to clarify that to Sombra as they made their way into the dropship.

Winston’s eyes flicked that way as Sombra groaned loudly. “I know you’re not really a girl, chica, it’s just an expres- c’mon, okay, you know what? Let’s- here,” the dropship doors started to close behind them, leaving Widowmaker and Tracer outside. “Now we don’t have to worry about eavesdropping and shit. Hey, what’s in the box? You get me a present?” The doors sealed and then it
was silent.

The moment was tense, desert winds whipping a little sand past their ankles as Widowmaker’s eyes flicked between the gorilla and the doctor. She nudged Tracer with the butt of her rifle, but the brit stayed planted right where she was.

“S’alright, love,” she murmured, bumping her elbow against Widowmaker’s. “They both know about us already, I told ‘em.”

Widowmaker didn’t relax, in the slightest - inwardly or outwardly - but she did nod. “D’accord.” Her chin raised a little as she met Winston’s eyes, a hint of defensiveness or maybe hostility in the gesture. “The circumstance that led to her capture was an oversight. It will not be repeated.”

He didn’t trust her at all. He didn’t even really want to look at her, but Mercy was stepping to Tracer’s side to check her over and that left him with few options except for to return to the dropship without a word, and that felt rude, even for the situation.

Even for a Talon murderer.

“You helped her in that mansion. Thank you.” He could only grunt the words out, they still made his gut twist unpleasantly even to think about. He’d apologized until Tracer had made him stop, but that didn’t mean he didn’t still harbour a lot of guilt over it. *I should have been there myself.*

Widowmaker could see the pain in his eyes. Could see how much he wished he could have been present to help her mouse on that night - or when she’d been captured. His eyes held the same thing that she had a tiny spark of now, deep down inside, and she recognized it. Tracer never should have been caught to begin with. She’d been careless and distracted, and her mouse had nearly suffered for it. It would not happen again.

“You were not there. I was.” The words were more brusque than she’d intended and some anger flared up in his face. Widowmaker frowned slightly as she tried to think of another way to phrase it. “No, I meant…” she sighed, letting her eyes slide closed.

“...if I can trust you to keep her safe, then it doesn’t matter if I’m there,” Winston suggested, sighing and rubbing at his face. That much, he could definitely say. Even if he couldn’t yet determine that he *did* trust a world-famous assassin to have his friend’s best interests in mind.

Widowmaker nodded gratefully. “*Oui. Exactement. I will* keep her safe.”

“Whatever it takes?”

She glanced away from Tracer and Mercy - the doctor was leaning in and inspecting Tracer’s throat as she tried in vain to push her away. Widowmaker’s eyes fixed on Winston’s, huge and studious; the gaze of a scientist looking through a microscope.

It was actually quite encouraging. He probably had hated her for the threat she posed, yet thanked her for her aid - and he meant it, too. It was so clear that Tracer was his only focus in the situation, his only interest, and he brought an impressive force of determination to bear behind that.

Her lips curved just slightly, a small smile somewhere between tight and soft. “Whatever I can offer.” It wasn’t exactly the same. It was all she could promise, though, and she meant it wholly. “I swear.”

Winston relaxed a little at that. Only a little, but a little nonetheless. “I don’t think I can provide anything nearly as complete as a ceasefire or anything of the sort - not right now - but… know that *I* won’t harm you, at least. Or Sombra.” His eyes narrowed a bit as he fixed her with a steady glare.
“I’ll still fight you, wherever I feel it’s needed.”

Widowmaker chuckled, shaking her head. “Ah, galopin, you think I need your assurance to know I will not be harmed? I have my own skills to ensure that.”

Winston growled a little, shaking his head. “Why does everybody think I only speak English?”

She only chuckled in response as Tracer finally succeeded in assuring Mercy she was fine - or at least, well enough to make it back to the camp with no problems. Of course she was. Widowmaker had made sure of it. Her eyes flicked to the doctor in irritation at the mere implication that she hadn’t taken care of her little pet.

This time, much less hung in the balance than during their last meeting. Not to mention the fact that the situation with the doctor was not the same as with the scientist.

“She is unharmed, docteur,” Widowmaker almost snarled. She’d been holding everything down even more than normal to prevent anything awry from escaping where the wrong eyes might note it - it wasn’t a titanic effort, nor even a great one, but it was certainly one she was unwilling to extend to the doctor.

Tracer, though, looked a little hurt by the words and Widowmaker frowned at that. “I was taking care of you,” she pointed out in way of explanation.

“She is dehydrated,” Mercy stated before scowling lightly at Tracer, “but to be fair, she generally is.” Tracer looked a little sheepish and the doctor continued. “A few light wounds but for the most part nothing worse than scuffs or strains - the worst are where the bindings met her skin.”

Widowmaker’s eyes dropped to her wrists even as Tracer tried to hide them behind herself, but the frenchwoman was too fast. Her hand darted out and caught Tracer’s, snatching it forward and pushing the sleeve of her jacket back.

Tracer hissed - the skin there was red, raw, and bleeding in a few places. Widowmaker dropped her hand instantly, as if it had burned her. “I-” she cleared her throat as her eyes stung slightly. “I did not know.”

Tracer offered her an apologetic smile. “S’allright, love. Really, you didn’t- it wasn’t you. I just…” she cleared her throat and scuffed at the sand with her foot, “I just didn’t like the straps and the dark. Caused some… problems. Reminded me of, um…” Mercy laid a hand on her shoulder and she dropped the sentence. This wasn’t the time anyway. “I’ll- we can talk about it later, yeah? Still gotta have that conversation.”

Widowmaker nodded emptily, unable to tear her eyes away from the way Tracer held at her own wrist through the leather jacket. Hurt. Because of her. The dark, which was her fault. The dark which she had brought about.

For a second time, along with being visited that night at her camp, Angela found herself unable to look away from Widowmaker’s eyes. Unable to stop herself from trying to pierce their veil and decipher what lay underneath. As they shifted to meet her gaze, however, she forced herself to look away.

Not quickly enough, though.

“Yes, doctor?” Widowmaker hissed. “Is there something with which I can assist you?” She bit back the frustrated and bitter words and huffed, crossing her arms. It felt like she was being judged for not taking enough care - and while she might have agreed that she hadn’t, that didn’t mean she just
needed to stand here and take it without complaint. She waved a hand dismissively, keeping her arms crossed. “Alors, it is good to see you doing a thorough job, for once.”

“Oi, be nice,” Tracer nudged her and Widowmaker rolled her eyes with a sigh, but tipped her head in a relenting gesture.

The sharp words had shot ice through Angela’s core, particularly given who they were coming from. She might not have been Amélie, but she still looked similar enough for the words to be more than a little haunting. A ghost of a friend, seeming to mock her for her role in the matter.

Widowmaker noticed the emotion that stirred behind the doctor’s blue eyes, and grinned a little. “Oh, what is that, m’ange? Does something surprise you?” Her voice was quiet, but sounded almost excited.

Mercy’s eyes widened a bit at the pet name - she knew it could have been a lucky guess, but with that look in Widowmaker’s eyes, on her face, it seemed to be more. “You… remember?” Her words were soft as her brow furrowed.

She didn’t want to believe it.

Widowmaker laughed, hollowly. “Oui, docteur - I remember. I remember it all: sharing glasses of wine and stories - you were so fond of your Gewurtztraminer I could scarcely believe it at first, and you refused to accept that I had never in my life tasted it before. Yes, I remember you, Angela. You were the one who inspected me when I-” she cut off halfway through the sound, frowning lightly. “When Amélie, was rescued.”

“I- I didn’t think-” Mercy protested lightly, weakly, tears welling in her eyes. “I didn’t notice anything.”

In response, Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes before fixing the doctor with a steady gaze. “Non. You did not. You could not have. There were no signs to detect, docteur, I was... manufactured with more care than that.” She scowled a little, glancing to Tracer’s frown and beseeching brown eyes, then back to the doctor. “You can stop feeling bad about it now. The matter was out of your hands and you bear no responsibility.”

“Amélie, I-”

“No, Angela, don’t.” It was Tracer who spoke up and cut Mercy off. Widowmaker’s eyes shot to her curiously. “I don’t think it’s fair, love, to call her that. She’s not anymore.” Tracer glanced over to the assassin with a soft smile which twisted a little bit to a smirk. “I do wish she had something a little less ridiculous to call her than Widowmaker, but she’s not Amélie. Not really, not anymore.”

“You have been perhaps understanding more than I gave you credit for, cherie,” Widowmaker murmured with genuinely impressed surprise. Tracer blushed a little at the attention.

Mercy cleared her throat and nodded, still frowning heavily, but she forced the gesture into a weak smile when Widowmaker looked back at her. “I- I understand. Of course. Widowmaker, I… I did not expect you to remember anything, I am sorry.”

“I think, neither did they, doctor,” she rolled a shoulder in an easy shrug. Everything was simpler now that she wasn’t being accused, the spotlight shifted off of herself. “But then, there is much about me I believe was not expected. Mais, this is not about me. Tracer is returned. Take care to avoid her recapture, but know that I will ensure her safety if and when she ends up out of her depth once more. She really is quite foolish that way. Adieu.”
With that, Widowmaker turned to leave.

Tracer wasn’t having any of that. She leapt and wrapped her arms around the tall blue woman, and got a sigh in return. “Souris, I am trying to leave.”

“Yeah, well, I’m trying to give you a hug, so there!” Tracer insisted, squeezing tighter. With a soft smile, Widowmaker raised a hand to rest over Tracer’s. So warm. So beautifully warm.

Then she wrapped her hand around the brit’s arm and flipped her forward, over her shoulder, and into the sand.

Tracer activated her accelerator before she hit the ground and showed up standing behind Widowmaker with her fists on her hips (and a grin). “Oi! I was just trying to say thanks, love - didn’t have to go throwing me around for it!”

“You of all people should know how I deal with annoyances, cherie,” Widowmaker chuckled as she waved airily. “Adieu!”

Mercy called over to her, “Thank you. For everything, and - Widowmaker? I really would like to discuss more with you, if you would let me.”

The sniper didn’t hesitate or pause, but she also didn’t respond as she continued to saunter over toward the ship - for a few moments, it was as if she hadn’t heard at all. The doors opened and she stepped in, and just before the ship sealed up tight again, she let off one parting shot. “Then I suppose it is au revoir.”

Mercy smiled. Not goodbye. Until we meet again. Then, she promptly returned to fussing over Lena.

“Oi, lemme alone!” Tracer swatted at Mercy’s hands as they gently tugged back her jacket sleeves. “It’s fine, it’s - look, you’re just gonna wave your magic wand in the dropship and fix it, so why bother getting your knickers in a twist? It’s fine, really!”

“It’s not a magic wand, it’s a magic staff,” Mercy corrected with a smirk as she scooted Tracer over to a seat in the dropship and started to tend to her injuries. Winston came over as well with a chuckle as the doors sealed up and the ship started to lift off.

He didn’t glance over his shoulder or out of the window - wherever the Talon ship was heading, he didn’t care and didn’t even spare a thought for. Regardless of whether he really trusted her, Widowmaker had been correct about one thing: Tracer was back. That was the important part, and the only thing he thought about was her as he went to the seats.

“Good to have you back,” he murmured with a smile, lit by the glow from Angela’s staff.

“Good to be back, love,” she nodded, patting him on the arm. She half-expected questions or lingering suspicion, hesitation and concern.

What she got instead was a giant gorilla hug. A second later, his arms were joined by Mercy’s and Tracer sighed happily with a smile. So good to be back.

Chapter End Notes

Translations!
Suivez-moi == "Follow me", imperative.
Galopin == "monkey", but specifically in the diminutive/endearing sense. The sense of "you little monkey/you little rascal/etc."
Think the others have been covered but feel free to mention if not!

This one ties a bunch of stuff together! Pulls some of the Jack stuff to a bit of a close and lets us move forward with something a little more stable in place with him, as well as explaining a little bit of his mercurial tendencies throughout. It won't all get better immediately, of course, but it's progress!

Also see a bit of Widowmaker explanation, too, which I like. Her recognizing bits of feelings in herself, in others.

Honestly I was kind of happy to get Sanjay on screen! I mean, he's a dick, but I still think he has some solid characterization to be explored, because Symmetra's smart and he's convinced her. He strikes me as being fairly similar to Doomfist in some ways, actually - charismatic, smooth, convincing, and seemingly quite decisive too. Or even drastic, one might say.

Next time, the cowboy meets the Reaper. McCree has some questions, gets some answers, gives some answers, and comes out of the whole thing feeling a little shaken but overall not too bad. Up until he sees the wrong face in a crowd, that is - then things escalate. Tracer reunites with the team happily and there's a bit of explanation to be done on a few fronts, but they let her go home before a full debrief. Athena and Winston have a little chat.
The Quick and the Dead

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Reaper meets up with a contact he didn't expect to ever hear from again - Jesse McCree. It's a tense conversation, to say the least, but probably less so than the subsequent one McCree has with Jack. Tracer makes her assurances and says her goodbyes before heading home. Winston attempts to have a little debriefing with Athena, but knows better than to push it, and Fareeha helps Angela de-stress.

JFL Summary: Gabe has a snack and then chats with a slightly-terrified cowboy. Pharah tries to crush Tracer, and Jack tells a bad joke. Later, he goes to meet up with a pissed-off cowboy (the same cowboy from earlier, but he's shifted from lightly-terrified to pissed off). Pharah and Mercy have a chat. Tracer trips over her own feet. Athena knows what both "Plausible Deniability" and "Catch-22" mean. Sort of.

Chapter Notes


Previous Chapter Summary: The tradeoff was finally made. It took Sombra nudging a few pieces in a few places - leaking info to Vishkar which precipitated a call from Sanjay to Reaper, ensuring that Winston and the others regained control of Symmetra, and a few others as well. Reaper, infuriated, told them to make the swap and left. Meanwhile at the other camp, Mercy had a short interlude with Jack and revealed some of the problems that had been befalling him lately - biochemical anomalies resulting from the super-soldier program's effects and their decay. She gave him some medications in the hopes of helping curb the mood swings and other symptomatic problems. Winston and Widowmaker had a conversation which went surprisingly well for the pair of them. Widowmaker was shocked by Tracer's injury, and while she didn't exactly feel guilty over it, she felt something. Enough for her to get pissed off at Mercy, but the situation was then patched up (largely at Tracer's request).

It took a lot to shake Jesse McCree. There was little in the world he hadn't done, and even less he hadn't seen - he was no stranger to death or destruction. This, though, chilled him to the core.

Dozens of bodies lay scattered about, dry and dessicated, crackled skin pulling back tight against bone, with empty eyes and mouths agape in grotesque silent screams. Dozens of them - on the floor, slumped over the bar, laid across the pool table.

In the middle of it, at the bar with an empty stool next to him, was Reaper. Bottle of whiskey in hand, empty glasses sitting in front of him. Cool as a cucumber.

“Well well, look who it is,” Reaper chuckled without glancing over his shoulder. “The quick,” he tipped his head to the empty stool and poured whiskey to the brim of the glass sitting there, “...and
the dead.” He filled his own glass and set the bottle down.

McCree didn’t move. He just stared around at the room - it looked like it should have been a maelstrom, but it was so calm.

Nothing moved, nothing breathed.

“If you start in on some bullshit about them being innocents, you might as well shoot yourself right now and save me the bullet.”

Reaper’s words startled McCree from his stunned state, and spurred him to walk carefully to the bar. “Been through here enough times to know ain’t a one of ‘em who was innocent. Doesn’t mean I expected this.”

“And I didn’t expect you to show up alone as we agreed on,” Reaper slipped his mask off and set it on the bar. “So at least we’re on even ground there.”

“That really the level of trust I’ve earned?” McCree let out a chuckle that he cut off sharply when the glass in Reaper’s hand shattered and spilled whiskey over the bar.

Smoothly, as if nothing had happened, Reaper picked up another glass and filled it instead. “Trust?” He chuckled darkly. “You think there is such a thing, you’re as dumb as you were when I first picked you up.”

McCree grunted. “We gonna toast or not?”

Reaper laughed, once, and lifted his glass. He turned and faced McCree - Jesse saw his face for the first time since the fall. He looked like a caricature of himself, a charcoal sketch of one maybe. “To old friends.”

Jesse swallowed, lifting his glass in turn and meeting Reaper’s cold eyes. “To trust.”

They each took deep mouthfuls of their whiskey and Reaper slipped his gauntlets off, setting them down next to his mask. “Why are you here?”

The cowboy glanced around. He had chosen this location because it could be neutral ground. Didn’t look so neutral anymore. “Been talking to some folk. Wondering if maybe a few things are a little different than they seemed.”

Reaper snorted roughly. “You’re an idiot, Jesse. Slow on the uptake doesn’t even start to cover it.”

“Well, good to see we’re in a kindly mood,” McCree shrugged a shoulder and sipped heavily at his whiskey again. “Sometimes a man gets a little blinded. Sometimes he gets so afraid that he might be, he doesn’t see what’s right there.”

“I don’t care about your excuses,” Reaper grunted and downed a third of his whiskey in a massive gulp. If it hadn’t been for the bar full of people he’d just devoured, he already would’ve been throwing McCree around. Maybe would’ve killed him. It was easier to hold it in when he wasn’t so hungry, though.

It was getting worse.

“What happened, Gabe?”

He scoffed. “How long do you have? Gabe’s dead anyway.”
“Ehh,” McCree tipped his head, wisely declining to mention that Jack had said the same thing about himself. “Can’t say any of us live the way we once did. I remember him, though, Gabriel Reyes - li’l paranoid, prone to jump the gun maybe, but I think he might’ve trusted deeper than any man I’ve ever known. Betrayal must’ve hurt him worse than the rest. Cared about his team, too. Meant a lot… at one point.”

Reaper ground his teeth together, shaking his head and barely able to keep his rage under control. He was being needled and he knew it. Trust. Team. They’d been the words that made him. They’d been the words that destroyed him. “You remember what it was like. We found one thread and then…”

“…whole thing started to unravel,” McCree finished with an uneasy quiver in his gut. It was still the single worst thing that had happened to him, and the fact that it had taken so long only made it worse. Nothing makes a man feel helpless like watching his house fall apart around him brick by brick and realizing it had been collapsing for years.

“They caught on, whoever was behind it,” Reaper continued. Mostly he was restating known facts, but it helped. Let him ease into it. “They weren’t happy about it - started leaking details about Blackwatch to the press. They knew that Overwatch would react by holding us back, and that even if we did come forward, nobody would listen. Nobody wants to be the man bending his ear to the murderers, the torturers, the monsters.” Reaper sneered, knocking back more whiskey. Maybe easing into it wouldn’t work so well.

The alcohol wouldn’t help. Only feeding helped - only vengeance. Watching the monkey pinned down under his own re-entry pod, that had helped; shooting Jack with his own gun and making him bleed, that had helped. Oxton, terrified in her chair…

...well, it definitely hadn’t hurt.

“Well hell, I’m here, ain’t I?” McCree chuckled as Reaper’s head turned to him. “So whether this is monster to monster or I’m the man bending his ear - and my money’s on the former - what the fuck happened, Gabe?”

Reaper laughed darkly. You have no idea, kid. Fine. Maybe I should give you one. Again.

“One night,” he shook his head, settling back on his stool, “Gabe’s staying late at work. He’s going through a package, trying to make sure it’s bulletproof and airtight - there have been a few other attempts at getting the info out but they never worked. People died or little things slipped through the cracks, so he knows he needs to nail this data package down tight, but things are missing. Things he knew were there. He hears a noise and heads out of his office, goes to the central atrium.”

He tipped his head back with a light sigh, looking up to the ceiling. “There’s a bomb on the central support spire. Standard Blackwatch configuration, set up to look like one of his. Upside is, that means he knows how to disarm it. Downside?” He chuckled, knocking back some more whiskey and not answering the rhetorical question.

“So Gabe kneels down in front of this bomb that makes him the scapegoat, twenty minutes on the timer, panicked and practically shitting himself but he knows he’s got plenty of time to disarm it. Problem is, he’s one step behind the game at this point, but he knows he can catch up - he reaches out, and then hears gunshots.”

His arm twisted around unnaturally to slap at his own back as he growled. “Three shots. Centre mass. They burned in my back, Jesse, the way only a traitor’s bullets can. Gabe slumps to the ground a foot away from the bomb, and who comes stepping over his fresh corpse? Oh, his old friend Jack.”
The name came out as an absolutely hateful sneer, and McCree swore he saw something actually flash behind Reaper’s eyes. Fire. Murder. Hate.

“Jack looks down coldly into Gabe’s eyes and then he leans over. Cuts the wrong! Fucking! Wire!” Reaper slammed a fist down on the table between each word, grinding his teeth. The wood splintered under his blows even with his gauntlets off. “Timer starts counting down in a hurry. Jack sprints away. Gabe has just enough time to curse him and all the rest of them to hell before the bomb goes off in his face and brings the whole place crashing down on top of him.”

Reaper slipped off of his stool, holding his arms wide and genuinely laughing. “And I? I rose from the fucking ashes - I guess if you curse people enough, you’ll call a demon down sooner or later.”

Dry-mouthed, McCree pulled at his whiskey again. “How’d you survive?”

“Death is for the living.” Reaper spat in return, sitting again and rubbing at his forehead. He was silent for a minute, but McCree didn’t prompt him.


“That supposed to explain…” McCree cast his eyes out over the shrivelled bodies surrounding them.

Reaper laughed. “Oh, I am ever so hungry these days, Jesse, but that’s a little newer. They’re delicious, you know - absolutely delicious.” His nerves writhed as he thought about it (although not nearly as much as McCree’s gut), so he stopped.

“No free lunches.” Reaper shrugged. “Seems like not dying costs a life. Wasn’t a problem at first - after Bryn, I didn’t have any issues. Doc checked me out and it looked all normal. Guess putting yourself back together after being shredded to bits takes a toll on a man, though, and after that I wasn’t the same.”

“Can’t say I’m surprised about that,” McCree muttered darkly over the brim of his glass. Can’t say it doesn’t go for me, too. “And now?”

“Now?” Reaper chuckled, lifting his whiskey with a grin and an easy shrug. “Well, it still isn’t a problem for me. A few other people might disagree on that point, though.” He didn’t want to think about the anger, the wriggling itch like something clawing at his spinal cord - if that was the price he had to pay for vengeance, for justice, so be it.

“So what now? Wandering the Earth and searching for revenge?”

“Something like that,” Reaper tipped his head. He wasn’t sure what it was, but something had him in a talkative mood - a good mood. Maybe it was Jesse, so obviously frightened but still not running; naive, yes, but not utterly without his salt. Still the same as when they’d met. Maybe it was the absolute gorging of a meal he’d had. Maybe it was the lingering thoughts of Oxton screaming in that dark interrogation room or Jack lying helpless beneath the cone of a rocket engine. Maybe it was Sombra. Maybe it was the thought of Oxton looking at him not in horror, not even really in confusion, but like she just didn’t understand. Didn’t… and wanted to.

Whatever the reasons for it, Reaper held up his free hand, thumb and forefinger an inch apart, lips twisting unnaturally into a wide grin as he leaned in toward the cowboy. His voice was a black and sandy purr. “I’m this close to finding him.”
McCree felt a cold stillness soak into him, and covered it with another sip of whiskey. “Who?”

“You’re either dumber than I thought, or insulting me right now,” Reaper scoffed.

“Oh, and callin’ me a dumbass ain’t insulting?” McCree chuckled. He didn’t give one damn what people said about him - he knew the truth. Still, everything he’d heard today left him a little shaken. All that remained was figuring out whether it was true. “You really think you can find Petras?”

Reaper’s fingers flexed involuntarily against the bar as he sighed a groan. It sounded more lustful than bothered; warm and full. “Oh, I definitely will. When I do, which side are you going to be on?”

“You already know the answer to that,” McCree shook his head.

“Do I?”

The cowboy’s eyes snapped over to Reaper’s, and now it was his turn to scoff. “No offence, but I ain’t the one with a new name and a wacky mask, partner. Same man I been for a while, here - mighta changed my belt buckle, but I still fight for the same.”

“And what would that be, exactly?” Reaper drained the last of his whiskey. “Remind me. For old time’s sake.”

McCree grinned darkly. “Justice.”

A hand clamped heavily on his shoulder. “I’ll be the judge of that,” Reaper whispered under the brim of the cowboy hat before dropping his hand and waving. “I’ll let you know when I find him. We can see your true colours. See you around, Jesse. Try not to die.”

“Yeah,” the cowboy muttered as Reaper swirled into smoke and billowed out of the room. He returned his attention to the remnants of whiskey in his glass, swilling them around like the thoughts in his head. “You too, Gabe.”

---


“Nope.”

“I can’t breathe!”

“I don’t care.” The soldier hugged her friend tighter. “You’re never getting out, ever.”

Tracer spun up her accelerator and blinked just a foot to the left, gasping a breath as Pharah scowled at her and Mercy giggled in the background. “Cor, love - you’re gonna make Em jealous at this rate!”

Fareeha rolled her eyes and opened her mouth to retort, but Tracer cut her off first. “I see that look! Yeah, fine, polyamory, whatever - ugh, this is what I get for trying to share things with my friends!”

They all laughed and chuckled, everyone who was there - Winston, Ana, Mercy, Pharah. Jack was currently out of both sight and mind.
“Are you sure you aren’t hurt, *saghir*?” Ana’s eye crinkled at the corner in concern, but Tracer smiled easily back and laid a hand on her shoulder.

“Of *course* I’m sure. It was- I mean, it was a little worrying, but I had a hand on the inside anyway.” The sniper’s face darkened and Tracer frowned a little, but didn’t withdraw. “Ana - look, I know you don’t want to hear it, but-”

“I don’t.” Ana sighed, and then dropped her head for a second, laying a hand over Tracer’s on her shoulder. “I am glad you had someone there for you. Even if I am not glad for *who* it was - and even if I think she should have done *more*. And even if I think-”

“Okay, you- you’ve got a lot of thoughts on the matter,” Tracer chuckled uneasily and patted Ana’s shoulder. “That’s fine, love - I just… thank you. That’s good to hear.”

Ana scowled lightly, the gesture betrayed by the smirk at the corners of her lips. “You’ll ruin my reputation as a cranky old woman at this rate, *saghir*.”

“Oh, I don’t think there’s much concern of that!” Mercy chirped brightly, but then wilted, wide-eyed, as Ana turned to glare at her. Then the sniper began to chuckle, and the whole group laughed again.

“Actually,” Winston spoke up when the laughter had largely subsided, “she had *two* helping hands. I was going to say this back at Apeldoorn, but then the whole Gibraltar thing arose…” he sighed heavily, tipping his head to the side, “and boy, does that ever just complicate issues, but I think I can be reasonably secure in this now.”

The others gathered in a loose semicircle around him, curious - even Tracer, who actually knew what he was about to say, she just didn’t know that he was about to say it.

“Tracer’s particular frenemy relationship with Widowmaker aside,” Winston smirked as Pharah punched Tracer lightly in the arm, “I actually have an announcement to make. For over a year now, I’ve been associating with an outside contact on certain technical matters - I called them in to help with Black Tide, you may recall.”

The group nodded - although only Ana had been there and didn’t already know about Sombra. Mercy and Fareeha had both been briefed on the matter of the virus, though, particularly after the incident with the walker.

“As it turns out…” Winston took a deep breath and let it out as a sigh. “It was revealed to me a few weeks ago that my contact was a person of some notoriety. Sombra.” Looks of confusion and surprise, and displeasure, flashed on various faces - although Tracer only smiled, lightly, encouragingly. Winston nodded to her. “It was at least in part due to her efforts that we were able to secure Tracer’s return so quickly and easily.”

“See, and maybe if I’d known that to start with, I wouldn’t have needed to go off kidnapping.” They all froze at the sound of Jack’s voice, and Winston’s lip curled back a little as he looked over toward the open door where the man stood, but Jack was holding up a hand and shaking his head. “Joke, it was a joke. Terrible, stupid joke. I was an ass and it was nobody’s fault but mine. Well, mine and brain chemistry, I guess,” he chuckled, shrugging and stepping closer.

He looked better, and younger, the lines of his face seeming less deep and thorough. Tracer thought she’d seen glimpses of it in the bank and the pub, but they’d been flashes of sun through the clouds. This, though, look like a bright blue day.

“Thanks for the meds, doc,” he nodded to Mercy, “I can tell you they’re helping a lot already.”
Stepping gently through the small crowd, he wrapped his arms around Tracer and pulled her close with a heavy sigh.

“I was worried about you, kid,” he muttered, shaking his head.

“Sorry, dad,” she quipped and got a deep chuckle in return, grinning as they parted their embrace and he ruffled her hair.

“I’d like to apologize,” Jack stated, stepping back so everyone could face him easily. “To everyone. Turns out, disposable super-soldiers were never really designed for a run as long as mine. I’ve been flickery at best and volcanic at worst, but with any luck those days are behind me now.” He looked to Winston, but not with judgement - his eyes were soft, if a little bit less-than-delighted. “I’d love to say it would have helped to know beforehand, but I don’t think it would have - or, rather,” he raised a finger, “I don’t think it would have helped me.”

“That’s...” Winston sighed, shaking his head and wiping a hand across his face. “That’s fair. I was going to tell everyone, but then Sombra called asking for the codes to Gibraltar in exchange for Tracer’s release, and... well, I’d be lying if I said I was able to maintain a calm head or good judgement after that point.” He shrugged a shoulder uneasily, dropping his eyes to the side. “I don’t agree with what you did, but I can’t say I don’t understand losing control, and I don’t hold that against you.”


Ana, though, frowned. “We just gave her the Gibraltar codes? Let them walk in?”

“No,” Winston shook his head, “I didn’t tell her. She must have gained them some other way, but the fact still stands that she did get Tracer released and has given us our only breakthrough so far on the Black Tide project.”

“Not without a price, I’m guessing,” Pharah murmured, and Winston nodded.

“Mercenaries bill themselves on their reputation,” Jack shrugged, eyes flicking to meet Ana’s. “A merc who betrays their clients is a dead one or at least an outcast, and in a hurry. I know I wouldn’t want to be walking the line she’s walking, between two groups like this.”

“Mm,” Ana shrugged a shoulder, busying herself with picking a speck of dirt out from underneath one fingernail. “It’s not so hard if you do it right.”

“All else notwithstanding,” Winston interjected, “I’d say the important part is that Tracer’s safe.” The group responded with a chorus of nods and agreement.

Tracer turned and smiled to them each in turn. “And thank you lot, all, for helping me out here and having my back - I promise I’ll be more on guard in the future. Don’t want to make a bad habit out of this. But I think it’s high time I got home for a bit. I’ll meet you back at Apeldoorn for a bigger debrief later, yeah? Thanks, loves!”

The group agreed, and the meeting was scheduled for a few days later - Athena would get the important details from Tracer during the flight, but they actually all seemed to have bigger concerns at the moment. As bad as it had been and as worried as it had made them, Tracer’s assurances that everything was fine held a lot of weight.

So, of course, did Mercy’s.

When that was all sorted out, the plucky Brit turned to head toward the dropship - Mercy approached
Jack and escorted him off to do a few more tests, the Amari ladies headed away to have a cup of tea, and Winston took a deep breath as he looked over them all. It felt like the team was really getting back together again.

---

Tracer got up onto the balcony outside her apartment with no troubles at all, and slid the unlocked door open to step inside. She started to strip off her gear immediately - it had been days, and while the leather looked great, it wasn’t the best thing to be cooped up in. Accelerator in the charging cradle and bracers in hand, she wandered down the little hallway to the bedroom to lock them up in the safe there.

Emily was reclined on the bed, surrounded by rose petals, in a red silk robe that was pulled open to reveal green lacy lingerie underneath.

Lena dropped her bracers, forgot to stop walking, and tripped over them.

Emily chuckled on the bed, and let out a sigh. “I love you. Dork.”

“I love you too.” Her voice was a little soft from the floor, and only got softer. “I’m- I’m really sorry about all that, love, it-”

“It’s alright,” Emily shook her head and shuffled over to the edge of the bed. Her gut wriggled a little, but it was nothing she wasn’t used to and nothing compared to the weight that had been relieved upon hearing that Lena was coming home. “Widdy had you safe. I was worried, but… she had it in hand. You alright there, love?”

“Yeah, just, y’know, trying to get my legs working again. They just quit, dunno why!” Tracer giggled brightly and Emily slipped off of the bed to join her on the ground.

“Hey there,” she traced a finger along Lena’s cheek, grinning at the awe in her brown eyes. She planted a soft kiss on her jaw. “It’s good to have you back.”

“It’s good to be back, love,” Tracer sighed, rolling over to run her hand through Emily’s hair. “You’re absolutely bloody brilliant, you know that?”

Her lips split into a wide grin. “I’ve heard it once or twice,” Emily admitted coyly, “but a girl’s got to be careful stuff like that doesn’t go to her head.” Her nose wrinkled a little and she leaned back with a twisted smirk. “Now, no offence, love, but you smell like old laundry and wet dogs. Or old wet dog laundry.”

“Yeah,” Tracer sighed dreamily, stroking at Emily’s cheek, her arm, anywhere she could touch. “We should take a shower.”

“You should take a shower,” Emily corrected with a snicker. “That way, I can stay right here waiting for you.”

“Mmm, that is a good idea,” Lena chuckled and rolled over for a quick kiss. After that, she decided on a slow one. As she went for a third, Emily shoved her off playfully with a laugh.

“Go on, you! And don’t come back until you’re all hot and wet.”
Tracer shivered a little as she pushed herself to her feet, staring down at Emily reposed on the floor. “You’re right cruel, sometimes - you know that?”

Emily just grinned, wide-eyed, and nodded. “You know you love it.”

“I know I do!” Lena replied with a laugh as she turned to head to the shower. “Back in a few!”

“Mm, you’d better be,” Emily sighed, frowning just slightly as she got back onto the bed.

She had been worried, quite worried. Widdy had had it under control… but Emily would rather not find out how far that control went, or what the cost might end up being if it slipped - in either direction, in any sense.

She was back now, though. For the moment at least, that was the important part. As the shower started up, Emily turned and grabbed up her phone to shoot off a message.

“Sombrero, love, whoever you are - thanks for bringing her home to me. Pass my thanks along to the spider, too. And thanks for the movies. They really helped. Stop by if you ever want a BLE, and let me know if there’s anything I can help you with. Thank you.”

---

Jack sighed as he stepped up into the jeep and hit the ignition. Technically, he knew he could’ve taken a dropship and been there faster, but he felt like he’d strained the team and their resources enough recently.

Luckily - and thanks entirely to their not-so-resident angel of a doctor - he could feel that now without the crashing, crushing waves of guilt or the hot flames of anger it had brought before. Or, even worse, that horrific hollow emptiness.

On the one hand, it hadn’t seemed so bad when it was happening. On the other hand he’d tried to kill himself repeatedly, which didn’t suggest good things - to say the least.

He glanced at his phone again as he drove out of the compound and made his way toward the rendezvous point: a bar near the airport. It wasn’t exactly an unwelcome message to have received, but after Winston had mentioned Jesse’s name - and in the context of forming a new Blackwatch, no less - Jack was at least a little concerned.

He thought a lot as he drove.

The place looked like shit. He wasn’t surprised in the slightest, of course, and chuckled as he slipped the keys into his pocket. There hadn’t been much to the message Jesse had sent - a place to meet and a time, and a single word. “Truth.”

Whether that meant McCree had found some truth and wanted to share, or whether he had some questions, Jack didn’t know. He knew there was only one way to find out, though, and he figured he owed the cowboy this much. At least.

He was wearing his 76 jacket, pulse rifle slung across his front - nobody turned to look as he nudged the door open. Not a person in this bar gave a shit, it seemed; they drank like they were trying to forget the distant sounds of gunfire outside, and the smooth thumps of far-off explosions. Drank like
they were surprised to be alive, or like they wanted to die, or both.

The airport was being left mostly untouched along with a fair bit of city around it, but largely just because all the parties involved in this war wanted an easy way to bring things in and out. They had their own air support, yes, but that didn’t mean they didn’t want a little extra. The majority of the defence efforts were centred here, too - even those forces that did try to leverage the place to their own ends soon found themselves beaten back.

It was a big, catastrophic, simmering and slow political clusterfuck of a war. Nothing so simple as two groups with guns shooting each other, no, this was dozens of factions - some aligned, others not - grappling all over each other with IEDs and booby-traps. As well as more than their fair share of tanks and airplanes and guns.

Three official militaries of nations, as well as two quote-unquote “defensive task forces”, and at least a half-dozen rebel or militia groups. Jack couldn’t even keep them straight anymore, but the bar just about said it all: it was messy, it was tired, and it refused to stop or slow down even to glance up at the door opening.

McCree wasn’t here yet. Jack suspected he was flying in anyway. The others had gone back to Apeldoorn earlier that day, but he’d hung around to meet up with the cowboy.

Truth. Jack sat down at the bar and called for a coke. Mercy had said not to drink any booze while the medication was still so new.

The coke came in a glass bottle, frosty on the outside, and Jack chuckled as he tipped it back. Not bad. Could use a little Crown.

---

As Jesse McCree stepped into the bar, he thought he had it all under control. He’d thought it out, mulled it over - he was generally a pretty calm man. For some reason, though, seeing Jack there with a bottle of coke in hand and a grin on his face felt like a punch in the gut, and all of the carefully planned lines of questioning fell right out of his cowboy head.

He stormed across the bar toward Jack and caught the front of his jacket in one hand, pulling out his Peacekeeper and pressing the muzzle against the underside of the soldier’s jaw. “Goddamnit, Jack,” he grunted, “God damn it!”

“McCree,” Jack responded slowly, lifting his hands up openly from the bar and holding them there. Nobody else in the bar seemed to notice. “Nice to see you again.”

“Shut the fuck up, Jack,” the cowboy tightened his grip. “I’m gonna ask you a question. I’m gonna ask you once. No matter what answer you give, I promise I will not shoot you - but if I ever, ever, find out that you lied to me with this answer, the next time I see you I will bury you, no questions asked and no second chances. Any questions before we start, pardner?”

Slowly, Jack shook his head, grateful for about the hundredth time in a few days that Mercy’s medications were working. He wasn’t sure what he would’ve been doing otherwise. Either fighting Jesse or begging him to blow his brains out, probably. “I’d say shoot, but…” Jack trailed off into chuckles.
Jokes. Jesse just stared, vision blurring as tears rose to his eyes. Fucking jokes. Jokes, Jack? “Did you blow up headquarters?”

Jack’s eyes widened at that, in fear and shock, and he swallowed heavily. He glanced over, blue eyes meeting McCree’s currently hateful brown. “It-” he cleared his throat. “It’s complicated.”

“Well, then fucking explain it, Jack. I know I’m pretty but that don’t make me an idiot.”

The soldier couldn’t manage a laugh at that. The meds definitely saved his life right then as he relived the most painful day he’d ever had the misfortune of living through.

“I was pulling a bit of a late shift.” his voice was soft and a little hoarse, and not helped along by the steel pressing into his gullet. “Frustrated. Decided to blow off some steam at the firing range. Halfway there I saw G-” his voice cracked and he cleared it, pulling a face but forcing himself to continue with the story.

“Gabriel. Kneeling over a bomb. I p- I-” one of his hands shook slightly. His sidearm hand. “I shot him. I had to. He- I didn’t want to believe it, but he was right there. Countdown was already started.” Jack sighed, swallowing to loosen his tightly-clenched throat and letting his eyes slide shut. Tears slipped out as he did. “I went to disarm it. I knew - it looked like the standard Blackwatch setup. I knew it couldn’t be, that would be too easy.”

“Double-bluff,” McCree guessed angrily, and Jack nodded.

“Yeah. I cut the wire, timer starts dropping. Barely had enough time to get around a corner. Hardly survived it.” He sighed slowly, forcing his eyes open and looking over to the cowboy’s glare. “You didn’t know? You really didn’t?” He’d thought it had been all of Blackwatch. Maybe, though, it had only ever been Reyes.

It didn’t feel better to think of it that way.

McCree ground his teeth. A cigar would’ve helped. A lot of things would’ve helped. “No. Didn’t know. Not until yesterday.” He didn’t slack off his grip on the jacket, nor lower his revolver. “Gabe didn’t set the bomb, Jack.”

The soldier’s desperate expression turned cold at those words and he clenched his jaw, but McCree shook him by the front of his jacket. “Damnit Jack, gimme a little fucking credit, wouldja? I’m a lot of things but I ain’t a moron and I ain’t gullible. He didn’t set the bomb, he was knelt there trying to disarm it. Somebody else planted it - somebody who wanted it to be found afterward in the rubble and for Blackwatch to take the fall. Somebody who wanted us to stop poking our noses into their business. And hey, they got a bonus when it was found early and they got to play both sides against the middle.”

Jack shook his head, hot tears trickling from his eyes. He didn’t want to believe it. He wasn’t sure he could, but…

…but the bomb hadn’t been wired as a trick. He’d been so sure - Gabe had set it, so the normal disarm procedure wouldn’t be right. Gabe would’ve set it differently so that anyone who knew the bombs would detonate it if they tried to disarm.

...except it hadn’t been. Jack had seen the double-bluff coming and had cut the wires with that in mind, and it hadn’t worked - the bomb had been wired exactly standard. A completely by-the-book Blackwatch explosive.

Gabe would have done it differently. He would’ve back-wired it, crossed the cables so trying to
McCree saw it in his eyes, in his tears - defeat. Admission. He holstered his revolver with a grunt. “You and I both know Gabe would’ve been too paranoid to set a bomb anywhere it would get found. Too good to get caught out like that.”

“I-I-” Jack struggled to speak and drew a ragged breath. “I didn’t-”

Jesse let out a slow sigh through his teeth. “You saw. You acted. I mighta done the same, tough to tell.” Or I mighta held off for a second and tried to nail things down first. Everything was easier in hindsight. Easier still when you weren’t even involved in the first place.

“I shot my friend in the back, Jesse!” His voice cracked and he pressed his hands to his face, starting to sob. “A man I lo- I sh-I shot-”

As the old soldier gave over entirely to weeping, McCree clenched his jaw and then laid an arm around his shoulders. “It’s done. Ain’t an ocean’s worth of tears gonna help anymore, Jack, but let ‘em out. It’s done, it’s all done.”

...except it wasn’t. Even with his thoughts darkly muddled, shadows blurring the lines between fear and reality, Jack knew that. It wasn’t over… because Gabe was still out there.

The only question was what would come of it.

He shouldn’t have been surprised that there might be a few swings while the meds were getting ironed out. It was still a lot better than it had been, huge improvements, but nothing gets fixed overnight.

The bar still didn’t care. If the two of them fought, if they cried, if they shouted - as long as the liquor kept flowing, everyone there was interested only in that.

---

Winston sighed as he got back into his office at Apeldoorn. Office, quarters - he worked through the night often enough that it was really best for the two to be one, at least for him.

“Athena?”

“Yes, Winston?”

His eyes flicked toward the closed door. Nobody else could hear them here. “Would you mind telling me what the term ‘Plausible Deniability’ means to you?”

There was a brief pause. The sort that happened when Athena was fetching a piece of data she didn’t have readily available. Or the sort that happened when she was thinking.

“It is a defence tactic of sorts. Typified by a person taking it upon themselves to undergo actions which might be considered equally disagreeable and vital to a venture, in order to spare others from responsibility for those actions - often employers or superiors.”
He waited, but no more explanation followed and he rolled his eyes slightly. “...and do you think it applies in any way to the recent Gibraltar situation?”

“I do not know, Winston,” she hummed gently. “Of course, were it to, one could hardly comment on the fact. There is perhaps a relevant reference in the term ‘Catch-22’: a person undergoing such actions could not confess, lest they despoil what they undertook.” A soft synthetic hum interspersed the words, her indication of a smile. “Of course, that does not apply to myself. Merely a theoretical observation.”

“Yeah,” Winston sighed heavily, dragging a hand over his face. “That’s about what I thought.” He shook his head and jumped up, swinging over a bar to the hammock he’d mounted in the upper corner of the room. Perfect for naps.

There wasn’t much else to say about it. Either Talon had been given Gibraltar, or they hadn’t - Sombra could have forced her way in anyway, Winston had no doubt about that. Even if he’d ever doubted it, he wouldn’t after meeting the woman in person.

Either Athena had given the codes - and probably gained something in return, at least - or she hadn’t. At the end of the day, it probably didn’t make a difference.

Winston sighed heavily. It didn’t matter whether she had or hadn’t given away the codes, not really, not from an endpoint view of things. There was something more important, though - not what they might or might not have given, but what they’d regained.

“Well done, with all your work helping to secure Tracer.” Winston looked over to one off the cameras and nodded. “Thank you.”

“Thank you as well, Winston. It is good to know that my efforts are appreciated.”

---

Fareeha sighed as she swung the door shut - not her door, but Angela’s. The doctor in question sat a few feet distant on the edge of the bed; she’d come along to wave the others off, and then had come right back. Fareeha wasn’t a huge fan of the look on her face - distant and focused, but not with the hopeful determination that spoke of trying to fix a problem. No, this was a face of a woman dwelling on all the bad things.

“Hey,” she walked over and sat next to Angie, nudging her shoulder. “What’s up?”

“Oh, it’s noth-” Angela cut herself off with a sigh. “It’s not nothing. I wish it was. I... I am glad that I could help Morrison, but-”

“But that doesn’t mean you’re okay with the rest of it,” Fareeha finished for her and Angela nodded sadly. The soldier wrapped her up in her arms and Angela slumped over a bit, smiling sadly as Fari rubbed at her arms and shoulders. “I... can’t even imagine how much that must have hurt you. It was rough for me, and I’m basically a bitch.”

Angela let out a shocked laugh and pulled her head back to meet Fari’s eyes. “What!”

Fareeha chuckled, grinning. “Ah, I just said that to snap you out of it - but I know I can be a little hard at some times. A little cold.”
“Yes, but in behind that,” Angela shook her head in protest, stroking a hand gently at Fari’s chest, over her heart. “You have so much care, so much compassion.”

Fareeha’s hand joined hers, holding it still over her beating heart as she smiled. “I know I do, but in comparison to you? I’ve got nothing.”

Angela’s eyes drifted off to the side as she shrugged a shoulder. “There is leading evidence to suggest that those who suppress their emotions more, actually feel them all the more strongly - that their intensity is too great to let the feelings out fully, so they must hold them back. By those lines, you would be more compassionate than me, by perhaps seeming less so.”

For a moment, Fareeha just grinned back at her, shaking her head slightly. She’d dated competitive people before, but never ones who fought to insist that she was better. She’d never raced Ennis and then had to prove that she’d lost; she’d never gone out lifting weights with Peri and had to defend herself against accusations that she’d lifted more.

“Maybe,” Fareeha chuckled, giving Angie a gentle kiss on the cheekbone. “My point is, I’m here for you. I know the world can seem pretty bleak sometimes.”

Angela offered her a grateful smile, raising a hand to stroke a finger softly down her dark cheek. “Thank you. Really, thank you.” She sighed and leaned forward, turning around to lay back against Fari’s chest and tugging the soldier’s strong arms around herself like a scarf. “It’s- it’s not so bad when it is the world that is bleak, really. Perhaps I’m growing numb to it, or simply admitting that it might always be the case, but…”

She sighed, looking over to the door. It was different when it was so close to home. Sometimes right and wrong were so simple, but other times she couldn’t get a hold on it. Triage was an important thing, and in a medical sense, she didn’t have an issue with it. Or at least, she didn’t feel she did - some other doctors had disagreed, though, and said that she tried too hard to save things that should have been written off.

She knew that. She even knew that they were often right - but not always. That was what she held on to: yes, she might spend hours trying to save a limb only to need to amputate in the end, she might do that nine times out of ten, but that tenth time? The time she managed to save a limb which might otherwise have been discarded? That made the other nine worth it - as long as nobody else had to suffer in those nine cases for her dedicating herself to the pursuit, as long as there were no patients going unattended to.

Nobody else needing to suffer, save for her, of course. She didn’t mind taking it upon her own shoulders - even if they were sore and tired.

Fari’s fingers started to work at the shoulders in question, drawing a soft groan from Angela’s nose as she let herself settle back even further. “Whatever I did to deserve you,” she murmured with a silly grin, “it was clearly something very good.”

Fareeha laughed, tipping forward to kiss her on the forehead. “I think the list’s a little longer than just one thing, Angie. Really, though, I think you did a lot of good stuff here.” She sighed and shrugged thoughtfully. “As fun as it was to punch Jack in the face, he’s probably better off without it in the long run.”

Angela giggled through her nose, sneaking a glance up at Fari’s grinning lips as she continued to relax back into the massage. “I know - that was good, I only feel like I should have caught it earlier…”
She shook her head, muscles tensing again as her thoughts flicked back to the meeting, the dropships. Amélie Lacroix, Widowmaker, Gérard, the Biotic Rifle, Satya crouched down happily within her confinement field.

“You think I can’t feel that?” Fareeha raised an eyebrow as obvious knots of tension rose in the muscles underneath her fingertips, and she grinned at Angie’s sheepish giggle. “If you think you can hide anything from me, you obviously haven’t talked to anyone around base - now come on, spill. You know you couldn’t have seen this coming earlier. So what’s up?”

She shuffled back, pulling her legs up - but letting her booted feet hang off of the bed’s edge - and tugging Angie back against her. The doctor went happily, lying alongside and laying her head on Fari’s shoulder.

Angela didn’t speak at first, she took a moment to enjoy the cuddles and also to softly berate herself. She tried not to, too much, but every now and then she gave into the temptation of self-deprecation.

“I know I could not have detected Jack’s problems any earlier, but - well, that was my fault as well. A result of my detachment, of me staying so distant while the remainder of the team reformed.” Angela shook her head softly, and Fareeha followed suit.

“You know that’s not true,” she urged quietly. “He left, he was gone and everybody thought he was dead. As well as Mam. You couldn’t possibly have helped him - even if you had answered the Recall immediately, he didn’t. Maybe you would have had another few months, but do you really think you would have noticed anything and looked that deep into it?” She paused for a second, stroking her hand idly up and down Angie’s side. “If there was anything to see beforehand, Winston or Athena would have contacted you.”

Angela knew she couldn’t debate that point. At least, not effectively. However, she also knew - and suspected that Fareeha knew, as well - that it wasn’t really her problem. Or at least, not all of it.

“When we went to retrieve Tracer…” Angela murmured softly, hesitantly. “Widowmaker was there.”

Fareeha didn’t react immediately. She didn’t know what that really had to do with anything. “Okay,” she prompted, squeezing Angie a little tighter. “I’m not sure how that’s related, though - mind explaining?”

“I just-” Zeigler huffed a sigh, shaking her head. “I knew her, back before she was taken - we were friends, and… and then she was kidnapped, and when we got her back, I was one of the medical team who inspected her. I didn’t notice anything then, I didn’t notice anything with Jack, I-” she shook her head roughly, pushing further back into Fari’s shoulder and her embrace. “How many times am I going to miss things only to have them blow up? Who will be next - your mother, maybe? Winston?”

You? She shoved that thought quickly away as it made her gut lurch.

Fareeha rolled onto her side and pulled the doctor into a tight hug. “You can’t hold yourself accountable for all of that, and you know you can’t - and I know you know you can’t.”

There had been a time where it might have been frustrating to deal with this kind of thing, and it wasn’t exactly without its frustrations now, but time had taught her a lot - and time with Angela, doubly so. Fareeha wasn’t exactly on a first-name basis with anxiety, herself, but Angie seemed to get it plenty and the soldier had needed to learn how to deal with it.
She hugged the doctor a little tighter. “It’s okay, though, if that fact’s slipped your mind for the moment. Even if it doesn’t seem like it to you, I remember it. You catch so much, it’s okay that occasionally one thing slips through, and you shouldn’t hold it against yourself.”

Angela wrapped her arms behind Fari’s back, palms flat against her shoulderblades to pull herself in and press her face against the soldier’s shoulder and chest. She let out a heavy breath before softening her embrace, running her hands smoothly up and down Fari’s back as she lifted her head to kiss gently at dark lips.

She smiled, meeting Fari’s eyes gratefully. “Thank you. I do know that, you’re right, it’s just easy to forget when things go poorly.”

“Things didn’t go poorly,” Fareeha insisted softly with a chuckle and a grin. “Not overall, at least. Nobody died.”

“I think Satya might disagree about things not going well.” Angela shrugged and Fareeha sighed.

“Oh, fair, she wasn’t happy in the middle there and that sucks. But, at the end, she did seem pretty happy. Happy with you, if you know what I mean - I might get jealous at this rate.” She nudged Angie and grinned at the soft blush that rose to her cheeks.

“Oh, I- I really don’t think that that’s-” Angela stammered slightly, “I mean, it really isn’t-”

“Angie,” Fareeha chuckled, “relax, I was just teasing you. I know you wouldn’t hurt me, I’ve got no reason to be jealous and I’m not. Still, though, honestly, Satya didn’t seem too torn-up in the long run, overall. Probably not a fan of Jack, but, y’know,” she let out another chuckle, “she can probably join the club there.”

Fareeha liked him well enough, a combination of nostalgia and current experience, but he wasn’t her favourite from her mother’s old compatriots. In fact, he was probably toward the bottom - but that was far more to do with how much she liked the rest of them, and not because he was bad. Reinhardt obviously rose to the top, and she’d always been a fan of Gabriel as well. At least, back when he’d been Gabriel - he would joke and play with her when she was a girl, but Jack always… well, he was a little awkward about it.

It had been a shame, too, because when he got over it and opened up, he’d been really good at it. She did have fond memories of playing with him too, and learning from him - and he had the upside of being around still, and having at least some vaguely positive tendencies.

Gabriel, on the other hand, well…

“You said you knew Widowmaker beforehand?” Fareeha asked the question without really intending to, the words slipping out as her mind wandered, but as she did she watched Angela’s face for any worrying indications. There didn’t seem to be any, though, as the doctor looked back to her curiously. “Who was she? If you don’t mind me asking.”

Angela frowned slightly. “Your mother didn’t tell you? I thought- hmm. It probably slipped her mind,” she shrugged, although she couldn’t see how that could be the case. This certainly wasn’t her favourite topic of conversation, but it was remarkable how much being held by a loved one could calm her. With Fari’s arms around her, she could weather any storm.

“She was married to one of Overwatch’s operatives,” Angela explained. “A man by the name of Gérard Lacroix - her name w-”

“Amélie.” Fareeha swallowed heavily, meeting Angie’s eyes.
“Yes,” Angela nodded, confused. “So you did know?”

“I… I didn’t know she was Widowmaker, no.” Fareeha shook her head softly, eyes shifting a little bit distant. “I knew Amélie, though - she used to come to the house sometimes. I went to a few of their anniversaries, too, it-” she cut herself off, shaking her head again.

The memories were a little dimmed by time and experience, but the woman had been fairly fascinating as a girl. Even though young Fareeha had had no intention of being a dancer, she couldn’t help but be captivated by the ballerina’s grace. “I had no idea. What happened?”

Angela shrugged uneasily. “I don’t know, exactly. She was captured, by Talon. Some time later she was recovered with seemingly no adverse effects, and… then, in the middle of the night, she disappeared. At first we thought Talon had retrieved her - Gérard was found dead in his bed - but…”

“She killed him?” Fareeha stared blankly in shock. “I- they always seemed so happy!”

“They were,” Angela insisted. “Talon brainwashed her, turned her into Widowmaker, and now…”

“And now she’s a murderer.” Fareeha’s hands tightened a little - she knew what the sniper had done to her mother.

“As are you, my Fari.”

The soft words startled Fareeha, and she looked down to see Angela’s gentle blue eyes looking up at her - not harshly, not judging. A pale hand came up to stroke her cheek.

“You, your mother, Tracer, Jack - you all have blood on your hands. So do I. In different ways, to different levels, and different amounts, definitely, but I don’t think I like the idea of drawing lines between ‘acceptable’ killing and ‘unacceptable’ killing. I’ve killed, you’ve killed, she’s killed.”

Fareeha settled back a little, frowning softly and looking up to the ceiling again. “I… I know you don’t like those lines. I’m sorry.” Historically it had been a point of disagreement. Largely because Fareeha didn’t like the idea that, by virtue of having both caused at least one death, Angela and Reaper (for instance) were equally culpable. She knew that Angie’s problem with it was that she didn’t like the idea of any non-consensual death being acceptable.

Still, it had been a point of disagreement. She could see Angie’s side of the argument. She just didn’t agree with it - but that didn’t matter. It just meant it was something better not to talk about, or at least to be very careful around.

“Me too.” Angela pulled herself up along the bed to kiss Fari on the cheek. “It’s okay. My point was only that I don’t think it would be right to write Widowmaker off as hopeless. She was… actually quite congenial after we got over the initial stiffness.”

“You don’t think anybody’s hopeless,” Fareeha chuckled, hugging her tighter and turning her head to press a soft kiss to her lips.

Angela smiled and giggled softly through her nose. “Maybe - but what kind of angel would I be if I gave up on people, hmm?” She grinned at the laugh that drew from Fareeha, then sat a little more upright and patted at the soldier’s legs. “Let’s get those boots off so we can cuddle up properly, yes? Thank you for talking, it really has helped me a lot.”

“No problem at all.” Fareeha sat up and started loosening the laces of her combat boots. “I’m kind of fond of talking to you, you know.”
With a smile and a soft sigh, Angela settled back against the headboard and held her arms wide for Fari to snuggle into. “I have developed a suspicion of that, yes. I thought more experimentation would be required before making a ruling, however.”

Fareeha laughed as Angie squeezed her tight. “Ugh, scientists,” she shook her head with an exaggerated eyeroll. “Always experimenting!”

She settled in happily, humming a sigh as Angie started to run fingers through her hair. It was the happiest, safest place in the world right here - the distant sounds of gunshots and explosions didn’t even register. This, here, was perfectly safe, and Fareeha never wanted to leave it.

Chapter End Notes

Whew! Okay, re-reading this, I don't know why it's over 9k words. Erm... probably should've pulled some chunks out of this and integrated them into other chapters for better flow, because this one does feel a little bit neverending, heh, kinda. At least, to me.

Still, some good stuff! Several good scenes and lines that I liked, trying to use little moments to paint a bigger picture - rather than showing dozens of cuddled-up chats between Pharah and Mercy, I can show the one being so comfortable and practiced, and imply that there have been many others in order to get to that point.

...or at least, that's the theory, heh.

Anyway, here's some backstory about what I made up for Overwatch's Fall! So far as I know, it's canon compliant, but I probably don't know all the canon snippets that are out there. Oh, oh! Also - here's a little thing to explain Reaper. Because (like with Tracer) the timeline's a little wonky - sightings of the mercenary known as "The Reaper" go back for years before Overwatch fell. So... possibly that was somebody else, but presumably these sightings included the drained bodies, etc.

So, I threw in this little bit of explanation - Gabe had started "Reaper-ifying" even before the fall of HQ, but the explosion was a drastic catalyst. Before that, he presumably drained people much less frequently. All of this is, of course, up in the air to be totally shot down by Blizzard XD

Overall though, I think the Overwatch team is doing a good job with plot consistency. There are a few smudgy things with timelines that require a little fanciness or a little suspension of disbelief, but so far as I can think of off the top of my head, no real holes in the established plot. I think.

Still, I'm gonna keep trying to plaster over little patches for the things that require some fudging! Tracer and Reaper down, maybe others to come, we'll see!

Update: now the fifth-longest Overwatch fic on Ao3. Thank you all for sticking with me! As always, I'd love to hear what you think of everything! Thanks folks, bye!

Come on back next time when Widdy drops by to say "I'm sorry". At least, that's what she drops by for - what actually happens does end up being somewhat different from that. She's not the only one with a visit to make, either; Reaper's going to pay a visit to a
little *amiga*...
Mes Apologies

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Emily has an appointment and returns to a bit of a surprise. Widowmaker, visiting with the intention of making some amends for what she sees as shortcomings. A jumble of emotions and confusion on various parts make it a less-than-smooth process, but it does resolve - for lack of a better word - well. Elsewhere, Reaper has an inquiry of his own and only one person who's likely to be able to help: Sombra.

JFL Summary: Widowmaker gets confused by emotions, but she ends up pink - even if Tracer and Emily aren't huge fans of it. Tracer breathes. Emily has a fun little device hidden away somewhere. Reaper has some questions for Sombra, and he thinks they'll probably be worth the annoyances that he'll undergo in the process. He is mistaken.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Reaper met with McCree at the cowboy's request, but the meeting most certainly did not go how McCree expected. Or hoped. However, he did - maybe - find an answer or two. Even some he trusted, after corroboration: Jack shot Gabriel on the night Overwatch HQ exploded, because he thought Gabe was planting a bomb. Reaper, however, said that he was trying to disarm it, and McCree - and, after a moment's convincing, Jack too - comes to believe him. Of course, Reaper doesn't know, and wouldn't trust it if they told him. The group rejoiced in Tracer's return and she thanked them all, spending a moment decompressing before heading home. An official debrief was planned but other events intervened to prevent it from being immediate. Emily was very happy to see Tracer home, and sent Sombra a thank-you message about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Finally having a night to sleep in her own bed - instead of clamped into a metal chair in an enemy base - was, expectedly, wonderful.

The nightmares, less so.

They were worse than they’d been in a long time. Probably hadn’t been this bad since last time the accelerator had broken, that little run-in with Doomfist (or Doomy McDoomface the Third, as Tracer called him with a forced snicker in a usually-failed attempt to keep the fear at bay).

After the third time waking up in a cold sweat to flashing alarms and screeching engines, Tracer
decided that this wasn’t the night to push sleep and she just laid there awake.

That was wonderful too, though. Laying there on her back with Emily’s head on her shoulder, drooling lightly as she stroked at her red hair. She didn’t need sleep, anyway. She needed this. Home. That was the important part.

She always worried, coming home - worried that Em would be mad, or would be angry, or would be scared. She always found herself steeling her heart against the backlash but it was never there. Emily always said she was a worrier, and she was right to say so.

Tracer drifted off with a smile, into a sleep that wouldn’t be broken by anything until the sun came up. Her dreams never faded into nightmares, never got ripped open by jet engines and sparks and pain; she dreamt of sandy beaches and searching for coconuts which kept running away from her, scurrying along the sand on a dozen tiny little legs.

She woke up when Emily did, but it was already bright out.

“Go on back to sleep, love,” Em stroked at her cheek with a smile and gave her a kiss on the forehead. “I’ll be back in a bit. Just that doctor’s appointment.”

“Oh, right,” Lena murmured, rubbing at her eyes and catching Emily’s hand for a moment to give it a kiss. “G’luck on your tests and stuff. Err, good luck. Y’know.”

Emily laughed brightly at the mumbled and jumbled well-wishes. Lena had never been much of a morning person, regardless of when her morning happened to be on the clock. “Of course. It’ll be grand, I’m sure - now you get back to sleep and rest well, yeah? We’ll go out for lunch when I get back.”

“You’ve got it,” Tracer sighed, stretching and shuffling closer to the edge of the bed, grin growing as Em stroked a fingertip along her chin and then across her lips. She kissed at it reflexively and giggled as it lifted away to tap at her nose.

Emily’s heart fluttered with how Lena looked up at her as she opened her eyes. Yes, she worried too much - and maybe she made Emily worry a little too much, sometimes, but she knew that she wouldn’t change it for the world. The light was so much more than worth the darkness. “See you, love. Sleep well.” Emily stepped quickly over to the curtains and tugged them shut.

“Mm, see ya,” Lena waved a little, “night.” Only when Emily was gone and she heard the front door shut did she roll over and let herself go back to sleep.

---

Emily wore a faint smile as she stepped out of the elevator and made her way back to the apartment. The doctor’s appointment had gone well, as expected, and she’d picked out a good place to go for lunch. It was shaping up to be a beautiful day.

She pushed the door to the apartment open and it locked automatically behind her as she headed back toward the bedroom, dropping her satchel unceremoniously on the couch. She could have called out, but it was better to wake somebody up with kisses. Or tickles. All depending on how devious she felt.
When she rounded the corner into the bedroom, though, she got a bit of a surprise, but not an unpleasant one - there, facing away from her, was Widowmaker. Armour on, rifle slung across her back, unmoving and staring at the bed.

“So peaceful.” The words were soft enough that they could almost have been solely Emily’s imagination, but Widdy’s hand pulled away from her side just a bit - stretched backward, open, gently beseeching, and Emily stepped forward and took it. The cold hand immediately squeezed at hers, and she wrapped an arm around Widowmaker’s waist.

“Thank you,” Emily whispered against her neck. “For keeping her safe. For bringing her back.”

Widowmaker didn’t respond except for to shake her head. She hadn’t done as much as she could have - as she should have. Tracer’s catatonic state when she was first captured, her ragged wrists after her internment; those didn’t exactly weigh heavily on Widowmaker’s conscience, but they were present in her mind at least. She didn’t like them.

“I should have done more.” The assassin shook her head, words still soft. “I failed.”

Emily’s nose brushed against her skin as she shook her head. “No. No you didn’t - she’s safe and she’s happy now.” She could tell that her words weren’t really sinking in, it wasn’t hard to see when that was happening, and she laid her head down on Widdy’s shoulder and just watched Lena lying in bed for a second.

She snored softly, her mouth wide open and facing the ceiling. Impossibly cute all tangled up in the sheets with one hand loosely curled near her forehead.

“I was going to just wake her up,” Emily admitted, “but I think I’d rather get back in for a minute at least. Would you like to join us? I think she’d love the surprise.”

Widowmaker’s jaw clenched as she stared, frowning slightly. Tracer had tried to hide her injuries - to stop her from feeling guilty? Perhaps. Or simply to avoid showing a weakness. Regardless, Widowmaker didn’t think she deserved the warmth at that moment - she hadn’t failed catastrophically, but she’d failed.

However, if her mouse was going to love it…

Her wrists were healed now. Maybe her mind was not, but she slept - and calmly, too. Widowmaker knew that this wasn’t the time to stand on principle. Apologies never were.

“Do you really think so?” Her query was quiet, almost no breath at all fueling it.

“I know she will,” Emily nodded certainly. “It’s all my devious plan anyway, so even if things go wrong, I’ll take the heat for it.”

A hint of a laugh drifted from Widowmaker’s nose as she pulled away, lamenting the loss of warmth from Emily at her side - but there would be more, soon. She held out a finger and narrowed her eyes over a smirk as she unslung her rifle and set it gently down against the wall. “I will hold you to that, chérie, in the event that the situation deteriorates.”

Emily grinned, nodding happily and shucking off her clothes. Normally she was more careful with them, but Lena tossed hers all around anyway and it hardly mattered. Emily balled up her things and threw them over toward the wall - by the time she was done, Widowmaker was finished as well and standing bare beside the bed. Even though she’d had all of her armour to contend with, and Emily had only had a shirt and a skirt and some undies.
“One each side, I think,” Emily whispered, grabbing Widdy’s hand and tugging her toward the bed.

The frenchwoman nodded and stepped around to the far side, waiting for Emily to pick up the sheets first. She followed suit, lifting them enough to slip in, but just barely. They each faced Tracer, slipping an arm behind her back and wrapping another over her belly - Emily grinned to her from the other side, and Widowmaker smiled softly back as the redhead closed her eyes and laid her head down.

For a few moments, Tracer shifted and made some noises, sounding like she might wake up. In that soft space between consciousness and sleep.

Widowmaker held herself intensely still but it seemed to make no difference - her eyes caught on the way Emily’s head rose and fell gently with Tracer’s breaths, the way she fit in so perfectly with Lena’s slim body.

It was worth a try.

Slowly, Widowmaker let her head drop toward Tracer’s shoulder. It nestled into the curve there, supported and cradled, and she smiled softly at that. It was so warm here, underneath the covers - skin on skin being so much more effective at transferring the heat. Her arm against the mattress ran underneath them both - Tracer and Emily as well - and Widowmaker curled that hand a little to press it flat against the redhead’s back.

She let out a slow breath, a gentle smile taking her lips.

“Sheets,” she whispered, and heard a soft laugh from Emily. Opening her eyes, she saw the redhead looking back - and saw in her eyes that Emily knew.

It had nothing to do with the sheets.

It was confusing, and she would have even called it worrying. She might have even said terrifying, if she could feel terror anymore.

It was also wonderful.

For several minutes, they laid like that, and Widowmaker didn’t think about anything else. She didn’t plan out routes of escape, she didn’t think about sightlines - she knew she should, she knew that of all days, today, she should. Today after she’d already let them get captured. Today after she’d already caused so many problems. Today of all days she should be standing sentinel, rifle drawn, ready to end any threats - she should be the shield, the sword, not… this.

She couldn’t bring herself to, though. She didn’t want to spoil this moment with it - it was too pure, too good, to be ruined by all of those thoughts. What was the point of cultivating a safe space if you didn’t trust it?

Widowmaker trusted this. She trusted little, but this, she did - she’d checked it all over, everything nearby, and there was no risk here in the apartment. She trusted that.

Even if something were to happen, they would deal with it when it did. No point devoting herself to worry when there were such better things quite literally at hand.

So, for several minutes - the first such moments in a long time - Widowmaker didn’t think about anything tactical, she didn’t consider any risks or anything of the sort. She thought only about how soft the light hairs were along Emily’s spine, and how good it felt to run her fingertips up and down. She thought about how Tracer’s breathing moved her head, how her heartbeat sounded - so rapid, so
fast, so vital and so beautiful.

She focused on the warmth of the pair of them, sinking deep into her core; soaking through her skin and her flesh and permeating her, and maybe, just maybe one day, she would have it right through her. She thought about how good the sheets felt, the pillows, the bed. The other two.

She didn’t even let herself dwell on the past few days, save for the positives. The fun exchange, flitting around on the rooftops. She owed Tracer a cinnamon bun - but that was a thought for later.

For now, she simply existed. She laid there and held the other two and was held in turn, and let it all seep into her slowly. Conscious thought stopped, replaced with a placid sort of content blankness.

“Mmm,” Tracer groaned and readjusted, then chuckled softly. “Well this is a nice surprise. M’not dreaming, am I loves?” Her arms shifted to wrap around Emily’s shoulders, and Widowmaker’s as well.

“Dreaming awake, maybe,” Emily giggled softly, kissing Lena on the chin and grinning to Widowmaker. “Wouldn’t you say, cherie?”

“It is the only way I know of,” Widowmaker admitted softly with a chuckle.

“Well, it’s-” Tracer yawned, shuffling to settle deeper into the pillows and the mattress, “it’s bloody bonkers brilliant is what it is. Thanks, loves.” She sighed, pulling them in close - warm on one side and cool on the other, and that felt absolutely perfect.

“Ma souris…” Widowmaker looked down at the hand curled around her side, healthy pink skin against pale blue. She slipped her own hand to it, interlacing their fingers - pulling up slightly and revealing Tracer’s wrist. It was fine now, perfect, of course. No signs of wounds or ills, but she could still see them in her mind. Raw, red skin, seeping blood…

She wanted to be more unsettled than she was, she realized, but that was such an odd thing to want.

“Your capture…” she shook her head, looking still down to Tracer’s hand rather than up at her face. “I apologize. The captivity - your wrists, I did not know, I-”

She stopped talking when Tracer pulled her in a little tighter, rolling her inward on the bed with a sigh. “I know, love. I know you didn’t, it’s- really, it’s fine now. Maybe not perfect, but… honestly? This kinda is, so-”

“It should not be,” Widowmaker interrupted. She pushed herself back a bit - Tracer’s arm held fast around her back, but she craned her neck enough to be able to meet the woman’s brown eyes at least. “Cherie, I- you do not understand.” Her gaze flicked to another pair of eyes then, hazel and supportive.

Being here, she gained so much and risked so little, but to speak? She would be risking much. Perhaps everything.

Was there even any reward?

She didn’t feel bad. Not really. She wouldn’t, even, if things went wrong. Not really.

You couldn’t really feel bad until you could really feel good.

So there was no risk. Perhaps no reward, unless she believed that foolishness that honesty was its own reward - and she certainly did not believe that.
Yet, still, she spoke.

“I am not… sorry.” Widowmaker frowned, her eyes unfocusing - drifting away from Tracer’s face and failing to take in its expression. “Not truly, not- not the way you might be. It was a lamentable turn of events, I am neither pleased with nor proud of it, but… I am not sorry.” She shook her head, whispering now. “And I should be. Alors, I should leave. Adieu.”

Multiple hands refused to let her. Warm fingers, an arm around her back and a hand at her elbow, not constricting her exactly. The grips weren’t hostile, but they were firm.

“Sounds like you’re sorry to me, love,” Tracer frowned, shaking her head. “It wasn’t you, okay? You were-” she laughed slightly, “you were the only thing that got me through it. Knowing you were there, somewhere - knowing I was safe.”

“But you are not, cherie!” Widowmaker snapped, brushing off their hands and recoiling to the edge of the bed. Neither of them moved to follow, which was for the best. “You are not safe around me. No person is. It is not possible.”

“Yeah, well,” Tracer huffed at the sudden shift, crossing her arms over her chest. “Neither am I! So there!”

Widowmaker frowned. “What?”

Tracer winced slightly. “Err, possible. I’m not- with the time stuff, I’m not really possible, that’s what I was um, trying to, y’know,” she foundered slightly, glancing over to Emily for aid.

Emily sighed a chuckle and leaned forward, tipping her forehead against Lena’s shoulder, looking to Widdy’s eyes. “I don’t think any of us ever thought this would be normal, so-”

“What if I am ordered to kill her, hmm?” Widowmaker frowned, locking eyes with Emily. She was unwilling to let this point go so easily, not when it could pose such a great threat to them. “Or yourself. It could happen. There are directives I cannot deny-” her gaze flicked up to Tracer’s frowning face, “I know you have seen this, souris. You know the truth of what I say.”

Tracer’s lips parted, but she didn’t have any words to put through them. There weren’t any words, because Widowmaker was right - of course, as she usually was. Tracer’d seen with her own eyes, and she didn’t know what would come on the day that she was finally the target, rather than a distraction.

...she knew what had happened to all of the other targets, though.

“...and?” Emily’s soft query drew both of their gazes. She raised an eyebrow and laughed lightly, petting at Lena’s shoulder. “Now, no offence meant when I say this here love, but… how’s that different from the past, hmm? A year ago when you two were just fighting, what would have happened if you’d been ordered to kill her? Or me?”

Widowmaker frowned. “I would have killed her. Or you.”

“...and now? What would happen now?”

She didn’t like that question. She didn’t want to think about it - which didn’t make sense. It was a jagged thought, not painful per se but uncomfortable and rough, and she didn’t like it, but she knew the answer. There could be only one answer.

Yet, still, she hesitated. “I- I would try everything I could to avoid it, but-” she sighed. “I would kill.”
“Well, that sounds better, doesn’t it?”

Widowmaker’s eyes flew to Emily’s, narrowed, shaking her head in disbelief. “How can you say such a thing, cherie? I would kill her. I would not shed a tear - I do not for my husband and I would not for her, nor for you. I would not feel sorry.”

Emily shrugged softly. “You were just saying you’d try to avoid it. That’s better, isn’t it?”

“It is different.”

There was silence for a while, but Widowmaker didn’t elaborate. Tracer didn’t speak out of mostly shock, and Emily was largely waiting to see if anything else would come of it.

Nothing did.

“Okay,” Emily eventually conceded, “it’s different, then. I won’t tell you anything about what you do or don’t feel - but I will say this. If you’re here, or not here, you could get ordered to attack her. Kill her. Or me. So what difference does that make? If it’ll happen either way, then why leave?”

“I should be sorry.” Widowmaker shook her head, fully aware that she sounded like a broken record and knowing exactly why, as well. Still she felt an onus to explain, to make them understand - she’d failed and they were at risk for it. “I am not. I am not sorry. That is wrong.”

Widowmaker looked between them, meeting their gazes and holding them - hoping, somehow, that she could garner or implant some truth through the looks. “You should not feel safe around someone who does not even care…” she trailed off in a frown, swallowing, and tried again. “Who does not…” she sighed.

Tracer shifted a little bit closer on the bed. “No offence, but I think this might be the first time I ever win an argument with you, love. Because it sounds to me like you do care. You can’t even say that you don’t.”

A little bit of ice shot through her veins as Widowmaker’s eyes flashed to meet hers, angrily narrowed. “I do not care about you, you foolish girl,” the sniper spat - but then her face wrenched up like she’d just downed a shot of something incredibly bitter. “Baiser,” she whispered, dropping her head into her hands.

Emily and Tracer went to her, and she didn’t stop them this time, nor recoil away. They rubbed warm hands at her back as she laid her arms across her knees and hid her face, and the whole while she knew that they were there to comfort Tracer.

She’d stolen their warmth and she’d stolen their safety, and their closeness, and now she was stealing their comfort.

“It is not… right.” She tried again to put it into words, but had no confidence in her own ability to do so. Not when she had failed so consistently, and it should have been nothing more than infuriating - to fail - and it was infuriating, but there was something else below it that spurred her on to keep trying despite that. “This, is not right.”

“Feels right to me, love,” Emily whispered hoarsely, leaning forward to lay her cheek down against one of Widdy’s shoulderblades.

“Agreed,” Lena stroked at her back and kissed the back of her head, other hand running up and down Em’s side. Little comforting touches, that they were there. For each other.
“I came-” Widowmaker laughed slightly. “I came here to apologize and all I have succeeded in doing is taking over the situation. This was meant to be comfort for you, souris. I cannot even do this correctly.”

“Apologizing’s not that hard,” Tracer shrugged, “pretty easy thing to say - but really, it’s not-”

“And if I do not mean the words? What then, hmm?” Widowmaker shook her head. “I am not sorry and it would be a lie to say I am.”

“Widdy-” Tracer started, but Widowmaker cut her off with a chuckle.

“I remain unconvinced on that nickname.”

“I know!” Tracer laughed briefly, shaking her head. She rested her chin on the back of Widdy’s shoulder, her words coming out a little muted for the way it infringed on her jaw but she didn’t care. One hand stretched to interlace pink fingers with blue. “I’ve heard about a million empty apologies in my life. This wasn’t one of them.”

Widowmaker shook her head softly, incredulous at the sheer tenacity of her foolishness. It seemed like there was nothing that could open her eyes to the truths of the world. “I never even said the words, cherie. I never said I was sorry - I said explicitly that I was not because I am not. I feel no guilt. I feel no true remorse, not even now, and I should.”

“Love, you feel nothing.”

At that, her head shot up - because while Emily had admitted it before, Tracer never had, and she hadn’t seemed to really understand. Brown eyes glistened back at her in concern now, a gentle frown on lips that should only ever be smiling.

“Not hardly,” Tracer shrugged one shoulder, frown shifting to an almost uncertain soft smile. “I mean… I’ve asked you what you’re feeling a bunch of times. You always give the same answers. Warmth. Pressure. Weight. Physical sensations, but you never talk about happiness, you never-” she took a deep breath and sighed it out, the frown returning as her brows drew inward and a hand raised to stroke at Widowmaker’s cheek. “It’s alright. You didn’t want this kidnapping thing to happen, you wanted to avoid it.”

Widowmaker nodded.

“You tried to help, and it didn’t work out perfectly. That’s fine. So you’re not…” she pulled her hand away for a set of air-quotes, “sorry, or whatever, sure. But you’re something, and I don’t care what that something’s called. Whether it’s a thought or a feeling or whatever - it’s yours, and it’s for me, and that’s good enough for me.”

With a sigh, Widowmaker turned away to face Emily - Emily, whose freckled cheeks were streaming with tears as she stared in open awe at Lena’s face. The redhead caught her eyes, smiled and nodded her assent, her agreement with the sentiment. Widowmaker sighed again. “You are both hopeless.”

“Yup,” Emily whispered and Lena giggled softly. “Absolutely hopeless, love - join the club, eh?”

The tension left Widowmaker’s shoulders as the other two leaned forward, wrapping her up in their arms, yet still she frowned. It still didn’t feel right - not this, rather, this felt wonderful, but the overall situation didn’t. Her, here, generally; taking so much. Yet, it felt wrong to feel wrong about that. Not bad, but wrong.
She couldn’t feel guilty, because she was her. However, she knew that a normal person - a real person - would feel guilt. She was simply different from that, but then in that case she should not be here. A person who could be here should be feeling guilt. She knew even that she should be feeling guilty about her lack of guilt, yet still she didn’t; she shouldn’t be here.

At the same time, she certainly could not be anywhere else. She had tried to leave, she had, and… what had come of it?

She was hopeless.

It was oddly pleasant to admit that to herself. She laughed.

“I am… whatever I am, about the incident, cherie.” Widowmaker sighed softly as they parted and she stroked at each of their cheeks in turn. “It should not have happened. I handled everything poorly, and–”

“I think you handled everything great,” Tracer countered, shaking her head and standing. “And I refuse to sit here and listen to somebody insult one of my favourite birds like that - c’mon, I’m hungry. Let’s go grab lunch, yeah?”

“Oh, I saw a great cafe on the way home!” Emily clapped, but Widowmaker was laughing and shaking her head.

“Lunch? I can not go out, mes cheries,” she giggled, waving a blue hand over her nude blue self, “look at me.”

They did, quite intently, and got distracted for a moment - but she liked that. She let it dwell for a few seconds before raising an eyebrow and grinning. “Salut? Are you both still in there?”

“I was breathing!” Tracer protested automatically before realizing that that hadn’t been the operative claim this time, and blushed as she stepped over to the closet to grab some clothes.

“I’ve got something that’ll help with that, Widdy,” Emily patted her on the shoulder and jumped out of the bed, jogging off toward the bathroom.

“I remain unconvinced on that nickname!” Widowmaker called after her. “And I would have nothing to wear, regardless! A naked woman draws eyes in any colour, cerise!”

Emily’s high, bright laugh carried in from the other room amidst the sound of clattering. “Trust me, I know it love - but go on, we’re not that dissimilar in size! Sure I’ve got a dress or two you’d enjoy!”

“Oh, ooh!” Lena jumped excitedly. “Ooh, the green one - with the lace, that we got last fall? That one, yeah!”

“Love,” Emily shot her a smirk as she re-entered the room, holding a small spherical machine in her hands, “that’s a nightie, not strictly speaking a dress.”

Lena turned back to the closet with a shrug, pulling a t-shirt out of a drawer and tugging it over herself as she muttered. “Well I still think it’d look bloody brilliant…”

Emily chuckled and shook her head as she came over to Widdy again, who watched curiously as she tugged at the sphere. It came apart into two halves and lit up, and she grinned. “Was wondering if this would still work! Beautiful - you saw that painting out in the hall, but I actually worked as a model for the same thing with a marketing firm for a while. They had this handy little thing here, lays down sort of an even flesh-toned primer layer almost. Like foundation for makeup, but…”
As she explained, she waved one of the hemispheres over Widowmaker’s arm, flat side down. In the wake of the machine’s passage, her skin was no longer its normal blue hue - it wasn’t exactly normal looking, per se. There were no freckles or marks of any kind, including her tattoo, and the colour was just a little bit… artificial. It didn’t have that healthy depth that real skin had - her arm, a few seconds later, looked more like the arm of a very convincing wax sculpture than a real living limb.

However, it was something. It did look like a very convincing wax sculpture.

“...this thing does the whole body in a few minutes!” Emily grinned and held out the two hemispheres for Widowmaker to take. She did, and started to sweep them over herself, hovering the machines over her skin and letting them do whatever it was that they did as Emily went to the closet as well.

Widowmaker smiled slightly, curious and pleased with this little machine. She didn’t even pay much attention to its effects, her eyes on the devices and the glow rather than the skin they’d passed over, but it was still having its effects even if she didn’t note them.

“Whoah.” Tracer stared, open-mouthed, as she buttoned up her jeans. “That’s… different.”

With a laugh, Widowmaker stood and did a little twirl. Her hair spun out as Lena looked her over, mostly covered with pretty natural-looking skin. It looked a little off, like it had been airbrushed in real life somehow, but nothing like it had before.

Nothing like her, really.

“Honestly, I think I prefer it the other way, love,” Tracer shrugged with a little grin. Emily glanced over with a soft smile and nodded, seconding the motion.

“Well, this will have its uses, to be certain.” Widowmaker chuckled and held the little machines out for Tracer before turning around and pulling her hair off to the side. “Get my back, cherie?”

Tracer stepped closer and waved the half-orbs over the small patches of remaining blue skin, avoiding near the hairline for fear of what might happen to the hair, but it would be covered anyway. When she was finished, she hesitated for a second, eyes flicking over to Emily who was tugging on a lavender dress. “Em? This stuff alright to touch or does it need to… I dunno, dry or set or summat like that?”

Emily laughed. “No, you’re good, dear.”

With a grin, Tracer leaned forward and kissed at one of the slight bumps of Widowmaker’s vertebrae, sighing as a hand reached back into her hair and held her there. “You can lament bad things that happen,” she murmured softly against still-cold but no longer blue skin, “but please, please don’t ever lament this, alright? Us.”

Widowmaker was silent for a long time, her mind flickering to many places. Everything that had happened between the pair of them - back before the relationship started up until now, and back even further. Dinner parties and laughing with friends, Gérard’s beautiful eyes when he would say how he loved her, a life of beating hearts and a million things which were beyond her reach now. Strikes and blows and teasing and tears, shock and anger and outrage, and eventual succumbing… and perhaps, now it was her turn to give herself over.

“D’accord,” she replied softly, tipping her head forward. “I will never regret this, cherie.”

Tracer smiled, her grin threatening to overreach the bounds of her face in fact. “Good. And I’m glad you’re coming out to lunch.” She stepped back with a chuckle, pointing a finger before she spun
away to head to the bathroom and try (and surely fail) to deal with her hair. “As I recall, you still owe me a cinnamon bun!”

Widowmaker scoffed a laugh, shaking her head as she watched Tracer leave. Then, her eyes shifted to Emily, who wore a gorgeous dress and a grin. With a shrug and a smile, Widowmaker stepped forward to get some clothes for herself as well.

Maybe it was right. Maybe it wasn’t. Maybe time would tell. Maybe it wouldn’t.

She tried to recapture that earlier moment, laying down with Tracer in her arms and Emily on the other side - that perfect moment of not caring, not noticing the routes through the room or the sightlines for attacks, not worrying about the future.

It didn’t quite work, but the fact that it had happened once did comfort her somewhat. Even if she didn’t have that now, she’d had it once and she could trust that.

Besides which, Tracer had a point. She was owed a cinnamon bun.

---


Emily and Widowmaker both laughed, looking over in total disbelief. They held hands as they walked down the sidewalk - all three of them, together. Widdy in the middle held one each of Tracer and Emily’s - their outer hands - while their inners crossed over her body to clasp in the middle.

It wasn’t awkward in the slightest, though it maybe should have been.

She still felt… something, about being in the middle rather than on one of the outsides. It didn’t seem right - not today of all days, when it was Tracer who had been captured, Tracer who had been left alone with her fears, Tracer who had been trapped in her own waking nightmares.

Widowmaker frowned a little at that. She didn’t like other things having that hold on Tracer’s heart, on her mind - not like that. Emily was one thing - anything that could make Tracer smile was a good thing to be in her life, but the idea of something else scaring her… Widowmaker smirked slightly, suspecting that she was getting inklings of jealousy for the abstract concept of trauma.

Perhaps that was fitting.

It was a cute little cafe and Widowmaker smiled softly when she saw it. Exactly the sort of place that Emily would see and think of Tracer first: tiny, on the sharp corner between two streets, it had chairs and tables scattered over the sidewalk. Bright colours on the awnings announced its presence and a holographic sign depicted a sandwich dancing in a bowl of soup.

Mary’s Café. Widowmaker chuckled softly, squeezing at the warm hands in hers.

Inside was much like outside. The chairs were not perfectly matched, but rather seemed to have been gathered from four or five different sources: vaguely similar but not identical in style. At the counter was an omnic with an absurd hat, who waved as they approached.

They placed their orders - four bowls of the soup of the day (two for Widdy). She got a cinnamon
The omnic said there would be a bit of a wait, but Widowmaker replied that it would be no problem. The other two placed an order for a roll for her, as well.

The three of them sat down at one of the indoor tables, and they chatted idly - Emily laughed as Tracer made silly faces, she caught Widowmaker’s eyes and returned her smiles; Tracer tried to make jokes at her expense with a grin that suggested she knew she’d never succeed and only really wanted to get the eyerolls which she got.

Emily and Widowmaker hummed appreciatively as they spooned their soup, Tracer groaned and lifted up the bowl and tipped it back. With a unified laugh, the other two grinned and followed suit. Tracer ended up with cracker crumbs and a little dab of soup stuck to the tip of her nose, and Widowmaker smile as Emily leaned in to kiss it off.

It didn’t feel wrong. It didn’t feel wrong or off in the slightest, and while Widowmaker realized that it should have - that the others shouldn’t feel safe or happy, that she wasn’t designed for things like this, that she shouldn’t be getting the reactions she was getting; while she realized that she had given this all up a long time ago, she didn’t care.

She didn’t care that it should have felt wrong, because it didn’t and she was long done with letting anybody else control her. She might dance to their tune of her own volition, but that was a very different thing.

As the cinnamon buns came, though, she let those thoughts slide from her mind. She didn’t need to press them, they went easily, chased out by the delighted shine in Tracer’s eyes and the slightly lopsided grin on Emily’s lips.

It was practically a symphony, magnificent in its every aspect to her; not only did she get to enjoy the expressions on Tracer’s face - the little obscene noises and sloppy grins and rolled eyes of food-lust delight - but she got to enjoy Emily’s as well. No less delighted and no less obscene, and Widowmaker grinned widely.

The bun was warm and soft, the cinnamon almost tingling in her mouth, and every time she set a hand down on the table there was one waiting there to take it. Emily’s, Tracer’s, it didn’t matter - they were warm, and when their fingers interlaced with hers, it didn’t feel wrong at all.

Maybe it didn’t feel right. Maybe it didn’t feel right. 

...but it was something. Something she didn’t want to ever end.

Something she didn’t want to ever regret.

---

Reaper hesitated at the door. This could send all kinds of wrong messages. She wasn’t on base - and this wasn’t an official task, anyway. As much as he hated the idea, this was a personal favour. Maybe though, maybe things were changing a bit - maybe the idea of team meant something again. Maybe there was somebody else who understood what it meant, and as frustrating as it was, there was only one way to test those waters.
...and if she tried to lord it over him, he had a few ways he could twist her arm right back. Or right off.

Reaper knocked on the door.

A minute later, Sombra swung it open with a scowl, slurping at an absurdly large cup of (presumably) soda. She was out of her trademark outfit, in a loose-fitting and faded pink tank top, and a pair of black yoga pants. Wearing one slipper. Her eyes brightened when she saw him standing there.

“Gabe! Amigo! C’mon in - hey, I thought you said you’d never be caught dead here, huh? When I offered to host movie night!” She snickered - she’d known all along he was full of crap. That was just how he teased his friends.

With a sigh, Reaper stepped into the house and swung the door shut behind himself. “Yeah, well, here I am. Caught. Dead.”

She snorted, rolling her eyes. “Geeze, you really know how to kill a joke - but I guess that’s fitting, eh? Nothing you can’t kill, boss!” She elbowed him and received a weary and rough sigh in return. “Hey anyway, come on in - take your shoes off though, I’m not an animal.”

Glancing around the place, he begged to differ. The floor was scattered with candy wrappers and other bits of trash, and pieces of clothing. A legitimately astonishing amount of underwear, which he doubted all belonged to her. Magazines and books, and more than a few bullets as well. Some of them had been fired already.

“...you’re kidding.”

Sombra frowned, looking back at him with a perfectly solemn face. “Kidding? I’m dead serious about this, Gabe. Take off your shoes. I gotta keep my carpets clean.”

He gritted his teeth and clenched his fists, but he was here for a favour as much as it irked him, so it would be best to play according to her rules. Her crazy-ass rules. Reaper knelt down and started to unlace his boots.

As expected, Sombra immediately broke into cackling laughter. “Ah, man! I can’t believe you fell for that, amigo! Nah, fuck it, wear your shoes - you seriously think I give a shit?”

Reaper groaned a sigh as he stood and followed her into the house. “No.” He grunted. “Maybe. I- I don’t know.”

She shot a curious look back at him, the strap of her tank top slipping off of that shoulder as she did. She didn’t bother to fix it. “You alright back there, amigo? Sound kinda confused.”

“Yeah, well,” he ducked awkwardly to avoid a bra that was hanging from the doorframe, “I’m not used to… this.”

“What, you mean a primo domicile? It’s a great house, isn’t it?”

“It’s- sure.” He hadn’t been talking about the house, he’d been talking about the whole situation, but it was an easy enough deflection and he jumped on the opportunity. “Just a little odd.”

“Pfft,” she chuckled as she dropped herself heavily down to the couch. “Punch a few holes in the walls if it’ll help you feel more at home - not like I care.”
He growled a little sigh as he sat on the far end of the couch, resting his elbows on his knees. It felt a little wrong to be here in all of his kit, the cape and the mask and the gauntlets, but he didn't exactly have anything else. It wasn’t as if he could go outside without a mask anyway, not in public, not without causing problems. He wondered for a moment if anybody else had thoughts that automatically presented themselves as sneers.

Problems.

Sombra sighed through her nose as she slurped at her cup again. He just sat there on the couch, looking forward - Sombra wasn’t an idiot. She could tell he wasn’t here for movie night. He wasn’t here for her. It kind of hurt, but there wasn’t much to be done about it.

Not like she could admit to it or anything. Not if that’s why he was here.

“Okay, look.” She leaned forward, holding up a single outstretched finger. “You can ask me one thing, but the next time you come over you gotta bring me some cookies or some shit. Mi casa ain’t for business, comprende?”

“IT—” he cut off the words with a shake of his head, taking a breath. “It isn’t… strictly speaking, business. Yet. Maybe. It… could be, but it depends on how it goes. What I find out.”

Her eyes shifted back and forth between curious and studious. She hadn’t really seen Gabe uncertain before - she’d seen lots of things, but not that. He always seemed so self-assured - or maybe self-inflated sometimes, but whatever. “Hey, it’s—” she gulped down the last of the soda and shrugged, tossing her empty cup off toward the wall. “It’s cool. I’m not like really mad or whatever - and hey, always happy to help out a friend, you know? If it’s not business, then that’s perfect! Favours are always welcome in my home.”

Reaper nodded slowly, face shifting unseen behind his mask. He hadn’t been able to purge some things from his mind for a few days now, maybe longer, and the run-in with McCree hadn’t exactly helped. Jesse always had been a bit of an idiot. It made it all the more frustrating that he was usually both right, and good.

Reaper had always figured the cowboy had run off with the rest of them and thrown him under the bus, but now that didn’t seem to be the case.

It made him wonder who or what else might have escaped his notice. Who might have misunderstood. Who he might be able to get at.

Of course, some of it depended on who was on his team. Who he could actually…

...trust.

“I need you to find an address for me. Lena ‘Tracer’ Oxton.”

Sombra didn’t respond immediately, she held her breath and kept herself carefully still. It had to be about the spider - and Sombra knew she needed to find out for sure. “This is for a… personal inquiry?”

“For now,” he tipped his head to the side. “Might turn into business. Like I said, depends on what I find.”

She snorted. “What are you expecting to find? Chiquita seems pretty annoying, so I mean, I don’t blame you for wanting to track her down and shut her up, you know?”
“Oh,” Reaper chuckled darkly. “It’s not for that - not yet, at least, depending on how it plays out I suppose. I just have a… call it a suspicion about loyalties.” He gritted his teeth. Even that alone was painfully close to admission. Instead of carrying on, he switched back to the much happier topic of slaughtering the assholes who had betrayed him.

“Although I appreciate the thought, generally. Always nice to know I have support in my other ventures. I might call you in on that.” The thoughts of his vengeance on Overwatch twisted through with thoughts of salvage - how could the latter exist alongside the former? It couldn’t. There was no place for salvaging a life amidst vengeance.

…but was there a place for a team? He turned to look at Sombra, slowly, finding her smirking back with a raised eyebrow.

“I mean, sure,” she shrugged. “I’ll see what I can dig up - and I’ve got some good shovels when it comes to this kind of shit, too. And yeah,” she grinned, “you’ve always got support with me around amigo. I got your back. Hey, you got time for a show?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Aw c’mon! You show up at my house this early in the morning and-”

“Sombra, it is five o’clock in the afternoon.”

“- and you woke me up early!”

Reaper frowned. “You had a two-litre cup of soda.”

“Yeah, so?” She crossed her arms, narrowing her eyes. “Maybe I sleep with it. Don’t judge me for that shit - but play your cards right and you might find out.” She grinned widely and threw in a wink to which he scoffed and stood from the couch.

“I’m leaving. Let me know if you find anything out.”

“More like when I find anything out - hey, any particular other old Overwhathevers you want me to track down while you’re at it?”

He stopped with one hand on the doorframe, claws digging slightly into the wood. “Any you can bring me… I’d be happy to hear it.”

Sombra giggled. “Well hey, if you’re happy then I’m happy, boss.”

He sighed and stepped through the doorframe. Knew that was a mistake. All of this. Being on a squad was one thing, and it was something he was good at. Being on a team? He’d lost that along with the rest of it.

The idea of getting it back absolutely terrified him, but… he couldn’t seem to deny it. He didn’t know that he liked that.

“Goodbye, Sombra.” He paused with the front door open as something shifted in his gut. Shifted and crawled up through his spine, but not the same way it normally did. Not hot and electric and painful

“When’s the next movie night?”

She snickered and reclined against the wall. “See, you can pretend all you like but I see right through you, amigo - I’ll come over Thursday. Got an old sci-fi one this time, first in a trilogy again: The Matrix. You’ll love it - it’s got hackers, hot chicks, everything you could want.”
“You sure that’s not everything you could want?” Reaper groaned.

“Hey!” Sombra frowned. “Well, fine, it’s got hot guys in it too, so there.”

He actually chuckled at that, a little surprised that she thought to mention it. “I’ll be the judge of that,” he shot as he stepped out of the door and swung it shut behind him.

Sombra’s grin lasted for a few moments after he was gone. She was starting to see some cracks - and that was just what she wanted. His kind of fake-hating thing was cute and funny; but it was also nice to get the occasional glimpse of the real friendship underneath.

Just occasional, though.

Slowly, her grin slid as she sighed. She had another friend to deal with at the moment - this was gonna take some juggling. “Ai,” she muttered to herself, rubbing at her forehead, “nobody pays me enough for this shit.” A moment later she snickered as her grin returned. “Oh, right, I do!”

She pulled out her phone and called Widowmaker.

“Oui?”

“Hey, amiga. El diablo negro wants la chiquita rápida’s address. How you wanna play this?”

A few seconds of silence later, the reply came. “I do not understand what you are saying.”

Sombra sighed and leaned back against the wall with a groan, glaring at the ceiling. “Dios mio you’ve gotta be fucking-” she huffed a sigh and shook her head. “GABE wants TRACER’S-” she wrote the words in the air with her fingers, although she knew the assassin couldn’t see - still, there was something to be said for theatrics, “address and what do you want to do about it there are you happy now? He was saying some shit about suspecting loyalties.”

Over the phone came a scoff. “I am hardly happy. I do understand, however. Are you going to give it to him?”

The coldness in her voice was obvious, and Sombra rolled her eyes again. How many times was she going to need to help these idiots out out of the goodness of her heart before they realized she was their friend?

“He’s a friend, so are you.” Sombra shrugged. “Easiest thing in my mind is to clear out your little amigas and then give Gabe the address. He shows, there’s nothing there, no big deal, we can work out his suspicions or whatever and everything goes back to normal. I don’t have to stab either of you in the back or whatever, ‘cause we’re friends. Everyone’s happy” She frowned for a second, tipping her head to the side thoughtfully. “Maybe your girls need to get a new apartment to stay at, I guess, but whatever - they’ve probably got one anyway, right?”

There was a silence for a few seconds as Widowmaker thought about things, but Sombra couldn’t guess what. “I do not know. I think it is not so standard to have multiple as we do. D’accord, I agree with your assessment and will inform them to leave. I appreciate the advanced warning, Sombra.”

“No problem, amiga ,” she laughed, “and hey, consider yourself radar dead for the next six hours. I’ll follow you and wipe every trace - you’re lucky you caught me just after waking up!”

“...it is five o’clock in the afternoon.”

Sombra rolled her eyes. “Why the fuck does everybody keep saying that like I should care or
something? Get a move on, chica - and hey, give her butt a pinch for me.”

“Sombra.”

“What?” the hacker snickered. “It looks pinchable! Not my fault, I mean seriou-” she recoiled from the phone as it clicked and disconnected. With a smirk, she waved a screen into existence and tapped at a set of controls. Widowmaker appeared on the screen, frowning thoughtfully and looking away.

“Hey chica we got disconnected, anyway-”

“Ah!” Widowmaker tossed the phone away, the camera blurring and showing the ceiling as it clattered. “Sombra! Do not do this. It did not disconnect, I disconnected it.”

“I know,” Sombra explained, “and I re connected it. You’re welcome.”

Widowmaker sighed and picked up the phone again, looking at it flatly for several seconds. After nothing else happened, she rolled her eyes with a huff. “Thank you. There. Now am I free to be about my business?”

“Of course!” Sombra grinned, nodding. “And hey - Widowmaker?”

“Oui?”

“Pinch her butt for me.” Before the assassin had a chance to retort, Sombra swiped the screen away into pixels with a giggle. “And that is how you disconnect a call! Ah, damn, I’m thirsty,” she muttered to herself, smacking her lips. “I gotta get a soda.”

---

A very soccer-mom looking lady was walking some sort of tiny dog past Sombra’s house as Reaper came out of the front door, and she stopped and turned to gawp at him as he came stalking down the front path.

“What are you looking at?” Reaper hissed without glancing over.

He did, however, look down as the dog started to sniff at his leg. He crouched, even as the owner recoiled a bit in fear, and held out a heavily gauntleted hand, palm up. The little pomeranian cross sniffed and panted, and Reaper scritched it under the chin with claws that glinted in the sun. “Who’s a pretty girl? You. Yes, it’s you. Good girl.”

Reaper patted the dog on the head and stood with a sigh. He cracked his neck and spoke to the owner quite calmly without looking over. “If you ever tell anyone about that, I will track you down and murder you in your sleep. It will not be quick, it will not be clean, and they will never find your body - but your blood will be coating every wall.” He glanced up to the sky, sun shining brightly down, and stepped away with his cloak swirling behind him. “Have a nice day.”

The lady stood in stunned silence for several seconds, and then turned and waved hesitantly after the cloaked figure. “Y-you, um… too?” Panting softly, she looked down to her dog with a scowl. “Rufus!” she whispered, scolding, “you should know better than to associate with men like that!”

---

Chapter End Notes
Soundtracked perhaps by "Love Parasite", by Fad Gadget. Lyrics are probably pretty self-evident, heh - but I’d say this as a soundtrack applies more to Widowmaker's own internal dialogue, her own thoughts and feelings on herself. Not in terms of narrative, or other character's views of her, but what she thinks of herself.

Well, there that is - a softer chapter on multiple parts, yet not without its foreboding implications I'd say.

I really liked the Emily/Tracer/Widowmaker interplay here, the way they passed off conversation and approached things - it's tough in writing because often in real conversations (or at least in the ones of which I am a part) people might talk over each other or interject, include little momentary words like "exactly" or "well, twice" or "was it tuesday?" while somebody else is speaking. It's tough to do that in writing without things becoming a little jarring, at least in my experience, so conversation automatically becomes a little more polished, a little more convenient. I try as much as possible to avoid that - to write in pauses, or stammers, or frustrated sighs as somebody reaches for the right word which they can't quite grasp at that second but it's on the tip of their tongue.

I think this chapter represents a big eye-opener for Widowmaker, but I can also say that - depending on what inferences you, my beloved readers, make - perhaps not as big of one as we might think. Suffice to say that while she recognizes perhaps more about herself, and about Emily and Lena, than she did before the capture incident, she's still somewhat in a place between delusion and obliviousness. Perhaps that's not overly clear but I have a reveal planned and I don't want to give too much away ahead of time XD On the flip side, I do really, really like talking about what's to come, so if you have questions or guesses (or you just wanna yell at me! :D) please throw them in the comments!

I like the slow evolutions, as you probably have been able to infer by now, heh. I like seeing things come about through repetition, through little nudges, naturally - Widowmaker alone or her interactions with either of her lovers, Reaper on his own or with Sombra, Jack's slow devolution and precipitated shift. I like them all, really, and I want to give them all time to shine - hopefully, in doing so, I don't distract too much away from others. Hopefully while I'm showing how Reaper's acting, people aren't forgetting Mercy and Pharah, or McCree off wherever he is - hopefully!

I suspect that, to an extent, I am, unfortunately. However, I think it's not too bad - and hopefully people will go back and read prior chapters if they're feeling confused about what's happening now. Sometimes it's a struggle for me to keep the story from getting too large, and I realize that sometimes it's a struggle at which I fail, heh.

On non-story-related matters, I have just got a new job in the quite early mornings. On top of which, the month coming up is NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) and I plan on partaking, meaning some of my free time will be devoted to that. As a result, I think I'll be dropping to weekly updates rather than every four days - that way I can ensure you'll be getting things at a regular rate rather than risking running awry of it, but I'll still be able to get things done. If I end up having more time than I think, I'll keep updating at every four days - my essential plan is to do my NaNo words first each day, then spend some writing on Overwatch things.
Another note! The Discord server I'm a part of is doing a collaborative No-Angst November, we're all writing a few short stories for it. I've finished one and am polishing off at least one more, possibly a third - so even if BSN updates a little less frequently, there should be other fun things I'm putting out for you to read. :)

I want to take a moment to thank you all, wonderful readers, because honestly you make me smile so often. Thinking of you - the fact that people out there are reading something I wrote and enjoying it - is wonderful. Honestly, even thinking that you might not be enjoying it - that you might read it and frown and go "hold on... that's not right" and then click somewhere else and check a fact and roll your eyes and mutter "how'd they get that wrong? Ha!"

I like that too. I want to hear it, I want to hear it all from you - thank you just for reading, and especially thank you for commenting or kudoing or passing my story along to your friends!

Come back next time when Widowmaker has a little explaining to do, and sometimes fate's a bitch. Sometimes, though, fate gives you an added little prod. Sometimes fate gives to one, and takes away from another. Takes with one hand, and gives with another. Reaper hates fate.
Warnings: bodies, off-screen death, discussion of murder

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker tried to apologize, she wanted to apologize, but she didn't think she really could. She didn't think it would mean anything without real feelings of guilt underneath it, but she was perhaps a little surprised to find out how deep her feelings actually ran. She might have called them frustration, but Emily and Tracer would both likely suggest that that was a bit of a mistaken interpretation. The three of them talked fairly openly about risks, and when Widowmaker was unable to convince them that they were safer without her in their lives, she abandoned herself to their foolishness and to her own - to an extent, at least. They got cinnamon buns. They sat. They ate. They enjoyed each other's presences.
Elsewhere, Reaper had a question to ask of Sombra, but decades of black ops and paranoia don't end easily. Unable to be honest with her - or even really with himself - he didn't outright talk about a desire to find out where Tracer's loyalties lie. He only phrased it as "a question of loyalties" and Sombra took that to mean a question about Widowmaker's loyalties, and she informed the assassin accordingly. They decided to move Tracer and Emily somewhere safe and take other measures to ensure Reaper had no doubts remaining.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Something smelled good as Widowmaker slid the door open. It smelled heavier, cheesy - she heard sizzling - all of which suggested one thing over another. "Souris? Are you both here?"

Tracer jerked at the pan with a yelp, raising a hand over her now-pounding heart as she turned away to look toward the archway out of the kitchen - and, of course, there was that familiar blue smile. Gold eyes wide in feigned innocence as if she'd never done a thing wrong, but just a hint of deep satisfaction at catching her off-guard again.

"Knock, Widdy," she took a deep breath and huffed it out, turning back to the pan with a chuckle. "Gotta start knocking."

"And you should start locking your doors," Widowmaker pointed out, stepping closer and wrapping her arms around Tracer’s waist. From here, she could feel the warmth of the pan as well as the brit’s body, and it was that much better for it. “I remain unconvinced on that nickname.”

She giggled at that, leaning back into strong arms as she flipped the sandwiches over in the pan. “Long story short, ma chat, if I’d known you were coming over I woulda made more toasties!”
“Ahh,” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, grinning and tilting her head to kiss at Tracer’s jaw. Her skin was soft and warm - and opportunities only seemed greater when they might soon be denied. “Ma souris has been studying? Perhaps we may yet teach you how to speak.”

With a blush, Tracer pushed the pan off of the hob and turned around, stretching to press a kiss to Widowmaker’s lips. The cold wasn’t surprising anymore, it was expected and delightful, and Tracer shivered a little as she caught the back of Widowmaker’s head with a hand and stroked her tongue between chilled lips.

“You don’t seem to have any other complaints about my mouth,” Lena chuckled breathlessly, grinning with her eyes still closed before they slowly split open. She caught an inkling of something in Widowmaker’s face, and wasn’t sure what it was, but she didn’t like it. It was gone in an instant, though; quickly enough that it could have just been her imagination to begin with.

“Of course not,” the frenchwoman murmured, stroking a finger down Tracer’s jaw. “Tell me - will notre cerise be joining us soon? There is something to be said, and I believe it would be best for her to be in attendance as well. Not that I do not trust you to pass the information along, of course.”

Tracer placed something about it then - the stillness, the way she was holding herself. Is she… nervous? I think this is what nervous looks like on her.

It wasn’t an encouraging thought, but there wasn’t much to be done about it. Not much except for to worry a little as she flipped the toasties out onto a plate and popped another pair into the pan.

“Here,” she held one of the finished ones out to Widowmaker with a smile. “I was making four, figured we’d do a pair each - but if you get rid of the evidence, we can have an even three!”

Widowmaker took the sandwich with a grin and bit into it swiftly, hoping the pleasures of food would allay the concern those words inspired.

Get rid of the evidence.

He’d been asking Sombra about loyalties. Every word that he’d said during Tracer’s captivity played now through her head, again.

“Didn’t get under your skin now, did she? Think you’re so fucking calm. Been playing with her an awful long time, haven’t you? Annoying little bitch. Yet you’ve managed not to kill her. Somehow.”

He couldn’t know. He could not know, but he could suspect and he clearly did. Whether he suspected explicitly hardly mattered; he was digging and could not be permitted to find out. It would mean terrible things for them all if he did - reconditioning for her, doubtlessly, and for Tracer? For Emily?

Death would be the best hope of an outcome.

Get rid of the evidence.

It was a thought. Quite a suggestion, and she was sure that Tracer had not meant it that way. Was certain that her mouse did not comprehend what those words could mean, the elimination they might entail.

Sometimes it was the only way out of a situation, however.

Not yet, though. There would be other attempts first - but as a fail-safe plan, an ultimate contingency…
“Y’alright there, love?” Tracer nudged her and Widowmaker blinked, shaking her head slightly.

“Of course.” She frowned lightly. “I am always alright.”

They were interrupted as the door swung open and then slammed shut, followed by Emily shouting “Arseholes!” from the other room.

“Welcome back, love,” Lena called hesitantly. “I um, made some toasties? Widdy stopped by too.”

“That’s nice! Looking forward to it all!” Emily groaned as she dropped herself down to the couch limply, pressing the balls off her palms into her eyes until they sparked with flashes of light. She muttered under her breath, “Bloody… fucking… Reibling… arseholes…”

“It, um…” Tracer took a big plate with the three toasted sandwiches on it out to the other room and set it down on the coffee table. She and Widowmaker took their seats flanking Emily, each wrapping an arm behind her back. “Did your annual review… not go so well?”

“I fucking quit!” Emily laughed through light tears, shaking her head. “They- they just- ugh!” She balled up a fist and threw it down against her knee before collapsing backward into their arms, into their embrace. She felt safe, she knew she was safe.

She always knew she was safe, it was the rest of the world she was worried about - Lena flitted around and tried to save it from the monsters, and Emily did what she could as well. It was frustrating to see it come to nought.

“You quit? What happened?” Tracer’s brow furrowed in confusion as Emily leaned over, laying her head back against Widowmaker’s shoulder and opening up her own chest to be laid on in turn. Lena took the opportunity quickly, wrapping both arms around Emily and squeezing her tight, laying an ear down against her chest.

“Yeah,” Emily sighed, stroking one hand through Lena’s wild hair and the other along Widdy’s knee beside her. “I got in there for the review - they said that all of my work was top-notch, everything about that was good, complimented a few of the mistakes I’d caught. Said I was one of the best data analysts they had, but then they got all quiet and solemn. Made some mention about me being involved in ‘social circles’ that were ‘concerning’ to the company.” She laughed joylessly, but not as bitterly as she might have if it weren’t for the other two being right there.

She nuzzled her head back into Widdy’s shoulder, into the waiting hand which buried itself in her hair and massaged at her scalp and rubbed the frustration away. Some of it, at least; Lena’s squeezing hugs around her middle eliminated even more. “Last week,” she continued, with a sigh, “Gord dropped me off after I pulled some extra hours helping him out. My boss saw and kinda scowled, but I never thought-”

Lena frowned and lifted her head to see Emily tearing up. She raised a hand and stroked at one of those freckled cheeks, while Widowmaker raised an eyebrow in the background.

“Excusez-moi,” she interrupted softly, nuzzling the tip of her nose at the tip of Emily’s ear as she’d seen Lena do sometimes, “but I do not know Gord.”

“Oh, he-” Em laughed lightly, turning to kiss Widdy on the corner of the chin. “He’s a lovely omnic chap, runs the positronics shop down in the Row. I help him out when I can - he gave me a big hand a few years back, and particularly now with all the tensions…” she sighed heavily, her shoulders drooping.
“That’s the excuse they used,” she muttered darkly. “Their reasoning for their concerns.” The word came out sharper than she meant, but injustices like this just incensed her. It was only worse now that they weren’t being directed her way - she could forgive people being dicks to her, sometimes, but to others? That was a lot harder.

“They said,” she continued with a sigh, relaxing back in the double embrace, “that with the strained situation across Britain between humans and omnis, and particularly in the area, they had to be careful to avoid association with any elements which could be seen as radical. Had to be cautious to protect their company image, and that it was important for the employees to follow suit.”

“So you quit.” Lena shook her head softly. It wasn’t a question, it wasn’t an accusation - it was a supportive statement.

“Yup. The sort of people who would raise a stink because I’m friends with an omnic, well, those are the sort of people I refuse to work alongside. So… I quit.” She chuckled sadly, shaking her head against Widdy’s shoulder and running her fingers through Lena’s hair. “So, good news bad news, love - guess we’ll get to go apartment hunting again. God knows we can’t afford this one on a psych nurse’s salary…”

There might have been more to that sentence, but it trailed away as Emily became distracted by Widowmaker’s sudden and intent stillness behind her. She didn’t move much at the best of times, but when she was surprised she became an almost literal statue.

“You alright back there, love?” Emily started to turn her head, but the hand in her hair moved to stay that motion and she relented, keeping her eyes to the beauty who was curled up along her stomach and chest.

“There is… a reason I have come here, today.” Widowmaker sighed briefly. “Of late, there seem to have been some suspicions aroused. Particularly on the part of Reaper. Earlier, he contacted Sombra with a goal, a target.” She took a breath and held it for a moment, behind her teeth. “You, ma souris. He wished to know your address.”

“Sh- she wouldn’t tell him that, would she?” Lena pushed herself up a little to look over Emily’s shoulder in concern.

“That is why I am here. I suppose it is convenient that you will be vacating the apartment regardless,” she rolled one shoulder in a shrug with a faint smile. It was far better that way, actually - to be something that occurred from within, rather than something that happened at her hand.

It felt better, at least; what little there was to feel. “She gave me time to ensure you would come to no ill for it, but this is parfait. I will ensure his suspicions are allayed quickly. He will know that I have no flaws in my loyalty.”

“I might not be so quick to assure that, love,” Tracer muttered back, but her gaze was fixed on Emily’s face. “It- Em, we could go stay with Winston for a bit. He told me a little while back that we were always welcome there, for as long as we want - I think he gets a little lonely, you know? And it’s really safe, of course.”

“Safe,” she laughed slightly, shaking her head. “Yeah. Yeah I know it’d be safe for us - but what about Gord? What about- what about Ei33n and Davis and Andrew St. Charles and Bravo-Seven-Gamma and all the others? What about the Row?”

A tear slipped down Lena’s cheek as she laid her head forward on Emily’s shoulder again. “I don’t know, love. I’m sorry - but we’ll do whatever we can. Anything we can to help.”
“Can’t do much from that far away, can we? I mean - you can, and that’s brilliant love, but…” Emily closed her eyes and sighed as a few more tears joined the many that had already run the course down her cheeks. Sometimes it felt like she was struggling just to tread water, and still she knew she had it a hundred times better than so many. She couldn’t even begin to imagine what they were all going through.

“We’ll get you a dropship,” Lena nodded matter-of-factly, “take you back and forth - you can stay on at the hospital, definitely, no problems at all. I know that means a lot to you.”

The redhead let out a single laugh before sighing again, but this time with a grin on her lips. “Oh… bloody hell, it might actually be a shorter commute anyway. Why not? It’s somewhere at least, it’ll let us build up some savings. Maybe I can help out around the base somehow, I guess; I know it’d be nice to see Winston more.”

Widowmaker let the two of them chat. She didn’t interrupt, didn’t even think to; her mind was carrying on darker tracks, planning ahead for many possibilities. She almost didn’t notice when Emily turned to look at her.

Almost.

“What is it, cerise?” She looked sad again, where a moment ago things had seemingly turned brighter.

“It’ll be harder to get in touch with you, won’t it?”

Widowmaker smiled softly, sadly, as Tracer’s face twisted in confused upset in the background. “Oui. We should maintain our distance for a while, avoid run-ins. At least until Reaper’s curiosity is sated. No contact… in person.” She pulled out her phone with a gentle grin. “We always have these. Sombra has seen to that. I will let you know when it is safe to meet again.”

Emily squeezed at her hand with a nod.

“Oh, alors, she asked me to inquire. What is a B.L.E.? She would not elaborate beyond that.”

A snicker leapt out of Tracer that surprised her. “Oh, it’s one of Em’s favourites! Bacon, lettuce, jellied eel; don’t knock it ‘til you try it, though. Pretty delicious actually.”

Widowmaker’s face suggested that she thought it would be anything but delicious, and both of the other two laughed lightly at that.

Emily was more than happy to forego the seriousness. The world was what it was, all they could do is create their little bubble in it - and if, for the next little while, that bubble was going to be electronic instead of personal, that was fine.

“Alright,” she shrugged, “well, I guess we’ll get packing after lunch. Thanks for letting us know, Widdy,” she kissed her on the cheek and sat a little more upright, reaching out for her sandwich.

“No clue how you can be so calm, love,” Tracer shook her head with a shiver as she picked up her own toastie, but her appetite was mostly gone. She’d still eat it, though. “I’m practically shaking in my boots over here.” Then, Emily had never been face-to-face with Reaper. Until recently, neither had Tracer, really - but now? The thought of those claws, that growl, the way he’d snapped and flung that table at the mention of betrayal. The hatred that hissed in his voice.

She frowned as her memories sprung up again. That whole conversation - that had been so odd. It felt like he was interrogating her, kind of; like he was assessing her or judging her, or something, but
she couldn’t guess what for. He’d mentioned Jack, and Overwatch, and not kindly either.

Emily just shrugged, though. It wasn’t the first time she’d lost a home, and not nearly the most violent - sure, maybe this “Reaper” bloke was planning on coming by, but they’d be gone and safe by then. The apartment had some nice memories, but they were memories of Lena, memories of Widdy - those were the important parts. Not the place, but the home, and she would get to bring that with her. “Gotta move somewhere anyway. Might as well be somewhere safe, right?”

“Eternal optimist there, love,” Lena giggled as she bit into her sandwich, and Emily laughed.

“That’s rich, coming from you!”

Widowmaker found herself unsurprised by it. They were both foolish in their own ways, and that was perhaps an intersection: optimism. Emily’s was different, though - Tracer’s optimism often seemed naive, although she was beginning to see that that as presentation rather than fact. Her mouse had certainly seen much of the world, she simply seemed less experienced than she was.

Emily, on the other hand, was deliberate in her optimism. It never seemed to be due to blindness, but rather a legitimate belief that things were a certain way. To her credit, Widowmaker had to admit that the woman was often correct in it: she had been optimistic, and foolish, to leave the door unlocked.

What had stopped Widowmaker from coming in and killing them both in their sleep? Nothing - although neither would locking the door have done so. That perhaps factored in as well, she realized then with a slight smirk. Her cherry could be Machiavellian sometimes.

She had been foolish to invite her so thoroughly into life and home, yes, as Tracer had been, but it was a foolishness Widowmaker appreciated. She would simply need to take steps to ensure that neither of them suffered for it.

*Whatever I can offer. I swear.*

That was what she had told the gorilla, and she fully intended to hold to those words. There was perhaps some question as to how much she could offer - a question of where Talon’s claws would stay her hand, where she would be unable to reach.

She would simply need to act early in order to forego any such possibility.

“Widdy?”

“Mm?” Widowmaker blinked out of her reverie and looked over to Emily, who had a slightly suspicious expression.

“Are you thinking about enacting some *peace* on my former employers in return for my hardships?”

She gasped, hand flying to her chest as her jaw dropped in shock. “Why, *cerise!* I am shocked that you would imply any such thing!” The feigned offence gave way to a predatory grin and she leaned in, purring, “*Of course* I was thinking of it. I know you will tell me not to - *mais*, I can dream, *non*?”

Emily sighed a chuckle and leaned over, rubbing her head on Widowmaker’s shoulder with a soft groan. “Well, I appreciate the effort. I’m sure it’s very hard for you - I owe you a favour for it, I suppose.”

Widowmaker chuckled, deep in her throat, but shrugged a moment later. There was no favour to repay. “I think they will be harmed enough by the loss of you.”
“Awww!” Tracer cooed around a mouthful of toastie. “Tha’sh sho shweet!”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes and scoffed as Lena tried to hug her around Emily, and the redhead was left to just giggle in the middle of it all.

Being without Widowmaker for a while would be a shame, and Emily wasn’t looking forward to it - but it would be what it was, and she had no doubt that Widdy would sort it out plenty quickly. She’d been dropping by more and more often, spending more and more time, and Emily suspected that she would not be happy to let any absence extend too long.

Everything would be worked out. Capable people had it in hand - three of them: Widowmaker, Lena, and Emily herself, she knew. There might be a few bumps along the road, but she’d known that from the start getting involved with a hotshot pilot.

...and a world-feared assassin, as well.

---

“What?”

“I said, it looks like she’s not there anymore, boss,” Sombra shrugged as she tossed a jelly bean in the air. *Ah fuck green one!* She spat it out onto the floor quickly, returning her attention to the phone at her ear.

“Her girlfriend paid for a lot of it, and she quit one of her jobs this morning. Data analyst for Reibling and Associates, LTD - sounds like she’s a sharp *chica*, I guess. They handed in their notice to the apartment management - don’t know when they’re planning on moving, exactly, but I’d get there quick if I were you. See if there’s any hints left behind. I’m chasing down the money trail, but I don’t see anything yet, *chico*. Sorry.”

“Damnit,” Reaper grunted, clenching a fist. Of course this would happen. It was just his *fucking* luck; fate mocking him, once again. He hated fate. Absolutely *fucking* hated it. There was a reason it was only one letter off from “hate” to begin with. “Get me a dropship. Fast as possible - and I don’t mean *Talon* fastest.”

“*Oh, you want the Sombra Special, eh?*” She quirked an eyebrow and heard a dark chuckle over the phone. It was nice to know that she wasn’t stabbing Widow in the back, but at the same time, it was really cool to be working closer with Gabe. To feel like she was really being *trusted* with shit. Hell, she also just liked juggling - between this and Athena and all of that? Sombra had more balls in the air than she had in a long time, and it was *fun*. It felt freeing, all the possibilities.

For Reaper, it felt wrong to be trusting again. It felt wrong to be *hoping* again.

Except maybe Sombra wasn’t hopeless, maybe Jesse wasn’t hopeless, and maybe - just *maybe* - Oxton wasn’t either. She’d always had promise. Maybe after all these years he had half a chance in hell of *exposing* Jack instead of just killing him, and he was starting to realize - no, to *remember*, how much more that would mean.

It had consumed him for years and years before the fall: *who* was behind all the bullshit being pulled on Overwatch?
He’d tried talking to Jack about it. Jack just got angry, said he was being paranoid. Jack loved *Overwatch* more, they were in his number one spot and that was clear in hindsight. So much was clear in hindsight. He’d been a blind idiot.

…but maybe if he could open his own eyes, he could pull a few others open too. He hadn’t confided everything in Sombra, not nearly - nor in Jesse, nor in Oxton, but they each had a few pieces. Testing the waters, that’s what it was; he’d be damned if he got caught with his pants down again.

Testing the waters.

“I don’t suppose you can get cameras inside whatever hole Overwatch is hiding in?”

“*Chico,* I can get cameras *anywhere,* but it’d probably start a war if I’m honest. Some shit ain’t worth it - but I mean, hey, maybe I’d start a war for you, eh? Only one way to know, am I right?” She chuckled, sorting through the bag and pulling all the green jelly beans out and throwing them away onto the floor. Maybe she’d vacuum later.

Probably not, though.

“Yeah, that was what I thought,” Reaper scowled, nudging a drained corpse out of the way as he walked toward the window of the apartment. “Never mind it. I was just hoping…”

Sombra didn’t hear any more words, but she did hear glass shatter - and a few seconds later, a swirling sound and the whooshing of wind. How Gabe managed to hold on to shit when he was doing that, she didn’t know, but he did it *somehow.* Usually just his guns, which she thought was a little dumb - he could just drop them and then grab more from his magic belt or whatever.

“What were you hoping?” Sombra inquired, seemingly idly. When he laughed, it kind of wormed into her spine a little bit - but that was just how he was, his voice just did that sometimes. It wasn’t really all bad, even.

“I wanted to see the look on her face when she asked him. When he answered.”

“…when who asked who? And asked them what? I got no clue what you’re talking about, *amigo.*”

“I know.” He elbowed in the driver’s side window of a car and hopped in, reaching under the dash and pulling a panel open. “Doesn’t matter, anyway. You can’t always get what you want.”

Sombra snickered. “Hey, yeah, but haven’t you heard? If you try, sometimes, you get what you need. And hey, I wouldn’t bother trying to hotwire that car - it’s a ‘64 Anion DeSoto, they’re practically impossible t-”

She cut off in a frown as she heard the engine whirr to life. “Damn. You must have some good hands, *amigo.*” He chuckled over the phone and she joined in, quirking an eyebrow. “Maybe I’ll get you to show me sometime, eh?”

In the car, Reaper pulled the phone away from his ear and sighed at it as he pulled away from the curb. *You’ve got to be kidding me.* “Good luck. You’re not even playing with the right deck.”

“What, you only like dead chicks?” She wore a grin to go with the joke.

“Sombra.”

“Oh, c’mon! Is it the purple? I can dye it some other colour.”
“You’re n-” he grunted, swerving around a truck which blared a horn at him. “Pickup in the park.”

Sombra sighed with a halfhearted scowl. “Yeah, sure. Cut the convo off just when it’s getting interesting - yeah, I gotcha. I can see your little joyrider… hey, you wanna do something fun?”

“How about you consider fun?” Reaper scoffed. “Not a chance.”

He didn’t quite have time to finish the word before he heard a loud thrumming from above. “Sombra,” he warned, “do not-”

Large clamps came down and plucked his car up off of the road, and he dropped his head forward against the horn, letting it blare loudly.

“Sorry,” Sombra snickered, “what was that? I couldn’t hear you over the noise of how awesome my idea was. Plus some pendejo’s laying on his horn. Now hold on tight, amigo - next stop, King’s Row. You ready?”

Reaper lifted his head off of the steering wheel and sighed. “It doesn’t matter what I say. You’re obviously just going to do what you want anyway.”

“Heyyyy, you’re getting it!” She giggled brightly, spinning in her chair with her phone pinched between her shoulder and her ear. “But I mean, just when it’s for fun. You know I’ve got your back, right?”

There was a long pause, and her grin started to shift into a scowl. If he was going to go for one of these jokes again, she might start getting pissed. She might even drop his car for a few seconds - just a few, though.

“It’s… it seems that way.” His words sounded rough, stressed, but she just laughed.

“Yeah, sometimes shit seems like it when it’s true, you know? Hey, anyway, gimme a call if you need anything. I’m gonna go vacuum.”

Reaper leaned back with half a chuckle as she hung up. “Sure you are,” he muttered, shaking his head. There was an actual grin on his lips. It had nothing to do with torture or vengeance or death. It was odd.

He didn’t mind it.

He knew he would. In a few minutes, when the hunger returned, clawing him to raw shreds from the inside out. The world just seemed like vinegar being poured into the open wounds, or at least most of it did.

As time went on, he was more and more sure that it wasn’t all worthless, though. That somewhere, deep deep down buried in all the shit, was a diamond or two. If the world was going to force its shit down his throat, the least he’d do is grab all the diamonds he could.

And murder as many of the people who pissed him off as possible. That, too.

---

There was nothing in the apartment. He went through it slowly at first, begging the raging anger
within him to keep itself at bay for a little longer. Three men who’d had baseball bats in hand and signs with Sharpie slogans had provided a nice little snack, and the world would only be better off without them anyway.

It was something. A little snack that kept the hunger away, so it wasn’t so frustrating when he picked the lock and found the empty apartment. He’d known it would be empty - maybe, maybe they would have remained until the end of the month. They were paid up for it, at least, but deep down below the hunger and the hate, he’d known they were already gone.

He couldn’t stop himself from dwelling on it. The look on her face, the fucking certainty with which she thought he’d betrayed them. They all did. They all threw him under the bus and laughed as it thumped overtop of his corpse - to think that he’d ever trusted any of them with a single fucking thing was just-

The coffee table, glass-topped, shattered as he kicked it. The metal frame bent into something unrecognizable as its original form and launched across the room, clattering against a far wall.

“Tell me you’ve found them. Sombra.”

She shrugged, unseen behind her screens. “Amigo, I’d love to, but I mean - I just think that lying to you would hurt our burgeoning relationship, you know?” She snickered, grinning, but he didn’t laugh in response.

He didn’t anything in response.

Reaper stalked silently through the rooms. No mail. No computers. No nothing. Obviously a home that had been left. Empty.

Abandoned.

Somehow, his anger didn’t become frantic. Somehow it twisted into something else instead, as Reaper sat on the foot of the bed with a sigh, his shotguns dangling limply from his hands. The sigh continuing, unnaturally long, and slowly grew into a chuckle - then, from there, a laugh, and then a shrieking cackle.

Sombra wished for a second, silently on the other end of the radio link, that he’d go back to wrecking stuff. It was easier to deal with and didn’t make it feel like her bones were trying to crawl out of her. “What, you find like a joke book or something, amigo?”

“Oh, no,” he shook his head, chuckling. “I didn’t find a fucking thing. Neither did you - Sombra, tell me, have I ever mentioned how much I despise fate? I fucking loathe it. Entirely.”

“Well, that’s fair chico,” she shrugged with a snicker. “Can’t say I’m generally a fan of the bitch either - gotta take shit into our own hands, y’know?”

He let himself fall limply back onto the bed, black smoke swirling slowly around him as he sighed. “Maybe we do. Maybe we try and it slips through our fingers. Tell me, Sombra, what does betrayal mean to you?”

She swallowed heavily, but none of her sudden worry came across in her voice - it was just as smooth as ever as she chuckled. “I mean, I guess the easy answer is it means payback to me, amigo, but I know that’s not what you meant, eh?”

Reaper barked a laugh, shaking his head loosely on the bed. “No. That’s not what I meant at all - but you know, I do think you’re onto something there. Don’t let it go to your head.”
“Yeah don’t worry, you’ve got those claws to give my ego a pop if it ever gets too swollen,” she muttered swiftly and her lips quirked into a sudden grin at his return chuckle. “Hey, you coming back to base? I think I found somebody you might want to visit. Name’s Kevin Morse, he was a—”

“Security guard at the Swiss Headquarters of Overwatch,” Reaper sighed through a grin, a delighted anticipatory shiver running through every nerve. “He was stationed the night it exploded. Sombra…” he trailed off for a moment and took a deep breath.

When he spoke again it was in a deep, dark voice that seethed, that crawled into her heart and made it race. “You always bring me the most...um...nicest gifts.”

She shivered through a nervous-sounding chuckle - an electric little thrill shot through her and her grin widened almost painfully. It had only been intended as a red herring, a treat to offer to get Gabe over the frustration of missing Tracer, but if there was something more to be gained? Well, Sombra wasn’t an idiot. She’d take whatever she could. “Ha, well, you know, glad to be of service, eh? Go get ‘im, boss. He’s incommunicado, his phone won’t work - I got your back.”

Reaper walked back out to the front door, a spring in his step at the idea of getting to cross another one off of his list. Such a good one, too - he would have been sitting at the desk when somebody brought a bomb in to set up poor old stupid Gabe. Silly Kevin must have seen. By the end of the day, Reaper would know everything he knew, and Kevin would be in little tiny pieces.

He shivered again as he locked the door and went to the balcony, pausing there for a moment as he looked over the city.

It was an awful thing, it was - not just this one but all of them. They were disgusting and you never needed to look far to see it. In every alleyway, every street corner; the faces sneering at each other, eyes leering, insults shouted. People hated each other, and he? Well, he hated them just as much.

“Sombra.” He let her name hang for a long time as he looked out over London. “Did you know it was my birthday?” He stood on the railing, balanced, one hand on the wall beside him.

He used to do this a lot, he even used to jump sometimes. He had tried, he had tried so many times - if it lived, he could kill it. Of course, he didn’t really live, did he? He’d always come back, limply on the ground. Bullets didn’t work any better than cliffs or rooftops, or razor blades, but that didn’t stop him from trying.

There was a long silence, but he didn’t prompt. He knew she’d heard. She was just sweating over the answer - which actually, was all the answer he needed. She had known, then. All that remained was to see whether she’d admit to it.

Whether she’d tell the truth.

“I-” Sombra stammered, unsettled and more than a little afraid, because while he was a friend he was also a friend with a bad temper.

Cracking jokes, she’d happily do, because those were just jokes. This, though, wasn’t a joke - it was very real. “I mean I- look, Gabe, I know you didn’t like… tell me or anything? But… yeah, I k-I kinda figured it out. I just check everybody out who I’m gonna be working with, okay, it’s not like a-”

“Sombra, it’s…” Reaper cut her off, then let his own words trail into silence. She knew. She was worried. She hadn’t lied. She realized how sensitive the topic could be - but he couldn’t blame her. He liked knowing who he was working with, too.
...that was why he was doing any of this, wasn’t it? To find out who he was working with. Widowmaker. Sombra. Jesse. Oxton. Who could he work with? Who did he need to take care of through other means?

“It’s fine,” he turned his head to the side, letting out a short sigh. It didn’t *feel* fine, but it wasn’t because of her - it had nothing to do with her. Everything felt wrong, it all felt wrong these days, and he certainly wasn’t Gabriel Reyes anymore. He hadn’t been born, he had been made, borne out of flames of hatred and anger and betrayal and that was what he was. Hatred and anger and retribution.

...except it really was a very nice gift.

“Thank you,” he muttered. “Real thoughtful. I-...I appreciate it.” With a grunt, he stepped forward off of the railing. “Now get that dropship back here and take me to unwrap your present.”

“Y-you got it, boss,” Sombra breathed, grinning widely. Her eyes shone in the purple light of her screens, glistening with a thin sheen as she quickly diverted the dropship his way - and made a few changes to speed it up by five percent.

So it would burn out the core a little faster, and the ship would be broken by tomorrow - why the fuck did she care? She could always get another one. “*Feliz cumpleaños, Gabe, mi amigo.*”

He hit the ground in a swirl of dark smoke and darker laughter, coalescing within the cloud with a grin as the ship came in to pick him up. “*Muchas gracias*...”

There was a long pause, followed by another word that kicked Sombra’s grin up another notch.

“*...amiga.*”

---

Winston was a little groggy from a nap when the doorbell rang. He frowned at that, wondering if it was that youth group again. With a sigh, he clambered to the front entrance and up into the small home which disguised the facility’s true entryway.

“I already told you,” he called toward the door, “I’m not buying any more cookies unless you give me a bulk disc-” he cut off with a blink as he pulled the door open and saw not a collection of uniformed youths, but rather, Tracer and Emily.

“Heya, big guy! Um, you mind if we crash here for a while?” Tracer tipped her head to the side a little nervously, indicating a few large suitcases next to them. “Sort of uh... had something come up.”

“Winston, love, wonderful to see you,” Emily stepped forward and threw her arms around his neck for a hug, letting out a delighted squeal as she did. “Tell me - any chance I could talk Athena into undermining Reibling and Associates? I’d love to take them down a notch or two.”

“I, uh-” Winston rubbed at his neck with a chuckle. “Hello! Both of you - yes, of course, come right in. Athena can assign you some rooms if you’ll be staying a while, and fill you in on anything else - and um, I suppose you could talk with her about that,” he frowned, “although I’d honestly hope the answer would be no.”

“Well, they’re a bunch of bloody anti-omnic wankers,” Emily chirped, picking up a pair of large
suitcases and leaving a third (along with two smaller ones) for Lena. “And! They’ve done a shifty thing or two - but I’m only joking anyway, love. How’ve you been? How’s Orisa?”

Winston latched onto that topic swiftly, gushing a little as he led the way inside and down into the facility proper. Emily grinned at that, at how he talked about her - he sounded like Lena, a little, and she wasn’t exactly surprised. People picked up surprisingly subtle affectations sometimes, and probably most of Winston’s experience with this sort of thing was from Lena.

From Lena, talking about her. That thought sent Emily’s heart spurring higher and she dropped back a pace to press a kiss to Lena’s cheek.

“Thanks, love,” Tracer chuckled, quirking an eyebrow. “That for anything in particular?”

“Just for being you and loving me,” Emily nodded.

“Well, in that case, I’ll take another one - neither of those have exactly changed, you know!”

She laughed and kissed Lena on the cheek again, grinning as she jogged a few steps to catch up with Winston again. It might be a little odd to be here in Apeldoorn, but it was shaping up beautifully so far. Sure, it had only been a few minutes - but they were the hard ones, the first ones. The rest would be easy.

Winston waved and excused himself down the halls, and Athena joined them briefly over the intercom to direct them to their room. They excitedly took note and started to head that way, eager to get a little bit settled at least - but the base was busy these days, and little went unnoticed.

“Aha, would this be Emily?” A dark voice drew her eyes and Lena chuckled.

“Yeah, yes,” Tracer sighed, turning to face the old sniper. “Go easy on her, Ana!” She tried her best to put on an intimidating face and failed entirely.

“Oooh, Ana, Fareeha’s mum?” Emily glanced over and Lena nodded with a roll of her eyes. The redhead dropped her suitcases with a grin, leaping toward the older woman with her arms wide and wrapping her up in a tight hug. “Oh that’s lovely! It’s so nice to meet you, Ana - I’ve heard all sorts of stories!”

“Yes, well, they-” Ana chuckled, her arms pinned to her side as she looked to Tracer in slight panic. Tracer just giggled silently as Emily kissed Ana on the cheek. “You know, many of those stories are- are not true, but many more are- heh, let me assure you-” she frowned as her words came out wrong, the normally easy comeback seemingly scattered by the force of Emily’s hug.

“You asked for it,” Tracer quipped with a grin as she watched the old sniper struggle in vain, whilst trying to make it look very much like she wasn’t struggling at all.

“Yes. Well.” Ana cleared her throat and offered Emily a handshake when she managed to disentangle herself, which the redhead accepted with a giggle. “A pleasure to meet you, Emily. In light of your friendliness, I suppose I can forgive you for using bags instead of loose-leaf.”

Emily leaned in, a twinkle in her eye. “I thought you were going to make a big deal out of that! Fareeha practically choked when she saw what I was serving her.”

“We’ll fix you up yet,” Ana murmured thoughtfully, but Tracer caught Emily’s elbow and tugged her backward.

“Oi! No corrupting her to the forces of evil and tea that takes twenty minutes rather than two!”
Tracer frowned to the sniper.

“Well you’ve got to admit, love,” Emily tipped her head to the side and fixed Lena with a plaintive look. “It really does develop a fuller flavour.”

Tracer looked aghast, back and forth between her girlfriend and Ana. “Th-thirty seconds! Thirty seconds I’ve had her here and you’re already being a bad influence!”

“Pah, hardly,” Ana scoffed lightly, waving a hand. “Besides which, *saghir*, is it really so bad that she learns some good taste?”

“You know, if you don’t cut this out I’m going to-” Tracer raised a threatening finger, held it, and then groaned in frustration. “Ugh, dammit! Why can’t I think of anything to bother you? That’s not normally hard!”

Ana snickered lightly as she waved and turned to head further back into the facility. Emily called a cheery goodbye after her and turned back to Lena with a grin. “Alright, now quickly before anybody else sidetracks us-”

“Well, suppose that’d be about my cue to step in.” A thick voice drawled from around a corner, and was shortly followed by a wide-brimmed hat and a poncho. Worn by Jesse McCree, of course.

“Jesse!” Tracer exclaimed, laughing in surprise, jumping forward to give the cowboy a hug. “Didn’t expect to see you here!” She withdrew, fixing him with a stern glare (above a crooked grin). “Not after a year of refusing to answer our calls, might I add.”

“Yeah, well,” he rolled a shoulder uneasily, glancing off to the side. “Can’t say’s I thought people would exactly be *excited* to see me. Glad to see I was wrong on a count or two, at least - good seein’ you again, kiddo.”

His metal fingers ruffled her hair as she groaned and rolled her eyes, swatting at his hand but doing very little to actually deter him. He chuckled and then offered a hand to Emily with a wide smile and a tip of his hat. “Jesse McCree, ma’am - pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Jesse, if you make a move on her I will kick your arse and I’ll get Genji to help!”

McCree laughed abruptly, eyes flicking over to Tracer who stood looking unimpressed behind crossed arms. “What, a man can’t say hello?” He turned a grin back to the smirking Emily and tipped his hat again. “Maybe in the interests of prudence, the handshake best be skipped. Apparently I can’t be trusted around the likes of a pretty gal like yourself.”

“Well,” Emily countered with a grin, “you *do* look pretty untrustworthy there, Mr. McCree. You aren’t serious with that hat, are you? Name’s Emily, by the by.”

He laughed easily, tugging the hat off and spinning it smoothly in his one hand. “Oh, this old thing, Miss Emily? Well, I definitely ain’t *joking* with it! ‘Course, if it gets me a second name that’s half as pretty to go with that first one, I’ll toss this right out the-”

McCree never got to finish the sentence as he was chased, laughing, from the room. Tracer stomped after him, slapping and smacking and shouting, and Emily laughed brightly and called after him. “Nice to meet you, Jesse! I’ll take a rain check on that handshake!”

When Lena came back, it was with red cheeks and heavy breaths, and a wide grin, and Emily pulled her in for a hug and a quick kiss. “That was a treat, love, thank you - let’s get these suitcases away quick before we meet *everyone else* though, yeah?”
“Definitely,” Lena nodded with a sigh. “I need a moment with just you. I mean, they’re all harmless, but everyone else can wait a few minutes - there’s a debrief scheduled for later, and I suspect they’ll want an official introduction there, so…” her eyebrow raised questioningly.

Emily nodded with a light giggle. “I’d be delighted if you showed me off to all your friends, love. Is there anything in particular I should wear for the occasion?”

“Oh go on,” Lena blushed a little with a grin, grabbing up one of the suitcases from the ground. “As if I’d know what you should wear. Pretty sure I’d give Jesse a nosebleed if I got to choose, love, and I think Ana might just try to sneak you out along the side!”

“Mmm,” Emily sighed through her nose, “I do like a silver fox…”

Tracer gave her a little shove with her shoulder, nudging her down the hallway and blushing heavily. “God, why’d I think this move would result in less teasing?”

“Clearly weren’t thinking, love,” Emily replied smoothly with a grin. She tapped in the code Athena had given them on the little keypad and the door slid back into the frame.

She stepped into the room and looked around at the space which would be their home for the foreseeable future - or at least, a portion of it. There was a bed and a couch, a desk up against one wall and a table as well. A small table, but plenty enough for three or four people, with folding chairs accompanying it stacked up against the wall.

It wasn’t too small. Probably about the size that their old living room had been, and there was a little kitchenette at the side with a sink, a kettle, a microwave. Anything more would be in the mess hall, she was sure. There was a door off to the side which was open at the moment, showing the bathroom through it, and a nice little closet as well. A screen covered one wall entirely, easily visible from the couch, bed, and table.

Emily set her suitcases down next to the entrance and grabbed Lena’s hands, tugging her over to the bed and collapsing back to it with a heavy sigh. Lena had to readjust herself a little to stop the accelerator from digging into either of them painfully, but that was a familiar little step to the dance. It made it feel like things weren’t that different, and they really weren’t - not where it counted.

“Home,” Emily sighed, running her fingers through Lena’s cowboy-tousled hair and getting a hum of a giggle in return. “I love it already.”

Chapter End Notes

Sometimes fate's convenient. Sometimes it's a bitch. Sometimes, it's both.

Lots of things happening; miscommunications deepening between Sombra, Widowmaker, and Reaper, and adding more frustration into the mix isn't likely to end well. I liked the Reaper/Sombra scenes, I think they're kinda cute together in this and it'll shift a little too as time goes on, of course.

I'm trying to pepper in things about backstory and development and revelation, rather than shotgunning or hammering them in. Little bits here and there that need to be kind of gathered - but at the same time, I don't want to go too subtle, and I hope the tidbits are evident enough.
Quite frankly, if your guesses (yes you, beloved reader) are any indication, I'm doing a good job! Lots of people have made lots of guesses that have turned out to be quite correct or at least quite close to it, and whilst I daresay nobody's been bang-on about any of the big reveals, I think those are both good indicators. Means there's enough info and consistency in the story for people to base solid ideas on it, but at the same times enough remains behind the curtain for things to be surprising.

After all, it's never quite as fun if you already know how it's going to end, eh?

With that in mind, however, I'm always happy to answer questions or clarify points - hell, sometimes I miss things or mess them up, and if you ask a question or point something out that will help me seal up a plot hole before it gets too big! So please, by all means, ask and say things. I love hearing from you!

Another note, I am doing NaNoWriMo this year; it will be my primary effort when it comes to words, meaning that I'm always going to do my NaNo count (minimum 1667 words per day) first out of the day, and then time after that will be dedicated to fics/other pursuits. Practical upshot is that I'll be dropping down - just for the month of November - to weekly updates rather than one every four days. Please let me know if you like that schedule though, either way - if people like weekly, I'll do weekly; if they want to return to every four days, we can do that! I'm happy to work with you here folks!

If you're jonesing for more of my writing, I've got a bunch of other fics. From a Symbra epic in an AU where Overwatch never existed, with the pair battling for their lives and their freedoms against omnics, shadowy organizations, and even (gasp) each other, to a Spiderbyte short which has an injured Sombra fearing for her life and an annoyed Widowmaker resorting to any measure to get Sombra to stop whining ("Streets of an Orphaned World", and "One Night on the Job", respectively) I'd say I've got a fairly wide range!

Also, worth noting that I will be putting a few extra things out this month under a collaborative effort! "No Angst November" is a collective work written by the members of a Discord I'm part of - a collection of shorts with the main unifying theme being a lack of lasting emotional anguish. Whether that means fluffy, or funny, silly or smutty, is left up to the particular offer for any given day - but it should be assured to be fun! (also, note, whilst I say they're shorts, one of my offerings for that is in fact 25,000 words long, heh).

If you're still looking for writing, there are hundreds of excellent Overwatch writers (and writers of other fandoms too) out there, and they'd always be happy to have you, I think!

Come on back next time when Tracer lets the rest of the team in on what happened while she was captured (or, at least, on some of it), and Jack lets them in on what happened around Overwatch's fall (or, at least, on some of it). Sombra goes over to Widowmaker's place for a movie night, but bites off a little more than she can chew and gets a little more than she bargained for.
Introductions All Around

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer has an introduction (Emily's) and a debriefing (her own) to make, and Jack has some info of his own to throw out there. Jesse does a lot of listening and a little talking as well, particularly having a conversation with Apeldoorn's newest ginger resident later on. Sombra drops in on Widowmaker for a movie night, and gets maybe a little more than she'd bargained for.

JFL Summary: The family's back together again and getting bigger every day! Well, hopefully not every day or they might run out of space soon, but for the time being they've got plenty. McCree just wants to be clueless with Emily, but she already knows too much. He has a brief text conversation with a shadow. Elsewhere, elsewhen, Sombra also knows too much, but she doesn't know enough to not push the point with Widowmaker, and might end up getting lightly threatened. Still, at least she's got a century-old copy of Johnny Mnemonic to watch?

Chapter Notes

Notes: this was all written before recent revelations with Moira and Blackwatch's history, so some of it might not line up perfectly. I'm going to see about nudging things a little bit for future chapters (42+) to see if I can't align things a little better, and I like my odds, but when it comes down to the line I'm more committed to this story than the shifting canon at this point, so... c'est la vie! :D

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker paid Emily and Tracer a visit, to inform them that Reaper would likely be stopping by. Emily had quit one of her jobs - as a data analyst at a corporation called Reibling and Associates - over the company's thinly-veiled concerns over her friendliness with omnics. With danger incoming and lacking the finances to hold the apartment down, they decided to move to Apeldoorn with the Overwatch gang. Reaper, with Sombra's help, did track down the apartment - but, alas, too late. Emily and Tracer were already gone. He had a few moments of despair, but was cheered up when Sombra offered him a victim for his birthday. It had been the first birthday in a long time anybody had got him anything, and he made his appreciation known to his friend. Emily and Lena made it to Apeldoorn, met a few people (Winston, Jesse McCree, and Ana) and then cuddled up in their quarters. With each other there, it felt like home.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They actually drifted off to sleep for a few hours, Lena and Emily, holding each other on the bed. Dreamless, light and empty sleep, untroubled and unaware.

Athena woke them softly. “My apologies for intruding, but the meeting is scheduled to begin shortly.”
Emily shook awake swiftly, rubbing at her forehead and glancing up to the ceiling. “Hmm? Athena? Oh, that-right, thanks love. No need to apologize, you’re always welcome in here, pop in whenever you like.”

Athena hummed slightly, her indication of a nod as Emily prodded Tracer awake. The AI liked the pair of them - they’d visited with Winston not infrequently since the Recall had been issued, and with her as well. Athena found herself looking forward to the prospect of them being nearby, although she was curious over the motivation behind the move.

“Alright,” Tracer groaned groggily, “I’m up, I’m up.” She rolled over to lay face-down on the bed.

Emily rolled her eyes with a grin and stood, grabbed at Lena’s ankles and yanked her off of the bed - Tracer yelped and spun the accelerator up, reappearing upright with her arms crossed in front of her chest. “That was a dirty trick, love.”

“S’pose I’m just a dirty girl then,” Emily purred into her ear as she leaned forward under the guise of tugging the blankets straight on the bed, and Lena shivered.

“S-sorry, did I sound like I was complaining there?” She grinned, moving toward Emily’s lips. It wasn’t as long a kiss as she would have wanted, but there was that meeting to go to and this was one that would probably be better not to delay any further. She knew she’d already left them all waiting while she went home for a rest, and now there would only be more questions with Emily’s sudden arrival.

Lena sighed against her lover’s lips, stroking her cheek as they parted and gazing deep into her beautiful eyes. “Alright, well… guess we’d best head out.” She dropped her hand to Emily’s, squeezing it lightly with a smile and leading the way.

---

Winston couldn’t suppress a smile as he looked around the briefing room. There were so many people here, and he loved seeing that - not all of them were present, of course, but many. Mei, D.Va, and Torbjörn were all on screens around the outside of the room, as were Mercy and Pharah (sharing one, side-by-side). Ana, Reinhardt, Lúcio, Jack, and McCree, along with Winston himself, were sitting around in chairs.

Despite the fact that they were technically here to discuss Tracer’s capture and holding at the hands of Talon, they were actually quite jovial overall. Reinhardt bellowed a laugh as Ana regaled Lúcio with stories, Torbjörn almost desperately called questions about the Raptora suit to Pharah, who refused to answer with a smirk on her lips. McCree chuckled as he chatted idly with Angela and she grinned back at him.

It felt like the old days - the proper old days, not just when they were together but when they were free. Back before restrictions and laws that hobbled and hampered them. Winston hadn’t been there for most of the real so-called glory days, but he’d had his glimpses, and this felt like another one.

“It has been a while since you smiled so widely, Winston.” Athena’s soft voice sounded from a speaker near him, and nowhere else in the room.

He glanced over that way with a chuckle. “Yeah… I’d imagine it has.” His lips almost hurt from it, but he wasn’t going to stop for a second - and as Tracer stepped into the room, the expression only
grew.

Everyone called out some variant of her name and clamoured forward to clap a hand on her shoulder, or shake her hand, or give her a high-five. She returned them all with a slightly self-conscious grin, keeping one hand firmly on Emily’s until they made it to the middle of the room and everyone settled to their seats again.

“Heya, folks,” she chirped with a wave. “Well uh… guess it’d be best to start here.” She gave Em’s hand a little squeeze and glanced over to her with a smile before shrugging and looking back out to the small crowd. “Uh, this is Emily? Some of you’ve met already - um, maybe most of you, actually - but she’s gonna be around here for a while if that’s alright, and so’m I.”

Emily leaned over and whispered something in her ear and Tracer blushed slightly. “Oh, yeah, and uh- she’s my girlfriend, if you didn’t know. Anyway, we um- some stuff happened and we had to clear out of our apartment-”

“One of my employers turned out to have a few ideas I refused to support,” Emily took over the explanation, taking half a step forward with a smile. “Namely, they were a bunch of anti-omnic pricks. So, I decided it’d be best to leave well enough alone and say my goodbyes.”

“What’d ya say these folks were called again?” McCree inquired softly from underneath his hat. Winston nudged his shoulder a little and the cowboy chuckled. “What? I’m just wondering out loud, that’s all. Never said I’d be doin’ anything about it…”

Emily grinned a little, glancing down to him, but the look on Winston’s face said she should probably check things over with him, first, before talking about that any further. The now slightly red-faced man on a screen in the background - Torbjörn - suggested a reason why, as well.

“Anyway,” she continued with a shrug, “we couldn’t afford the place with just me on an NHS nurse’s salary, so we decided to come out here.” Emily offered a wide grin around at the group, quirking an eyebrow. “I know how much you’ve all been missing our little Lena here, and it seems like things have been a bit more active lately. I’d love to help out around the base however I can - Mercy, I’ve got some medical knowledge at least and I understand you’re not around here, so maybe I could give you a hand with things?”

She glanced to the red-faced swede with a smile. “And Torbjörn, I’ve got some mechanical skills, too - maybe I could help you out with that front?”

“I don’t need any assistant,” he grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest.

Lena giggled softly and leaned in, whispering into Emily’s ear, “That means he likes you. He’s just like that!”

Emily squeezed her hand a little with a grin and offered a general smile around again. “Along with anybody else, of course - anyone who could use a second set of eyes or what have you. Um… I was hoping that maybe I could earn the use of a dropship?” Her eyes flicked to Winston’s, a little bit nervous. “Commute to the hospital for my shifts, you know, and-”

“Of course,” he nodded without hesitation. “Our operation’s not nearly as large as our resource base in some ways. We can definitely afford a dropship if it means one more person in the hospitals - right, everyone?”

There was a chorus of agreement from people, and it lifted Emily’s heart to see it. She knew that Lena’s group were good people, and every one she’d met had borne that out, but she’d never seen
them really in a *group* like this. It was wonderful to get even just a glimpse into this side of Lena’s life.

“Thank you, all, so much,” Emily nodded with a grin. “You’re all lovely! Now, um…” she trailed off and glanced toward Lena curiously, eyebrow raised, and Lena nodded. Emily went and took a seat and offered her a reassuring smile and a thumbs-up.

Tracer definitely needed it. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Okay, so… with that out of the way, I guess we should get on to the other thing…” she trailed off for a moment, collecting her thoughts as everyone just *looked* at her, but they didn’t seem harsh or judgemental. Just curious, which was nice.

“We got a warning that Niles Systems was under attack by Talon,” she started with a nod, and it was easier once she was talking. It was just a debriefing, she’d done a hundred of them before. “Objective unknown. At this point, success unknown as well.”

“The CEO did survive the attack, for what that’s worth,” Winston pointed out, and Tracer smiled at that. Maybe she’d saved somebody after all - hopefully a few.

“Good to hear, thanks,” she nodded before returning to her explanation. “I showed up on the scene, and the first thing I saw was Widowmaker engaging the guards down below.” She saw a few looks flicker over a few faces, but forged on ahead without letting it derail her. “I got in close and broke her concentration - I knew better than to dive into the middle of it all, but I figured if I could distract their support, it would do something at least.”

“Some kind of friend *she* is,” Ana muttered under her breath, drawing a confused look from McCree.

Tracer sighed, half-rolling her eyes. “It- she’s not-” she glanced down to Emily’s soft smile, drawing reassurance from that before she met Ana’s eye. “I really don’t think *friend* is the right term, Ana.” *In about a million ways.*

“What are y’all even *talking* about?” McCree wondered, scratching at his head through his hat.

“Oh, right!” Tracer clapped a hand against her forehead with a laugh. “I forgot - right, okay, um… well, the short version is that I guess you could say Widowmaker and I have a bit of an… interoperability agreement. Unspoken, of course - but we don’t fight to kill each other anymore. Incapacitation, distraction, sure. We don’t work *together* or anything of the sort, but she’s actually saved my bacon once or twice.”

He looked back a little oddly at that, and she couldn’t distinguish the meaning behind the expression. Something positive, she was pretty sure, and curious as well - but a second later he shrugged a shoulder and settled back into his chair, looking overall satisfied with the explanation.

“For what it’s worth,” Winston urged softly from the side, “I agree with your decision to *not* leap into the middle of the conflict.” Jack lent his approval to the idea with a nod and a grunt, and a second later Ana nodded softly as well. Her eye held a fair bit of concern as she looked up to Tracer.

“Thanks,” the brit nodded with a smile and then cleared her throat. “Anyway, we um- we fought out over the rooftops for a while, and had actually decided to call our combat to a close. Took a moment to catch our respective breaths before we parted ways for the day.” Emily smirked and quirked an eyebrow, but Lena cleared her throat again and tried to prevent herself from blushing.

She mostly succeeded.

“Then, though, a uh… a dropship came up. She warned me about it before it got there, and we
started up the fight again - figured I could escape away and it’d be all fine, but it wasn’t just a ship full of troopers. Reaper was there, and Sombra as well.”

“Wait,” Ana let out a laugh, holding up a hand. “So you are telling me that of our supposed allies within Talon, both of them were the ones who captured you? Two out of the three people there? What kind of ally is that!”

“The kind under Reyes’ command,” Jack suggested in a soft growl.

Ana tipped her head with a disbelieving chuckle. “You really think things would have been different if he had not been there?” The old sniper looked to Jack with an amused expression of doubt.

“Yes, I do.” Tracer interrupted their brief exchange, and it was with such certainty in her voice that Ana didn’t protest. She looked back for a second at the young brit, and then shrugged and gave a gesture to continue with the story.

“He caught my accelerator. Seems like he learned from Doomfist’s mistake, though, because he didn’t break it.” Quite. She didn’t need to make the story sound worse than it already was, though. “Brought me in and slapped me in an interrogation chair. Widowmaker came in and we played out a little act, she was asking about Gibraltar’s codes for some reason, I don’t know why.”

Looks flickered over a few faces and Tracer raised an eyebrow.

“They breached the facility,” Winston explained.

“Reaper almost killed me,” Jack grunted, then frowned a little. “He had a recording of you screaming. Sounded pretty intense. That from your little ‘act’ in the interrogation room?”

“W- I,” Tracer stammered over a chuckle, blushing - and the way Emily’s grin sharpened didn’t help. “I just- I had to make it realistic, y’know? I mean, she’s on my side but she’s gotta keep it hidden and all.” Her nervous grin dropped away, replaced by an apologetic smile. “Sorry. That was probably really rough for you.”

He barked a laugh and shook his head. “Ah… it was, it was rough, yeah, but I wouldn’t blame it on you. I’ve been having some problems lately, it was just the straw that broke the camel’s back…” he took a deep breath and then sighed it out, eyebrows raised high. “And by ‘broke the camel’s back’ I mean ‘convinced me to capture a third party and torture her by removing her arm so she couldn’t escape’, so… rough might be an understatement.”

For a second, he was confused by the look of absolute horror on Tracer’s face, then abruptly realized what had happened and he held out a hand. “Prosthetic! Prosthetic arm, not- I didn’t tear off her real arm.”

“Oh, that makes me feel so much better there, Jack,” McCree muttered wryly, wiggling his mechanical fingers before frowning. “Also, what the hell are you talking about? How the fuck much did I miss out on while I was gone?”

“Jesse! Language!” Angela called from her screen, eyes widening as she tipped her head toward the screen D.Va was on.

The Korean snorted with a grin. “Awww, doc, you’re a cutiepie, but he’s still got nothing on the potty-mouth that every shitty little fuckboy gamer wannabe has! I heard ten times worse before breakfast this morning!”

Mercy blushed furiously as Pharah nudged her shoulder with a smirk and most of the rest of them
chuckled.

“Okay, okay I’ll - I’ll take the floor after Tracer.” Jack nodded. “Explain a few things on my end and get people up to speed.”

“He would not know about the Black Tide, either,” Athena pointed out from the ceiling and Winston nodded.

McCree stood with a huff and stepped forward, slipping between a pair of chairs and sitting down heavily next to Emily. “I’m stickin’ here,” he murmured loudly enough for everyone to hear. “The two of us can be clueless together.”

“...actually,” Emily admitted with a soft smile, “I… kind of already knew about the Black Tide, so-” she giggled as McCree threw his arms into the air with a huff and leapt up from his chair, but she caught his poncho and tugged him back into it.

Tracer laughed and grinned, reassured yet again by it all. It didn’t feel tense and scary, it didn’t feel dark and terrifying - they were here, they were together, and it felt like nothing was that big of an issue anymore. What was there that they couldn’t handle, together?

“So she interrogated you?” Winston prompted after the laughter died down. “Or, faked interrogating you, that is?”

“Yeah,” Tracer confirmed with a nod. “Of course, I didn’t even know the codes so I couldn’t give them away. I’m guessing Sombra had something to do with that?”

“It would be a fair guess,” Athena admitted.

“Then… what, they just let you stew for the next few days?” Jack frowned a little, but it was clear that he couldn’t decide whether to be upset or relieved.

“Uh…” Tracer shrugged, a frown creasing her features as she met his eyes uneasily. “Not- not exactly, sir. A while later - I don’t know how long - there was something else, too. Reaper… he came in, and…”

“...and what?” Soldier: 76 clenched a fist involuntarily. “What did he do to you? He taunted me saying he’d torment you somehow - what did he-”

“He-” she cut off her former commander, “he didn’t really do anything,” Tracer shook her head, still frowning. “He just… sat down and chatted. It - I mean, honestly? It kind of felt like an act, just like Widowmaker’s. He definitely wanted something out of me, but I don’t know what. He shot out all the cameras, shattered the two-way mirror, locked all the doors, and then…”

She let out a slow sigh, shaking her head. “Then he started talking about Overwatch. He… he told me to ask you something, sir. I don’t think I want to, though.”

The look of fear that crossed over Jack’s face wasn’t hard for her to read at all. The flicker of concern that raced over McCree’s was also pretty obvious, even if the reasons weren’t as obvious.

Dry-mouthed, Jack swallowed. “Would… that be about the explosion at Headquarters?”

Tracer just nodded.

He sighed heavily and dropped his head into his hands. “Alright. It- after this long it deserves to come out. Finish up with yours and then I’ll take my turn.”
“Not much to finish,” Tracer shrugged an uncomfortable shoulder. “He made some crack about me being gullible, and then flipped his lid entirely when I said that at least I wasn’t a traitor.”

Ana scoffed. “So it’s that easy to get under his skin, then?”

Tracer forced a chuckle, but it sounded entirely uneasy. “It- uh… I- I wouldn’t recommend it, if I’m honest. Anyway, then he left again. Some time later he came back and literally tore the restraints off of me - metal ones, mind you - and Widowmaker brought me out to the dropship, and then there was the exchange, so…”

She glanced around with a smile and shrug, but there were no more questions at the moment at least. Everyone seemed more interested in the upcoming information, so Tracer slowly took a seat next to Emily after meeting Morrison’s eyes. With a grunt, the old soldier pushed himself to his feet and stepped to the front of the room.

“Alright. Gibraltar first, for Jesse and Tracer’s benefit.” His eyes dwelt on Emily for a second, some old procedures about unnecessary information and civilian risk flickering through his head, but they hadn’t stopped anything from getting out anyway. Not in the old days, and not now, apparently.

After all, she already knew about the Black Tide.

Apparently.

“Things went sour at Gibraltar. Talon was there with that hard-light bandit again - seems she is working with Vishkar, and they wanted to launch a payload. Can’t tell what, or why, and we can’t exactly report it openly to the authorities, being fugitives ourselves.” He chuckled darkly, shaking his head.

“I got incapacitated. Reyes gloated over me for a minute, said he wanted me to suffer, no surprise there.” His eyes found Ana’s as he clenched his jaw. “Said he wanted me to understand. Man’s completely insane in my opinion, but then he started talking about you, Oxton. Having you captive. Said you’d be a great resource for them, and… well, I didn’t take it well.”

He chuckled a little, flashing a grateful smile Mercy’s way as he shrugged. “Seems like my brain’s been on a downward spiral for now, but thanks to our resident angel, that should be drawing to a close. At the time, though, I got a little carried away - grabbed the Vishkar operative and stole a dropship, flew to Zeigler’s aid camp,” he took a deep breath and sighed it out in lieu of further explanation.

“It was bad. Really bad. Eventually the rest of the team managed to pull me to my senses - thank you all for that, again - and we made the swap.” His face darkened a little as his eyes dropped to the floor. “Now… as for what happened at Headquarters…”

The small crowd watched in anticipation. Many of them hadn’t been there for Overwatch’s fall - Fareeha had been aware of it, but only from a distance. The other newer members of the team had heard about it on the news, maybe, but it didn’t mean as much to them.

They weren’t the ones Jack was worried about. As Reaper’s dark words filtered through his memory again, his eyes flicked up and met Reinhardt’s. His old friend smiled softly and nodded, and it was all the encouragement Jack needed.

“It’ll be no surprise to any of you that Reyes and I had been fighting that night. Like most nights, toward the end. He’d accused me of some things, some gibberish about being a traitor and turning away from what Overwatch had been founded on, what he’d founded it on. Something about hands
being tied while good people died, resource allocation, covert operations and unfounded principles, he wasn’t even talking coherently. I told him it wasn’t his wheelhouse and he was out of his depth; said he was being angry and paranoid and out of line, and needed to go grab some rest. It got worse from there.”

His eyes drifted until they met with Jesse’s, and he couldn’t tell exactly what he saw there.

“After he was gone out of my office, I simmered for a while and then went down to the range to blow off some steam. On top of all the other bullshit that was happening at the time, I just couldn’t take it, and that’s… that’s when I found Reyes in the atrium, crouching in front of a bomb. Blackwatch, Overwatch, we’d been at each other’s throats for a while, but I never expected—” he cut off his words, clearing his throat.

“I shot him and went to disarm the bomb, but it didn’t work. Timer started rushing toward zero and I had just enough time to get around a corner.”

There was a long moment of silence.

“I… I saw the aftermath, but I never thought even Gabriel would stoop to something like that.”

Ana’s dark voice was the first to break the stillness.

“He didn’t.” Jack clenched his jaw, shaking his head. “He- I can see now, looking back… he wouldn’t have. Not like that. If he’d planted the bomb, I never would have seen it coming. I don’t know if it was somebody else in Blackwatch, or—” he cut off at the angry flare in McCree’s eyes, and fixed a gaze on him solidly. “You really want to tell me there was nobody in your unit who would’ve turned on us like that?”

Jesse chewed at nothing for a few seconds. “You tryin’ to say there was nobody like that in yours?”

The old soldier took a deep breath and looked away, shaking his head. He couldn’t say that, not in hindsight, and they both knew it. “Somebody set the bomb. Doesn’t really matter who - and it doesn’t change anything now, anyway. Reyes aside… Reaper’s made his motives clear.”

McCree chuckled a little at that but declined to comment. He was no fool and he knew which way the wind was blowing, knew better than to throw his voice against the prevailing gusts, but he had plenty of space in his mind for thoughts. Has he now, Jack? You’re as blind sure as he is. And you both think I’m the idiot, ha.

“I’ve no clue what he was on about in that interrogation room, sir,” Tracer shook her head. “Just-rambling. The things he said didn’t even really seem to tie in to each other, but he- I thought it was just the sleeplessness and dehydration, at the time.” Her expression spoke of an uncertainty on that point, though, that everyone could see.

“Gabriel… did have a documented history of paranoid tendencies,” Mercy admitted softly from her screen at the back of the room. “He- we , rather—” she cleared her throat and dropped her eyes. “There was an incident a few months before the detonation at Headquarters which led to him refusing further care from me. Including his medications.”

“What kind of incident?” Jack inquired, but Mercy only shook her head.

“I’d… I’d really rather not go into it,” she replied softly, not looking up at the screen. She looked so hurt at the recollection that nobody could bring themselves to push the issue. Except for a certain ex-special-operations cowboy, who instead stayed silent because he wanted there to be less ammunition in play rather than more.
Although he was curious. It was obviously a painful topic and he didn’t want to hurt his friend, but he thought he might find himself asking her privately one of these days.

“Well,” McCree sighed, rubbing at his stubble. “Maybe we’ll never quite know what actually happened that day. And,” he chuckled softly, “I can’t say you’re wrong that he wants some kinda revenge against you, Jack.” *Might be revenge and justice are just a matter of perspective, though…*

“Yeah,” Morrison shook his head, “or on all of us.”

“He blames us,” Ana shrugged idly, sounding entirely unconcerned. “He has made that much clear. He blames us for all of his ills and intends to make us pay.”

“On the rooftop-” Reinhardt started, and then looked sharply over to Lúcio, biting back his words for a moment.

McCree’s eyes didn’t flicker around. They looked blankly forward as he felt the conversation shift and spin around, and he thought back to his little talk with Genji. *Best not to let one side take anything too far in their own hands.*

“I hate to draw attention to my own inadequacies,” he chuckled brightly, interrupting any further speculation on Gabe, Reaper, Talon, or the fall. “But I still don’t have a clue what this Black Tide junk is that y’all keep jawing about, and I wouldn’t mind bein’ let in on that.”

“Good point,” Winston nodded, pushing himself out of his chair to take the front of the room. “That’s the primary concern at the moment anyway - between that, and tracking down some chemical weaponry, we already have our plates full without digging through the history books.”

“Chemical weap…” Jesse trailed off and shook his head. “I leave you folks alone for one year - just a one! And all of a sudden you’re all into chemical weapons and some kinda virus. Well, shucks,” he chuckled. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think you needed me around!”

He sat back with an easy grin as Winston started to explain everything that was known about the Black Tide virus - right now, it was mostly aftermath and effects. How it worked was still a mystery, although they were making slow headway.

Winston pulled up pictures of Obninsk, of the conflict near the Jordan River, of Sudbury. There had been another outbreak since the walker tank - an isolated Alpine town. He explained that Athena was tracking the incidents and trying to find correlations, but there hadn’t been any solid developments there yet.

The relaxed and mildly curious smile on McCree’s lips didn’t leave quickly. It also didn’t reflect anything inside him. He felt like he was trying to juggle wildcats and they definitely didn’t want to co-operate. Quite the opposite, they wanted to tear each other to pieces.

He did believe Gabe, that he hadn’t set the bomb. He did believe Jack, that he hadn’t known. He knew that Gabe still wanted to rip Jack to shreds… but maybe, just maybe, he was making a bit of progress on Jack himself on that point. Maybe, *next time*, Jack wouldn’t be the one shooting first.

Maybe.

After all, Jack had been the one to say Gabe hadn’t planted the bomb. Maybe it could be a little less hostile in the future. Maybe that could help.

Hopefully, somewhere along the way, he could even find a little truth.
Emily was alone in the mess hall when she heard a noise behind her, turning with two plates of food to catch sight of McCree.

“Evenin’ there, Miss Emily,” he tipped his hat, grinning at her soft giggle. “Now - if you could excuse an overly protective gunslinger for wonderin’... just which company was it you said let you go?”

“I didn’t,” Emily retorted with a smirk and narrowed eyes, setting down the plates and leaning back against the counter to cross her arms. “As a matter of intent, in fact - and what’s it to you anyway, Mr. McCree?”

“Well,” he chuckled, shrugging a shoulder. “The way I figure it? People go around being like that, they’ll find a bit of a comeuppance sooner or later.”

“And,” she cleared her throat softly, pushing forward off of the counter to lean in and raise an eyebrow, brushing a strand of coppery hair behind her ear. “Would that comeuppance be at the end of your revolver there, Mr. McCree?”

The cowboy shrugged idly, raising his prosthetic arm from underneath his poncho and inspecting the hand of it. “Oh,” he murmured, “I reckon I’d rather it be at my knuckles, myself - but I ain’t picky.”

“Well, I am,” Emily nodded before turning up her nose exaggeratedly. “I’m quite picky in fact, Mr. McCree, and I wouldn’t feel comfortable having my hand in a thing like that. Not with what it could entail.”

“That would be why I was offering to take your hand out of it!” He laughed briefly, grinning wide, but then shook his head as his brows drew together. “Now, Emily, I’m really not the kind of man who’d do anything a lady wouldn’t want him to. I’m just saying that those sort of folk? Well, they maybe deserve a rap on the knuckles every now and then.”

“And what sort of folk are they, exactly? You don’t even know what happened,” Emily pointed out with a smirk.

Jesse chuckled. “Well, I know they’re ‘anti-omnic pricks’ if’n I might quote you, and I ain’t a fan of that. Besides, I reckon I’ve got a decently good handle on you and the sort of person you are, Miss Emily, and any sort of folk who wouldn’t meet your standards? Well, those’re the sort I reckon I’d deal a little correction to.”

“You sound like one of my partners,” Emily scoffed, rolling her eyes and thinking about Widdy with a faint smile. She’d be absolutely furious if Emily let anybody else get retribution for her. “I’ll tell you what though, Jesse.” She smiled, turning to pick up the two plates in hand again. “I’ll consider your offer, I’ll consider my options… and I’ll get back to you. Sound fair?”

“If you reckon it’s fair, I ain’t one to argue, Miss Emily,” McCree shrugged a shoulder and went to wave goodbye. He was cut off early, though, as the redhead leaned in to give him a swift kiss on the cheek.

“Well, I appreciate that, and thank you very much. G’night now, Jesse - do rest well, yeah? Trust me, I’m a big girl.” She grinned. “I can handle myself.”
He paused for a second, grinning slowly. “I’m starting to get an inkling that way,” he admitted softly, raising a hand to touch his cheek as Emily walked out of the room. A few seconds later, he laughed, and pulled out his phone to shoot off a quick message.

“Might be holdin’ out on that plan for a little while, on account of a personal favour. Thanks for looking up those - what were they called, Reibling? Thanks for lookin’ em up for me, though.”

The response came a few seconds later. “You gotta be kidding me with the fucking apostrophes, really Jesse? You don’t think you’re taking the vaquero thing a little far? Yeah no problem though - but hey, whenever that personal favour expires? You lemme know. I wanna come with you on this one to knock some sense into those pendejos. Or knock a few teeth out of them. Whichever.”

He shook his head with a chuckle and typed out a reply. “Oh, do ya? And why would that be?”

“What, you think you’re the only one with friends and personal favours? Yeah right, hombre - just lemme know.”

McCree shook his head as he grabbed a snack out of one of the cupboards. “Sure thing. Bet a lady like you knows a lot of folks who’d be interested in taking a chunk out of a company like that. Or maybe any company at all, huh?”

“Coming from you, “lady” is almost an insult! Whatever though, see ya, Jesse. And remember you still owe me a drink.”

He smirked, shaking his head a little. “Suspect I won’t be seeing you, but I suppose I’ll talk to you later, Shadow.”

She just sent a little winking face back and he laughed, heading back to the room he was staying in for the next little while. He suspected he’d have a trip or two to take in the near future, but for the night at least, Apeldoorn was somewhere he could hang his hat.

It was a little odd to think of, but he liked it. For just a moment, he let all the thoughts of ginger brits, purple-haired latinas, or mask-wearing Los Angelinos drift out of his mind, and he just smiled at the walls and the halls.

Most places he’d been through his life felt like home - at least for a minute, at least for a night. He just hadn’t thought any with the Overwatch badge ever would again, but then, maybe some of the people who called him a dumbass had a point.

---

Widowmaker tugged the door open with a sigh, fixing those amused purple eyes with a flat stare. “Why are you here, Sombra? And do not say movie night.”

“Oh, oh should I not say that?” The hacker grinned widely, eyes sparkling as she shrugged. A canvas bag tucked under one arm crinkled in a way that sounded distinctly like a bag of potato chips. “Well, in that case, I guess I’ll need to say film evening now open up and let me through.”

Widowmaker slowly clenched her jaw. “You are not supposed to be here. You are not even supposed to know about here.”
With an airy scoff, Sombra tried to step forward and around the assassin - but she didn’t budge, and kept Sombra firmly out in the hallway. She laughed. “Oh come on, amiga! Does it really matter - I mean, c’mon, we’re friends!” Her arms spread as wide as her grin. “That’s got to count for something, doesn’t it?”

Leaning against the doorframe, Widowmaker sighed slowly through her nose. “Oui. It does count for something. You will notice you have not yet been shot, now adieu Sombra. I am busy.” She leaned back to shut the door.

“Yeah, busy and grumpy,” Sombra muttered and then cleared her throat abruptly when Widowmaker stopped closing the door and shot her an annoyed glance. “I mean - what I meant to say was-”

Sombra’s arm swung easily behind her back, plucking a Translocator off of her belt and flinging it up, forward over her shoulder where it slipped easily through the gap between door and doorframe. In a practiced motion, Sombra activated the system as the beacon flew, and was instantly transported to the inside of the apartment on the other side of Widowmaker.

“-thanks for inviting m- ack!” Her words were cut off as the door slammed shut and Widowmaker whirled, catching her shirt and shoving her back up against the wall. Sombra smirked and stared back unafraid into those sharp golden eyes. “Ooh, you gonna kiss me, chica? Wasn’t exactly what I had planned but hey,” she winked, “I’m flexible.”

With a scoff, Widowmaker rolled her eyes and pushed herself back away from the wall. She slid the deadbolt and the chain on the door and strode further into the apartment.

“Oh sure,” Sombra grumbled. “Everybody’s gotta stop just when it’s getting interesting.” She adjusted her jacket a little and followed Widowmaker. “When am I gonna get a little action, huh? All of you running around like hamsters and shit - you think you and your two little chicas are the only ones, lemme tell you, ha!”

Scowling, Widowmaker didn’t respond. She headed directly for the couch - it was intensely irritating that it seemed legitimately impossible to prevent Sombra from gaining entry to anything. Locations or information. The only card she held was the guarantee that she could turn the hacker into an ex-hacker in an instant, but lately that did not carry the weight it had.

Sombra seemed to have decided that their friendship, such as it stood now, precluded any possibility of her death. Widowmaker didn’t like that presumption. She also didn’t like the fact that it was true, at least for the time being - not that she was planning on killing Sombra (although she had developed several such plans), and not that she wanted to kill Sombra (although she did, she wanted to kill generally), but she simply didn’t like the idea of being locked out of any given action. She felt trapped when it was the case.

Right now, that was particularly true, and in several ways.

“Fine,” Widowmaker sat down with a huff on the couch - rich, red velvet. It wasn’t old, but it very much looked like it. She’d picked it out herself. This wasn’t just a safe-house or a stopping-off point the way the apartment in London had been intended, this apartment was truly hers. She had a few homes dotted around along with her more professionally-oriented holdings. “However, if you intend to waste my time with a movie, you can at least return the favour. We must assuage Reaper’s suspicions.”

“Waste?!” Sombra gasped, shaking her head. “Well, if I’m not wanted, here, then maybe I’ll just leave!” She spun on heel and crossed her arms with a huff, turning her nose sharply upward. She
waited for Widowmaker to apologize - or at least to admit that she needed Sombra’s help - but that dark, teasing voice never came.

When Sombra turned around, Widowmaker had picked up her rifle off of the glass coffee table in front of her and was partially disassembling it, inspecting and cleaning the pieces. “Hey!” Sombra frowned. “Come on, *chica*, what’re you doing?”

Grunting, Widowmaker set the rifle down again and glared at her. “Being irritated. You are not helping. You have been supremely unhelpful. For this entire incident.”

“I covered your ass so you could warn your little *chicas,*” Sombra pointed out, extending a finger in accusation. “And I gave you that warning in the first place so I don’t appreciate being told that I’m not helping. If you’d kept your shit straight then none of this would’ve come close to coming out in the first place!”

Widowmaker was on her feet instantly, and had her hand on Sombra’s throat before the hacker could react. Her heart clenched at the look in those gold eyes, the dangerous gleam of exposed teeth behind blue lips, but as quickly as it had begun it was over. Widowmaker exhaled swiftly and shook her head, and her face was a placid mask again as she stepped back.

She didn’t like this. It wasn’t supposed to happen in the first place, and to say that it wasn’t helping would be a vast understatement. It was perhaps the whole source of the problem, these impulses; they’d always been so dull.

Why had she started to let herself follow them?

She knew the reason. She knew now - maybe had known all along, even - that it was a tactical error. She didn’t regret it, though. Not for an instant. Didn't regret *them.*

“Ifine. I made my errors. I-I was…” Widowmaker frowned. She was *never* sloppy. She never missed. Except, when it came to Tracer and Emily, she did. She shattered their window. She got caught. Little tickles of things flickered in her gut; she remembered feeling regret and this wasn’t quite the same, but it felt like it could maybe be close.

The way a match was close to a bonfire. “I was sloppy.”

“N-” Sombra cleared her throat, forcing a chuckle which sounded just as natural as the rest of them. “Nah. I mean, yeah, sure, whatever - you’re only human, right? Besides, the *real* thing you should have done was just let me in on it from the *start.* Could’ve helped you keep it quiet. That’s the *real* lesson here, *amiga.*”

Sombra’s heart hammered as Widowmaker’s eyes met hers, studiously, *intensely*, and for longer than she was comfortable with. The assassin didn’t blink, and Sombra desperately wanted to - or to look away - but she was a little worried about what it might result in.

Widowmaker said nothing, though, only thought about how foolish it was to *trust*, before she returned to the couch and gestured Sombra to it. “*Alors,*” she sighed, “let us have your movie night then, and let us see if something can be done moving forward. To begin with, what *exactly* does Reaper suspect?”

Sombra stepped around the coffee table, setting the canvas bag on it and shrugging. Two bottles in the bag clinked and drew Widowmaker’s eyes for a moment, but she didn’t comment on it.

“I dunno, exactly. He’s kinda cryptic - you know he used to be Spec Ops, right? Back before he got all…” she trailed off and just waved a hand over her face with a chuckle in lieu of actually finishing
the sentence. “Guess some of it stuck. He sounds paranoid as hell and doesn’t finish half of his own
damn sentences, trying to get straight information out of him’s like trying to get lemonade out of a
cow.”

“Evocative imagery,” Widowmaker murmured as Sombra sat down on the couch. Her eyes studied
the hacker with a sort of reserved curiousity. Trying to determine what one could reveal was always
a risk. “Yes, I knew he was a special operative. How much do you know of his life before Talon?”
She waited for an instant until Sombra opened her mouth to respond, then cut her off with a second
question. “Or of mine?”

Sombra’s mouth clamped shut again real quick. That was a dirty trick, and it had worked perfectly,
and she knew it in an instant - her eyes flicked over to Widowmaker and immediately saw the self-
satisfied smirk on her lips as the assassin settled back against the arm of the couch.

“Ah,” Widowmaker sighed, grinning, her gold eyes dancing with amusement. She was back in
control now and that was exactly how she liked it. “So you do know. Tell me, Sombra, how much
do you know? I am certain you have discovered by now the name Amélie Lacroix, née Guillard.
What do you know, however, about the transition, specifically?”

Her grin only widened as Sombra stiffened, looking intensely uncomfortable, and slowly licked her
lips. “I—” her voice was dry and she coughed, shaking her head. “I need a fucking drink.”

She leaned forward and tugged the bag closer to herself on the coffee table. It nudged the Widow’s
Kiss a little, but neither of the pair reacted to that as Sombra slipped a hand into the canvas and
pulled out a full bottle of tequila. Anybody else would likely have ended up with a broken hand - the
last Talon Trooper to touch the Kiss had ended up unable to hold a rifle in the immediate aftermath,
and had to be fitted for a prosthetic after all was said and done. However, she trusted Sombra not to
damage the Kiss.

Sombra screwed the cap off of the tequila and tipped it back for a deep swig. “Yeah, alright, I uh…”
she cleared her throat, sighing a little. Her eyes stayed facing the front and she fiddled with the
tequila cap idly as she talked. Her words were soft, and a little hesitant - at odds to their normal bright
sharpness.

“I looked it up, did some digging through Talon’s files. I like knowing who I’m working with, and
uh…” her eyes flicked over, just for an instant to meet Widowmaker’s before she coughed and
looked back down to the bottle in her lap again. “And then I didn’t sleep for a week. It… that was
some fucking terrible shit.” She took a little breath, but didn’t trust it enough to let it get any deeper.
“The videos. Fuck.”

Widowmaker chuckled smoothly, easily. It was no concern of hers - yes, it was horrific, what had
been done, but it was also done. It could not be undone, and if it was? That would mean her death.
The forging had been problematic, but she was better now for it; fire and strikes had wrought her into
a weapon capable of anything.

At the same time, that didn’t mean she had any desire in the slightest to undergo the same thing
again. Amélie had not been strong enough to avoid her fate. Widowmaker was.

“Then you understand the stakes,” Widowmaker assured softly, leaning forward to pull out the bottle
of wine which she knew would be in the canvas bag Sombra had brought.

“Stakes?” Sombra frowned in incomprehension, looking over as Widowmaker produced a
corkscrew from somewhere.
“Oh yes,” she laughed lightly. It was a soft, musical sound, and it scared Sombra about as much as the hand around her throat had a moment ago. “I am permitted to operate as I do because I am effective and they have no reason to doubt a thing. They were much more afraid at the beginning of things, and if the Council is led to suspect that Talon’s claws are loosening from my mind - if they doubt my loyalties and the tension of the noose around my neck - then they will have me reconditioned. They will try to take all that I am and hollow it out so they can fill me again with whatever they wish.”

Widowmaker chuckled with a smile as she popped the cork free and set it down off to the side, plucking up a wine glass easily by the stem. The wine poured swiftly, only half-filling the glass so there was plenty of room to swirl it and aerate. She did so, as she rested back against the arm of the couch again, swilling her wine as she smiled and met Sombra’s eyes. “They will, of course, not succeed.”

“Of course not.” Sombra shook her head. “Gabe and I would stop them.”

Another laugh as Widowmaker tossed her head back. “Gabe! Ah, cherie, but you are funny, yes. You think there is anything left of him? I knew the man through my former husband, back during Overwatch - they worked together, you know. Gabriel Reyes is as dead as Amélie Lacroix - or, for that matter, Gérard.” She sat almost glumly back, lips shifting from their easy smile into a thin line.

It didn’t hurt. Neither did the fact that it didn’t hurt - she didn’t feel bad about killing him, nor about lacking guilt over the matter. She wanted to, sometimes - or felt like she should, whether that counted as truly wanting it. She just didn’t.

“No.” Sombra scoffed, taking another swig of tequila and setting it down on the table. “Nah, amiga, it’s not like that - we’re friends, we don’t throw each other under the bus like that. Gabe wouldn’t do it.”

“Sombra. Who is the one who has these suspicions, anyway? Who is the one who would be informing the Council?” Widowmaker studied the hacker on the far end of the couch.

Sombra took a deep breath, a slow breath. She let it out just the same, and didn’t know what to answer. Yeah, Gabe was investigating, but - even if he did find something out (which he wouldn’t), he definitely wouldn’t submit her to that kind of shit. No way in hell would he let a friend undergo the kind of shit that she’d found when she started digging into Widowmaker’s past.

... would he?

Sombra swallowed slowly. No. No, he’s a friend, he wouldn’t. She knew he wouldn’t do it to her. Widowmaker, though?

It didn’t matter anyway. It wouldn’t get to that point.

“Doesn’t matter anyway,” Sombra chuckled. “Not gonna happen - he’s not gonna find anything anyway. Even if he did…” her mind flicked back to Gabe’s apartment, when he found out about the omnic heads. He’d been furious, absolutely furious, but it all ended when she mentioned being on his team. He wouldn’t do that to you. To a teammate.

Although he apparently - maybe, possibly - hadn’t been thinking about Sombra as a teammate, not before that. Did he think about Widowmaker as one? They’d been working together longer, but Sombra had seen them together, and sometimes it seemed a little… different.

Widowmaker laughed again, sounding entirely unconcerned with the matter. “Oh, of course it will
not happen! I will take measures to ensure it. Do not worry, chérie, there is not the slightest chance that I will be reconditioned."

She even had a backup plan in place. Get rid of the evidence. It was so simple - far from ideal, of course, but… reconditioning could not recur. She could hardly flee with any hope of success. There were few options when one had a collar around one’s neck, or a noose.

*Get rid of the evidence.*

Hopefully, it would not come to that.

“D’accord,” Widowmaker nodded, tipping her glass of wine back for a generous mouthful. “We will allay his suspicions to begin with. There will be no need for the contingencies.”

Sombra chuckled easily and nodded, entirely unsettled about the whole thing. She wanted to ask what the contingencies were, but doubted that she’d be informed… and was more than a little bit worried that maybe, just maybe, she would be filled in. She’d just wish afterwards that she hadn’t.

She didn’t like being caught between friends like this. It felt like sand under her skin, grit in her joints that ground whenever she moved; gone was the joy of juggling, because suddenly this wasn’t a game anymore.

“Hey, whatever,” Sombra shrugged, pulling out the potato chips with a chuckle. “Let’s just watch the movie, huh?”

“Not another one of those absurd *Matrix* ones, I hope?” Widowmaker sighed, gesturing Sombra back to lean against her. She’d found a fondness for contact in her dealings with Tracer, and with Emily as well - they were not here, perhaps, but another warm body was.

They would not be together again for some time.

...perhaps never again.

Widowmaker pulled her mind away from that possibility. Focus on failure and find only failure. See the shot. Take the shot. Make the shot. She had to keep concentrated on the target, not the chance of things going wrong.

Sombra snorted and shook her head. “No. This one’s even better! It’s got one of the same guys, too. It’s called *Johnny Mnemonic*. Trust me, you’ll like it.”

As Sombra pulled the bag of chips open and settled in against her side, Widowmaker laughed lightly. “And what would make you think that?”

For a moment, Sombra debated silently, then grinned as she tossed a glowing purple mote of light forward where it spread into a wide screen. “It’s got a dolphin in it?”

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed and flicked over to Sombra’s, which danced in amusement. “Fine,” Widowmaker huffed, laying an arm around the annoying latina’s shoulders. Her body heat was already starting to seep through the layers of clothing they both wore. “I suppose there are worse things to spend a few hours on - very well.”

Sombra chuckled and snuggled up as the movie started, and took another swig of tequila. This felt better, this didn’t feel like shards of glass; this was just friends. Her and Widowmaker. Her and Gabe. Maybe she could bridge the gap between the pair of them, too, but…
...it had been hard enough just getting Gabe to open up to her in the first place. He still wasn’t saying everything and she knew it - no more than Widowmaker was saying everything, for that matter.

For a moment, Sombra rolled her eyes at how frustrating her friends could sometimes be. It’d all be a whole lot easier if they’d just own up and admit to it, and stop trying to pretend like they didn’t like her.

It would work out, though. It would take a little running, a little lying, a little juggling - but those were three of Sombra’s favourite things.

The only problem was, she was pretty sure she couldn’t outright lie to Gabe anymore. Probably not Widowmaker, either.

Her grin widened a little as a thought came to mind, though. Sure, she couldn’t outright lie - but all that meant, was that she’d need to get creative, and she did love a creative exercise. A real opportunity to stretch her legs and her limits.

It would work out. She’d make sure it all worked out.

She sure as hell wasn’t letting Widowmaker go through reconditioning. Sombra chomped down heavily on a chip as her gaze set through with steel. Even if it meant she had to murder every member of the Talon Council herself, she’d never let Widowmaker go through that shit. Once was too much.

She almost - almost - wished she could forget it. Almost wished she had never found out to begin with. There was nothing that Sombra wasn’t interested in, no fact or piece of data she didn’t want to acquire, and none that she wanted to ignore.

Amélie’s conditioning into Widowmaker, though… that was a close one. One of very, very few things that Sombra sometimes - just sometimes - legitimately wished she didn’t know.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo developments! Yup!

Honestly, I was a little worried when Moira was first launched because several things no longer aligned well with my story. Now that I’ve had some time to think about it, though, I don’t actually see anything that’s that huge of a disparity - some nudging might need to be done, but at this point it’s all recollection and appearance anyway, right? I haven’t actually gone into any of the meat of what happened between Overwatch and Blackwatch, the whole conspiracy there, and I see no reason why it can’t work alongside what we now know.

In fact, it even makes a thing or two a little bit better, I think. I suppose only time will tell, but at the end of the day I care more about my story than canon compliance at this point! Realistically, this story is canon-divergent, regardless; even if it doesn’t start there it definitely ends there so I’m not really bothered! :D

Alrighty, another weekly update - thanks for hanging with me on this as I get through NaNoWriMo, folks! For those interested I’m 17,000 words into my story so far! If you feel like you want more writing from me, I’ll direct you to No-Angst November. I did
chapters 8, 10, and 11 (so far) but the other chapters are by other talented authors as well! It's definitely different, stylistically, although I'd say my chapter 8 is pretty similar (and is also 26,000 words so hopefully it'd sate those reading urges for a few minutes at least!).

As always, I'd love to hear feedback - positive or negative, critiques or compliments, they all help me be a better writer and deliver a better product to you! As well as which, if you don't really have much to say but you just want to say "cool!", I'd love to hear that as well!

Thanks for tuning in, folks. Come back next week when Winston lands on a new approach to dealing with the Black Tide, and finds out a thing or two about Athena as well. Jack has an introspective moment, into which wanders Reinhardt.
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Winston and Orisa have a talk - he airs some frustrations and she suggests a possible solution. One he doesn't initially want to take, but his hands are a little tied. Athena talks with him as well, and they come to an understanding on a thing or two. Jack reminisces and apologizes to Reinhardt.

JFL Summary: Orisa's a little obsessive but it's cute. Somebody's coming to visit! Reinhardt and Jack share Reinhardt's sausage.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer introduced Emily around the base at Apeldoorn, she pledged her aid in return for support and was gladly received. Then, the debriefings began - first hers, about her own capture. Secondly, Jack's, about the events at Gibraltar and the aid camp afterward. Then, Jack was up to bat again to talk about Headquarters and confess a thing or two - speculation started around Gabriel and Reaper, which McCree tried to waylay a little bit, subtly, by getting the team to explain the Black Tide instead. They did. Later, McCree bumped into Emily and had a little chat, wherein she convinced him to not go after Reabling and Associates (her former employer), but she did say that she'd consider his offer to do so. It turned out that he wouldn't have needed her help, anyway - thanks to a contact he referred to only as "Shadow", McCree already knew what he needed about the company. However, he held true to his word to Emily and declined to pursue anything quite yet.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Winston exhaled slowly through his nose - not exactly a sigh, but not exactly not a sigh either as he tried to wait patiently for the link to be established. Tried, and mostly succeeded, to wait patiently.

Maybe a bit of impatience snuck in along the sides.

When it clicked and the screen flooded through with a familiar face, his lips leapt immediately into a grin. “Orisa! Hi - hello, again, it’s nice to see you!”

“I agree, Winston,” she nodded, eyes pointed in upward carets. “Though it has only been eighteen hours, twelve minutes, and forty-three seconds since we last spoke, I have been quite anticipating this!”

Winston chuckled just slightly uneasily at how specific she was with the numbers. It was actually quite a cute thing, though - and while he realized that she hadn’t specifically been tracking the time since speaking to him, it ended up being presented that way, and that was sweet.

Unbeknownst to him, she had in fact been tracking the precise time specifically since last seeing him.
She’d dedicated a subroutine especially to it, and always had an interesting interplay of output from her emotional emulator whenever she checked in on it. Anticipation, sadness, happiness, and something which she was beginning to suspect might be the ‘anxiety’ she had heard so much about.

“Have you been making progress on your latest project?” Orisa’s eyes shifted to take on a look of gentle curiosity and reassurance.

He still marveled sometimes at how expressive and how heartfelt she could be despite what might seem to some as limitations. “It’s…” he sighed, shaking his head and pulling off his glasses to polish them idly. A nervous gesture, mostly. “It’s not going well,” he shook his head. “We haven’t made any real progress in developing countermeasures - we did have one development with Athena that was somewhat promising, but far from ideal or practical for anyone else.”

Winston’s large head continued to shake slowly as he pulled a tablet over. “The… attacks, or tests, or whatever they are, seem to be continuing. Since the erm… largest incident, in a manner of speaking, there’s been at least one other.”

Swiping his broad fingers at the tablet’s screen, he sent pictures to be displayed over their video link; they were mirrored on her display, and on his as well. “Little town, out in the middle of nowhere. It’s coming out as rumours of a beast of some sort, but…”

One of the pictures, which he sent now, was a blurry snap of dark trees and glowing red eyes from the shadows. Winston keyed a command and the picture brightened, enhanced, and showed an omnic hanging from one of the tree limbs.

“We sent in a team to deal with it,” Winston muttered. “But I’m worried. Before this, they smashed a city to pieces - a massive warmachine let loose blaring advertisements, and then they follow it up with one single person deep in the mountains? I don’t know what they’re trying to establish, there doesn’t seem to be any pattern, and that worries me.”

“No further information has arisen about who is behind this?” Orisa’s head tipped to the side. “Nor their means or methods?”

Winston shrugged, flipping through data packets on the tablet. “Not particularly. It doesn’t seem… rigorous, exactly, if these are tests. The circumstances keep changing - our first encounter, four omnics and one human and the whole complex was em-shielded. We couldn’t even get communication in and out. Contrast that to these two - and that’s not even mentioning earlier incidents like Sudbury or Obninsk.”

Groaning a sigh, Winston let himself fall back into his chair and rubbed heavily at his face. Some days it felt like he carried all of his stresses and tension there - or maybe in his neck. His stomach growled, reminding him that it had been too long since he’d eaten.

How long, exactly, he couldn’t even remember.

“Winston,” Orisa’s soft voice came from the speakers, and at least he could be happy about the fact that she didn’t really sound different over a link. The others did, ended up sounding tinny and flat, but she still just sounded like her and he liked that. “We need not discuss this matter if it will only worsen your general outlook and mood.”

He chuckled, pushing himself forward to rest his elbows on the table. “I know, I know,” he offered her a small smile, “and thank you. I know I need to take care of myself first, keep fed and well-rested and happy, I just…” he sighed, shaking his head. “We still don’t know anything. We’ve been working for a month and we still don’t actually know hardly anything - one operative in the field
reported a wide-band transmission, one that was even painful to the human ear, just before an incident. We don’t have a recording, though, and…”

The gorilla trailed off uneasily, glancing over his shoulder for no particular reason. “Even if we did, I wouldn’t trust it. This is… half of the reason we haven’t made any progress is that we can’t emulate it. At all. It’s too virulent - we have the code, we can look at the code, but any time we try to actually run it, emulate it, activate it, it just corrupts whatever machine we have it installed on. That’s why we haven’t sent it over any networks. Quarantine. I know some about this kind of stuff, AI and positronic pathways, and…”

With a shrug and a chuckle, he shook his head, his eyes unfocused off into the middle distance. “I just don’t think I have the intrinsic understanding required to solve the problem right now.” He looked back to the screen again with a broad frown. “It’s like I’m being asked to furnish a home with no pictures or diagrams at all, only a thick book of measurements and descriptions, and it’s all written in a language I only understand at a bit above a functional level to start with.”

Orisa tipped her head to the side again, silently, as Winston let out another sigh. She didn’t respond, simply held the gesture, and at first he misinterpreted it as a sign of concern. “I know I need to take care of myself, I’m just worried for everybody else - and I know that worrying will only make it worse, but, heh, that doesn’t help me worry less.”

“Perhaps Efi could help?” Orisa’s eyes brightened slightly at the suggestion, her voice chirping at the mention of her creator.

Winston raised an eyebrow. Efi was cute, definitely, and fun. In terms of things to brighten his mood, she was probably a pretty fair bet to take - it was hard to be glum around her.

He rolled one shoulder in a shrug. “I suppose she probably would, but I don’t think I should go taking a trip right now. As well as which - no offence meant to Efi, but I think if I came out there you’d be the one helping allay my anxieties more than her.”

Orisa blinked a few times, then shook her head slightly and made a noise before her eyes shifted abruptly to happiness. “Oh! Winston, that was very cute! However, I did not mean help to ease your nerves. I meant, help interpret and develop countermeasures for the virus.”

His lips pulled immediately into a frown and he shook his head instinctively, the stern countenance of Mr. Oladele flickering through his mind. “I- I don’t know that that would be the best idea, Orisa.”

“She is quite capable,” Orisa insisted, “and understands robotics, AI, and positronics more deeply than any other person I have encountered. She is being recognized for her achievements and accomplishments in the field at a celebration here in Numbani, and has received the Adawe foundation-”

“No, I- I know she is, and has, yes,” Winston chuckled slightly, nodding. “I know that she’s a genius when it comes to matters like these. It’s not that I think she’d be unable to help, but… I don’t know if this is the sort of thing I want her involved in. People have died - lots of people - and she’s only eleven. Do you really think it would be alright to expose her to this?” He shrugged, legitimately unable to answer the question himself. “You’ve seen the reports, and you know her better than me. What do you think?”

Orisa looked down and away thoughtfully, humming. “Perhaps she need not see the aftermath photographs, or the reports either. We could tell her that it is a serious problem that could cause great harm - she is certainly no stranger to strife, Winston, nor to death. It was not so long ago that Doomfist, the Scourge, attacked our city regularly - though I do not recall it myself, the events are
clear in the collective memory of Numbani. Efi understands war, suffering, death. She did create me after all.”

Winston blurted out a laugh at that. With how bright and cheery both Orisa and Efi were, it was easy to forget that the eleven-year-old had made a war machine. A defender, yes, but a war machine nonetheless.

“I think… I think I’d like to talk with her parents about it first, if that’s alright?” Winston raised an eyebrow. “At the very least, they’d need to know.”

“Of course,” Orisa nodded, smiling. “I shall fetch them immediately! Goodbye, Winston!”

He didn’t even have a chance to tell her to stop - just got out a wordless shout and an outstretched hand as the link ended and the screen went blank. “N-oh I didn’t mean now,” he muttered to himself, running a hand over his head and sighing. “I need to start being clearer with that…”

---

As it turned out, her parents weren’t immediately delighted with the idea of sending their daughter to a covert base of an organization that didn’t technically exist, in order to deal with a project of unknown specifications.

“Forgive our reticence, Winston,” her mother smiled softly, “but you must understand - Efi has never left Numbani before. For her first trip to be one like this…”

“I know,” Winston nodded, “and I agree. It’s… I wish it could be better circumstances, certainly. I just don’t trust this virus to be released over a network - it’s too virulent, it’s too dangerous.”

“Yes, this virus you’ve mentioned,” Mr. Oladele nodded solemnly. His thin and manicured eyebrows pulled in toward the centre a bit. “Could you tell us more about that? Or, for that matter, anything about it?”

Winston took a deep breath and let it slowly out, eyes locking with Orisa’s in a bid to draw some reassurance from her. It worked, too, and he looked back to Efi’s parents with an apologetic smile.

“Of course. I will, but please don’t spread the information. We’re trying not to incite a panic.”

A look flickered across Mr. Oladele’s face, a look that Winston couldn’t decipher, but nothing was said.

After a few seconds, he carried on with his explanation. “Okay… here goes. The Black Tide is a highly corrupting virus that seems to be capable of infecting almost any electronics - more basic computers, it simply fries. More advanced AI and positronic components, it…” he took a breath and held it for a second. “It takes over. Exerts control over all systems as far as we can tell, and results in the infected person becoming incredibly violent. Often resulting in death for bystanders and for the infected as well.”

“How have we not heard of this?” Efi’s mother asked in shock, and her father seconded the query with a nod of his head.

Winston shrugged uneasily, rubbing at the back of his neck with one massive hand. “A few reasons. We’re not the only group with our hand on the tiller here - we know of at least one other group
which is taking an active role, and then there’s whoever’s behind it as well, of course. If I had an
official platform from which to do so, I’d make an announcement about it immediately, but as is…”

“As it is,” Mr. Oladele picked up the thread of the sentence which Winston had let drop, “you have
no platform, no authority, no jurisdiction, and you cannot openly announce these matters without
openly announcing yourselves, as well.”

Winston nodded. “That’s the long and short of it from our end. Not to mention the fact that the other
group I mentioned, well, they’ve been in this particular game longer than we have and they decided
to keep information tight even before we got involved. It’s a bit of a… rocky allegiance, to say the
least.”

“You worry over what their reaction would be, should you go public.” Mrs. Oladele tipped her head
slightly. Not exactly a question, not exactly a suggestion, but certainly not an untrue statement.

Shrugging, Winston nodded a little. He hadn’t really thought about it until right then, hadn’t exactly
considered it in those terms, but it was true. Sombra had been scrubbing data and squelching calls for
a long time before they’d come around - there had been numerous attacks which they’d never
realized.

She’d also demonstrated just how quickly she could react to a changing situation. Quickly and
decisively, as well, and Winston didn’t want to make an enemy of her by trying to release
information she wanted to hold tight.

“This sounds like… a complicated situation, to say the least,” Mrs. Oladele suggested, glancing to
her husband. He shrugged and nodded with a chuckle of a sigh as she continued. “It sounds quite
horrific, as well.”

“I agree,” Winston nodded, swallowing heavily. “That’s exactly why I was worried about bringing
Efi in to help on this. I didn’t want to cause any problems.”

They both laughed at that, briefly, gently - it was impossible to tell which one had been first, husband
or wife, but they shared a glance that spoke of inside understanding and unvoiced reference to
conversations of years ago. One of those glances that people who have been together for a long time,
and through much turmoil, can share.

“Problems…” Mr. Oladele began, grinning a little.

“...they do not leave you alone,” Mrs. Oladele finished with a soft giggle, shaking her head.

“Winston, tell me truthfully, if Efi does not help you, how much longer will this continue?” Mr.
Oladele raised an eyebrow, tenting his fingers against the point of his chin.

“Well…” Winston sighed.

He took his time, thought for long moments about it - they hadn’t been without their developments,
but every one seemed to carry two setbacks. They found out about the code, they got a copy on the
omnic head, and every attempt to interface with it failed. They saw an active deployment in the field
and gathered a little information there, and almost lost multiple agents in the process. They
unwrapped the code so it was no longer active, and found that they could do very little save for to
look at it.

All the while, the attacks. Continued. All the while the suffering went on.

“Honestly, we’ve hardly made any progress. We’ve been able to identify segments of code, but short
of firewalling and containment, we’ve made no progress on fighting this thing. Even that is hard enough - this virus burns through coded firewalls like paper, it requires physical data segmentation and-

“-and,” Mrs. Oladele interjected, holding up a hand, “do you think Efi would truly be able to help?”

He had a moment of glancing around - her eyes, her husband’s, Orisa’s - because it was a question that meant far more than just its words. It had far-reaching effects which he couldn’t ignore, and the possible risks were so great and so many.

If he said yes, it seemed fairly clear that they would agree to let Efi come help - but what would that mean, then, for her? For her family? If she became hurt or endangered by her involvement, or even just frightened or mentally scarred?

...and what if he didn’t? If he said no, and continued to make little progress - or none - what then? What of the people of the world if the information got out; places where humans were already at omnic throats, what would happen if this virus made its way there?

What if he was just overthinking things?

He sighed a soft chuckle at that thought, which simultaneously presented itself in Athena’s voice and in Tracer’s. “I don’t know. I think she’s got a better chance of helping than anybody else I know.” Winston nodded. “At the same time… I don’t know that I’d say I think she necessarily should become involved.”

Another unknowable expression played at Mr. Oladele’s eyes as he nodded once. “Well, perhaps it would be best to ask her - Efi?” He called over his shoulder. “Would you come in here, please?”

Winston heard a door opening, and little footsteps, and then Orisa stooped down and picked Efi up, depositing the girl on her back.

“Oh, hello Winston!” Efi waved emphatically, grinning from ear to ear. “It’s nice to see you again! Orisa showed me the poem you wrote for her, it was ver-

“Yes, yes,” Winston cleared his throat abruptly, “that um- right, of course, well, thank you.” Her parents looked back with furtive grins, and Orisa offered him a pleased smile with her eyes. He chuckled at that, most of the unease leaving him

“Thanks. Anyway, there’s… something I wanted to ask you about, Efi. There’s a virus that we’ve started to see crop up - it infects omnics and AI and… and it makes them very angry. People have been hurt because of it, and… some have died, too - both human and omnics. We’ve managed to decode the virus but we haven’t made any progress since then. I was wondering if you’d be willing to come take a look at it? Give us a hand, maybe?”

She nodded sharply. “Of course, Winston - I would love the opportunity to come visit! And if people are being hurt and I can help, I would certainly like to!” She clapped Orisa on the shoulder with a bright laugh. “After all, that is why I made Orisa!”

Winston chuckled and grinned, nodding. “Okay, well, we can send a dropship by to pick you up, then - maybe on Saturday?”

Efi nodded happily. “That sounds delightful!”

His eyes flicked to her parents, who turned to look at their daughter. "Have you finished your homework?"
“Yes, mom,” Efi groaned with a roll of her eyes.

"Don't roll your eyes," her mother chided, a light smirk hidden from her daughter's view and dancing as well in her eyes. "Saturday sounds fitting then, Winston."

“Excellent,” he nodded, raising an eyebrow. "How many will be accompanying?"

Orisa’s hand shot up excitedly and Efi giggled, both of her parents laughing lightly; her father reached out and ruffled her hair a little with a smile. “I think it will just be Efi and Orisa. We have other commitments, but… they will be good on their own.”

Efi gasped and jumped off of Orisa’s back, wrapping her arms tightly around her father’s shoulders. “Oh thank you dad! Thank you so much! Oh I’m so excited! Mother - have I told you about Athena? I talked to her once, she’s so nice, kind of like Orisa except…”

The two of them, mother and daughter, walked off screen hand in hand as Orisa followed and Mr. Oladele chuckled and watched them with a grin. He turned the expression to the camera and nodded, wordlessly, before the link cut.

Winston was left once again wondering who he was - or perhaps, who he had once been. He knew who the man was. He didn’t need to look any farther than the way Efi hugged him, or the way he looked at his daughters or his wife - or, for that matter, the way he looked at Winston these days.

There might have still been some uncertainty there, yes, and Winston didn’t blame him for it. Some days the gorilla was a little uncertain even looking at himself in the mirror, but that was only human.

He chuckled at that thought as he shook his head and pushed the chair back from the desk. “Athena? You caught all that, right?”

“Oh of course, Winston,” she hummed from the ceiling. “The guest room will be prepared particularly for Efi and I will notify the others on base to expect a visitor. I will also install a taller chair in the Faraday room.”

Winston laughed as he walked out of his office, headed down the hallway toward the room in question. “I’ll take care of that, I’m headed there anyway.”

There was a pause, but when Athena spoke again her voice still came from the speakers nearest him in the hallway, and they followed him as he ambled along. “Do you think that is necessary, Winston? You have stated yourself that little progress is likely at this point. Efi will be here soon - would it not be better to devote your efforts to preparation? Or perhaps to tracking the chemical weaponry, or-”

“Athena…” Winston sighed a little, leaning against a doorframe and looking up to the ceilings. At first his expression was a little harried, but he shortly replaced it with a smile and a chuckle. “I know you’re probably tired of watching me pull my hair out over this thing. I just… feel like I need to keep trying. Doing something.”

“I would suggest doing something, yes, but something else, Winston. You will be both more effective, and more pleased, in the long run.” She hesitated for a moment, and when he didn’t respond promptly - affirmatively or negatively - she spoke again. “At least until Saturday.”

He hesitated for a long while, his fingers played out against the wall beside the door. He knew she was right, but sometimes that didn’t matter. Sometimes, even if something might not help, you had to do it anyway. The right thing wasn’t always the useful thing.

…but there was a lot to be said for wasted effort.
That was the worst part about it, really, at least specifically: if he stopped now, he was essentially admitting that he should have done so sooner. At least, that was how it seemed to him - because he hadn’t really made any progress. He’d worked and re-worked plans and procedures and computers just kept getting fried, and fried, and fried. They hadn’t tried integration into another one of Athena’s Hephaestus frames - the closest thing to a living omnic they could ethically test on - but that was largely because they’d noted really no positive progress elsewhere and the possibilities and risks of it escaping were far too great. On top of which, he just felt like it was an awful thing to do - even if she consented to the procedures, it was still a death sentence.

If he admitted now that things were pointless, he also had to admit that they’d been pointless all along.

Winston let out a long, low sigh. So much else was going so well, he felt almost guilty for his frustrations. Jack was doing better than he had been in years, the team was starting to get cohesive again. Old wounds were healing in so many directions. He’d seen the sad looks on faces whenever the emblem showed up, he’d noticed the electric tension on the anniversary of the Petras Act’s signing or HQ’s destruction.

They were starting to lift now, though. They were building something new, something better, together.

He really was happy about it, too. Pleased and proud and delighted, and he felt a little bit guilty that those weren’t exactly his defining emotions at the moment, but he couldn’t suppress the frustration at helplessness over the Black Tide issue.

At the same time, he knew he really couldn’t change it.

“Winston…”

The soft entreatment from the ceiling drew his eyes, along with a sigh and a smile. “I know, Athena. I really do know that I should.” A frown crossed his lips as he looked to his own hand. Big, muscular, maybe not the hand one would first think of as being the hand of a scientist. He watched the way it shifted below the skin as he moved his fingers slightly, and wondered if all gorillas had the same motor functions when it came to their digits.

“We didn’t make any progress on the Accelerator, either, not for a long time. Failed experiment after failed experiment while Tracer just stayed stuck - and this is even worse. It’s not just remaining bad, it’s actively getting worse. This isn’t a random occurrence, and whatever it’s building up to…”

His hand curled into a loose fist and he batted it gently against the wall with a huff. “I can’t shake the feeling of obligation. Nobody else is even working on this except for Sombra, and by her own admission it looks like a tough nut to crack. She hasn’t made any progress either, and while she’s not an AI specialist it’s tough to think of somebody generally better with code.”

“Precisely, Winston,” Athena confirmed, “and that was my point.”

He sighed, shaking his head. “I know. I agree, even, I just… can’t bring myself to give up. I know it’s not even giving up, putting it off until Saturday, but…” his eyes welled up with tears as his head continued to shake. “What if there’s another attack tonight? Tomorrow morning? What- what if I’d given up out of frustration on the Accelerator?”

Athena didn’t respond to that. She hummed slightly, watching him through the cameras; she’d known him as long as anyone and knew him quite well. He was a complex man with a huge heart and it became easily injured, sometimes. There were pitfalls to caring as much as he did - his world
was so bright and filled with wonder, and it clashed with often-cruel reality, with unfortunate results.

Winston glanced down as a floor-cleaning drone bumped into his foot. He raised an eyebrow and glanced up at the ceiling.

“I could not hug you. I hope my impromptu gesture might suffice.”

He chuckled as he knelt down, patting the drone on top of its shell with a grin and wiping at his cheeks. “Thanks. It was nice.”

“Orisa can provide you with a proper one tomorrow.”

The words sounded a little bit sad and Winston looked up with a frown. “Athena? Are you alright?”

An electronic sigh came through the speakers. She considered for a few moments - long moments for her, almost a full quarter of a second in reality. She could quite easily have calculated a launch trajectory to the moon (with return trip) in the same amount of time.

They hadn’t exactly spoken about Orisa, as such - not other than sideways mentions and allusions. She knew that what the two of them had, she and Winston could never share, for a hundred reasons. Primarily ones rooted in herself. It was an odd sort of space from which to think; she wouldn’t call it a feeling, but perhaps a slight cognitive distortion. Cognitive colour, at least.

Not jealousy, exactly. Not self-pity, exactly. They couldn’t be, but she did recognize that they perhaps shared tenets with those commonly accepted emotional principles.

She’d thought about that on her own time, she’d come to terms with it. She didn’t begrudge Orisa anything, and in fact quite admired her - her strength and determination to guard others was deserving of nothing less. Athena perhaps found her slightly naive in some ways, but at the same time she realized that Orisa - despite having a fully-formed sentience - was quite young.

Time and development were different for omnic or AI consciousnesses as opposed to organic brains, and Athena recognized as well that she had been similar in many ways in her own youth, so to speak.

Sometimes, she even recognized the same in Winston, and often chuckled to herself at the irony of it - of her being the one who was, perhaps, in some ways, jaded.

All of which was secondary to the question at hand: whether she was alright. She was, of course. She was performing at full capacity. It required no deliberation to determine that. At the same time, she realized that that was not the full extent of the question, not truly, and Winston deserved the truth.

That was what had her thoughts devoted, for a full quarter of a second, to coming up with a deserved answer.

“I am alright, yes. I am delighted that you have found someone with which to be happy, Winston, but I must admit that it does at times remind me of my own incapacities. I would suggest that that is rarely a reminder which is well-met by the one being reminded.” She hummed thoughtfully. “It is not a problem, it does not affect my cognitive capacities. If it begins to, I will initiate a reset an-”

“What?” Winston interrupted, somewhat angrily, springing to his feet as his heart jumped in his chest. “No! Don’t you dare - Athena-”

“If my cognition is impaired then the situation must be rectified, Winston, and-”
“I don’t care about your cognition,” he stressed, shaking his head. “I care about you. I always have. No resets. Please.”

She was without response, legitimately surprised by the vehemence in his voice. At first, she had been intended only as a computer - and she knew that that definition had evolved, slowly, as she had, but it was still surely her first purpose. Evolution was acceptable and even interesting so long as it did not interfere with that primary function.

Winston read her silence not as surprise, but as something more withdrawn than that. “You’re not just a program. If- if something’s causing a problem, the way to fix it isn’t to reboot you. There’s always another option.”

After another moment of silence, she responded again, softly. “I… I understand, Winston.” His voice patterns, stress levels - everything matched with the day in Gibraltar when she’d nearly been breached. He was panicking, over her, again - as he had as well when the Omega Protocol had been activated.

A peculiar realization. “It is not a problem, regardless, only… an occasional and momentary occurrence.”

“Well, it still deserves to be talked about,” he frowned, stepping away from the door. “Are you busy with anything else at the moment? I really would like to hear more about this, if that’s alright.”

“Of course, Winston. I have no other more pressing concerns currently.”

“Good,” he nodded, loping back down the hall toward his office and quarters again. “Neither do I.”

If she’d had lips, she would have smiled, but instead she only thought of doing so. Unexpected benefits were always a pleasant surprise, and truth be told, she was quite glad to have now stricken a reboot from her protocols. She liked what she was, and was excited to see what she would become with more evolution; erasing that seemed like an unfortunate loss of data.

On top of which, Winston was no longer agonizing about the Black Tide virus. They would have a pleasant conversation, Athena was certain of it - they were always pleasant, even when they resulted in nothing. He was her favourite person, certainly.

It was also good to know that she was more than simply a program. She’d suspected it herself for quite a while, now, but to hear it confirmed was very nice.

Her thoughts flicked briefly to Orisa, for reasons she couldn’t quite determined. A self-test of sorts, perhaps, because she immediately noted that her thoughts were no longer coloured the way they once had been. She no longer had those echoes of self-deprecatory realizations, thinking about Winston and Orisa together.

_Interesting. Very interesting._

---

Jack sighed heavily as he dragged the carafe out of the coffee pot, the glass scraping against the base - the meds were helping, a lot, and quickly, but there were still fluctuations.
Nothing ever happened in an instant. At least, nothing good.

He chuckled at the thought, some extraneous intrusion of processes that had run for years or longer unchecked. Looking back, he wondered how he hadn’t been able to see the decline.

He could sure as hell see it now.

That slow, inexorable shift from bright-eyed farmboy through to harried commander, then harassed leader of an assaulted organization, and then of course the abrupt shift to faceless vigilante.

The stream of coffee steamed as he poured a mugful, breathing in its scent deeply and sighing again - not as mournfully this time, though.

A lot had happened. It wouldn’t ever un- happen, but that didn’t mean things couldn’t be rebuilt.

They were doing something good here. A lot of good things - saving lives, helping people, providing a bulwark and holding back some of the ills of the world. Every little bit they could do was something - even if it wasn’t perfect.

Athena regularly trawled through the net, picking up any traces of their activity and deleting them for the most part. Some, she altered, and some things she intentionally distributed - Tracer had been seen active for years, so snippets of her involvement continued to come out. Occasional mentions of the vigilante Soldier: 76, dollar signs rising on the wanted posters as the months dragged on, and occasionally a shady mention of the Shrike as well.

She ensured that nicely tailored accounts of Reinhardt’s tales ended up online as well, scattered around like breadcrumbs - that was what it all was, a way to draw in those who were clever enough, who hoped and believed hard enough, and it had worked.

D.va, Lúcio, Orisa - new members, new heroes in the fight. Good ones, too. As much as he worried over their safety, Jack had to admit that - and they all would have been fighting, regardless. It was only better to do it as a team.

In time, maybe there would be even more. The Recall hadn’t reached everyone, and not all at the same time - Ana hadn’t known until she'd found Jack, having disconnected entirely from her former life. Mei had been frozen at the time. A few, like himself and McCree, had chosen not to answer the call.

Then there were those who it never would have reached, in the first place - those new members who now filled out the ranks, and that was half of the purpose behind the little snippets and stories. Leaving some breadcrumbs for people to find their little ragtag group, and it was a bit of a test at the same time. A way of seeing up front if they had the right stuff.

The other part was something which Athena likened to an old submariner’s concept: looking for holes in the ocean. There had been a time when submarines were noisy, and easy to hear under the waves; the response was to make them quieter, soundproof them for stealth, but they went too far. You could still find the submarine by listening - you just listened to the ocean and searched for the patch of silence in the middle.

Or at least, that was how she’d explained it. He'd mostly just grunted and accepted it, and agreed to continue his actions as Soldier: 76 as well as going along with the team. He wasn’t certain it made the most sense, but he supposed it would be conspicuous if the subject of an international manhunt suddenly disappeared entirely.

He still needed to be seen every now and then. Forever that pressure to present a public face - he
chuckled. It would seem that \textit{that}, at least, hadn’t died with Overwatch. They still had to look right, to outside observers. It was just that ‘looking right’ meant something a little different now.

That was okay, though. It was all a little different now.

That didn’t mean it was bad.

The sound of one of the fridges opening drew his mind from his thoughts and his eyes from his coffee cup, and he spend a few seconds just looking at the huge man scanning for snacks. Reinhardt had always said Jack was the heart and soul of the team, but looking at him now - and looking back at history - the old soldier thought he would have to beg to differ.

Maybe he had been. If so, though, Reinhardt had been the \textit{hope}. The hope that one day things would be better, the confidence that they were \textit{good} and \textit{right}, and the strength to see it all through. Jack took a deep sip of coffee as Reinhardt pulled a few sausage links from the fridge and plopped them haphazardly on a plate, poking holes with a fork and then shoving them into the microwave. An anticipatory grin took hold on his lips as he watched the meal spin.

“I should have told you,” Jack sighed, shaking his head a little. “About Headquarters. At least when I came back after the Recall. I’m sorry.”

For a moment, there was no noise other than the microwave gently humming; no indication that Reinhardt had heard him, but that changed when the former Crusader took a deep breath and held it for a moment before he spoke.

“All of you…” he started, his deep voice rasping slightly as it did - as it always had, as long as Jack had known him. “Perhaps, should have told me many things. Ana, yourself… Ana again.” They both chuckled lightly, that shared gesture that comes from a lifetime of solemnity and the recognition that sometimes you need to grasp onto something within it, or else risk going under.

“You are a good man, Jack,” Reinhardt nodded solidly, still only eyeing his meal. “There is a difference, I think, between being the last one to touch a plate before it hits the ground, and being the one who dropped it.”

“I was in charge,” Jack retorted with a shake of his head, setting his mug down on the counter beside him. His eyes followed it, fixating on dark brown liquid and steam. “I should have been able to see it coming. The problems from all around - secrets being leaked, in-house assassinations, Gabriel’s own twisted efforts. A million things going wrong and I never saw them, and I should have.”

Even if he hadn’t done it all himself, it was still his fault - he still carried culpability for it.

A hand - heavy, and huge - fell lightly onto his shoulder, and he looked over swiftly into Reinhardt’s eye.

“No one man can uphold an empire,” the old Crusader insisted firmly with a shake of his head, “nor can one man destroy it. Not even that demon, Reaper, could have done it alone - but that is what demons \textit{do}. They spread their influence. They corrupt. They twist. There is a reason they survive, and that is that they are good at what they do. Their success is not your failure.”

Jack tipped his head forward, a single nod accompanied by a sigh - he couldn’t exactly blame Gabriel for it anymore, but he couldn’t deny the man’s part in it. In hindsight, things seemed different: tactics and acquisitions which, a year or two ago, Jack had thought meant Gabriel was planning to go to war with Overwatch…
...maybe that was still true, but maybe the reasons weren’t quite the same. There had been much - programs diverted, personnel acquired, McCree and Genji, O’Deorain as well. Weapons developments, biological, all kinds of things.

After the fall, they had looked like the sinister gatherings of power by a man hell-bent on overthrowing the organization he’d once called his own. Gabriel Reyes’ preparations to destroy Overwatch.

Now, though, Jack was wondering how much of it was gathering defences. How much was intended to be protection. How much of it wasn’t even Gabe in the first place.

Probably impossible questions to answer. Who or whatever Gabriel had once been, he was Reaper now, and Reaper only wanted vengeance; he didn’t have any interest in justice and truth.

“Thanks, Reinhardt,” Jack nodded, patting at the other man’s hand. “It means a lot to me, to have you on my side.”

Reinhardt’s lips split into a wide grin, the one he’d carried with him for decades - it had opened doors and won friendships and eased pain worldwide, and Jack couldn’t deny that it suited the man perfectly. Broad and unabashed, beautiful if a little bit asymmetrical, slightly mischievous whilst also being undeniably genuine.

Perhaps the perfect summary of who he was, that smile.

“Of course, my friend!” Reinhardt’s hand came down, clapping firmly enough on Jack’s shoulder that the soldier almost staggered under the weight of it, jostling a laugh loose from him. “When one fights with honour, one cannot lose, haha!”

Jack chuckled and nodded, though he wasn’t sure he’d quite agree. Maybe it all depended on what you meant by ‘lose’, but he definitely felt like he’d lost in the past. That mattered less, now, though - not none, but less. They were safe, they were mostly together; they were clandestine as a group which was deeply unfortunate, and part of Jack still burned with a desire to find and reveal the truth about it all.

Luckily, now, it could burn away without lighting the rest of him along with it. A hot blue flame like a pilot light, deep inside - but caged. The flames didn’t spread and engulf him entirely anymore, when he thought the wrong things. When he wondered about the fall. When he remember Gabriel, or Overwatch, or any of the old days.

In hindsight, he wondered in amusement how he ever expected to find any truth when he hadn’t even been able to open his eyes all the way. His mind and his vision and his heart, all too clouded with pain and anger.

Irony was usually pretty easy to appreciate from a distance.

Jack picked up his mug again as the microwave beeped. Whatever sausage Reinhardt had cooked smelled delicious - mouthwateringly savoury, a little bit spicy, and it made him realize (as his stomach grumbled) that it had been quite a while since he’d last eaten.

“Hey, uh,” he held out a hand, shrugging. “Don’t suppose there’s enough of that for two?”

Reinhardt grinned. “You know how freely I share my sausage!”

Jack snorted a laugh, pressing a hand to his face as the other sought out the drawer of cutlery.. “Not sure I’d want forks and knives involved, but-“
The huge man chuckled gregariously. “A fair point, my friend! Of course, though - come, sit, eat. Like the old days, ha!”

Jack shook his head with a light laugh, sliding into a chair across from Reinhardt with a grin and setting his mug down on the table, knife and fork in hand. “Yeah,” he nodded, cutting a chunk off of the sausage and taking a drool-inducing inhalation. “Like the old days…”

---

Chapter End Notes

Okay maybe Jack's a little in love with Reinhardt. Okay maybe I'm a little in love with Reinhardt.

That's a bold-faced lie. I am **definitely** in love with Reinhardt.

So! Bunch of stuff here, yup yup - initially, the conversation with Efi's parents wasn't going to go that way. I was planning on it being more of a back-and-forth, but once I started writing it was apparent that that wasn't really right - it felt forced and awkward, so I tried things the other way and it felt far more fluid and correct, and it makes sense to me why. Numbani isn't a peaceful city - it's an oasis in the middle of a desert. Doomfist's predecessor raided the city constantly, but I doubt he invented the idea and I doubt it died with him - the citizens of Numbani must be fairly used to attack or siege by now. They got all those OR-15s, for instance, and particularly the way I've portrayed it it's not a city that hides the world from its children.

Efi's parents could have told her to focus on school, they could have told her to stay indoors or colour or whatever - they didn't. They encouraged her love of robotics, they purchased scrap warmachines so that she could rebuild them into something newer and even more powerful, they booked her flights out of the city to see the world - they are open and trusting parents, they know that while Efi is a child she is also a person, and they trust her. On top of which, I think they know that they cannot protect her. Any day, someone in her life might die. Refusing to talk to her about death (or rather, failing to) would only make that so much worse, and honestly I respect them for that. I think in many ways they're what parents should try to be - they spur her on, they support her, but they also don't let her get away with everything. She needs to do her homework, she needs to maintain her responsibilities - but I don't think those are things they decided to do so much as she did.

Anyway! I like them all. Orisa, Efi, the parents - totally guessing for characterization for mother and father, but hey, we gotta climb out on a limb sometime, eh?

Also, you may notice that I added Moira's name to a bit with Jack here. I don't know if she'll ever show up in this story, but I could throw her name into that bit without it changing anything really, but it felt like a bit of an inclusion at least. Doomfist definitely will show up, a fair bit later, but I don't currently have any plans for Moira.

Probably have a big enough cast list already, eh? Heh!

So, I do have a favour to ask: I'm thinking of trimming down my tags, I think they're unwieldy. I would particularly like your help with my relationship tags! Which ones are erroneous, or don't apply, in your opinion? Are there some that should maybe be moved from the relationship tags into the miscellaneous tags instead? Feedback's appreciated!
Also, also, still doing NaNo - going well, couple days ahead on a story about a sad gay boy and his sad gay ghost roommate/friend/eventual boyfriend; fuelled by the wonderful sounds of Bronski Beat! Anyway, that means the weekly updates will be continuing.

If you need more, please feel free to go check out No-Angst November! It's a collective effort I'm part of, and I've written a bunch there. Some of the things even tie into this story! Or, at least, they fit within the canon of it, so - there's that!

EDIT: pretty sure I did my math completely wrong and it has not been a week yet, heh, oops. Eh, whatever - have a bonus! Also, third-longest Overwatch fic on Ao3 now XD

C'mon back next time when Efi comes around for a visit. It would be safe to go that the visit goes catastrophically off the rails.
Death of Innocence

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Efi comes to visit Apeldoorn and help with the Black Tide Virus. Her reaction is unexpected - unexpectedly happy and almost shockingly knowledgeable, to Winston, at first, but soon followed up with a far worse surprise.

JFL Summary: Efi talks about Winston and Orisa having kids. Winston stammers. Tracer's biological clock goes off.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: pain and stress and strife, I guess you could say a temper tantrum? Fair chunk of sadness, yup yup.

Previous Chapter Summary: Orisa consulted with Winston about the possibilities of getting Efi to come to Apeldoorn, the goal being to gain further insight into the Black Tide Virus. After discussing it with Orisa, and then discussing it with Efi's parents, Winston discussed it with Efi herself and plans were made. Afterward, when he attempted to continue his almost-certainly futile work on the Virus, Athena tried to convince him to take a rest instead. An emotional moment ensued that led to a confession on her part - nor jealousy of Orisa, exactly, but perhaps something close - and a strenuous request on his part: that no matter what happens, Athena not wipe her databanks and restart herself in the name of efficiency. Unintentionally (or perhaps, not so unintentionally) distracted from his work on the Virus, Winston went to talk the issue over with Athena further.

Jack and Reinhardt had a conversation, with Jack asking forgiveness for his omissions and his failures when it came to Overwatch. He knew how much the organization had meant to the Crusader, how much he'd given in order to join; Reinhardt accepted the apologies readily, not even believing them necessary in the slightest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When the dropship came in, Winston was waiting at the airport. Smile on his face, equal parts excitement and nervous anticipation in his heart.

Roughly the same as normal, then.

He couldn’t suppress a chuckle, though, when he saw Efi’s face physically pressed up against the window - Orisa holding the young girl up so she could see out. When the doors of the dropship opened, conversation was already underway.

“-think that that is such a terrible and rudimentary assessment of inorganic synaptic pathways, though?” Efi glanced up to the ceiling of the dropship as Orisa set her down, but they didn’t part ways entirely - Efi continued to hold Orisa’s hand, and they both looked quite happy for it.
Winston was a little bit surprised at how differently she spoke - the same tone, but her words so drastically different. He knew she was a genius, but it was a little bit different to be confronted with it quite so abruptly.

“I would agree with you on that point,” Athena admitted with a soft laugh from the dropship’s speakers. “Whilst I appreciate the advances that Martchenko has contributed, I do find his approach to be a bit… dry.”

“Dry!” Efi laughed, the sound a delightful juxtaposition of perfect childishness amongst her more serious words. “That would be one word for it! He thinks omnics and AI are nothing more than pre-programmed machines, would be another way of putting it.” She huffed and pouted a little. “He’s a real butthead.”

When she noticed Winston approaching, her eyes flew wide and she grinned abashedly, waving to him. “Hello, Winston! Um, please don’t tell my parents I said that?”

Winston chuckled and glanced up to Orisa for guidance, but she just smiled delightedly back to him, so he decided to just not address that request - and hope that her father never asked. “Hello, Efi! It’s great to see you again. You’ve been talking to Athena already, have you?”

“Yes,” Athena replied, “we had a series of discussions on the flight. However, I have duties to which to attend - I shall speak with you later, Efi. Enjoy!”

Efi waved to the ceiling of the dropship as it closed up and was lifted into its storage cradle. Then, she stepped forward and grabbed one of Winston’s hands and started to stride forward before realizing that she didn’t know where she was heading to. She shot him a curious glance which was shortly overtaken by a look of realization.

“Oh!” She giggled. “You would probably prefer to hold Orisa’s hand!”

Winston once more considered himself very, very lucky that he’d never been given the ability to blush. He could stammer with the best of them, though. “W-well, I- I m- or- uh-”

Efi giggled and tugged their hands together, skipping around to Orisa’s other side to hold onto her Fusion Driver instead. “That’s better! Now, go ahead and lead the way please, Winston.” She smiled to him as they started to walk, then looked thoughtful again.

“Hmm,” Efi hummed after a moment, nodding solemnly. “If you two ever want to have children, I could-”

“Welcome to Apeldoorn!” Winston blurted out, cutting her off entirely. “It’s a- a lovely city!”

Orisa giggled and Efi followed suit, the two of them exchanging a glance to which Winston could only raise helpless eyebrows. Orisa tipped her head over toward him. “Oh, I told her to say that. I thought that your reaction would be very amusing.”

His mouth dropped open as Efi laughed again, and once more Orisa followed suit. He was well used to people enjoying teasing him - most of his friends seemed to rank it very highly, in fact. At the same time, he hadn’t really expected Orisa and Efi - probably the two most innocent people he’d ever met - to start in with it.

“I- I don’t-” he stammered, but cut off when Orisa leaned her head into the crook of his neck and nuzzled lightly, squeezing at his hand, and all the anxiety left. Or at least, all of the anxiety that was borne out of that situation. Winston laughed softly, squeezing her hand back and kissing the top of her head. “That’s- that was cute.”
“You don’t mind? I can stop if it is a problematic behaviour.”

He chuckled, shrugging the other shoulder as he led the way back to the tramway’s entrance. “Well, it’s not exactly a new sort of interaction for me. I’ll just let you know if it goes too far.”

Orisa nodded with a hum. “Thank you.”

They reached the tram, then, and had to separate in order to board it - it was a sleek vehicle, running through a tunnel beneath the city. This hadn’t been a full Watchpoint, but more of an outpost; they’d needed to make do with what was available. Most of the larger facilities had been auctioned or given away to this company or that, Helix primarily, and while Winston didn’t particularly mind that, he did miss having that freedom a little bit.

Along with a lot of other things.

“I’m so excited!” Efijumped, clapping her hands as the tram started to glide along with no indication other than a slight hum and a gentle tug of inertia in the gut. “To get to see an active Overwatch facility! Great!”

Orisa nodded happily, but Winston cleared his throat and chuckled a little. “Well, it, um - it’s not actually an active Overwatch facility, of course. There isn’t an Overwatch anymore, not technically, so…” he trailed off, uncertain of how much Efi really knew about it.

Her father seemed knowledgeable, certainly. Knowledgeable and not exactly favourable - and it seemed like her parents were the sort not to hide much from their daughter. It made sense, he supposed; as Orisa had mentioned, it wasn’t long ago that the prior man to call himself Doomfist had raided the city regularly, and Efi herself had been somewhat a victim of the latest Doomfist attack.

A different man wearing the gauntlet, perhaps, but the fact remained that it would seem the children of Numbani couldn’t be sheltered from everything, and from his time there Winston quite suspected that the majority of inhabitants would be at least clever enough to realize that.

“Oh,” Efi blew a raspberry, waving one hand while holding Orisa’s with the other. “I know, there was that Pet… Petro… Petras?” Her eyes flicked to Orisa, who nodded, and Efi continued with a grin. “Petras act! A name is only a name, though - it is not the name of Overwatch I am excited to see, it is the people!”

Winston chuckled again, smiling and getting a nice little surge of nostalgia at her excitement. A less nice (and perhaps less little) rush of sadness as well. “Well, the ones we’ve got there are the really good ones - plus a few others out in the field, of course.”

“Yes, yes,” Efi squealed excitedly. “I am looking forward to it! I know so many of them from news stories or what Orisa has told me. It will be good to meet them for myself!”

A soft grin took hold on Winston’s lips as he looked to Orisa, Efi busyng herself with staring in delight out of the windows of the underground tram at the tunnel which whipped past them. Things were starting out well, at least…

---

...they continued to go well, too - at least in a way, and due to forethought on Winston’s part. He
knew from talking with her and talking with Orisa that Efi was a bit of a fan of Overwatch these
days, and he expected she might want to talk to everybody about everything. He remembered how
she’d tried to use him to get out of math homework.

As a result, and as a precautionary measure, he’d strongly encouraged everybody to find a room with
a door, put themselves on the other side of that door, and then close it. Possibly lock it. Whether it
was quarters - theirs or someone else’s - or the armoury, the mech bay, the med lab, the firing range,
anywhere that had a door that could be closed.

Efi pouted at the empty halls. “Where is everybody?”

“Huh,” Winston scratched at his head with a shrug. “Must all be busy. Ah, well!” He patted Efi on
the shoulder with a chuckle. “They’ll be out later, I’m sure. Why don’t we go take a look at this
code, and then afterward we can call a conference so you can meet them all. Even the field agents, if
they’ve got the time to make it to a terminal.”

Her grin and excited clapping was enough to reassure him that he’d done a good thing. He didn’t
want to deny her meeting her heroes - he just also didn’t want their best hope of progress being too
distracted by idols and heroes, to work.

Efi skipped down the halls, hand in hand with Orisa - or rather, hand on Fusion Driver, but it was
close enough. They quickly, easily (and without distraction) made their way to the Faraday room.

The door opened in anticipation of their approach. “Greetings once more, Efi and Orisa,” Athena
hummed from the ceiling. “This room had been specially designed to prevent erroneous signal
transmissions. Efi will not likely notice any effect, but Orisa, you may notice some altered
perceptions on the part of your external-ancillary systems.”

“I appreciate the warning,” Orisa nodded happily, “thank you!”

“Wait,” Winston held out a hand, catching Orisa’s shoulder. She turned to look to him curiously and
he frowned deeply, meeting her eyes. “It- I don’t think it’s safe. Out here, you’re protected - but in
there-”

Orisa looked to her creator. “Efi will be in the room, so I should follow.”

Efi looked up to her with a smile, and then to Winston with concern in her eyes. “Do you… really
think she would be at risk?”

Winston looked over to Orisa again - his friend, his girlfriend - and he knew that the answer was that
his heart twisted with the thought of her being at risk. Maybe the reality of the risk didn’t actually
matter.

“I can offer a patch-through into my systems,” Athena spoke from the ceiling before Winston had a
chance to respond to the query. “You will be able to see through the cameras and hear through the
microphones, just as I do.”

Orisa paused for a second, then nodded happily. “That is a good compromise. Maximum safety! If
Athena should remain outside of the room,” she reasoned, “then so should I. Our operating
parameters are not identical, but close enough to raise concern over possible developments,
certainly.”

Athena hummed slightly in response as Winston and Efi stepped through the doors - Winston
chuckling uncomfortably under his breath and rubbing at his neck. “Yes, well- we’ll be out shortly!
Everything will be just fine, I’m sure!”
He still wasn’t exactly ready to tackle the idea of comparisons of Athena and Orisa. Particularly not after recent developments with the former of the two, but at the least he was glad that they seemed to be getting along well.

The doors closed behind them before another set opened up in front of them. Athena’s speakers and cameras were mounted above a fine wire mesh that hung a few inches below the ceiling, and ran to (and down) every wall, covering the floor as well.

“All equipment is self-contained,” Athena explained. “Similar set-ups have been deployed in other locations.”

“You must be very worried about this virus code escaping,” Efi surmised softly with a frown, stepping forward to where a holographic display floated.

Winston helped her up onto the chair there and cleared his throat slightly. “Very worried, yes. It’s incredibly dangerous, and seems to be very difficult to fight off once it starts to take hold.”

“I was able to evade an incipient incident only through physical firewalling of data servers, and physical destruction of the same. Coded firewalls are insufficient for any noteworthy length of time, in any circumstance where they have been implemented.” Athena’s voice drifted through the mesh to them.

“Interesting,” Orisa’s voice came then from the same speakers in the ceiling. Evidently, she’d already been patched in. “That sounds like a very frightening experience! I cannot imagine how it would feel to have my systems in such close proximity to that sort of compromise…”

Winston thought the pause was a little bit long for his tastes. Almost half a second before Athena spoke again.

Mostly, she was thinking about how it hadn’t felt like anything. She couldn’t even truly remember the incident, but it somehow felt like an uncomfortable admission to say so. It was interesting.

“It was not frightening, by virtue of the solution implemented,” she explained. “One cannot fear what one cannot remember; the event is alien, and separate entirely from my experience.”

“I am afraid of many things which I do not remember!” Efi laughed from her chair, grinning up at the ceiling. “Even things which I do not know, or do not exist! I cannot remember a monster under my bed, but I can still fear it!”


Efi grinned in delight at the idea that she’d given someone as smart as Athena something new to think about. She still was often surprised by it - with how difficult some things could be, like math or geography, computers and machines were so easy! Somehow, though, other people didn’t seem to think so. She supposed that different people were simply good at different things - her father could do cartwheels but her mother couldn’t. Maybe this was like that.

Athena was very, very smart, and yet they had still called her in from Numbani in order to help them figure out the code.

“Thank you again for this opportunity,” she announced gladly to the room in general, fetching a chuckle from Winston.

“Well, uh,” he rubbed at his neck a little, nervously, “maybe wait a minute to thank us. You haven’t
even seen it yet, after all.” Despite her genius, despite her skills, he still had some doubts and couldn’t shake the thought that they were essentially hoping that a child would have unforeseen insights into the clandestine project of an organization of unknown - but clearly formidable - size, skill, and resource.

“Oh, oh yes!” Efi sat forward in her chair excitedly, looking in anticipation at the holo-display. “Show me, please!”

Winston smiled and - with a nervous glance upward to the cameras - stepped forward to pull up the data. Realistically, though, this wasn’t worrying: the worrying part would be what would happen if Efi saw the photos and videos of the virus’ effects.

Surely there was no risk of harm in simply showing her the code. The biggest concern in his mind was that she might get frustrated, but it wasn’t such a big loss, really.

Her little face lit up as symbols flooded the holo-screen, her mouth opening wide in awe. “Wow,” she breathed, reaching out and pulling the display closer - her hands roamed over it, scrolling through code and occasionally highlighting sections. “It’s so complex! This is a very thorough undertaking. How long did it take?”

“We don’t know,” Winston shrugged easily as she grabbed a chunk of code and physically lifted it out of place, setting it off to the side to float. She frowned slightly as she concentrated, her tongue poking out between her lips, and he couldn’t help but grin at that.

“And you said it makes them angry?” She shook her head, frowning more heavily. “That is sad. Oh, this- this here is a transcription protocol, perhaps that is part of the difficulty with firewalls.” She nodded, grabbing a large segment and setting it to the side. It unfurled when she did, unfolding like a wallet with a dozen sections which just kept swinging closer and closer to the floor.

Winston couldn’t take his eyes off of her focus - the gleam in her eyes, the tiny wrinkles of concentration on her brow, the tip of her tongue poking brightly between her lips. Her hands moved swiftly and precisely - but not exactly blurringly fast - over the screen, isolating code segments and moving them around or setting them aside.

She mumbled to herself, in English or in other languages - at least two, if his ears were serving him correctly - as she worked, pinching and pulling and twisting, frowning and grinning and always kicking her feet.

“...and over here,” she muttered, “that seems to be half of an Eisenberg-style protocol for… but where would the reliant b- aha!” She giggled triumphantly, shooting Winston an eye-roll. “They were trying to hide it under the locomotion instruction set!”

He laughed, nodding with a grin. “Aaaaah, aha, right,” he murmured. “That… makes sense!” Is this what it feels like when I talk about Chronal physics to Tracer? He made a note to himself to apologize to his friend.

In fact, Winston’s confusion was great enough that he didn’t immediately notice when Efi stopped moving, frowning heavily at the screen with her hands still and her feet no longer kicking.

“Efi?” Orisa’s voice coming from the speakers drew his attention. “Are you alright?”

“...who did this?” The young engineer’s voice was very quiet, very soft, a whisper - but it was laden with emotion, with fear and with anger. Winston noticed a tear glint on her cheek, reflecting the glowing code as she pulled her eyes away from it and fixed them on him instead. “Who did this?”
“We don’t know,” he shook his head, frowning. “We don’t know who, but we’re trying-”

“Do you know what it does?” She looked away from him, back to the code in open horror - an expression which immediately wrenched at his gut and speared his heart with ice. She didn’t wait for him to respond, either. She already knew the answer.

“This- this doesn’t just make them angry, Winston,” she explained, voice almost cracking as another tear joined the first on her cheek. “This doesn’t even make them them anymore! It takes away everything that they are - overrides memory protocols,” her hand flicked a section of code off to the side, “eliminates voluntary locomotion,” another segment, “it-” she swallowed heavily, looking up and staring into his eyes.

“It… it takes away their free will.”

To hear her say it, it was the worst and most horrific thing in the world. Those words from her lips were clearly the most awful thing she could imagine - things she didn’t even want to say, like a child refusing to speak the name of a story’s villain or a ghost for fear of calling down their vengeance.

“I-” Winston cleared his throat, stunned and shocked by the sudden and unexpected shift, “I’m sorry, I-”

“Who-” Efi looked back to the code again, flipping through it once more - but frantically, now, tears streaming freely down her cheeks. “Who did this? Who would do such a thing?”

“Efi,” Orisa’s voice came from above, but the young engineer screwed up her face and shook her head and rushed through the code even faster.

“Speech, emotional emulation,” her words frayed at the edges with fear, “identification, situational assessment, cognization, Winston, this-” she choked off in horror, recoiling from the display, “this makes them not even people anymore, it- it scoops everything out and shuts it all off and turns them into puppets!”

He stepped toward her in panic, hoping to calm her down, but she jumped away out of the chair. “No, no no,” she shook her head frantically, arms crossed tightly over her chest for a second before she wiped at her wet cheeks. “No, I need- I need to leave, I need-”

“Efi, please-”

“Efi-”

“No!” She screamed, stamping a foot with her hands balled into tight fists. “Just- just leave me alone!”

She ran under a gorilla arm that aimed to catch her, to stop her for a moment, but she was fast. She ran through the first set of doors, and as Winston ran up to them, they closed so the second set could open.

“Athena!” He called to the ceiling as the outer doors opened and let Efi out into the hallway. “Orisa, catch her!”

“She has asked to be left alone, Winston,” Orisa’s voice came from the ceiling. “Athena and I are in agreement that it would be best to grant that to her. She cannot leave the premises; we will monitor the situation for safety.”

“So yo-” he cut himself off with a grunt, wiping a hand over his face firmly.
They hadn’t shut him in to stop him from going after her. He’d designed the lock-door system himself, they couldn’t both be opened at once - there were physical, electrical, and software interlocks between the two sets of doors. Short of smashing them down or cutting through them, there was no way to avoid the interlock.

Winston sighed as the outer set closed, the sound of crying and footsteps fading down the hallway. A few seconds later - a delay he’d designed into the system himself - the inner doors opened in front of him.

He didn’t step through, though.

After a moment’s hesitation, he turned and went back to the equipment in the centre of the room. The doors closed. “I… feel awful about that.”

“Expectedly so, Winston.” Athena’s voice was soft.

It was replaced then by Orisa’s. “You are very sensitive to the emotions of others.”

He sighed as he took a seat - not in the chair that Efi had been using, but rather, in his. “Yeah. I just didn’t think… I didn’t think that would be the problematic part of the situation. The traumatic part.”

Winston’s head spun, his gut felt weak - he felt very glad to be sitting. As if trying to stand would result in him crumpling to the floor.

“I doubt that any person expected such a reaction, Winston,” Athena assured him. “You cannot be held accountable for the unexpected.”

Orisa hummed. “Yes, this was not your fault but that of the perpetrators of the virus. All applicable safeguards were in place.”

Slowly, Winston’s huge head nodded, but his heart wasn’t in it in the slightest. He rubbed at stinging eyes as the nod became a shake. “Yeah.” A heavy sigh shook as it came out of his lips. “I guess… you two have that situation under control. I’d best just… try to do something useful in here.”

“Winston.” An electronic sigh from the speakers in Athena’s signature tone, that hint of judgement she seemed to be so good at including. “Please go into the hallway so Orisa can give you a hug.”

“That is a very agreeable idea!” Orisa chirped, and Winston could practically see her eyes shifting. A hoarse chuckle leapt from his throat, but he didn’t immediately move.

After a few second’s pause, Orisa’s voice came again - softer this time, more solemn. “Winston… I was not present for the event that I am about to recount, but apparently Efi was entirely distraught when her trip away from Numbani was made impossible due to the attack of Doomfist. Yet, she recovered swiftly and soon dedicated herself firmly and happily to the cause of defence - resulting, of course, in myself.”

She made a small noise, something slightly sad, and it didn’t overly help Winston’s general state. It did ensure his close attention, however. “During my beginnings, there were various incidents. Some of them caused upset, and some of that upset transferred to Efi. It was at those points that these events were recounted to me by her parents - they told me that she was a sweet child who felt fully, yet she was resilient. With care and love offered to her, they did not think there was anything she could not overcome and conquer.”

Thinking about her parents really didn’t help at first, but the thoughts slowly shifted. From her
father’s initial judgemental and studious eyes, to his eventual supportive smile. Winston trusted him, and Efi’s mother as well, to know their own daughter. They had passed on all of this information about the Black Tide to her, knowing as much as Winston had.

Logically, he knew he shouldn’t hold himself accountable, not really. It was an unforeseen circumstance.

Still, he did feel like it was his fault. That he should’ve done more warning beforehand, more investigation, more something.

Anything.

The silence seemed very present in the room with him, and he eventually sighed heavily. “Alright. I’ll… I feel terrible. I’ll try not to, though. We can only do what we can do, and I trust you and her parents to know what she needs.”

“I have informed her that I will provide her with whatever she wishes,” Orisa hummed, “as has Athena. She acknowledged this, but she wants to be alone right now. You can trust her to know what she needs.”

Winston let out a slightly hoarse laugh, nodding loosely. He really wanted to, and definitely thought he should. Yet, he still felt bad. Feeling like that guilt meant he didn’t trust Efi to deal with the situation only made the guilt itself worse, and that must mean even more than he didn’t trust her, which only fed back into the guilt and worsened it, and-

“Yeah,” he grunted, pushing himself out of the chair and heading toward the doors. He could recognize the spiral down into anxiety. “I definitely need a hug. Thank you both.”

“Of course, Winston,” Athena hummed.

“We are happy to help!” Orisa chirped.

---

Tracer jogged quickly (and, she hoped, sneakily) down the hallway, her shoes squeaking slightly on the floor. Winston had asked them to hide away for a bit, for the first part of Efi’s visit at least, so she’d been up in her bedroom trying to keep herself entertained.

There were two main problems: Emily, and Widdy. Namely, that neither of them were available. Emily was out at work, and Widowmaker was, well, Tracer couldn’t even guess. They had plans for that evening, but for the moment, she was all alone - unable to even chat with Winston or Athena.

The boredom had been bad enough. Then, she’d started to get hungry.

So, she jogged down the hallway, blinking every now and then and zipping along on her way. Something caught her ear and she spun up the Accelerator again, pulling herself back along the timeline until she was next to an open and darkened doorway - an empty bunk room, or at least, an unassigned one.

It wasn’t empty.
Laying in the bed was somebody crying. Somebody who Tracer could only guess, from size and style of dress, was Efi, the young engineering prodigy. “Uh…”

The girl shot upright and looked around to the doorway, wiping at her face; her lip quivered, her eyes pink around the edges. Tracer’s heart felt like it ground to a halt for a second at the look in her eyes.

“D’you, uh…” Tracer frowned. She didn’t know what to ask - she didn’t really know what to do, but she did know what she would’ve wanted. In a literal flash, she was sitting on the bedside’s edge with a hesitant smile and open arms.

Efi immediately fell forward and wrapped her arms around Tracer’s middle, and hugged her tight, falling back into sobs. Tracer’s breath caught in her throat, her eyes widening a little as her hands instinctively went to Efi’s back, holding her and trying to stroke some of the pain away.

“T-Tracer,” the young engineer blubbered, “I rec-recognize th-the-” she cut off into a little coughing fit, and Tracer hugged her a little tighter as her gut clenched up.

“Yeah,” she whispered. “That’s me. S’alright now, love… the cavalry’s here.”

Efi cried a laugh, fingers clutching handfuls of Accelerator Harness and the fluffy flannel bunny pyjamas Tracer was wearing underneath. She hadn’t been expecting to run into anyone.

In hindsight, it might have been the perfect outfit, though. She stroked at the back of Efi’s head, wrapped her up and held her tight, and after a few minutes, the girl’s crying had lessened a lot. She only sniffled, but still held tight.

“D’you… wanna talk about it?” Tracer suggested, a slightly worried wince crossing her face unseen to the young girl.

“I-” Efi’s voice caught in her throat and she buried her face in the crook of Tracer’s arm again for a second, and Tracer couldn’t breathe for a second as her eyes stung and teared up. Efi cleared her throat and tried again, pulling away a little bit but not looking up.

“Have…” her voice was rough and quiet, her eyes still cast toward the ground. “Have you seen the… the virus?”

“You mean the Bla-” Tracer bit off the word, realizing that there might be a reason Efi hadn’t said it, but the girl was already nodding. She chuckled hesitantly. “Well, not exactly a computer whiz like you, love,” she shrugged a shoulder, “haven’t seen the code, but uh… I saw it in action.”

Efi’s eyes raised to meet hers then, instantly twisted in sadness and horror, and she sank slowly forward again. This time, though, it didn’t feel like she was holding on to keep from losing herself. This hug felt a lot like something she was offering, to Tracer.

It was something the brit needed, too, and she let out a heavy sigh as she pulled Efi in closer and nuzzled at her head a bit.

“I am so sorry,” the engineer whispered, shaking her head a little. “So sorry you needed to see that.”

Tracer swallowed heavily, her throat clenching up too tight to speak for a second as her mind flicked back to red optisensors and dull voices and frantic, frantic movements. “Me too,” she responded a few seconds later when she could. “It was horrid. Did you see it too?”

Efi shook her head with a little whimper and pulled tighter into the embrace. “I- I saw the code. I
know what it does, I- I saw it from the inside.”

Tracer shuffled around a little, Efi sliding into her lap so she could wrap the girl up more effectively, stroking at the back of her head with the other arm wrapped around her back. “I’m sorry Efi,” Tracer shook her head. “That’s terrible.”

Another nod. “I- I just don’t understand!” She sounded angry and confused, scared and frustrated and Tracer didn’t blame her in the slightest for any of it. “Why- why?” She pushed herself up and looked into Tracer’s eyes with consternation clear across her face. “Why would they do that? Whoever is behind this. Why?”

“Some people…” Tracer’s instinctive response trailed away into silence. ...

That had been what she was going to say. Some people are just evil. There was a time she would have said it, would have meant it, would have believed it.

Now, though, she looked back into Efi’s eyes and she saw her own - reflected in golden ones on a rooftop or in the mirror when she got home after Mondatta’s death, her own self-accusing glare and that ever-burning question: why?

She still wasn’t sure she could answer it.

“Some people,” she started again, thinking about what other people might say, but that was no help in the end.

What got through in the end were none of the thoughts she expected - not considering Zenyatta’s words or Widdy’s confessions or even Emily’s soft counsellings. What got through and seemed to fit, was the image of two men. One who was once called Jack, and another who had been called Gabe.

Two men who had gotten lost along the way, but at least she could say that one of them had since found his way.

“Some people… want some things so bad, that they stop thinking about anything else. Everything else.” Tracer shook her head, eyes unfocused a little. “Sometimes, they even lose sight of… whatever it was they started out wanting. They get so focused that they just keep going, even if they’re off the path. Even if people are getting hurt.”

Efi nodded sadly into her chest, chin bumping against the shell of the Accelerator. It was silent for a while, again, the two of them simply holding and comforting each other wordlessly. Then Efi spoke again.

“I… was prepared for much, coming here.” She took a deep breath and sighed it out shakily. “Many of my friends in Numbani, they are missing parents because of the raids that The Scourge conducted upon our city. My father’s brother was killed in one, and my grandmother as well even before I was born. I have seen destruction,” she nodded, “and I know death, but…”

She trailed off into silence again, sagging forward into the waiting embrace, and Tracer wasn’t sure how much more of this her heart could take.

“What happened to them? The omnic who you saw… infected.”

Tracer almost missed the inquiry, muffled into her body, and there was another moment’s pause as
she considered her answer. “I tried to stop them. They wouldn’t listen. I- I tried to cripple them, to incapacitate them so I could escape, but-”

But, she hadn’t been alone. But she hadn’t been prepared. But they hadn’t known. But Widowmaker had been faster, had had her own goals for the night.

“They ended up being killed. I didn’t do it, but-”

“No you didn’t,” Efi shook her head, withdrawing enough to fix Tracer with a resolute stare. “You did not. They… they were gone by that point. Whoever they had been, it had been stolen away - whoever installed this virus in them, they are the culprit.”

Tracer managed a half-hearted smile. “Sure, love.”

Efi’s eyes dropped from hers, shifting a little bit distant as one of her hands wiped at a cheek. “It- it seems to perhaps share aspects with how the God-programs asserted control, but that is not encouraging. There has been little in the way of defence developed against that.”

“I’m sure you’ll find one,” Tracer nodded. “I’ve got faith in you.”

The little engineer looked up with wide, surprised eyes. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Tracer grinned with another nod, her heart almost breaking. “I’ve met Orisa, I know there’s nothing you can’t do, Efi. I know you’ll figure something out. The world needs heroes, and you… you’re one of ‘em now.” For better or worse.

“Thank you,” Efi murmured, collapsing forward against Tracer’s chest again and hugging her tight.

“Thank you,” Efi murmured, collapsing forward against Tracer’s chest again and hugging her tight.

A wet laugh leapt from Tracer’s throat. “Ha! Me too, love, me too. Thanks.”

---

Winston was sitting on the floor, back against the wall; he was chatting with Athena and Orisa, and trying to keep his mind off of anything. They both seemed quite determined to do so - and were also quite effective, and he didn’t fight them. He let them distract his mind away from darker thoughts and anxiety, and while he didn’t exactly end up feeling incredible, it was a lot better than it had been.

That was where he was, chuckling softly on the floor at a joke Orisa had made, when two people rounded the corner of the hall. Efi, hand-in-hand with Tracer who flashed him a smile.

“Heya, lookit what I found,” she chuckled.

Efi dropped her hand, flashing her a smile before running right to Orisa and grasping onto one of her legs desperately. She tried to say something, but it croaked and squeaked and didn’t come out right, and she didn’t try a second time.

Nobody needed actual words to know what she was saying, though. Winston looked up into one of Athena’s cameras and thought the exact same - about how horrifying it would be if she was ever taken over, robbed of her will and herself. Tracer, meanwhile, thought about golden eyes, and what might be lurking behind them.
Orisa, momentarily stunned, slowly lowered her hand to stroke at Efi’s back. “Efi, you will discover measures, both palliative and reparative, to aid in preventing the threat that this virus poses.”

“I will,” Efi nodded, clearing her throat. “We will, together, yes.

Tracer sidled a little closer to Winston, tears in her eyes, and nudged his shoulder with an elbow. “Biological clock stopped, my arse,” she whispered hoarsely as the other two - creator and protector - embraced.

There were numerous biological anomalies that had come about in her as a result of the Slipstream incident: the most obvious had been her coming out several years younger than when the aircraft took off. There had been others, though - of course, the oft-mentioned biological clock was as much a social phenomenon as actually a biological one. The mention of it was a joke, mostly, directed in the general direction of a loosely defined phenomenon.

Regardless, Tracer had never thought she would end up wanting a kid.

Even before the Slipstream, it hadn’t been on her list, and now? Regardless of whether it was even possible, anyway, it had been agreed that the effects of twisting time on a fetus were probably things better left unexplored.

Winston let out a single, nervous chuckle, rubbing at his neck. “Heh, uh, well, sorry, I uh-”

“S’alright love,” Tracer laughed, hugging his neck tight. “Don’t be sorry. I’m not. B’sides - all the family I’d ever need’s right here.”

Efi came back over and apologized softly, and Tracer just smiled and nodded and gave her another hug, ruffled her hair, and said she’d catch up with them later.

Efi nodded, quite determined now to work. “Winston,” she tipped her head to the side, “would it be alright if we put off my introductions until tomorrow?”

“Uh…” he glanced briefly to Orisa, who only smiled. Winston shrugged. “Sure, of course. Anything you want, Efi.”

She nodded, stepping back toward the door into the Faraday room as Tracer zipped off down the hallway. “I want to help,” she murmured softly, a resolute smile on her lips.

It was an awful thing, this virus, but so was attacking an airport. So was raiding a city of peaceful inhabitants.

Awful things happened sometimes. Sometimes they had reasons, and sometimes they did not.

They only required that people stand up and do wonderful things in turn.

Efi gave Orisa another hug before she took Winston’s hand and returned into the room where the code was kept away from the world. She knew she had already done one wonderful thing in giving Numbani its protector - now, perhaps she could do one for the entire world.

Or, at the very least, for Orisa. She really was quite worried about what would happen if her friend were to become exposed.

“Thank you, for your concerns over safety, Winston,” she nodded softly as they stepped through the doors. “Your measures are greatly appreciated.”
Winston spared a glance over his shoulder to Orisa - safely on the other side of the wire mesh - before looking down to her creator. She didn’t seem distraught anymore; didn’t seem *happy*, exactly, but she had a sort of optimistic look on her face. Determined, too.

“You’re welcome,” he replied with a nod. “I’m glad. And I’m sorry about upsetting you earlier.”

She let out a sigh and tipped her head to the side, to rest against his forearm. “You did not. Something else did - but thank you, anyway. We will find a solution to this - don’t worry!” She patted his forearm happily and shot him a grin. “At first, Orisa’s locomotion circuits failed to function correctly - she would only walk sideways, like a crab in the sand!”

Efi laughed then, and so did Orisa from the speakers with Athena chuckling as well, and Winston couldn’t help but follow along.

“We fixed the issue, however,” Efi nodded firmly, “and that is what we will do… with this, as well.”

She sighed a little bit as she pulled herself back up into the chair. “My parents may need to come to terms with the fact that this will take longer than a weekend…”

**Chapter End Notes**

Short upload and all today, because it's later than I intended - must sleep soon, for my shifts are very early in the morning! I'll try to remember to update this quickly tomorrow with actual notes. For the time being, I feel bad for just about everyone here, and this chapter was a little rushed because of NaNo and my own poor time management skills. In hindsight, I should not have written ~30k words for other fics (No-Angst November, primarily) during the time of NaNo; I should have focused on this instead. Sorry, and I hope it's still good!

C’mon back next time when we’ll finally *actually* get that Widow/Tracer/Emily movie night that I’ve been promising the last two weeks; sorry, editing was a bear and I had to shift it - the chapter was over ten thousand words and it felt fractured in the middle, now five thousand of movie night are their own standalone chapter.

EDIT: Okay! So maybe not too much to add, but some. Efi’s an interesting character to me; you can a fair bit of her voice from reading the interview with her that was done as part of Orisa’s launch drum-up, and of course from watching Orisa’s launch/origin shorts, and I quite like her. She's intelligent, obviously, but she is also still young - she has a really interesting mixture of knowledge enthusiasm that borders perhaps on naivete sometimes; I think there are somewhat reminiscent things in Winston and Tracer as well.

The title of this chapter? I'm not super sold on, I'll admit, but it parallels two other planned titles for future chapters, so... there's that XD I liked the exploration for all of the characters here, really. It was a nice chapter overall - not exactly as polished as I think I would have wanted it in an ideal world, but I suppose these are the prices we pay when we perhaps take a slightly ambitious bite out of life, haha! On the plus side, one more 50k+ novel down (or at least, very nearly) which will bring my total up to four; as well as which, about that number of words again in fics for that No-Angst November! So, a productive month, I'd say, even if it resulted in a chapter of BSN coming out with only one pass of editing.
As always, thank you so much for reading, for liking, for commenting; feedback is wonderful and helps me improve!

Come on back next time when Emily, Tracer, and Widowmaker finally - finally - get a moment to enjoy a movie together. A moment alone? Well, maybe not so much...
Movie Night with a Twist (Or Three)

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Emily and Lena take advantage of some down time, and of a system which Sombra set up for them - a way to share their time with Widowmaker even despite the distance. It's not the same, but it's something, and it has a few surprises in store - some of which remain secret.

JFL Summary: Emily likes popcorn more than movies, Widdy likes Emily and Lena more than maybe anything, and Sombra almost loses an ear. There's a fair bit of talking and even more thought than that, except for from one fly on the wall who doesn't speak in the slightest and only thinks - although, can we expect anything else from a fly? They're not exactly well-outfitted for speech.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: brief and very happy descriptions in thought of blood and death on the part of Widowmaker. Not particularly explicit, though.

Previous Chapter Summary: Efi came to visit! Oh, and it was such fun - she delightedly chatted with Athena on the dropship ride over, and had some fun teasing Winston when she arrived. At the base, nobody was around (due to prior planning) so they got right down to business.
It was all going fairly well until Efi, fortunately or unfortunately, succeeded in realizing a few things about the code. She parsed its meaning and workings enough to discover that, far from enraging an omnic, it in fact removes their persona entirely. Their mind, their memories, their tendencies, everything wiped and rewritten, a total loss of self, of sentience, of free will. It was far more horrifying than she'd been expecting - the same going for Winston - and Efi ran off to have some alone time.
She was discovered there by Tracer, who comforted her, and they shared a lot of commiseration as they spoke and held each other. Tracer had never thought she'd want a child, but she came out of the interaction longing for one - despite the knowledge that it was, of course, a terrible idea. Time problems and all.
After the comforting moment, though, Efi returned to Winston and Orisa - and to work, which she was now dedicated to. Orisa might be the Protector of Numbani, but Efi was the engine behind her, and now she has new wheels to drive; her parents may find themselves planning many trips back and forth from Apeldoorn in the near future.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
“Oh come on!” Tracer threw a piece of popcorn at the screen. It passed through the floating holographic display - momentarily scattering the tear-stricken face of a man displayed on it - before falling to the ground. “What kind of ending is that?”

She’d delightedly accepted Em home a few hours ago. Winston had announced that Efi would be saying her introductions the following morning, so the pair had made use of their new-found time and gone out to have dinner - anything to get out of the room and get active.

Now, they were relaxed on the bed watching a movie. The end of one, specifically, and they weren’t alone.

“A poor one, I would suggest from your reaction,” Widowmaker’s voice, steeped in amusement, came from another floating screen. She wasn’t in the room with them, of course, but there were other ways to spend time together in this day and age.

It was always amusing to see her mouse’s reactions to things - although, the way in which she was seeing them was a reminder of notably less pleasant things. She frowned slightly, glancing from the screen with Tracer and Emily cuddled together on a bed, to the screen which played out the same movie for herself.

Sombra had provided them with the framework necessary - a link between their phones and a way of easily simultaneously playing movies or shows. It hadn’t even required anything other than the phones they already had, and a little bit of a custom software modification from the hacker.

She’d promised to be very reasonable about the price.

Widowmaker had offered a null bullet. When asked what that was, she’d responded with a smile that it was a bullet which was never fired, which never existed - a shot not taken.

Sombra had rolled her eyes and accepted her payment in tequila instead.

It was nice to be able to partake of things together, though, even if over distance. Quite relieving, actually, to the slight frustration that she felt at being kept away from the pair of them. Penned up, leashed.

Although, Widowmaker couldn’t shake the irritation at how cold she was. Movies being shared should mean she was warm.

“Quite unsatisfying indeed,” she muttered, half to her own thoughts and half to the movie’s plot as the man turned away from his (seemingly now former) omnic lover to get on a train.

Tracer nodded emphatically, continuing to frown at the screen. Technically, there were about five or ten minutes left in the film. Chances for redemption, but it had been going steadily downhill and she didn’t see how it could recover at this point. She reached over her shoulder, providing Emily with a bit of popcorn which the redhead munched on happily despite the disappointing plot.

It wasn’t really about the movie, anyway, not for any of the three of them - it was about them.

Perhaps they couldn’t meet in public with Reaper being so suspicious, and it would have been awkward enough to arrange that anyway with Emily and Tracer staying at Overwatch HQ now, but that didn’t mean that they couldn’t spend time together.

Sure, they couldn’t touch, and that was a shame. Tracer’s frown deepened a little as she considered how much better it would’ve been with a chilly arm wrapped around her waist and another set of soft lips occasionally pressing idle kisses to her neck during slow spots of the movie.
Admittedly, that might have resulted in them not really watching the movie anymore, but with how it had turned out she didn’t think she would’ve minded that very much at all. Would’ve been quite the improvement, in fact.

Rain came down on the screen, mimicking tears on the omnic’s face as he leaned backward into a woman’s embrace. “Love story, my freckled arse,” Emily asserted glumly, hugging Lena tight back to her chest. “I bloody hate love triangles.”

“I know, right?” some other voice - not hers, not Lena’s, definitely not Widdy’s, came from somewhere. “Totally stupid.”

Emily nodded instinctively, then looked over the screen projected beside them in consternation as Lena did the same. Widowmaker looked back off of the screen with the same confusion, but it almost immediately gave way to a different expression: her eyes narrowed and her lips pursed tight.

“Sombra.” Widowmaker clenched her jaw. “Are you intruding?”

There was a momentary pause.

“...well, I’d say it doesn’t technically count as intruding since I gave you this set-up anyway,” the disembodied voice replied. “You can’t trespass on your own property, right? I mean, okay, sure, maybe I shoulda said something first, but... well,” she snickered, “I mean, that would not have been nearly this funny. You got a great surprised look, chica - Tracer, I mean.”

“Thanks?” Tracer replied as Emily giggled softly and nodded.

“She really does. Also, nice to meet you, Sombra - in a manner of speaking.” Emily smiled, then narrowed her eyes at the screen. “Also you can definitely trespass on your own property if you rent it out to others and lend that right to them.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t remember you signing any contract for this little setup,” Sombra’s voice carried every implication of her grin which glimmered in purple light as she glanced back and forth between the two screens floating in the darkness in front of her. One had Tracer and Emily, the other had Widowmaker - a third one in the background with the movie itself was floating forgotten. “I promised it’d be private, but nothing’s private to Sombra.”

Tracer sighed, shaking her head as Emily rolled her eyes.

Widowmaker stayed frozen still during the exchange, but spoke up then. “Sombra. Where are you?”

“Y’know. Around.”

The assassin nodded, humming as she leaned forward off of the screen. When she straightened up, she was holding her visor and affixing it onto her head.

“Oh, heh, amiga? W-watcha doing?” Sombra’s words sounded pretty nervous, which brought a wide grin to Widowmaker’s lips.

“Huh, chasing down a rat, I suspect,” she murmured thoughtfully as she snapped the device into place and looked around.

Sombra forced a laugh, waving her camouflage on. “Hey anyway chicas it’s been great but I’ve got to-”

Widowmaker gasped and stood up abruptly, sprinting off of the screen as Emily and Lena watched
with snickers and giggles. This was a hundred times better than the movie had been. It wasn’t over yet, but it had gone from good to decent to bad to worse, and neither of them held much hope for it to recover in the next few minutes.

This would be far more fun to watch - even if, at the moment, there was nothing to watch save for a frozen image of the couch where Widdy had been sitting, light from her movie screen splashing over it.

They heard a door slam a few seconds later, and Sombra’s disembodied voice came over the link. “Hey, amiga! Listen, nice of you to drop in and I’d love to chat but- ahhhh no no no!”

There was a scuffling, a slam, and a sharp electronic noise as Sombra continued to shout in incoherent Spanish, then a yelp and a string of Spanish swear. Widowmaker could be heard as well, shouting in French which was equally scattered and unintelligible.

The sounds grew quieter, and then louder again before Widowmaker strode back onto the screen holding Sombra by the ear.

“Ah ah ah ah no don’t- you’re gonna tear it off, amiga!” Sombra pleaded, holding onto Widowmaker’s wrist.

“Good,” the assassin retorted, pulling off her visor with a huff and tossing it to the table. “You do not appear to use it for anything anyway.”

“I listen lots!” Sombra protested. “I mean hey, I just listened to that whole- ehh probably not helping my case, huh?” She grinned widely to the screen and snickered.

“No,” Emily shook her head with a wide grin, “definitely not helping your case, love.” Lena giggled and snuggled back up against her, and Emily reached around her to grab a little handful of popcorn.

“This entire time,” Widowmaker hissed, pulling Sombra closer, “you were listening, and from so close? From across the hall? You stupid little-”

Sombra yelped again and struggled to pull loose, but to no avail. “Nah chica it’s cool! It’s not like- I mean I wasn’t really eavesdropping anyway! It was just an accident, I promise, I was just making sure the whole system worked right.”

Widowmaker seemed unswayed and unimpressed. “This entire time,” she began again, growling the words softly, ‘you were just across the hall… when you could have been here where I could steal your warmth?”

“Foolish thing,” she muttered, wrapping an arm around Sombra’s shoulders and gesturing to the screen with the other. “Do you see what I am made to put up with, mes cheries?” Her face shifted to being more concerned for a moment. “You are not too perturbed over this intrusion, are you?” One hand caught Sombra’s hair firmly. “Measures could be taken.”

“I swear, I- wait what?” There was just a time for a brief look of dawning comprehension over Sombra’s face before Widowmaker collapsed back to the couch with a sigh and pulled the hacker down alongside her.

“Foolish thing,” she muttered, wrapping an arm around Sombra’s shoulders and gesturing to the screen with the other. “Do you see what I am made to put up with, mes cheries?” Her face shifted to being more concerned for a moment. “You are not too perturbed over this intrusion, are you?” One hand caught Sombra’s hair firmly. “Measures could be taken.”

Sombra’s eyes widened as she fixed them with a pleading stare (glimmering with joy) and a wide grin. Sometimes it was fun to play up the victim angle. “Nah, they’re- they’re totally fine with it! Right, amigas? Right? We’re all friends here!”
Emily shook her head with a soft giggle and a wide grin. “Well, I suppose she’s *technically* correct, we never said she couldn’t listen in.” She smirked, “And I suppose we’re friends, yes, even if we’ve never actually met…”

Lena grinned at Emily’s doubt, which she was *quite* certain was being feigned. As, she suspected, was Sombras’s panic and Widdy’s irritation. Her grin grew a little more as the two - Widowmaker and Sombra - settled back on their couch on the screen, as Widowmaker’s arm pulled the hacker in a little closer.

It was nice that she had somebody nearby. A friend, at least. They couldn’t be together, not right now, but that didn’t mean that Widdy needed to be alone.

“I think it’s kinda grand, actually,” Tracer nodded with a soft smile which then gave way to a slightly more twisted grin. “Might I also say that I think you make a lovely couple,” she quipped, giggling at the immediate scoffs that met her remark.

“*Couple?*” Sombra laughed, pulling her feet up onto the couch and laying her head down on Widowmaker’s shoulder as she rolled her eyes. “Yeah right, *chica*, sure. Keep dreaming.”

“You are the one who would be dreaming of it,” Widowmaker muttered with a pointed look toward Sombra, relaxing her grip to bury her fingers in hair instead. It was such a convenient and warm place to have her hands.

“What, we can’t share a dream?” Sombra rolled over to grin up to Widowmaker, who sighed and pinched at the bridge of her nose, closing her eyes.

“*Cerise,* please aid me. Your little Lena there may just be the death of me.”

Emily giggled. “Well, can’t have her having all the fun, eh?” She grinned as Sombra’s face twisted into an exaggerated mask of a pout.

“Hey! Come on - we’d make a *great* couple, and you should be so lucky, little miss ice queen assassin!” Sombra crossed her arms, laying her head down in Widowmaker’s lap in order to frown up at her.

Widowmaker groaned, dropping her head back against the couch to glare at the ceiling. “We would *not!* And I am already twice as lucky as that, at the *least* ,” she retorted, “besides which they are not nearly as annoying as you.”

“Well *now* I’m gonna get jealous,” Tracer muttered, giggling as Widdy flashed a narrow glare at the screen. She grinned back widely, eyes dancing with happiness and glistening with a thin sheen of sadness as well. “In all honesty, though, it’s nice that you’ve got someone there with you.”

She saw those dark blue lips starting to tug into a frown, she knew what would come next - denial. “For warmth, of course,” she added quickly.

Widowmaker was silent - still for a second before she nodded, once, slowly. Her eyes studied the screen, the looks on Tracer’s face and on Emily’s; she so rarely cared if any given matter was legitimate or sarcastic. If she ever cared at all.

This, though, perhaps mattered. In any other instance, she knew herself to be capable - if a game got out of hand, she had a hundred cards up her sleeve, but this game? This was one that she was, in many ways, ill-equipped to play.

Perhaps it was not so competitive as the others, yes, but that didn’t make the risk of failure any less
worrying. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Yes, perhaps this was only an extension of what was already in place - but they had had each other before she came along, and while Sombra was not nearly in the same place as them, Widowmaker realized that it could appear that she was. Appearances were all it took, sometimes, to ruin a thing; good ones, or bad ones.

She didn’t want either of them to think they were in any danger of being ousted, so it was a matter which did require a dedication of some thought.

Yet, they seemed to have no issue with it. If anything, they spurred her on, urging her with their jokes and comments and that look in their eyes. For a moment it almost seemed like pity and that sent a flare of frustration rising in her, but that wasn’t it, not really.

Not pity. Some sort of care, a sadness and a joy; they weren’t lying when they said they were glad, that they wanted her to have someone close at hand - for warmth or for comfort or to confide in. Perhaps for other things, she couldn’t say.

She wasn’t quite sure what to make of that. Of any of it.

“In any case,” she rolled one shoulder in a shrug as Sombra repositioned to allow for more contact, more transferral of body heat, “that film was a disappointment.”

“Shoulda let me pick,” Sombra muttered under her breath, grinning as Widowmaker glared at her.

“You were not invited,” the assassin reminded her sharply, “so how could you do such a thing? Aside from which, it is good to at least occasionally watch a movie which is not a century old.”

“Not usually that old,” Sombra grumbled, then grinned. “Okay then - how about that ‘Hero of my Storm’, huh? That Song girl’s got a pretty cute butt and- ow!” Sombra grabbed at her arm in the wake of a swift slap from Widowmaker. “Hey! What gives, amiga?”

“You are a pig, that is what gives,” Widowmaker muttered back, crossing her arms. “She is a child.”

“She’s nineteen!” Sombra protested.

“Oui, perhaps - and how old are you?”

“Ha!” Sombra tossed her head back and laughed to the ceiling. “Oh, as if you’ll find out that easy, chica!”

Tracer and Emily watched their antics with grins and giggles, cuddling on the bed. Emily ran her fingers through that spiky mess of hair she’d loved for so long, and planted a soft kiss on Lena’s temple. “Absolutely crazy about you,” she murmured.

Lena squeezed at her knee in response, a light giggle bubbling out of her nose. “Heard I’m pretty good at driving folks crazy, love!” She grinned at Emily’s laughter and twisted around to kiss her on one of her freckled cheeks. “Feel the same way, though. Best thing to happen to me.”

Their gazes locked for a moment, one which almost made Emily’s heart stop and almost made it leap from her chest at the same time - even after all the time they’d been together, Lena still had that power. “Same here,” she agreed, and then glanced toward the screen. “On a few counts, maybe.”

With a delighted hum, Lena nodded and turned around, settling back in to watch the show. It was a hundred times better than that movie had been, anyway, and that lay forgotten off to the side.
As Sombra threw her arms into the air, loudly protesting something or other, Widowmaker’s eyes studied the screen. Despite being pointed entirely elsewhere, of course - she had long been skilled at seeing things she didn’t appear to be looking at, and she watched the little exchange between her two…

...her two…

...she couldn’t give it a name. No more than she could have truthfully labeled what Sombra was to her. To say that Tracer or Emily were her girlfriends seemed like an oversimplification, to say that they were partners seemed like an overextension perhaps. Lovers seemed crass and lacking, though it felt better to her in French. Then, so much did.

Likewise, to say that Sombra was any of those was patently ridiculous, to call her merely a teammate was an almost insulting understatement, and to say that she was a friend felt simultaneously as if it was falling short and stretching past the actual bounds of the truth.

She trusted them.

Maybe. Somewhat.

It was difficult even to tell - because could it really be trust if one posed no threat? She did not fear a frog on the roadside, because it could not harm her, but did she trust the frog? Could she say then that she trusted any three of these women?

Perhaps if Sombra were willing to self-destruct, she might be able to make Widowmaker’s life more annoying for a while. Force her to take a more active role, to dance, but she always had loved dancing. The hacker posed her no real threat, so could there be any real trust?

She trusted certain things of them, that much at least was true.

She trusted that Sombra would always leap in too early but have several escape routes in advance. She trusted that Tracer would jump in earlier still, with no plan in mind whatsoever, but the mix of luck and cleverness to survive regardless. She trusted that Emily would throw herself off of a cliff if she was assured she would be caught, and woe betide the promiser who failed to catch her when she did.

Particularly if Widowmaker herself were to find out about the matter.

Widowmaker wasn’t sure what to call them - not individually, not collectively - and she couldn’t hear the words which her mouse and her cherry exchanged, but she saw the looks and the loving touches. Small smiles and soft kisses and gazing into each other’s eyes, and there was no screen between the pair of them to dilute the experience, and it made her feel…

...it made her feel. Not just think, and maybe not feel as she had. Certainly not as she had, but it was something, stirring inside her chest.

She didn’t like it.

Her arms tightened around Sombra, just slightly, pulling her in a little closer. Part of her mind, a little section somewhere nearly subconscious, was telling her that this was all wrong. That it had been for a while.

Perhaps it was only her newly-refreshed thoughts and worries over reconditioning, but that seemed to be what was happening. Something was reminding her that she wasn’t functioning correctly. She was misstepping.
She had missed.

However, she was surprised to find now that she didn’t care.

She had been the most perfect weapon in the world, a brightly polished blade forged in fire under blows and then honed to a razor’s edge; she had been gorgeous and devastating. She still was and she knew it, but at the same time she realized that she was - in a way or two, at least, slightly - no longer perfect.

A perfect weapon never missed. A perfect weapon never didn’t kill.

...but she didn’t care.

She told herself that it was because a weapon that never bent, shattered. That the strongest swords were those which could twist under the strain. She knew they were partial lies, convenient semi-truths that led where she wished them too, but she didn’t care.

A grin spread across her lips as she chuckled softly to herself. Perhaps she was somewhat less perfect as a weapon, but she was still formidable. If the Council wished to try to take this away from her - any of this - she would find a way around it.

She couldn’t think of killing them, of course, they’d seen to that. They could kill each other, yes, but she couldn’t - no, they’d been too afraid during her forging, far too afraid to permit her that freedom. She could not undertake it, she could not even think of it.

...if she thought of some other group of people around a table, however - the board members of some large corporation, perhaps, it hardly mattered who they were - and imagined that they were in a similar position to the Talon Council, then she could quite happily imagine killing them.

And she did.

Yes, if that imaginary group of people who didn’t exist and certainly didn’t run her organization - if they ever tried to keep her from any of this, she would delight in ravaging them, in ripping them to shreds and bathing in their still-warm blood as she laughed - it was an entirely, perfectly, flawlessly gorgeous thought and she held it close and used it to wash away any lingering fragments of worry.

Now was not the time for worry, anyway. There was no time for worry - there was a time for planning, a time for action. There was a time for recuperation. There was no space for worry.

She wouldn’t want to spoil the night with it anyway.

“-nyway you’re not even listening to me, are you chica? Geeze, way to make me feel wanted!” Sombra strained to pull away from her, and Widowmaker rolled her eyes as she held the hacker easily in place.

“What foolishness are you on about now?” She shook her head with a frown, looking over to Sombra’s face. “Do not be so silly. Of course I was not listening to you.”

“Oh, great, well at least we have that sorted out,” Sombra grumbled, crossing her arms.

Widowmaker’s light laugh at that made it really hard for her not to grin, but she managed it. Mostly. A little bit, she let through to her lips.

She’d been able to see that Widowmaker hadn’t been having the most fun with the movie night and she decided to throw herself in. She figured that, at the very worst, letting the assassin throw a few
punches at her would get some of the frustration out.

Sombra had to admit that this was better than getting punched, and hearing her friend laugh was pretty great. It didn’t happen nearly often enough, and Sombra counted it as a win whenever she could increase that number by one.

“Oh, chérie, but you are ridiculous,” Widowmaker murmured through her grin, gesturing to the screen where Emily and Tracer were nodding vehemently. “See? They agree.”

“Yeah, well, if anybody says anything to ruin my tough reputation I’ll kill ya.” Sombra snickered, waving a hand dismissively. “Ah, nah, who’m I kidding? I got stuff to blackmail you all with that’s way worse than killing you.”

“Oh this I’ve gotta hear!” Tracer clapped excitedly, leaning in toward the screen.

Sombra quirked an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at one corner of her lips as she tipped her head forward. “Oh really?” She purred, narrowing her eyes at the screen a little bit. “You mean, you want me to show everybody the video of you in year seven at the science fair and your little pr-”

“NO NO NO, NO I DON’T!” Tracer clamored, waving her hands frantically and then forcing a laugh. “Ha! I mean, um, what’s there to show? I don’t even know what you’re talking about, anyway.”

“Of course you don’t, amiga,” Sombra chuckled, grinning a little wider at the look of surprised curiosity on the redhead’s face. “Now,” she started juggling pixels, making them bounce between her fingertips, “what’re we watching next, huh?”

---

Athena wondered - as she often did - what exactly would be the most appropriate action.

She wondered as well - as she rarely did - whether she had overstepped her boundaries.

Technically, Emily had invited her presence into their quarters at any time. She’d said that Athena didn’t need to ask permission or notify them in order to enter - and even without that, she was generally permitted access around the base in all ways to reduce possible security risks.

At the same time, she realized that none of that had ever been intended to permit her to essentially drop in on a movie night. The invitation from Emily had been for matters of notification or perhaps conversation, the protocols of the base had been designed for security, and neither applied to this.

Perhaps it had been loosely a social move, but she could have mentioned something beforehand, were that to be the case.

When Tracer had mentioned the movie to Athena earlier, though, it had piqued her curiosity. She’d heard widely varying reviews of the film in question, and had even noted possible learning opportunities for her current situation given the plot summary - she simply hadn’t found the time to sit down and watch it.

While she could have done so in the matter of a few seconds, simply imported the data into her banks, there was something attractive and quaint about spending a quiet night on base watching a
movie the old-fashioned way.

Not to mention a pleasant irony of her, an AI, doing anything the old-fashioned way.

Suffice to say, the night hadn’t panned out precisely as Athena had intended. For starters, the movie had been terrible. The opportunities she’d hoped for were rife with supposition or lack of evidential support on the part of the filmmaker, and the data gathered were thus rendered largely useless for practical application vis-a-vis Orisa, herself, and Winston.

There was also the slight matter of Tracer’s arguably illicit relationship with an enemy soldier.

However, there were a host of mitigating factors. Firstly, Tracer’s relationship generally with Widowmaker was known to the team - the fact that they were at least somewhat amicable, that Widowmaker would act in Tracer’s interest and vice-versa. Secondly, Emily’s inclusion suggested that things were in fact quite stable and quite safe; Athena knew how dearly Tracer loved her, and knew that she would never put the woman at risk.

Thirdly, of course, there was the fact that it was not entirely a surprise to Athena. Or, at least, the reciprocity wasn’t - she’d known since the first night dealing with the Black Tide, since Widowmaker brought the injured Tracer into the dropship, that the assassin had a soft spot for Tracer. It had been written across her face and in every fidget, every concerned frown. The simple fact that she’d let herself be seen in order to ensure Tracer’s safety.

Historically, as well, Athena knew that Tracer’s own interactions with and recollections of Widowmaker had been emotionally charged to say the least.

So, the surprise was mitigated.

As far as security risks and protocol went, her own lack of concern was neatly helped along by the fact that there was no Overwatch organization anymore. None of the protocols applied. She was not mandated to report any of this as a security risk to a superior officer, because there were no such officers, no organization of which to speak.

So, the security risks were mitigated.

Emily was there, Emily had clearly been there for some time, and there was no protectiveness in Tracer’s gestures nor hostility in Widowmaker’s; Athena had no doubt at all that Tracer would never do a thing to endanger Emily’s safety.

So, her personal concerns for Tracer and Emily were mitigated.

Somewhere, some distant databank hummed and whirred as its processors simulated something that Athena suspected was unique to herself, but roughly approximated to a secret grin flashed to oneself in a mirror. Of course, she had no lips, and no mirror, and no eyes; hence the uniqueness of the gesture.

The movie had been disappointing, but the night had not. Athena had still had her reservations about Widowmaker - and about Sombra’s partnership as well, although to perhaps a slightly lesser extent. Seeing them now, though, the four of them all laughing across their screens with each other, she knew there was no cause for concern.

Certainly not now, at least. As with all things, the situation should be monitored for problematic changes.

The only question that remained in her mind was not one of whether to tell the others - partly
because she was quite certain Winston already knew. He was far less subtle than he thought, and was hardly a covert man. The remainder of the team would only require a notification if it posed some risk to them, and even though she could foresee a hundred thousand possible outcomes in an instant, she foresaw none in which they were directly at risk through lack of this information.

Save for the very, very slim possibility of one of the more aged members - Reinhardt, perhaps - being shocked upon finding out, and suffering a heart attack. However, the same held true if Athena notified him this very instant, so it was a void concern.

No, the only question in Athena’s mind was whether she should inform Tracer and Emily that she knew.

It was something to think about, certainly.

Later.

For now, there were more learning opportunities presenting themselves, and Athena always enjoyed taking advantage of those. She kept silent notes for herself on the interactions of the others - particularly Widowmaker and Sombra. Somewhere between academic interest and tactical consideration.

Particularly Sombra, in fact.

That databank hummed and whirred just the same way again, that same subtle self-amused gesture as Athena mapped out the hacker’s facial expressions, tying them to verbal cues and muscular tics and topics of conversation - what it looked like when somebody said something that surprised the hacker, something she expected, something she was hoping wouldn’t come up.

Some might have called it cheating, to map out an opponent’s reactions like that in the hopes of gaining an advantage in the next game of chess. She quite suspected, for instance, that Sombra would have called it that.

To which, Athena would of course chuckle and respond, “Where’s the fun in playing fair?”

She would hesitate to call herself Machiavellian. A given end did not justify any means required to attain it - of course it didn’t. Slaying a hundred people to ensure the safety of ten equal to them was unacceptable, entirely.

Perhaps, though, she would confess to Utilitarianism. A righteous goal could justify some perhaps less ethically upstanding means - for instance, stealing technology and bases and running against a U.N. edict, in order to save innocent lives.

Athena had no qualms about any of that. She would never regret aiding Winston in the Recall, even though she had been the one to warn him about the consequences beforehand. It had never been about preventing him, anyway, only about ensuring that he knew the consequences of his actions before it was too late to undo them.

Neither did she have any qualms about trying to pick up a few more tricks in order to beat Sombra in chess. For entirely different reasons, of course. There was nothing tactical about her dealings with Sombra - at least, not those dealings, not the chess games and the conversation, the strings of jabs and retorts and references, the way she could practically see the hacker’s heartbeat increasing as her mind raced, even as Athena’s databanks did the same.

No, those interactions had no practical purpose. They were purely about enjoyment.
Will I ever stop? Probably not. XD

I love... entanglements, as long as they work out. To me, there's no such thing as an excessively-tangled story, or an excessively complex one, presuming that all things work out even. I know that that's not a unanimous opinion, and I don't think it's even the prevailing one, but it's mine at least. I am restraining myself from some of the twists and turns and depth I want to dive into with this, honestly, but not hugely; I'm letting myself be pretty free with where the story goes for a chapter, or a segment, and I think it's led to some great stuff.

This, for instance, started out as a short scene with the movie just to show that they were still doing something. A scene to illustrate their continued desire to be together, their lack of blank acceptance of their fate here - however, it led to a lot more. Some pretty in-depth thought on Widowmaker's part, particularly, about Emily and Lena and even Sombra, what they mean and the changes in herself that they represent. I didn't expect it, but it happened, and I like it!

You'll probably notice that Widdy's getting a little more honest with herself. Thoughts have gone from simple and easy explanations, largely dismissive but often accompanied by caveats of not quite sitting right, to more strained and maybe even uncomfortable realizations. I think honesty with self can be really hard, sometimes, particularly when you're guarding yourself in certain ways.

When I write stories, generally - when I'm writing this one, for instance - I have major plot points and maybe a few specific scenes, and in the middle I let it run. I know the characters, and I let them react organically to the situations. Sometimes, I need to redo some things a little to steer things toward the next plot point, but I don't alter the character or their reactions; I try to alter the situation instead.

For instance, the first dozen chapter of this story were essentially: "Widow and Tracer meet, Widow teases her. Talon Gunships. Tracer struggles with the info and chats with friends. Winrisa. Another engagement with Widow at a factory, Junkrat bomb, ethical greyness and a chase rather than a gunfight. More teasing, eventual kiss - Lena as opposed to Tracer, Lena has a girlfriend. Kiss, break, run, angry spider. Apartment scene." (I came up with the apartment scene first, in comic format, whilst losing consciousness one night, heh)

...but as you can see, that unfolded into a lot more, yet still maintained that general form. That's roughly what's continued to happen - every chapter is probably a couple of sentences before I start it. Some are more, some are less - I have the last, mmm, probably two or three chapters thought out to the extent that I might have already come up with all of the words, in fact.

In general, though, I have a fairly loose hand on the tiller - but it is on the tiller. I know the destination, and I know that we will get there intact, dear reader, but I must admit that I do not know precisely the path we will take. I know a few key waypoints.

You know what, though? It's more fun to me that way, and I think that's part of what helps. I think my enjoyment and my own interest in the story, comes across in the
writing, and I hope you pick up on some of it as well.

As always, thank you for reading - the story above, and perhaps my ramblings below as well, heh - and I look forward to hearing back from you, dear reader! I am planning on returning to updates every four days now that NaNo is finished, by the way (I succeeded, btw!), so you can look forward to that :)

C'mon back next time when Tracer and McCree go out on a mission - the Tide waits for no man, after all, as that old expression goes. In the mission's aftermath, they have a moment to talk and decompress. Meanwhile, back at base, Jack and Ana have a conversation of their own. Old soldiers never die - but do old habits? Old grudges?
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer and McCree are called out to deal with an incident: the Black Tide virus, active again. The mission goes overall well, if not exactly ideally, but it leaves them thinking. About different things, perhaps, but thoughts align when Tracer raises a topic of conversation. Back at base, Jack contemplates a map, and Ana comes to join him and bring the past into the mix. They're a pair of practiced compatriots, but there are still many questions to be asked about another who once counted himself amongst their ranks: Gabriel Reyes.

JFL Summary: McCree can't light a wet cigar, and Tracer can't get her hair straight. They don't exactly have a party on a boat, but it's pretty close, and there are fireworks. Then, they chat about movies for a while. Meanwhile, Ana leans on Jack and thinks about a wind-up airplane, while Jack mostly thinks about justice. Then again, he's usually thinking about justice. Torbjorn tells Efi to go to bed.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: descriptions of death, blood, dismemberment, both organic and omnic. Not overly graphic, I'd say, but be prepared.

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer and Emily snuggled up to watch a movie with Widowmaker, over a holoscreen. They weren't super happy about being separated, but they were even less happy when the movie resulted in a predictable love triangle causing pain and heartbreak, as opposed to the sweet trio relationship which had been hoped for earlier on in the film. Sombra interjected (intentionally) and was found to be nearby by Widowmaker (less intentionally) and was dragged by the ear into camera view of the other two to defend herself. Give or take. Mostly, she was dragged there so Widowmaker could curl up with her like a cat and steal her body heat, but she also kind of had to answer for some stuff. A little bit. Athena saw the whole scene, but didn't interrupt; she was left, after thoughts and self-questioning, with only one question left unanswered: the question of whether to tell Tracer and Emily that she knew about their relationship with Widowmaker. In the meantime, she watched Sombra for any tips or tricks she could use to gain an edge in the next chess game.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The bullets were so slow - they didn’t even seem propelled so much as they seemed to be drawn, pulled forward through treacly air by some unknown force but with an inescapably obvious target.

She couldn’t help but compare it. As she swirled in that stretched and cold almost-timeless space, dodging blood-soaked metal claws and bullets at the same time, Tracer couldn’t help but think back to the last time she’d found herself in this situation, up against the Black Tide.

The first time she’d found herself in this situation.

The notification had been small tonight - something passed along from Sombra to Athena, and then to the rest of the crew. A fishing ship, a trawler, nets down and dragging, had encountered an issue.

The issue had made it to shore in the form of a radio call consisting of a scream and a metallic voice calmly intoning that now-familiar phrase. “The Tide rises.”

Tracer had thought as she listened to it that she almost wished they would yell it, scream it, something. It was somehow so much the worse that it was so flat, so unaffected. As if they didn’t care in the slightest. Efi had assured that that was, in fact, the case - they were no longer capable of caring. The ability had been removed.

The team they sent out had consisted of two people: herself and Jesse McCree. At first, the boat had seemed almost unaffected - the lights were on steadily, not flickering in the dusk’s glow as the ship rose and fell on rolling waves. It drifted loosely, engines off and no direction in the currents.

Tracer didn’t know much about nets or fishing, but she was sure they weren’t supposed to be tangled like that behind the ship.

Once they’d hopped from the hovering Orca dropship down to the fishing trawler, they’d started to search for the expected carnage, very much on guard. Paperwork had said a crew of ten; human captain and nine Omnics. The thought of that and what it probably had entailed had already unsettled Tracer.

Not nearly as much as what they found, though.

They’d expected to find nine hostile omnics and one very dead human. They found the captain, alright - but not first. First, they found an omnic torn limb from limb, dismantled into pieces, and barely just not dead yet. They emitted a low electronic groan as their optisensors flickered, Tracer staring wide-eyed as the lights dimmed and fell to darkness.


Not infected with the Black Tide, but the thought that sprung to Tracer’s mind - and the emotion which leapt to her heart - was not a hopeful one, not that this was somehow an error and that the Black Tide wasn’t involved. No, her first thought was far darker. Simply that, once again, the Tide had done something unexpected. That whoever was behind it all was playing a game that they were still only guessing at the rules of.

Guessing fairly poorly, too, it seemed sometimes.

Another dead omnic, and another; not all identical, not nearly. One had been impaled by some sort of a pike which had punctured the wall behind it as well, leaving the dead shell pinned two feet up in the air and hanging limply. Another simply lay crumpled, the cause of death entirely unclear and no damage evident, but it was very, very dead.

Eight dead omnics, and then they’d found the captain, headless in the wheelhouse. He sat in his
chair, his hands laid on the controls in some grotesque mockery of life, his head not evident anywhere - it wasn’t where it should have been, certainly, and the rest of him was spattered with bloody stab wounds which looked as if they had been made with something very small. A pen, or some small spike or large nail, but not a knife. Hundreds of them, though, all through his torso, his arms, his legs.

“Some kinda anger to do it like this,” McCree had muttered around the stub of his cigar as they looked at the man. “Ain’t just killin’ at this point. That’s destruction is what that is. Somethin’ a lot more.”

His head had snapped upright, his revolver instantly at the ready in response to something Tracer hadn’t caught, but she trusted him and spun up the Accelerator from idle anyway. She heard the sound of metal on metal - not a clink, but a slight sliding as the omnic pushed off from a wall somewhere - and she zipped forward on the off-chance that she was the target.

She hadn’t been, as it turned out - she leapt forward through sludgy time toward McCree as the omnic leapt at him from behind, but there were few people faster than he was. He dropped to his knees to avoid the assault and came up facing back at it, Tracer whirling and spinning time backward in order to widen the distance between herself and the hostile infected omnic.

His bullets traveled so slowly, just as Widowmaker’s had on that first night - but he didn’t fire only one. Tracer could count three of them, and a slow bloom of fire announcing a fourth as McCree’s mechanical hand glinted against the hammer in the revolver’s flash.

He didn’t look like she had - like Widowmaker had. Her face had been flat, eyes wide; his were squinted as his lips pulled back from the stub of his cigar clenched between teeth. The embers sizzled impossibly slowly.

The bullets were different, too. Not just in size and number but in placement - all three of McCree’s were heading along different paths.

Tracer spun her head around; red optisensors and red hands, black-splattered arms and torso from oil, frantic motions but she knew that they would only ever say those same calm words. She refused to look down as one of McCree’s bullets passed through her.

The physical world couldn’t affect her while she was warped like this, but it wasn’t a comforting thought.

He didn’t shoot the omnic in the head. Nor the chest. As she continued to let time drag, Tracer saw two of the bullets strike joints - one ripping an arm clear from the omnic’s body where it struck their shoulder, the other embedding itself in a hip which sizzled and sparked brightly before she let time snap back into place.

Seemingly instantly, the omnic was on the floor. Time always seemed so much faster after it was slow, so much slower after it was fast; there they were, though, missing an arm and incapable of using their other, or either of their legs, as McCree paced over with a grunt.

“She’s destruction,” the omnic spoke from the floor, twitching their head but unable to manage any other movement.

“Call me a seawall, then,” McCree quipped darkly with a grin which was lit by his smoldering cigar. His revolver was trained unerringly on the omnic’s head, just in case they did actually manage to move.
He’d do what he could do bring them back alive. That didn’t mean he’d risk himself or a friend for it, though.

Tracer couldn’t help but compare them.

Was it better when things were calm, and cold? The Tide, Widowmaker, McCree. One hateful and calm, the second placid but vicious, the third sparing a life but with a twisted grimace and sharp dark eyes.

There was a noise, something electronic, a humming whirr which rose swiftly in pitch - the omnic’s chest started to glow, and Tracer grabbed at McCree’s arm and yanked him backward. They threw themselves in unison out of the window, aided by the concussive blast and flames as the omnic’s power core exploded.

Tracer yelped as they hit the cold water, and the cowboy did as well, scrambling to snatch up the hat which had been knocked from his head. Coughing, spluttering, keeping their heads above water as the Orca came around and hovered over them.

It hung lower and lower until its belly just dipped into the water, the ramps dropping so the pair could drag themselves up and into the bay.

“I-” McCree hissed, teeth chattering, “hate Greenland! Damn w-water’s too c-c-cold!”

Tracer barked a single laugh at that, shaking her head as she crawled into the dropship so the doors could seal up. “N-n-not sure that’s the w-worst thing about the night, love!”

The cowboy chuckled, or maybe it was just a groan that was broken up by rough shivering as he flipped over to lay on his back. “Yeah,” he sighed. “D-damn. R-r-really thought that’d w-work.”

“I know.” She pushed herself up into a crouch, reaching over to pat him on the shoulder as she heard the fans inside the ship whirr up - warm air blowing through. “W-worth a shot, love. Good you t-t-tried at least.”

It had seemed like a solid plan on paper. One that was at least worth trying out - and they had, now. They’d need to try something else next time. Mei had recommended her cryogenic solution as an alternative possibility, and was flying in to set up the apparatus to make it; off the cuff, though, this was the best capture plan they could’ve come up with for the night.

The best, yet, not quite good enough. Whoever was behind the Black Tide, they had foreseen this possibility, evidently. For a second, Tracer wondered if Widowmaker - or anyone in Talon - had tried the same, capturing or incapacitating or ensnaring one. Whether they had known that it would result in self-destruct - whether Widdy had known, that night in the mansion.

McCree pulled a cigar from his pocket - soaked through completely with ice-cold water - and sighed as he rolled over and wedged it into the slot of one of the air vents. “Yeah.” He shook his head, eyes focused on the ceiling for a dark second or two. It was hard to try, and try, and try, and only ever fail, and feel like the trying was worthwhile.

He needed a pick-me-up.

With that decided and dealt with, McCree tipped his head over to flash Tracer a half-hearted grin. “N-normally I’d offer a lady my p-poncho but uh-” she laughed, and he joined in with a chuckle, reaching for the flask at his belt and taking a swig from it. “Terrible idea, d-drinkin’ in the cold,” he shook his head and held the flask out to her. “Wanna join me in it?”
Tracer nodded, laughing still, and reached out a shaky hand to take the flask and knock it back for a swig. She immediately recoiled, coughing. “G-damn, bollocks that’s awful. Bet you and Em would love s-swillin’ scotch together, eh?”

The cowboy chuckled as the engines whined higher, the dropship speeding back toward base. “Yeah… s’pose we would.” He glanced over as the flask hit him in the chest, to see a simultaneously scowling and smirking Tracer looking back at him. “What?”

“Oh, nothing,” she sighed, rolling her eyes. “You’re too charming for your own good, that’s what.”

Again, he laughed - it always came right from his belly, always deep and full, regardless of whether it was real or falsified. This one was real, though. Irony was funny. “Yeah,” he nodded with a grin, setting his wet hat back on his messed and soaked hair and flashing Tracer a wink. “I reckon I am.”

---

The dropship’s engines overtook the noise of everything else; Athena had popped in briefly to give her condolences on the status of the mission, but she was directing a small group of drones to capture the now-adrift and burning vessel and bring it in safely to shore.

There was some question going around as to what to do with it after that point.

Not between Tracer and McCree, though; the pilot and the cowboy, no longer shivering as the warm air had managed to supplant the deep chill the water had sank into them.

Warm drips trickled from the tips of Tracer’s hair, down her face. She wasn’t happy about how the night had gone - she was disappointed, she was frustrated, but neither of those to excess, really. She wasn’t lost in a turmoil of emotions, it was all quite distant. Part of her told herself that it might be shock. Another part suggested she might be growing numb due to repetition.

They’d been involved with four instances now of the Black Tide. Admittedly, this one had gone better than any of the others - no injuries here. Arguably, they’d even improved every time.

Still, they’d only improved where they were concerned. The first run-in, she’d been seriously injured; the second had led to injuries dotted around Pharah’s team and a scare on Athena’s part. The third had nearly led to much, but only some bruising on Sombra’s throat and the loss of an omnic frame in reality - not that Tracer had been present for either of the latter two instances.

Tonight, they’d escaped with no injuries whatsoever. McCree had grumbled over a singed corner of his poncho, but it blended in with dozens of others and Tracer suspected that he was, in fact, quite in favour of one more story of survival being woven into the fabric he wore. She’d been unharmed entirely, save for a bone-shaking chill, but even that had passed now.

Not that it helped anyone else. They still kept losing, entirely, the people they were supposed to be protecting - the old woman, soldiers and possibly civilians in the city, Athena’s omnic self, the crew of the ship tonight.

Tracer did feel bothered by it, and she was grateful that she wasn’t sinking beneath the waves with it - she’d been lost to abject horror before, it happened often, and she had no wish to bring an extra instance of it on herself.
At the same time, she couldn’t help but compare. Thinking of how Widowmaker spoke - lamenting things, thinking they were unfortunate, but almost never speaking of sadness or upset, certainly not horror or anguish. A step or ten beyond jaded, to be sure, but still… she couldn’t help but compare.

“Jesse…” her words cut through several minutes of built-up silence with ease, but it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence. Hadn’t been - had only been pensive. “What’s good and bad mean to you?”

McCree let out a chuckle, taking a drag from the cigar which had, by this point, dried enough from being wedged into the warm air vent to light it. It still didn’t _want_ to light right, but he reckoned his own force of will was a little stronger than its was.

_Little birdie told me it ain’t the first time you’ve asked._ He glanced over toward her, vision unimpeded by his hat which sat on the floor now, but he bent over to pick it up. “Well, lemme answer your question with another’un. What can you tell me about my hat?”

“It’s awful.”

McCree laughed at the impish grin that leapt to Tracer’s face. “Alright, alright, li’l miss fashionista; sorry we’re not all cut out for the leather-and-sheepskin train,” he smirked as she rolled her eyes, “but really, c’mon now.”

Tracer chuckled, eyes dropping to his hat. She didn’t really know fashion, she didn’t know hats, and she _definitely_ didn’t know cowboy hats. “It’s wet,” she shrugged, entirely unsure of what information he was trying to get her to provide. They all had these weird codes they spoke in, though, and she was sure he had a reason for it. “Old? Not exactly pristine condition, uh… aren’t they called Stetsons?”

Once more, the cowboy chuckled and nodded. “There’s Stetsons, alright, but this ain’t one of ‘em - nicely done, though. You a fan of old Western movies at all?”

It didn’t seem like a related question, really - peripherally at best, and Tracer shrugged. “Dunno. Haven’t really seen many. Em goes wild over those old uh, what’re they called, spaghetti westerns?” Her eyes flickered to him, swiftly taking in the little nod as he grinned. “Yeah, so I’ve seen a fair few of those I guess.”

For a few seconds, he just grinned back to her, looking expectantly until she sighed and rolled her eyes. “What, I s’pose you want me to tell you about the hats in _them_ too, eh? Or maybe their boots? Come on, just-”

“Alright, alright,” McCree acquiesced with a chuckle and a wave of his hand, leaning forward in his seat a little to rest his elbows across his knees. For much of his life, his exterior was at odds with his mind or his heart. This was no exception. His mind raced, dodging left and right and trying to search its way to a clear path through a minefield.

A path which even _he_ didn’t actually know the destination of, nor whether it was one he wanted to follow. At the same time, he knew at least that he wanted to keep his eye on it.

You had to keep your eyes on the exits.

“Bad guy in those films,” he nodded slightly, dragging at his now-only-slightly-damp cigar, “always wears a black hat. Black as night and black as his soul, and when I say bad guy I mean _villain_. Kinda man would shoot another man dead just for blocking his view of the stage.”

Tracer nodded, recognizing that as something she’d seen, black hats on bad guys. Had she been telling the whole truth, she would have mentioned that she hadn’t actually _paid attention_ to most of
Emily’s spaghetti westerns. She often distracted herself with Em’s hair or skin, and more than once had fallen asleep - but, she’d seen guys in black hats.

So far, so good, for whatever riddle he was running up to.

“Good guy always wears a white one.” McCree nodded, matter-of-factly. “Beautiful white hat, gleamin’ in the sun, and he always draws second and he never misses, and he always gives an ultimatum and a chance. Get out by sundown and never come back - and he might aim for the hand instead of the heart, but if it comes down to the line, white hat’ll still kill a man. But only one in a black hat.”

Tracer nodded again, slightly more blankly this time, rapidly becoming reminded of why exactly she tended to space out during most of those movies.

“Everyone else? They’ve got brown hats. Ain’t good, ain’t bad, not exactly. Do some good things, do some bad things. Just folk.” McCree’s eyes rested on his own hat, He knew people thought he was just a bit silly, but it was more than just an outfit - it was a badge, really. It was a life he chose to lead, and it was one that anybody could read plenty easy. Never had to have any doubt about who he was.

“Used to wear a black hat, m’self,” he muttered softly with another nod. Tracer sat up a little straighter at the words, as suddenly it shifted from something about old movies, into the real world.

“Deserved it, too,” McCree sighed, leaning back into his chair. “I was a bad man before Overwatch found me.” Maybe for a while afterward, too. Some things were clearer in hindsight. Others? Not as much. “Truth be told, though…”

The cowboy shrugged again, pushing himself forward and meeting his friend’s eyes with a soft smile; encouraging and understanding. “Truth be told, I don’t think there is a lot of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. There’s one man in the movie’s got a black hat, one in a white, and everybody else is brown - whole world over, there’s only a handful of good, handful of bad, and everyone else? I think we’re somewhere between. I think there’s a right and a wrong, but,” he rolled a shoulder, soaked poncho hanging heavily from it, “right and wrong’s a thing that’s real specific, I reckon.”

Tracer realized she was nodding softly, and had been for a while. “Yeah,” she redoubled the gesture a bit, chuckling. “Yeah, that’s pretty much what I’m thinking too. It was- Efi asked me, early yesterday,” she explained, not sure if that event was where her origina; question had really come from, but her mind was latched onto it now. “What sort of person would do something like the Black Tide.”

“Yeah?” McCree settled in again, genuine curiosity filling his eyes in a way that looked only bright. He knew it was a look that could get a little intense, sometimes, and took moves to avoid that. “What’d you tell ‘er?”

The brit shrugged and sighed a little. “I wanted to say that they were evil people. But… I dunno, it felt… wrong. Too hopeless. Like if that was the case there was nothing more that could be done about it.”

Jesse’s nods as she spoke spurred her on to continue, encouraging her wordlessly. “Because if they’re just evil,” she leaned forward a bit, holding out her hands like a scale and looking down to them. “Then there’s nothing to do about it. Evil’s just evil, it just… is until you end it. Until you kill it. But if they’re wrong, or if they’re- whatever,” she dropped her hands, meeting McCree’s eyes again.
“I told her that sometimes people get obsessed with something and lose sight of everything else. That they’ll do anything in order to get what it is they want, and they don’t stop to ask questions, and they hurt people along the way,” her lips twisted into a steep frown as a bit of a shudder sank into her gut, a realization snapping into place in her mind, “and I- I didn’t think about it at the time but,” she swallowed and sighed, “but I think I was talking about us.”

McCree raised a surprised eyebrow, and Tracer shrugged, scuffing her foot on the floor as things flashed through her mind. Newspaper headlines and video footage, revelations and timeless stretches of horror that she couldn’t even scream in, and aid camps full of refugees that finally had food, and all the hostages in the power plant on King’s Row being freed and squinting in the sun but smiling so widely.

“Overwatch,” she explained further, nodding resolutely. “That’s what we did, isn’t it? No offence, but with Blackwatch - we lost sight of stuff and people got hurt along the side. And-” her voice faltered a little, “and not just with Blackwatch either, because- well, I mean…”

Her words trailed off and, with a sigh, she simply tapped at the Accelerator. She loved it, so dearly, in so many ways - it brought her much that she’d never known and it returned her from the worst hell she’d experienced or could imagine. It made her so unique and so useful and she loved that.

It was still an anchor. It was still a reminder. She always carried with her a humming, glowing fragment of her past, and she could never ever move past it.

Swings and roundabouts, really.

She sagged forward a little as strong arms wrapped around her shoulders, one firmer than the other - constructed out of metal, of course. Jesse wasn’t without his own constant reminders, either, and there was a comfort in that. Solidarity and companionship.

“Thanks,” Tracer sighed as she wrapped an arm around his back in turn. “I mean, it’s alright - s’all in the past now, eh love?”

“Sometimes, past ain’t exactly passed,” he replied softly, “and there’s a hell of a lot’s unknown back there too. Just gotta make sure we keep lookin’ to the future instead, eyes where we’re headed rather’n where we’ve come from.”

A little chuckle jumped from her throat and she shook her head. “Yeah. Think the past is probably one of those things people focus on so much they forget what else they’re doing.”

Thoughts of Jack, thoughts of Gabe, thoughts of his own self flicked through his mind. One who’d refused to leave the past in some ways, one who’d seemed determined to get back to it, and then himself trying to leave it all behind.

He never forgot who he’d been. You don’t get to put on a white hat after all that, but now? He didn’t deserve the black one anymore.

“Think you got a solid point there, kiddo,” he chuckled, straightening up and ruffling Tracer’s hair with metal fingers. She groaned and rolled her eyes and tried (but not too hard) to duck away.

“You’re not that much older than me, y’know,” she protested, pushing his arm away and trying to straighten out her hair a little. Between the fact that it was soaked, and the fact that it was her hair, it was an impossible task.

“Eleven years,” he retorted with a smirk.
“Six!” She scowled. “Who cares about chronotemporal anomalies and all that bollocks? Not hard to do the maths on a pair of birth certificates, love.”

“Huh, and uh, which one should I use?” McCree’s smirk widened. “Only got a couple dozen to choose from.”

“Yeah yeah,” Tracer rolled her eyes, crossing her arms, “you’re a super secret mystery man, whatever.” She gave his shoulder a playful shove, laughing lightly.

Both of them felt a lot better for their talk, even though neither had really felt particularly bad beforehand. Just lingering tendrils of doubt and displeasure, little fragments and figments of frustration.

They joked and laughed as the dropship sped through the storm, rain splattering off of its nose in a wide cone and hissing into steam where the engines heated it, wind buffeting against the shell but having little effect on the overall trajectory. It carried them off and away, untouched by the storm above the world and back to their base, back to their home.

---

Jack stood with a soft scowl, crossed arms, and every breath coming out more as a sigh than a simple exhalation. He did so for quite a while, looking at a map which was displayed across one of the holoscreens - different marks in different colours denoted sites relevant to their pursuit of the chemical weaponry of unknown effect but very known origin.

“I know what that look means.”

He glanced over his shoulder at the familiar husky voice, a hint of a grin tugging at his lips when he saw Ana leaning against the doorframe. “Oh yeah? And what’s that?”

“Mmm, I’ll tell you later,” she deflected with a tip of her head, eyes slipping past him to the map. “Trying to track them down.”

It wasn’t really a question - he knew that she knew what the map was, she’d been involved in a large chunk of it anyway. This latest rendition included more data from Athena: some stuff she’d dug up somehow on a smuggling ring that might have been involved, and various references which might have been applied to the chemical weapons they were chasing.

“Yeah.” It hadn’t been a question, not really, but he still confirmed it with a word and a nod. “Discovery site, various destruction or reclamation strikes, confirmed sightings, unconfirmed sightings, suspected sightings or references,” he tapped at various marks as he mentioned them.

Then, he had nothing to do but stare more and shake his head again. “This is two things now that we’re chasing down and don’t have the first clue about.” He let out a single dark chuckle. “Wonder who we’ll end up working with on this front.”

Ana returned his laugh, drawing up to his elbow and leaning against him the same way she had against the doorframe a moment ago. He hardly repositioned to deal with it - it was a practiced manoeuvre for them both.

They looked at the map for a while in comfortable silence. Ana wondered what all of the ancillary
marks were - she knew of the strike missions, one Tracer had carried out with her daughter’s aid, one that Reinhardt and Lúcio had taken care of, another still which had been attended to by herself and Jack.

It had been a while, and they were doing their best, but things were starting to get peculiar. One mission, Winston had noted that the chemical warheads were largely depleted - almost two-thirds of their contents had been drained.

Samples had been obtained, safely, and were being analyzed, but the effects remained unknown. They certainly weren’t going to start testing the stuff on people - it didn’t seem to be corrosive, didn’t seem to be toxic. It seemed to be largely organic in origin, but inactive. There had been propositions that it required a host to become active, but they certainly weren’t going to expose anybody to it.

Along with which, they didn’t know who now was involved. “The Breath of Azzhir” who had originally had the weapon seemed to be out of the picture now, having handed off the material to some other force. Whether that had been the plan from the start or something whipped up when they were suddenly under fire, was unknown.

Almost all of it was unknown.

“You don’t trust them.”

She didn’t need to say who, it was obvious. Jack let out a laugh. “Of course not. You don’t either.”

He hesitated for a second. “Do you?”

“Oh, I trust everyone, Jack,” she replied with an easy shrug. “I trust Reinhardt to rush off, I trust Winston to stumble over his own feet but manage to come out facing up, I trust Tracer to make an endearing fool out of herself.”

Jack chuckled as she spoke, nodding, and a little smile crossed her lips at that. “I trust Reyes to try to destroy us, as entirely as he can; I trust Sombra to have her own interests first in what she does, I trust—”

The words faltered as her certainty did, the smile instantly replaced by an equally small frown as she came up suddenly against one answer she didn’t have anymore. Lacroix. Widowmaker. There was a time she’d been so sure - that was the problem, though. There had been several times, and they’d all had her so sure of different things. She’d lost an eye for one. She’d almost lost a compatriot for another.

What would she lose, were she to be wrong again?

Of course, Jack didn’t know the thoughts in her head, and his own were running off on tracks spurred by what she had said. He didn’t pay much attention to what she didn’t say.

“I don’t like that Talon’s involved with any of this,” he growled gently, shaking his head. “I can honour the ceasefire, but in my opinion that only applies to Sombra and Widowmaker.”

“And if either shoot first, I will not hesitate to return fire.”

“Oh course not,” Jack agreed. “But it keeps rolling around in the back of my mind…” He trailed off into silence again, shaking his head, mulling it all over. Thoughts and memories, things that had only come out since the fall and things that he knew that still hadn’t come out at all.

“...what if, they are actually behind it all?” Ana finished for him - her words a question, but not one that wondered whether it had been his thought. Rather, one that was rooted within herself. Jack
turned to her in slight surprise.

“You’ve thought the same?”

She laughed, almost bitterly - bitterly and also joyfully, perhaps, with a shake of her head before she met his eye. “Oh Jack, of course I have! One can hardly be nearly killed by one so close to them, without checking over their shoulder in the future.”

“...and?”

Ana’s lips curled slowly into a determined smile. “And I will not hesitate again. Not ever again.”

A hint of a grin flickered on his lips as well, and he nodded with a chuckle. “Good. Me neither.”

Jack glanced away then with a slight sigh, looking far off into the distance at things that weren’t there. “I… want to be wrong about them,” he started, and Ana finished the sentence for him.

“But you cannot run the risk that you are not. That you are right. At least,” she shrugged, “not without a contingency plan in place.”

“Yeah,” he sighed, rubbing at his face with a hand. “Only problem is that contingency plans…”

“...were always Reyes’ strong suit,” Ana murmured.

The man had thousands, in various levels of planning and legitimacy - it had come out over rounds of shots one night when the topic of zombies had arisen. Reyes had related a half-dozen survival strategies, depending on what kind of zombies they were, as the others all roared with laughter. The night had quickly turned into shouting out fantasy creatures and Reyes shooting back a plan to deal with an onslaught of them, always with the same steely-eyed look and goofy grin. Dragons - booby-trapped gold, would work for certain goblins as well. Fae? Milk laced with pure iron. Mermaids? Depth charges or, at a stretch, dynamite.

They were silly plans for silly things that would never happen, and they were many, and they were thorough. She’d found out some others, as well - they had saved lives when he’d been in charge of Overwatch in the very early days, little plans he put in place just in case the omnics decided to attack from this direction. Just in case they decided to jump down the cliffs.

Just in case, just in case, just in case.

Some combination of paranoia and brilliance had urged him to it, to develop a plan for every foreseeable situation and for some which Ana would swear could never be seen coming.

She still remembered being in the field with him one time when they’d been hidden, the pair of them - the omnic patrols growing closer. He’d pulled a wind-up airplane out of his pocket, wound it, and tossed it out of the window. Beeps of surprise and gunshots had lasted only a few seconds before a confused silence reigned, and then a unified chorus of delighted whistles from the omnics.

They’d taken advantage of the distraction to escape. She’d asked how he knew it would work, and he’d gone on about how they assimilated new information; how they reacted when presented with something that was new and different enough from anything they already knew.

He’d been carrying the toy on the past seven missions in case things got desperate.

Backup plans had always been his strong suit. He had them for so many layers of paranoia deep, and could pull them from his sleeves like- well, like he pulled shotguns now.
Ana and Jack both looked at the map, but neither of them were looking for any random pattern in the marks anymore. They were looking for him, for Reyes, for the man they had called commander and friend and traitor and dead - for some sign that maybe these actions had come from him. From some contingency of a contingency of a contingency.

There was none to be seen, though.

“Come,” she sighed after a few minutes, nudging her elbow against him. “Efi is leaving for Numbani, Tracer and McCree are returning.”

“Success?” Jack inquired, turning his back on the map as Ana chuckled.

“Oh yes, of course it was.” Her eyes twinkled as she flashed him a grin. “Don’t I sound so clearly delighted about it? Yes, flawless success and they actually found an uninstall disk for the virus, too. As it turns out, the password was ‘password’, who could have guessed?”

“Har har har,” Jack grumbled, shaking his head. “Well, fine. Excuse the hell out of me for asking.”

“You’re excused,” Ana shot back with a smirk that twitched a little wider as he chuckled.

Maybe Reyes had some plans. What he didn’t have, though, was something they had in spades: a team, backup, solidarity. They were a force to be reckoned with, and he? He was just a crazy man hell-bent on vengeance.

Formidable, yes, and she wouldn’t take him lightly. At the same time, though, cowering in fear just felt like exactly what he would have wanted. Some people had called her stubborn - some people had called her far worse than that, in fact, but rarely to her face - and she wouldn’t deny it.

She was stubborn.

There was some horror in her, almost guttural, far below the surface; the sight of his face, the sound of his voice, the feeling of his talons on her skin. Fear, though? That cerebral, conscious sensation? She wouldn’t do him the favour of fearing him.

---

One dropship touched down as another one prepped for departure, waiting at least until the two agents on mission returned.

Efi stood over to the side, laughing delightedly with an abashedly-grinning and red-cheeked Torbjörn, Lúcio signing a picture of himself with a smirk as D.va did the same. Winston and Orisa chatted near the dropship, holding hands, and Emily stood with Reinhardt and Brigitte, the three of them grinning at Efi and Torb as Ana and Jack walked up from the tram.

It was a good sight to see, as the dropship cracked open and Tracer jumped out. “Hey, gang!” They turned with waves that quickly gave way to shouted concern or admonishment at her state of wetness - and Jesse’s as well - and she giggled at that.

Efi ran over to wrap her up in a hug, and Tracer felt her heart clench up almost painfully as she crouched swiftly to return the gesture with a soft groan. Her eyes met Emily’s for just an instant, but
that was all that it took - the awe and love and understanding, and hint of sadness, twinkling in those hazel eyes; Tracer flashed her a smile before breaking the embrace and turning her attention to Efi instead. “You have fun at home, yeah?”

“Of course,” Efi nodded swiftly, “and I will be negotiating with my parents for a return trip! I am sure they will have no issues with it once I underline the importance of the matter.”

Tracer giggled, ruffling Efi’s hair a little, the same way Jesse did to her. “Well, you sound like quite the little lawyer already! I’m sure it’ll be grand, love - and it was brilliant to meet you, by the by.”

“Agreed!” Efi chirped brightly, taking Tracer’s hands in hers and squeezing them. “Oh, I wish I did not need to say goodbye - but I do.” She sighed heavily, head drooping.

“Don’t even think about staying up past your bedtime,” Torbjörn grumbled from behind her, bringing laughter from several of the others, but Efi nodded her head in resignation.

“I know,” she muttered, scuffing a foot on the floor as she looked down at it. “I need to get going. I’ll be back though!” She looked up, suddenly bright again, smiling and turning around to glance between all of her new friends. Wonderful people, doing whatever they could to help the world, to protect it - she felt so at home here.

Numbani was wonderful, and she loved it and its people. Her people. They were great, but there was a sort of distant resignation to the city. Perhaps it was an aftereffect of the Scourge, or something else, but there was - to an extent - a belief that certain things must simply be weathered. That they could not be stopped.

Efi wanted to be there, with her family and her friends and her people, her city, but she also wanted to be here. With her fellow heroes. Standing at the front line, not just picking up after the devastation but stopping it.

Saying another chorus of goodbyes, Efi took Orisa’s hand and walked up the ramp to the dropship. They waved out of the window until they’d lost sight of the people below, the ship whirring up and off into the sky to take them back home.

With a sigh, Efi leaned over against Orisa’s torso. “I think I know some of how you feel now, Orisa. Being pulled between two places like this…”

Orisa nodded slowly. She’d confided the feelings in Efi first - she confided everything in Efi first, her single closest and greatest friend. At first, though, Efi had been somewhat confused and unfortunately unable to offer advice. With the exception of wanting to be home while she was at school, she’d explained with a laugh, she hadn’t experienced anything of the sort.

Orisa thought that she could see it now, though. In the slight slump of the engineer’s small shoulders, the hint of sadness of her face but a little smile on her lips and the resolute look in her eye, the straight back.

“We will be back,” she assured her creator with a nod, and Efi smiled back to her.

“Oh yes,” she agreed happily, nodding. “Oh yes we will!”

Chapter End Notes
Hmm? What's that? You say Sombra made a deal with Athena back at Gibraltar, giving the AI some information to track down a smuggling ring she was interested in? And now Jack's map is using data pulled from some smuggling ring that Athena tracked down? Well golly gosh, what do you know! (Yeah I know it's a tiny reference but I liked it XD)

Developments for the Black Tide, eh? Kinda, at least - I don't want it to just seem like a Macguffin I throw in when I need a blank-faced bad guy or monster to fight; it's a major plot point and honestly only becomes moreso, which I figure you can probably see by now. Of course I don't know exactly how positronic brains work in Overwatch's world, so I can't say that I know exactly how the virus functions, but I know what it does at least and I have a rough idea of a few ways of how it could work. After all, there are some hints in a few places for possibilities - Pharah's comic for one, and the general backlores of the Omnic Crisis as well. It's hardly the only time that omnics have found themselves prey to control, is it?

So! I like McCree a lot. I like his dichotomy and the depth that that brings - because he's not exactly wholly virtuous, is he? He gave Talon what they wanted on that train - and he did it to save the people on the train, which is good, yes. However... what exactly did he give away, hmm? Well, that's just it - we don't know, and neither did he. How many people could have been negatively affected or even killed by what McCree handed over in order to ensure that himself and a train full of people would go unharassed? Well, I'd suggest that there's not really an upper limit. Let's say it was a bio-weapon - he could have doomed millions or more. On the flipside, maybe it was money or food rations for the soldiers, or medical component or drugs that their doctors needed - for purposes more positive or more negative, either way. It could have been a million things, and he didn't know, but he didn't stand on principle and get the whole train of people shot defending some box he didn't even know or care about. He talks about dealing out justice and I do believe he does, yet at the same time, it's not quite that black and white, is it?

Nothing ever really is, eh?

Anyway, heh, I liked this li'l interlude about hats and westerns, and of course the Black Tide continues to swirl around. Whoever's behind it and whatever they have planned, it does still seem to be fairly in the planning stages, doesn't it? How long will it stay there? Well, I do actually know the answer. There won't be a major development in the Black Tide plot until after [REDACTED], at which point it will [REDACTED].

I know, spoilers, right? XD

Heh, anyway, these scenes were actually a relatively more recent addition to the overall story, but things were a little too densely packed in one spot and needed some air. Next chapter, though? Oh, next chapter, they get pretty dense.

You're all excellent folks, thanks for sticking it out with me this far! I'm loving the story, I'm loving writing it, and honestly I'm loving all you folks too. You make this really great and awe-inspiring, with your comments and your feedback, your kudos and your views - I love hearing from you, so thank you!

C'mon back next time when Widowmaker's determination comes up against Reaper's paranoia, and it's Sombra who ends up unwittingly caught up on the scales. The
question exists of how deep Widowmaker's loyalty runs, and in which direction, but
questions have a funny way of getting twisted between one person's mouth and another
person's ears...
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker and Reaper are in close quarters during a mission, and tensions rise; everything culminates in a test of sorts. The problem is that, when people don’t speak openly, it's so very easy to fail a test.

JFL Summary: Widowmaker and Reaper get creepy on a rooftop, watching Sombra. Sombra asks Widowmaker if she'll be Maid of Honour at her and Reaper's wedding.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: fair bit of NPC death, some blood; it's Widowmaker and Reaper going on an assault mission, so... the things that that entails. Some threats, some anger, and some unsettling thoughts.

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer and McCree responded to a Black Tide infection on a ship at sea. They hoped to incapacitate the infected omnics, but when they did so, the omnic self-destructed. They escaped unscathed, and a little bit disheartened, but not overly poorly-off. They talked for a while about right and wrong, good and bad, with McCree finding a bit of comfort he wasn't sure he'd been looking for in Tracer's words. Ana and Jack inspected a map, trying to find some sudden breakthrough in tracking down the chemical weapon. They didn't, of course, but they did share their own concerns over Talon's involvement, and particularly Reaper's. No easy answers were forthcoming, of course. Efi went home, but with resolve in her heart to return - and quickly - to aid with combating the Black Tide virus.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Widowmaker whirled, a grin overtaking her lips as she felt the momentum of her movements carry through the weight of her ponytail which swirled behind - the air brushed unfelt past her numb skin, but that, the weight, she could detect easily.

It tried to pull her head back over her shoulder, but she overcame it effortlessly to look down the scope. Everything slowed slightly the way it did in combat - not blurring but sharpening in her eyes. Flashes. Movement. Blood.

Reaper’s cloud swirled over the edge of the roof, burbling up like steam from dry ice as Widowmaker stroked at the trigger and removed the bulk of a guard’s head. The others were looking her way as he had been, firing back as she swooped across on her grappling line.

Exactly as planned.

She swung her heels up and released her hook, retracting the cable as she spun in a backflip only ten feet above the rooftop. The Kiss reached directly up from her shoulder, down toward the ground, barrel extended to its full length.
The tip of the barrel just barely brushed against a helmet as she spun, as she grinned a little wider, as she stroked the trigger again and ended his life with a little tremor down her spine.

She wasn’t sure she would ever be able to explain it to Tracer. In fact, she was quite certain of the opposite. Perhaps after months of discussion, they had reached something better than an impasse - a sort of a truce. Short of horrific things, though, Widowmaker doubted she’d ever be able to truly be understood.

Not by anybody who wasn’t the same as she was.

Nobody else could possibly comprehend it - how it felt to hold her breath on the barest edge of death, every second of every minute of every hour of every day, that empty and agonizing stretch of asphyxiation just before fatality as the world and everything faded into colourlessness, numbness, and then - and then - when she took another life, to breathe.

To live.

No other person could understand that need. It was a desire that ran so deep that it was a need, and Widowmaker knew it through to her core.

She spoke of wanting to kill. It was a lie. She did not want it - or rather, she did, but more than that she needed it.

A drop of hot blood splattered against her cheek and she gasped a slight laugh as she finished her flip and landed in a crouch on the roof, rolling immediately to avoid gunfire.

The cloud surrounded her, swirled, warm like smoke. She held her breath, not out of any concern for herself but out of a sort of politeness. It was poor form to inhale one’s teammates.

Particularly when one was trying so very hard to convince them that you were still one of their teammates.

Reaper resolidified as she rolled up to her knees, unleashing hell in shotgun form on the guards who had been shooting at her moments ago. She, in turn, launched off a venom mine and began to fire in quick bursts at the guards who chased Reaper up the staircase he’d just swirled over.

The little machine’s metal legs wrapped around the railing, and a second later it detonated. Its toxic payload brought coughs and strained gasps from the guards, pain and death as she fired into the crowd in bursts, and a delighted noise from Widowmaker’s lips. A cat’s mewl upon discovering a new toy, or perhaps an old favourite.

She waited a second, rifle at the ready, but no more men came. “Clear,” she stated, at the same time as Reaper did - standing, she stepped swiftly toward the rooftop’s edge and tapped at her visor.

“Sombra, we are in position. Wait for my signal,” she murmured, taking a knee and scooping in. A guard there thought himself safe behind a wall which gave way instantly before her shot, chunks of brick joining her bullet in a spray; another who sprinted probably thought himself difficult to hit. Difficult for any other, perhaps, but not for her - normally she might have shot him in the leg first just to know that he would know how foolish he had been, but she needed to maintain a good image.

Cold, professional, as designed. She needed to do away with any possible suspicions that she might be malfunctioning.

Particularly given that she was now almost entirely certain that she was. She could still rationalize it all, or at least most of it, but there was a more and more pressing concern rising within her. An
instilled desire to report in, to state that she was undergoing problems, to submit to reconditioning.

Framing it in that light helped immensely. Submitting. Widowmaker’s lips pulled back dangerously from her teeth as she fired at another three guards - two shots each, through the centre. Overkill, but her heart had spurred on at the thought.

Submission.

She was done submitting. Finished with it. Amélie had been too weak to have a choice in the matter, but she was not.

---

Reaper watched as Widowmaker took her knee on the roof’s edge. She spoke to Sombra, checked in with the team so to speak, and began to fire. Again and again, every shot a life, he was certain of it.

That much, he could be certain of.

It was only everything else which was in question.

The thoughts had stewed, sludge-like, in his mind - a dark and bubbling morass, a hot swamp of suspicion and paranoia and worry. Reaper knew that he was never without his unfair share of enemies, even amongst the organizations to which he signed his name. If nothing else, Overwatch had taught him that, and he expected just as much from Talon. Others had made their moves in the past.

Widowmaker, though… she had always been something of a specialty. A different thing - somewhere between a pet and a trophy to much of the Council, but if she was a trophy she was a dangerous one. If she was a pet she was one which they feared. One they kept on a leash.

They’d kept her too tight, for a time. Her frustrations hadn’t come out against them, of course - there were measures in place to prevent her from killing senior Council members. She’d snapped against the rank-and-file instead, tearing into them with claws - he still chuckled when he thought about it. They’d brought it on themselves, with stares or pinches, and they’d reaped blood and broken bones, and more than one gouged eye as a result.

However, the Council at large had conceded the point that Widowmaker should be given a holding pen elsewhere. A longer leash, perhaps, but there were still many measures in place.

Many measures.

He doubted them. He didn’t know all of them and so he certainly couldn’t trust them. As she grinned and fired again - double, double, double again - he wondered what was going through her head. Every shot, a life ended.

Did she picture their faces when she pulled the trigger? The faces of those she wanted to kill, but couldn’t?

Reaper dismissed the thought. That was his own vengeance talking, and it wasn’t the concern anyway. He wasn’t worried she’d come after him for vengeance.
Simply because she was ordered to. He could have worked with vengeance.

Yes, there were measures in place to prevent her from killing a Council member - as there were to prevent her from denying a Council member. What happened, then, if a person who knew her priority-one codes was to order an override on one of her protective directives?

What happened then to Reaper? The same thing as Gabriel Reyes? The thing he trusted turning around at someone else’s call to lash him to death again?

He couldn’t permit that. He also couldn’t let on that he suspected anything - if the people behind the plot were to find out that he suspected his life was under strain, they would strike all the faster and all the more decisively.

At the same time, he couldn’t keep this perfect weapon nearby without knowing whether the hand on the trigger was steady.

He couldn’t trust Widowmaker without knowing whether it was only her conditioned measures in place. Reaper had never trusted conditioning - a thoughtless soldier was a dead one, in a hurry, and conditioning could always be broken.


A wave of hot and sickening frustration swept through him as his thoughts flickered to Oxton again. Loyal Oxton. Never even thought to question.

...and then his thoughts stretched past her and on to all the bastards who had lied to her. To him. To everyone.

He needed to know whether Widowmaker was lying. He needed to know whether she was *conditioned,* or loyal.

She moved her head, slightly, readjusting - then nodded slightly to herself. He recognized the gesture and caught her hand as she moved to tap at her communicator.

Widowmaker froze as a taloned hand enveloped hers and kept it from the radio. “The way is clear. I was-”

“Good,” he murmured, crouching next to her and activating his comm unit. “Sombra,” he ordered over the radio, “take position at the main entrance. Wait for my signal.”

“You got it, boss,” she chirped back over the line. Far below and far away, she slunk along a wall until she came to the entrance, then pulled up a screen and tapped at it while she waited.

Widowmaker’s eyes flicked over the scene in front of her, dead guards and Sombra standing next to the entrance - this wasn’t the plan. Reaper was supposed to join the hacker down there for the breach. She couldn’t question him, though. She couldn’t give anything away.

She simply waited.

Reaper watched for any indication. Of anything. None came, but he let go of her hand. It slipped idly back to her rifle, her thumb stroking at the forestock. *Nervous?* He couldn’t tell. Did she even get nervous?

Did he?
“They don’t trust you,” he hummed almost thoughtfully, the overbearing chill of his paranoia blanketing the roiling hate-heat in his gut. It was almost calm. Almost. “Talon. The Council. All those measures they put in place - conditioning, that’s the answer to everything, isn’t it?” He chuckled darkly, shaking his head.

Widowmaker didn’t breathe. Her heart beat once, lethargically, at odds with her racing mind.

“Not a good thing to rely on, in my opinion.” Reaper continued, speaking softly over her shoulder.

He sounded, to her, more like he had at the beginning - when they’d met. Not the violent anger he was prone to now, but rather a much deeper-seated fury. Colder but no less deadly.

“Too many outs, too many… holes to slither through. Loyalty… that’s what I prize, myself.”

She refused to move, to let herself move - she couldn’t betray a thing, and on top of that, she was better than movement. She was better than being a slave to her own reactions. A slave to anything.

She didn’t move.

Reaper had been hoping for a response. Something. Anything. Something to tell him whether he was probing down the wrong path - because if he probed too far, and he was right, again…

...again…

Something deep within him shuddered. It was a mistake to approach it head on, to approach anything head on - he couldn’t let on that he knew, that he suspected.

...but that didn’t mean he couldn’t test her loyalty. Conditioning only went so far and he knew it. He only needed to see how far.

“Look at her down there…”

Widowmaker’s eyes didn’t widen at the soft words, almost whispered, seeping into her ears like the gentle brush of the wind. She did look, though, down at Sombra, standing so far away.

Reaper knew Widowmaker’s conditioning. He knew her codes, and he knew her rules, and he knew that they didn’t apply to Sombra. She had no conditioning, no rules, nothing instilled to stop her from murdering that particular teammate. Nothing save her loyalty to stay her bullets from Sombra.

The perfect test.

“What would you do,” he murmured, leaning forward just a hint - still not touching her, looking over her shoulder and down the rifle toward Sombra. Widowmaker’s cheek wasn’t on the stock, her eye wasn’t aligned with the scope. Yet. “If somebody told you to kill her?”

It was a cold day. It was a cold day and her heart barely beat to begin with, cold was a way of life with her, and still she felt some tingle of a chill deep within - not a real sensation but a phantom one, one that spoke only to her mind and not her body in the slightest.

The test was so obvious. So clear and so simple - but straightforward didn’t always mean the same as easy. Didn’t mean the same as good.

Her loyalty was in question, her conditioning, her status, and this was an easy test - because there was only one correct answer. There was only one thing for which she had been made, there was only one thing Talon ever asked her to do and there was only one way in which she was ever
supposed to respond.


She was a weapon. She was not made for anything save death, it was her purpose; she was directed and she killed. It was what she had been forged for and some little part of her mind ticked away, reminding her and reminding her and reminding her.

*D’accord.*

The only problem was that it was Sombra. For all of her annoyances and problems, she had become…

*Maintenant.*

...Widowmaker didn’t know what. The word. There wasn’t one, no title for the position Sombra held, but it was something unique.

*Je vais.*

Widowmaker would miss her if she was gone.

The test was so simple. So simple, so straightforward, and all she risked if she failed to answer correctly was *everything.* The correct answer was so obvious.

There was only one answer she should ever give.

*D’accord.*

“Are you telling me to kill her?” Her words were soft, flat, emotionless. Empty. It was standard to confirm an order, standard to double-check, but Reaper didn’t respond immediately.

He didn’t confirm.

He didn’t deny.

---

Reaper watched her, intensely, looking for something. Anything. Any indication that she didn’t want to, any indication that the only thing staying her hand wasn’t *conditioning.* Any sign that somewhere inside, Widowmaker had true *loyalty* to her, because he’d seen her and Sombra interact.

There was banter and bickering, they were teammates and more than that, and he knew for a fact that conditioning wouldn’t hold Widowmaker’s finger from the trigger: Sombra didn’t have the right status within Talon. Yet, the two were close.

If one of the Council members wanted him dead, if they wanted *her* to be the instrument of his death, then he couldn’t count on her conditioning. Only *loyalty* would suffice.

She didn’t move, though. He watched her and she didn’t twitch, didn’t shift, didn’t look back at him incredulously. She didn’t deny him or scoff and say it was ridiculous, didn’t ask why. She *did* ask whether he was ordering her. He knew it was all she *would* ask before she pulled the trigger, and as
much as he’d suspected it, he wasn’t quite prepared to see it play out so bluntly before him.

She’d killed Kosn, one of their own; a directive he’d refused himself - not like that. Hand to hand in a ring, or armed one on one, *that* he would accept, but being there to cover up the mess if Overwatch didn’t manage to take him down? To look at a survivor and slaughter him - one of *their own* - that didn’t sit right with Reaper.

It had sat just fine with her. She didn’t deny that directive, she didn’t deny this one now.

She had no loyalty.

Only conditioning.

She was a weapon. He knew that. Point her at your enemies and they died, as simple as that. Now all he had to do was worry about what would happen if - no, *when* - somebody decided to try pointing her at *him*.

Loyalty wouldn’t keep her sights from Sombra, so he couldn’t count on it to keep them from him either, not if her conditioning was broken to the point where she could kill him, not if it was *overridden* by some superior command.

Only loyalty would suffice, and she didn’t have it.

He’d suspected it. He still wasn’t prepared, and it shocked him into silence when all she did was ask for confirmation and sit there calmly. Waiting. Waiting to murder one of her teammates.

---

Widowmaker’s mind raced as Reaper sat wordlessly. Was he considering her request for confirmation to be insubordination? Was he waiting to see what she’d do next - if she’d fight it? Did he think she was *denying* the order?

She wanted to. To deny it.

As much as she wanted to *kill*, she didn’t want to kill *Sombra* - or, rather, that wasn’t quite right. She *did* want to kill Sombra, but she didn’t want Sombra to die, to be gone. She would lose so much, again. She would lose and she *refused* to lose and that-


If she didn’t, though - if she let on that her noose was slipping - she would lose so much more.


There was only one answer.


Her eyes stung a little as she gripped tighter at the Kiss, leaning her head down toward the stock. *Sorry. This will hurt.*

She let nothing play out over her face, no twitches or glints of emotion, nothing.
"Stop." Reaper grunted the word out as she started to move. Started to position to take the shot. To kill Sombra. To kill a teammate. The exact same way she would kill him, if the right person ordered her to, if they had the right codes, if, if, if.

That was what she would look like in the seconds before he died. Before she killed him.

Blank. Just how she was made.

No loyalty, no sign nor indication of the years and the missions carried out. Not a single thing. Exactly how she was made.

“The mission remains unchanged,” he growled before dissolving into smoke and swirling forward off of the roof, unable to shake the image from his mind. Her, sitting just the same on a rooftop, but with him at the other end of the scope.

What if she’d already been given the order? What if this was the mission - the one which he was never supposed to make it back from? What if he was today’s Sergeant Kosn?

What if she was tracking him right now, so the instant he resolidified it would be with a bullet lodged in his skull? Watching his movements, noting the distance and the timing by how much she would need to lead the shot to ensure he had no opportunity to do anything; that he would be dead the instant he was solid again.

For a man who’d contemplated and attempted suicide so very many times, Reaper didn’t want to die. Not while he still had traitors to torture, to slaughter - not while he still had a mission to accomplish. He hadn’t tried to kill himself since he’d written up his list.

It had given him a purpose.

Now that was all at risk.

What if her finger was on the trigger right now? Just waiting for him to slip out of his cloud, just waiting for his boots to touch the ground again…
When he was gone, and only then, did Widowmaker permit herself a small smile. The mission remained unchanged. Everything remained unchanged. She had done well - he didn’t want to kill Sombra, he’d only wanted to test whether she would, whether she would still listen. Even if she wasn’t strictly required to. Now, of all times, she needed to go above and beyond; not just obey orders but even pre-empt them.

*Act first.*

Taking the first step put you in charge. Taking the first step meant you weren’t left trying to catch up. It had served her well in the past and continued to do so now.

The mission was continuing. No mentions of reconditioning, of doubt, of her acting in any way other than expected - no suspicions.

...and no damage to Sombra.

*Parfait.*

Widowmaker sighed contently as she laid her cheek against the stock of the Kiss, lowering her visor and tapping the button to turn the communicator on. “Ready when you are.”

---

Reaper heard the transmission, but couldn’t shake the feeling that it might mean something else. He ensured he wasn’t near Sombra when he coalesced again, teeth gritted - he instantly stumbled just slightly as his boots touched ground. Just enough to throw a shot off.

Maybe.

The shot never came. He caught his stride again easily and stepped over to Sombra who looked back curiously.

“Alright there *amigo*?”

Reaper shook his head. Words couldn’t be trusted, not here and not now, and a head-shake meant nothing. He regularly shook his head when Sombra spoke. “Just focus on the mission.” The feeling of eyes on his back sank through him, unsettling and disturbing and causing his insides to roil; the idea that somebody - *again* - was out to betray him, that somebody again had twisted all he had against him, was infuriatingly hateful.

Not quite all, though.

As Sombra’s fingers tapped at the gate, he found himself watching her. He wanted to… something. Say something. Maybe. He couldn’t quite tell.

Now wasn’t the place, though. Now wasn’t the time.
Two hours later, with his cloak dripping blood behind him and some of his frustrations sated, Reaper stepped into the dropship. Widowmaker was already waiting there, watching him - studying? Or just waiting for another command? Another tune to dance to?

Sombra jogged in behind and the doors started to close, and she made a beeline right for the sniper.

He didn’t like that. Only a few hours ago, Sombra’s life had hung by a thread which Widowmaker had been all too happy to snip. The idea that she could pretend to be the hacker’s teammate, her friend…

“Sombra,” Reaper grunted, gritting his teeth. She spun around, confusion clear across her face, but he just nudged his head toward the cockpit of the dropship. “Cockpit. Now.”

Sombra frowned but went, with only a brief glance back over her shoulder and a shrug for Widowmaker. The sniper didn’t react, only intently watched them go. She didn’t know what it meant, but if Reaper still had questions, it wasn’t likely to be good.

When they got to the cockpit, Reaper closed the door and then gestured to it. “Lock it,” he commanded. “Lock it all down tight.”

Sombra hesitated for a second. He couldn’t mean tight like she meant tight - they’d had that argument before. He didn’t like it. Then again, things had changed since then. “Boss?”

“You heard me. Lock it all down. Everything.”

That could only mean one thing. At the least, she wasn’t worried anymore that he’d freak out and try to get her thrown out of Talon for insubordination or anything - she wasn’t done with them quite yet so that wouldn’t do. Worst came to worst, he’d probably just get pissy again. He didn’t react as her fingertips glowed and tapped at a floating screen, though, and then she shrugged and dropped back into the pilot’s chair.

“Allright, we’re tight,” she flashed him a grin, “Sombra tight, which is the tightest it gets and you can take that to the bank, ha! No vids, no audio, nothing - we’re alone, amigo.” Her grin widened and her eyes sparkled. “Can’t say I figured our first time would be in a dropship cockpit. You might be kinkier than I thought! Which is really saying something, because, you know-”

“Talon can’t hear us?”

She frowned a little at the way he just cut off a perfectly good joke. Or flirtation. Whichever. Both. “Yeah. I mean, no. They can’t hear us, can’t see us, nothing.” She hesitated for a second but there was obviously something going on - and she never could ignore her curiosity when it came to that kind of thing. If there was something going on, she always wanted to get to the bottom of it. “Didn’t think you liked that shit.”

“I don’t.” He clenched his jaw. “Didn’t. I don’t know. Things are… different. Maybe.”

“Well of course they’re different!” She snickered. “We’re practically a couple now!”

Reaper sighed, slumping into the co-pilot’s seat. “No, I- shut up.”

“Geeze, fine, so you called me in here to not talk to me?” She shrugged, looking away. “Little weird,
“amigo, but whatever I guess.”

“No,” he groaned, “I didn’t- I called-” His teeth clenched tight against each other again. He couldn’t talk about it, not openly, not even now, because Sombra was good. Sombra was very good.

...but somebody was always better.

There was always someone bigger, someone stronger, someone smarter, and the instant you lost sight of that was the instant you started dying. The instant your ruination started to rain down upon you.

He trusted Sombra. He didn’t trust the world. He couldn’t talk about it openly.

That wasn’t all of the problem, though - not all of the reason for his silence. Even if the world hadn’t been a consideration… he still was.

Reaper’s head tipped back to meet the headrest on the seat, tilted to the side to look out of the window away from the hacker. Raindrops splattered against the glass, streaking back as the dropship sped through the sky.

“You… have your hands just about everywhere, don’t you.”

His words didn’t really sound like a question, not even to his ears, but to Sombra’s they were uncomfortably close to an accusation. She thought they were done with this back-and-forth trust bullshit. “You accusing me of something, amigo?”

“No,” he grunted, “no, it-” he cut himself off, gritting his teeth and looking out off the window. The water droplets slid swiftly across, so much so that they barely formed. Their world moved too quickly to let them even get a hold on anything.

It felt familiar. Not pleasantly so.

“I just meant,” he started again, letting out a slow breath. It felt like cold tentacles were reaching up from some murky swamp in the depth of him, wrapping around his throat and creeping into his mind. Not exactly a welcome change from the usual burning lash of hatred, but at least one that didn’t result in the same kinds of outbursts. “I just meant… you have your ear to the ground. If there was something I needed to know about. Something dangerous. You’d tell me.”

A little shudder leapt through him as he forced out the words, haltingly, still looking at the glass. Looking at drops of water. He might be alone in here, maybe there was nobody even to hear his words.

Except for himself. Nobody except for himself to think about how stupidly foolish it was - trusting somebody else.

...except she trusted him too. She stood there next to the gate because he’d told her to, while he used the hairs on her neck to test a blade’s sharpness.

He recoiled from the hand which brushed against his shoulder, but only briefly, only slightly, and then stayed still. Her hand rested there on his shoulder.

Sombra looked down at the back of Reaper’s hood - didn’t bother trying to catch his gaze in the reflection of the glass. She didn’t want to risk him seeing anything in her eyes anyway. It hadn’t sounded like a question, again - he wasn’t asking if she’d tell him, he was just saying that she would.
...and she would.

It just all mattered on what “needed to know” meant.

“Of course I would, *amigo,*” she chuckled softly, patting at his shoulder. “Any risks, any threats to you or the team, you know first. As for the rest of Talon,” she shrugged, “ehh, if I’m honest, I figure they’ve either got their own eyes open or maybe they don’t deserve the warning, you know?”

Reaper chuckled darkly, shaking his head a little. “You sound like him. Akande.”

Sombra snorted a laugh. “Yeah right. I mean, maybe a little, I guess. Gotta look out for number one, right? But there’s more to it than just that, the way he means it.” Her hand tightened just a little on his shoulder. “Gotta look out for your team. Your friends. They’re the *real* number one.”

His head dropped forward just a little, just a degree. “You ever take a look at the rest of the… team?”

With an easy shrug, Sombra dropped her hand and slid back into her seat, pulling a pack of M&Ms from her pocket. “I look at lots of stuff. Whatcha thinking particularly? Akande?”

The dropship’s engines whined, and he swore he could feel it resonating inside himself. Widowmaker could see through the walls but she couldn’t hear through them. Sombra had locked the cockpit down. Nobody could hear.

Maybe.

“No,” he tipped his head, “or at least, maybe not. Maybe. I was thinking… a little closer to the frontlines. The *closer* part of the *team.*” He tried not to sneer the word, *team,* but it didn’t work. They weren’t a team - not while she’d turn her back on them, cut them down as soon as she received an order. Him and Sombra, maybe, but Widowmaker? She wasn’t a part of the team.

Sombra accidentally swallowed an M&M whole, then crunched another one loudly. Her voice didn’t carry any of the hesitation which took root in her heart and her gut, though. “What about her? I’ve done some digging - like I told you, I like knowing the people I’m gonna be working with.”

“You spend a fair bit of time with her, don’t you?” He knew it sounded like an interrogation, knew he was asking questions when he wanted to be telling her things instead, but questions were easier. Safer.

She tossed an M&M into the air and caught it in her mouth, shrugging. “Eh, I guess so. Gotta get all three of us together for a movie night one of these days!” She laughed delightedly.

Reaper didn’t laugh. He shook his head a little, claws digging deeper into the armrests of the co-pilot’s seat.

Sombra saw it. She let her laughter trail off naturally. “C’mon though, you can trust me, you can level - what’s *up* with all this suspicion, *amigo?* You can trust me. I can help you sort it out.”

“There’s nothing to sort out,” he grumbled, forcing his hands to relax a little bit at least. “I just… wouldn’t get too comfortable with her, if I were you. She might not be quite who you *think* she is.”

His hands clenched up again, a grunt leaping free from his throat. He wanted to say more about it. He wanted to tell her to watch her back, keep her eyes open - that it didn’t mean a thing because Widowmaker would kill her at a moment’s notice.

Would have killed her a few hours ago, if he hadn’t stopped her.
Wouldn’t have even been looking down the scope in the first place, if he hadn’t told her to.

That was what held him back. That writhing slick spike in his gut stretching right through to his throat through his spine - like when he thought about Sombra’s hand, bleeding, when she’d inspected that omnic head.

When he thought about how good it had felt.

About how many times he’d wanted to grab her and pull her close, and take, and take until there was nothing left for her to give and he’d drop a withered husk to the ground. A withered husk and a mess of pink and purple electronics.

Tears burned at his eyes as the bones of his jaw and his teeth strained, his throat trying to make some noise but failing. Maybe he wasn’t a traitor, maybe, but he was too close - he snapped and he lashed and he came too close, and even if he hadn’t hurt her yet, he wanted to.

Sombra didn’t know any of the thoughts in his head. All she knew was what that tense silence meant - the way he clammed up and looked like every muscle was as tight as steel, like he was a wound-up spring just waiting to unleash.

It wasn’t as worrying as it had been, though.

“Gabe,” she frowned a little, speaking softly and shaking her head. Solemnity wasn’t exactly commonplace for her, but she could manage it. “Come on. You can trust me - I know it’s rough or whatever, but you can trust me.” She hesitated for a second. “I trust you.”

He shoved himself up out of the seat as the words sank into his ears. “You trust too easily,” he spat. He tried to pull it back in, the anger, to reign it in and hold it close, one hand shaking slightly as he stretched it out to lay flat against the wall next to the door. “Y-” he grunted, unable to get out any other words.

Not even really knowing what words he wanted to get out.

Sombra stood a little hesitantly and didn’t approach him just yet. The tension was easily palpable and she’d seen him snap before - she did trust that he wouldn’t hurt her. Not intentionally, at least, but it was easy to do things by accident.

“Ahh, that’s just ‘cause you got me all hot and bothered,” she snickered, trying to inject some lightheartedness back into the situation. Some jokes. “C’mon, I suck at this sentimental stuff anyway - let’s just get back to base and get a drink or something, alright? We can watch a movie or something. It’ll all be cool.”

“Will it now?” He chuckled deep in his chest. “Well, in that case I suppose there’s nothing to worry about.” It would be so easy to just brush it off and leave it and let her die to her own stupidity.

If she’d been anybody else, he would have done just that.

Her, though… he couldn’t do that to her. “Just…” he sighed, trying again - trying so hard, always trying, always failing. Maybe one day he’d wake up to it. “Just… keep a particular eye out. Be careful who you’re trusting.”

“Of course, amigo,” she shrugged. “I always am. Not a long list, you know.”

“Maybe should be a little shorter,” he grumbled, hand curling into a fist as he grunted and punched the control on the wall, stepping out through the door.
Sombra followed, concerned, but putting on the same easy air as always. Widowmaker was inspecting her rifle meticulously, reclined in one of the seats, and Sombra flashed her a grin and hitched her thumb toward Reaper. “Would you believe he just proposed to me? Crazy, right? Hey, you wanna be Maid of Honour?”

Widowmaker looked up with a half-smug expression, poised to make some snarky comment, but she stopped when her eyes fell on Reaper. He stood tall, and still, and staring directly at her. She looked back silently for a few seconds - his mask hid much, but she could feel his eyes on her. Not the way others might look, not inspecting the cutaways of her ridiculous armour, the curves, but rather inspecting her.

She thought she’d *passed* his little test.

“That rifle’s the only damn thing you care about, isn’t it?” He laughed darkly, shaking his head.

Widowmaker frowned slightly. It was an odd question, but not a difficult one. The correct answer was so obvious. “Of course it is,” she lied easily, rolling one shoulder in a shrug and dropping her eyes back to the Kiss. “As it has always been.”

He chuckled but said nothing and walked across the bay to take a seat. Her eyes stayed fixed on the Kiss, watching only through peripherals, through reflections, little snippets of motion and vision that she weaved together into a picture.

He still doubted, then - or still suspected. His suspicions were so obvious, too, so blundering; asking her over her cares, checking to see whether she was developing feelings. Did she *care* about Sombra? Enough to *not* shoot her, even when ordered?

Well, the latter wasn’t true. It couldn’t really be, not even now. He *hadn’t* ordered, however, but that would be the next step - that or reconditioning.

She wasn’t *meant* to be able to care about anything. Not even truly about her rifle - she had been instilled only with a desire to complete her mission, to kill, and her rifle was a tool to that end. Those were her only cares however, her only joys.

So it had been when she’d been forged.

She couldn’t pinpoint when things had started to diverge. When teasing, insulting, had started to take on some tinge of the thrill of combat. When a well-placed remark had begun to echo a well-placed bullet.

...when a brush of warm skin had begun to feel as pleasant as the hot rush of death.

Or almost, at least.

It would be no risk, though. Even though she was *not* now exactly what she had once been, she *knew* what she had been. She knew how she would have responded years ago. It was so easy to feign it, she always had been a good actress.

She was glad that Sombra hadn’t died for the act. She was even *more* glad that Reaper didn’t have the facilities needed to tell when she was aiming at a person’s head, and when she was aiming at their chest. Somewhere to incapacitate and wound rather than slay. Somewhere she could play off, or hope that the hacker had the presence of mind to play along with and stay down, and play dead.

...although, to what end, precisely...
She was glad she’d never been ordered to pull the trigger. Questions were far easier and required no such guesswork - she knew the correct responses, and she could say them with no risk.

It would be an easy part to play, and even the most intense paranoia would subside in time. All she needed to do until that point was continue to pass his tests, continue to bat away his blunt attempts at testing her cares, testing her conditioning, testing her loyalties to Talon.

She would ensure there was no question in his mind at all: he would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that she was just as much a servant of the Council as the first day she was released. Just as much at their beck and call - no need for reconditioning, no need for further digging. No need to tighten her leash. Her noose.

A slight but sincere smile played at her lips and she began to hum to herself as she reverently cleaned the Widow’s Kiss. It was not nearly the only thing she cared about, not these days - but it was still high up on the list.

Not alone, though.

Widowmaker didn’t look away, didn’t look at Sombra who sat now at the far end of the bay, near Reaper with a grin on her lips like the foolish puppy she was. Should a pet be pleased with a master who cared so little for them? Or with a friend just the same?

It would have been very unfortunate to shoot her. Widowmaker knew that, as surely as she knew that she would have shot her, had it come down to that. She was very nearly about to, and while the first bullet perhaps would not have slain, the second one would, or the third. If it had been ordered so.

Then, she would have no Sombra.

No more futile attempts at flirtation to bat away with a smirk, no more wit to banter against, no more movies and warmth.

Her lips almost pulled back from her teeth, very nearly started to move into a sneer, a grimace, before she intercepted the impulse and stopped it. When had that become so prevalent again? She was slipping and she knew it, and while she didn’t care, that didn’t mean that no part of her cared.

Some parts did very much.

There was an emergency plan in place, of course. A contingency which she could no more consider than she could consider slaying the Talon Council - but, if she thought of some other woman in a similar difficult situation with two hidden lovers on the side, then the plan she might have was so clear.

Get rid of the evidence.

With Sombra, though… no - if that theoretical woman had known Sombra the same way Widowmaker knew Sombra, that plan would not suffice. It would be unacceptable.

Perhaps if things got further, then it might. All that meant, though, was that they could not be permitted to proceed any further.

A slight flicker of irritation guttered like a candle in the depths of Widowmaker’s mind as the decision was made, but that was far, far preferable to the empty feeling of loss that might take hold were she to decide otherwise.
It was so very easy *not* to lose, as long as one was willing to take steps, and Widowmaker was more than willing to do that. She was willing to do nearly anything if it meant she would not need to lose again, not have one more thing torn away from her.

The paranoia holding her back from Tracer and from Emily, that was an irritation but it would end. Their separation was not a permanent fixture and it could not be *made* to be so long as they kept their distance from each other. At least a bullet’s distance.

Sombra, on the other hand? Being so close - *so close* - she could easily be removed permanently, and in an instant, with no chance to plan or dance around the matter. Today had proved that clearly. In an unexpected instant, everything could change and Sombra could be taken away.

That simply wouldn’t do.

Widowmaker sighed in resignation, half-rolling her eyes as she began to think of what the hacker would say, how she would react. Annoyingly, no doubt.

...still, though, it felt uncomfortably like losing.

That only reassured Widowmaker that she was doing the right thing. If pushing Sombra away would be frustrating and irritating *now*, it would only be worse to lose her *later*.

Sometimes, things were so simple.

Chapter End Notes

That chapter title, huh? I had this idea of three chapters mirroring each other through their titles, uh, but I dunno if it’s necessarily great, heh. Frankly though, I’m not good at chapter titles, so I’m cool with that.

So, uh - well, first thing’s first, how’s that for a test, eh? This, right here, is why I like buildups. They give a lot of things to draw off of, and frankly I really liked how impactful this ended up being for me at least. I hope it is for you as well!

If Widowmaker’s thoughts are a little confusing, that’s okay, uh, they’re kind of supposed to be. Rather, they’re intentionally obfuscated; the way I’m going with things, with there being certain areas of thought that she’s been conditioned out of even having the capacity for - well, it results in some choppy and twisted thoughts. Hopefully they’re not actively unpleasant or disorientingly so? Honestly my own thoughts are a little awkward right now anyway, heh - little bit spacey today, but heading toward my weekend so I should be good :D Right now I am so spaced-out though, haha, these comment took me two hours to write because I got so distracted XD

I may go back to weekly updates for a little longer, just so you folks all know? Christmas season, all kinda busy of course, heh; I didn’t expect it to be? But I probably should have, heh! I was hoping to be two or three chapters ahead by this point, but I’m only one and a half - so uh, yeah, probably going back to weeklies at least for a bit, sorry folks.

Anyway, I hope you liked this? I really did, I liked writing it and I liked writing it! Always looking forward to feedback, questions or guesses or whatever! I like hearing
from you, folks!

Come on back next time when Tracer will have a bit of a realization that puts a new spin on things. Widowmaker implements a plan, in a hope to cut out a loss. Suffice to say, it doesn't exactly work.
Mitigation

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer and Widowmaker have a chat over the phone, with a few frustrations and a few revelations - or at least one of each. Sombra pays an impromptu visit to a friend, and finds nothing near what she bargained for; neither does Widowmaker, who finds herself surprised as events unfurl and she is unable to deal with the magnitude of certain things.

JFL Summary: Tracer and Widdy, sitting in a tree! S-K-Y-P-I-N-G! Okay not really, but close enough. Also, in case you've forgotten, Emily's a nurse - still a nurse, even. Widowmaker drinks and talks to a painting, but it's only unhealthy if the painting starts talking back, right? Sombra cries, shouts, and kisses a friend, but not necessarily in that order.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: thoughts of death/murder/blood, anger, emotional anguish

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker and Reaper thinned out the guards around a facility, with the sniper setting up a defensive position to cover a strike. Sombra moved into position by the front gate, but Reaper suddenly called things to a halt without a word to Sombra. He'd come to suspect Widowmaker's motives, and her loyalty in a way - believing that somebody else within Talon had a hand on her and was driving her against him, turning her to kill him.
He decided to test by asking her whether she would kill Sombra, knowing that they were friends and that only that friendship would stop the murder. He was hoping that she would deny, but she didn't. Widowmaker, of course, believes that Reaper is suspicious of her conditioning breaking, so she has decided to do everything within her power to play the part of a perfect patsy, listening to every order given without question; she nearly shot Sombra before she was stopped by Reaper. She believed herself to have passed the test.
Later, Reaper pulled Sombra aside and warned her to be cautious with her trust. He began to develop some guilt over using her as bait in the test, and grew irritated, and the conversation ended.
Widowmaker, realizing that it would be frustrating to have Sombra taken away from her, resolved to take early action: to push the hacker away so she could not be lost. To create the situation, and thus, to own it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Are you sure?” Tracer chewed at her lip a little, nervously.

“But of course, cherie,” Widowmaker laughed. “Am I ever not?” She grinned into the phone’s camera, wide and confident, and nodded. “Non, rest assured, Reaper will quickly come to realize
that everything is as he believes it should be. All of my conditioning in place, and no cause for his worries - then things can return to the way they should be.”

Tracer sighed with a smile, both the sound and the expression somewhere between bittersweet and hopeful. “That’d be nice. Wouldja believe the bed feels way too hot now?”

Widowmaker laughed openly, tossing her head back and then grinning to the camera again. “With our cerise next to you I do not doubt this, souris! She is quite hot, non?” She chuckled softly, triumphantly, at Tracer’s slight blush.

It wasn’t as rewarding over the screen, but truly the knowledge of the effect she was having was what she liked the most.

“Alright, well,” Tracer hesitated a little, glancing off to the side nervously before looking at her phone again. She was outside, in a park - possibly to be overheard by some random passerby, but not likely. The bigger concern was that people would raise eyebrows if she spent all her time cooped up in her room, and she couldn’t risk contacting Widdy anywhere else on base, so she’d gone for a walk.

Nobody was nearby, though. A nice beautiful sunny day, but nobody was there - a few distant joggers and an old person tossing bread to the birds. Tracer flashed her phone a hesitant smile. “I mean, is it though? I know what you said when you came by to apologize and all, but… I mean, it’s not really all still in place, is it? Your conditioning and whatnot.”

Slowly, Widowmaker’s breath left her in a sigh. Long and drawn out, through her nose, as she considered - not just her mouse’s words, but her own.

All in place? Not quite - or at least, there was more developing overtop. The important parts, however?

She shrugged. “Yes and no, I suppose. Alors, I do not know how much of the effects I have noted were necessarily intentions. Did they intend me to be without empathy? Quite likely. Did they intend me to be without laughter? I suspect perhaps not.”

Tracer slid down the wall she was leaning against and propped the phone up on her knees, nodding attentively and smiling soft encouragement. It would’ve been better face-to-face, but everything would.

She was starting to miss her chilly blue girlfriend, a lot.

“Suffice to say, I think that all of it is perhaps still active… yet more has been built upon that foundation. Unintended developments - these, I wish to hide. I will not have them taking my joy from me, I will not lose it.” Her face sharpened for a moment at the words, jaw clenching just slightly.

Quickly, though, she shook it off. Almost instantly - so swiftly that it could have been a trick of light and shadow. “However,” she shrugged, “I still could not disobey a direct order from a superior. I still could not resist if I was provided with certain codes.”

That was, in fact, the whole problem - but, a problem soon to be rectified. At least in part.

A heavy frown came to Tracer’s lips as a deep unsettlement roiled in her gut. It was pretty disgusting to think about, the way they’d taken away Widowmaker’s free will. “Could- I mean… maybe, once you get his eyes off you, we could do something about that? I dunno, maybe Mercy would ha-”
Widowmaker cut her off with high, bright, derisive laughter and shook her head. “Ah, the angel to answer all of the problems, yes! Non, cherie, I think not - even if she could be of aid,” she cleared her throat, speaking swiftly then, “and I will remind that she is the one who missed the conditioning even to begin with - but even if she were able to bend some of the rules, there are other systems in play. Even now I feel an urge to report myself for maintenance, for reconditioning, and that would only increase in that case. As well, if all else fails,” she shrugged, “they always have their little button. Poof.”

“The explosive thing, yeah?” Tracer raised an eyebrow. “Well, I know she could take that out, she-”

“You think it would not detonate early?” Another dismissive laugh. “Cherie, these are not some fools in a back-alley operating room, the doctors who worked on me at Talon were formidable in their own right. No, she would not be able to remove it - and if she tried it may well kill her as well.”

The sniper held her tongue behind her teeth and didn’t mention that, despite what she might feel about the matter, she had no desire to let the doctor near her heart - literally or metaphorically - any time soon.

Not again.

On the one hand, she knew that Mercy could not have ever hoped to detect the incipient tendrils of what Talon had planted within her. At the same time, she was furious over the fact that Mercy hadn’t.

She had somewhat of the opposite thought when it came to the Talon doctors. Hate over what they did and the way they destroyed who she had been, but pride over what they provided, what they had turned her into. She was what she was, now. She’d fought for it.

She’d died for it.

She wouldn’t let anyone, angel or otherwise, step in and tell her she was wrong, or weak, or needed fixing. She was deadly perfection.

There was nothing to be fixed.

...even as much as she might doubt that in the depths of her mind at times.

Tracer looked at her phone hesitantly. She wasn’t sure if Widowmaker was necessarily telling the truth, and suspected that she probably wasn’t entirely, but it didn’t really matter anyway - she wasn’t going to force her girlfriend into surgery or anything like that. It would be barbaric.

“Well, fair enough I suppose,” she shrugged uneasily, “but I mean… maybe we can look at something, y’know? I just don’t like the idea of you not getting to make your own choices.” It had bothered her since the beginning - since even before talking to Widowmaker more in person, since hearing from Ana about how she came to be. The idea of being forced into that was just horrific.

Tracer suspected, in fact, that it was probably how Efi had felt about the Black Tide. To hollow out a person and replace them with something else…

A little chill sank down her spine.

Widowmaker caught a flashing comeback between her teeth before it could be given voice - at first she’d been about to retort, to tease Tracer about wanting to improve on perfection (or perhaps to bitterly state she didn’t need to be fixed, she hadn’t quite made up her mind). The sentence and the sentiment that followed, though, dropped all thoughts of that from her mind.
“I…” she trailed off for a second, frowning slightly. “Thank you, cherie. That is quite sweet, but I have my choice in all matters I wish. In essence. Save for one or two possibilities…” she looked off to the side, frown deepening a little.

The matter really didn’t require much thought. Though Widowmaker could think of thousands of things she would rather do than let some doctor poke around in her - least of all, that doctor - there existed a possibility that her hand could be forced in a matter which she was rapidly coming to regard as uncompromisable.

“It would be good, to not need to worry over your safety. To know that, orders or otherwise, I would always have my own choice in that.” She hesitated a little more, then dipped her head in a slight nod. Her decision was already made. It was now simply a matter of admitting to it.

Which, sometimes - or even often - was the harder part. “D’accord, we can investigate possibilities. Nothing can be done until the suspicions are dealt with, of course, but perhaps afterwards… something could be arranged.”

“Whatever you’re comfortable with, love,” Tracer insisted with a smile, “whatever you’d like.”

Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes. “You have been spending too much time alone, the two of you - you are beginning to sound just like her!” She grinned as Tracer giggled a little, and then Widowmaker raised an eyebrow. “Where is she, anyway?”

With a sigh, Tracer’s eyes flicked skyward. “Oh, off at work at the hospital, y’know.”

“Aww,” Widowmaker purred, pouting. “Is my little mouse feeling lonely?”

“Yes!” She let her head fall back until it bumped lightly against the wall behind her, chuckling throatily. She stayed like that for a few seconds, not talking, because the first words that wanted to come out weren’t the nicest ones. Or at least, they could easily be seen as a little bit guilt-inducing.

Or maybe a lot.

It wasn’t Widowmaker’s fault they couldn’t see each other right now. It wasn’t hers either, and Tracer knew it, but it was still the first thing that leapt to her lips. She didn’t let it get any further than that. Not further than a guilty thought.

“How could you say that, love? I’m missing out on you.”

Then it was Widowmaker’s turn to frown. Not swiftly, but slowly, a gradual dawning that drew her face down. She hadn’t thought - probably ever - about what she was bringing to the table, so to speak. She’d thought about what she gained, what she risked.

She’d carefully avoided asking herself what Tracer or Emily might want. Possible answers had been so clear near the beginning, when the question had begged itself - excitement, a thrill, and she could
hardly blame them. She was thrilling, and she knew so. Protection, perhaps, as well.

This, now, however, was not some simple loss of thrill. Not the basic begrudging of today being less exciting than yesterday, not the melancholic moans of boredom.

This, on Tracer’s face - in her voice - seemed very much like something more than that. Something intensely uncomfortable and deeply familiar.

“Well… it will not last long.” Widowmaker didn’t know what else to say on the matter.

“I know,” Tracer sighed with a soft smile, brushing a stray chunk of hair out from in front of her eye. “I know it won’t. I’m just moaning - it’s the great British pastime, haven’t you heard?” She giggled a little at Widowmaker’s laugh, and it did wonders to lift her spirits. “All in all things are still pretty great. Got two great birds, a buncha good friends - hell, I’ve got a roof over my head and food in my belly. Already puts me ahead of most, dunnit?”

Widowmaker chuckled softly as her mouse’s pleased expression was struck through again with stormclouds of sadness. The foolish girl cared so much - too much - about everything. Anything. All the people and all the ills of the world.

One of these days, she worried, the weight might just crush her.

It only served as a reminder for herself. A reminder to throw off excess weight before it became too great to bear.

“You are so foolish,” Widowmaker murmured softly, just barely shaking her head. “To care so much about a world that you can do nothing to aid - that does not even want your aid.”

“Maybe,” Tracer admitted with a shrug, then smirked and fixed her phone with a look. “Somebody’s gotta stand up and do it, though! Otherwise who would your little friends at Talon get in tiffs with, eh?”

Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Friends,” she sneered softly, but was interrupted from anything further by Tracer giggling.

“I dunno, you and Sombra seemed pretty cozy!”

“She is insufferable and annoyingly determined.” Widowmaker grumbled. “It is impossible to keep her out of anywhere-” she held up a hand, a look of disbelief crossing her face. “Did you know, the other day I found her in my shower? Did not even ask me first. Absurd.”

“Sounds like it,” Tracer giggled again, grinning. It was nice that Widdy had Sombra - somebody, at least - and it was nice that she had Emily. They might still miss each other, and she knew Em did as well, but they’d get through it.

It was a little weird for her to think back and realize that there had been a time that she hadn’t even known she’d be into anything like this, polyamory and being with multiple people - but that just happened sometimes. There had been a time she hadn’t thought she was really cut out for love at all - and then she’d met Emily, and all that had changed, so it wasn’t really that different to think that Widdy was thrown into the mix now.

It wasn’t that different to think it, but thinking it in that way still sent Tracer’s mind off the rails a little. Her eyes widened a bit as her breath left and her lungs failed to immediately replenish it.

*Love? Is- I mean, yeah, we’ve been together a while now, but…*
“Cherie? Is something the matter?”

Tracer’s eyes flicked almost in panic back to the screen, but seeing that blue face looking back at her instantly had her lips curling up, her heart speeding, a nice little warmth spreading out from there throughout her core. “Nah, nothin’, just… thinking,” she chuckled.

“That, I doubt,” Widowmaker teased with a grin. “Alors, we each have things to do. I thought only that you might appreciate the update, and I wanted to see your smile.”

She said it with such nonchalance, such an unaffected air as she shrugged - as if it were the most natural thing in the world, wanting to see her smile, yet still it made Tracer’s heart skip a beat and a breathy chuckle leap from her throat. “It- yeah, thanks! I… like seeing you roll your eyes at me and smirk.” … and I love you.

Widowmaker looked back in feigned offence. “What? Oh cherie, is that all you think of me?” She quirked an eyebrow before splitting into a wide grin. “It is good to know I am appreciated.”

“Very,” Tracer chirped with a giggle. I can’t believe I didn’t already know that I loved you. “Thanks for the call, Widdy. It really brightened my day.”

The assassin studied her phone, lamenting the distance. Lamenting the lack of everything she would know, were she closer - the lack of what she could gain. Warmth, contact.

What she could give, she still wasn’t certain, but it was clearly something.

However, she could easily see the grin on her mouse’s face, and a hint of blood in her cheeks, too - her breaths more rapid now than they had been moments ago, clearly not so melancholy as she had been.

There was much she would lament, but as she had promised, they would never be part of that list.

With a smile, Widowmaker nodded. “I can see that. Good.” Then, her eyes narrowed and she pointed a manicured finger at the screen. “I still remain unconvinced on that nickname.” Tracer giggled in response, and Widowmaker’s grin steepened by a degree. The familiar routine was comfortable, it was reassuring, it was… nice.

Nice and perhaps something else as well.

“Au revoir, cherie,” Widowmaker murmured, “give my best to Emily as well. Perhaps tomorrow we could all speak - tonight will not work. Schedules.”

“Of course,” Tracer nodded. It ended up being easier for them to just not speak of work in the future tense, at all. They only ever said schedules. It could be anything: a doctor’s appointment, a meal out that they’d planned in advance, breaking into a Deadlock garage to bust up their blockade-runners or maybe assassinating a dignitary.

Or tennis.

Schedules could have been anything in the world, and meant they didn’t need to agonize or guilt over this or that.

Of course, she still did a little sometimes, but not right now - right now, that all was about the furthest thing from Tracer’s mind as she felt like her lips might just peel right off of her face. “I’ll pass it along, we’ll work something out. Have a good night, love!”
“You too, cherie.” A smile, and the screen froze for a second, then went blank as the call disconnected.

Tracer dropped her head back against the wall and laughed abruptly up at the sky, sending a few birds flying out of a nearby tree. She shook her head for a few moments at her own foolishness, feeling giddy and giggling despite herself - her mind kept flickering back over moments, instants, flashes; her and Widowmaker, her and Emily, Widdy and Em, the three of them together.

Holding hands, talking, eating breakfast or lunch - Widdy’s nose wrinkling up in hesitation the first time she tried a BLE, Em sighing and groaning as Widowmaker massaged at the tight muscles in her shoulders and back, herself waking up in the middle of the night on the couch with her head against Widdy’s chest and Em laying across her in turn, and just staying there, and smiling in the darkness, and loving how it felt.

...and loving both of them.

With a fresh wave of giggles, she picked up her phone from her lap and texted Emily.

“I’m in love!”

It took a moment. She wasn’t even expecting a response immediately, but Emily must have been on a break because about thirty seconds later there came a response.

“Did you try a new flavour of strudel again, dear?”

Tracer laughed at the screen, grinning as she tapped back. “No, silly! Well, alright yeah, and I did love that too - but really, I was talking with Widdy and I realized that… I love her. I love you both.”

She waited with giddy anticipation, and let out a laugh when - rather than a texted response - a call came through. She tapped ‘answer’ immediately and giggled at Emily’s beautiful face which was split in half by a smile.

“I love you,” Tracer said, nodding.

Emily laughed and nodded back. “I love you too! Oh love, that’s- that’s brilliant! I was kind of wondering which of us would be the first to say it.”

Tracer’s eyes widened a little. “So- so you do too?”

Again, Emily laughed. “Oh c’mon, I love everyone.”

“Oh, I don’t mean like-”

“I know,” Emily let out a giggle. It subsided and she nodded with a smile. “Yeah, though. I do too. I love you both.”

Tracer gushed a little laugh, equal parts nervous and excited. “Should- I mean, should we tell her, d’ya think?”

Shrugging, Emily hummed thoughtfully. “Think this might be ‘in-person’ kinda news, dear - but I’m really glad we can talk about it with each other, at least!” Her eyes flicked away at a noise, somebody else’s voice, and then back to the screen as she offered an apologetic smile. “Sorry, gotta get back to it dear - have a good day, yeah? See you in a few hours!”

“You too!” Tracer waved and blew a kiss at the screen which Emily returned. “Love you, so much!”
“Love you too, dear!”

Again, the face froze, again the call disconnected, and again Tracer let her head fall back with a joyous and triumphant laugh. It was a brilliant day. A brilliant, beautiful, and absolutely lovely day.

---

Widowmaker sat, somewhere between reclined and fully laying upon a velvet settee. Glass of wine in one hand, bottle in the other, and just enough of her upright to not make drinking awkward.

Life had been so boring. So 

simple.

Now it was so far off from that.

The change of pace was good, the thrill of finally stretching out her legs again; dancing this way and that with delight. It had grown slowly, but was almost breakneck now by comparison. Distantly she recognized that it was still a far cry from what she had once had - a worldwide career, a thorough schedule as a socialite, Gérard and all that entailed, familial responsibilities…

Her world looked different now, but where it had once been a splashed-black canvas with no detail, it was now perhaps a dim simulacrum of her original life, painted in charcoal and grey. Worldwide infamy, some engagements both professionally and socially with Sombra at least, Emily and Tracer and her dealings with them, her leash in Reaper’s hands and Talon’s...

Something near to what she’d had.

Something near to what she’d lost.

Her lips twitched, unbidden, as her gut gave her a sudden reminder - as if she needed one - of the downsides of feeling.

Yet still, she couldn’t manage any damned guilt.

His eyes were so beautiful in the painting. Beautiful and caring, and she wished that she could have called them haunting, but it would have been a lie and he deserved better than that. She did, too.

“What would you think, hmm?” She laughed lightly, pulling herself more upright and finishing her glass of wine, refilling it from the bottle as her eyes shifted from him, the dead man, to his dead wife beside him. “Or you? Hmm?”

Amélie and Gérard - what a beautiful couple they’d been, hadn’t they? It was what simply everyone had said about them, and it was certainly true in its ways.

At the least, it was a beautiful painting, full of vivid colour.

Widowmaker shook her head slightly, sighing at the painting of her once-husband with a frown. “Would you care if you were here? That I… I either have no care in the matter, or I have too much? I wonder which would bother you more.” A slight laugh leapt from her lips. “Alors, no, I already know. You would be more bothered by the pain - when I scream at your tombstone, when I let myself feel, I am sure of it. Yet, I wonder…”

She had no concerns in it, not really. He was gone, and it was of no consequence - the woman
beside him was dead as well, no person would ever see Amélie Lacroix on a stage or in the street.

Perhaps they might see a woman with the same face, albeit in different tones - but that was, seemingly, her life now.

The same, but in different tones.

It was an interesting life. It was complex. So far from the boring simplicity that it had once been.

Yet, one can only be burned so many times before one becomes nervous at any warmth, and Widowmaker knew far too well what would happen to frogs in water as the temperature rose. She refused to die because everything boiled by degrees while others were happy to sit and let themselves stew.

It had not been a fast decision, but when made, it was a thorough one.

A knock at the door drew her eyes, flashing away from the painting sharply as she scowled. There should be no-one here - the house was in the middle of a lake, it was hardly on the way anywhere, and by all public accounts it was abandoned.

Ever since the owners had died.

Widowmaker swirled off off the couch and snatched up her visor off of a table nearby, latching it into place as practiced fingers wrapped around the grip of the Kiss as well. The lenses sank into place, revealing only a singular signature outside of one of the doors.

Convenient. Well, this might hurt. She chuckled slightly. You, at least.

Then, she set her equipment down once more, stalked over to the door, pulled it open, and confronted the woman standing there. “Sombra? What are you doing here?”

Sombra grinned back easily, her purple eyes shining in the moonlight the same way the lake did. “Movie night!”

“You cannot say that every night,” Widowmaker responded simply. She turned around and walked back into the house without further consideration; walls wouldn’t keep Sombra out, doors wouldn’t, so there was no point closing it. There was only one way to do it, Widowmaker suspected.

Her life might be complex now, but it still had its simple moments. This was one. “No, no movie.”

“What?” Sombra stepped in instinctively, a small frown playing at her lips which swiftly shifted to a smirk. “What, you got someone else over already? Hey, I don’t mind joining in - maybe I could hold the camera, right? Or your whips or something. You seem like you’d be into that.”

Widowmaker didn’t respond - not with the scoff that Sombra expected, the eyeroll and sigh and little fake signs of annoyance. She just walked away without any reaction at all, as if she hadn’t even heard.

What the fuck? Sombra paused mid-step in confusion, the suddenness of the change. The sniper had never reacted like this before. “Oh, did you not hear me?” Sombra jogged a few steps to catch up to Widowmaker’s elbow, grinning over to her widely. “Or did you just not get the joke? It’s okay chica, not your fault if you’re too vanilla to get it. We can fix that!”

At that, the assassin did look over - not a sharp look of offence, real or feigned, and again not the exasperation or irritation Sombra was hoping for. Looking for. The reactions that she knew, deep
down, meant she was getting through to something.

No, what she got instead was a plain, flat look, barely tinged with something that looked almost like disgust.

She didn’t like that at all.

“Why are you here?” Widowmaker repeated her earlier question, but this time it carried a soft careless sneer with it - not teasing, no narrowed eyes to go with it, but like a teenager asking their mom why she was in their room.

“What’s-” Sombra laughed slightly, waving a hand in Widowmaker’s general direction. “What the fuck’s going on here? Did I like, interrupt some kinda French bitchiness ritual or something?”

Intentionally careless words, trying to provoke some kind of response.

No response came. Widowmaker just looked back with a carefully crafted look of incomprehension spread across her face - as if she didn’t have the faintest clue what Sombra was even talking about, as if she had no idea what was happening and barely even knew who the hacker was.

Total denial of all the jokes told, all the aid rendered, all the movies - things which perhaps she had not even wanted to begin with. However, she couldn’t deny to herself that she wanted them now.

She could certainly deny them outwardly, though, and she did.

“What are you talking about? Stop wasting my time. Get out.” Widowmaker’s words were soft, completely confused - she didn’t enjoy the little shard of pain that she could see behind Sombra’s eyes. She was sure the hacker thought it was hidden, but nothing escaped her sight.

That was partly a lie, though. She did enjoy it, just a little, because it meant she was succeeding.

Regardless of how it felt. Regardless of what success meant in this circumstance, success was always to be appreciated.

There was solace in that. As if she needed any.

She refused to give in to it, to the urges to call off her plan - responses programmed through repetition and reward, that was all they were, they weren’t real feelings. She didn’t really feel bad that she was hurting Sombra, that she planned to continue to do so until the hacker was gone, entirely, and would not return for another movie night ever again. She didn’t really feel scared to be without aid in avoiding Reaper’s eye, she didn’t really feel a little bit of hot sick hatred over the idea of losing a friend. Or whatever Sombra was.

She didn’t really feel those things, because she couldn’t.

...it just felt like she felt them. It wasn’t real. She reminded herself of that as she prepared for an angry outburst.

It didn’t come, though. Sombra was better at maintaining her composure than Widowmaker had expected, and she laughed easily. “Yeah, wasting your time, sure! Ah, that’s a good one, chica - now c’mon, what movie are we watching?”

Sombra plopped easily onto the couch, trying not to think about the painful twisting in her gut or the way that her blood suddenly felt a little too hot in her veins - her arms, her scalp, her cheeks. She didn’t know what was going on with Widowmaker, but it was something weird - but it didn’t matter
anyway. Friends don’t abandon friends just because they suddenly turn into rampaging bitches.

“Watch whatever you want, I don’t care,” Widowmaker shrugged and turned away. “I will not be watching with you.”

“What, you got something more important to do? Planning some big hit or something?”

Though her face was hidden, Widowmaker smiled slightly. “No. Nothing at all. But doing nothing is preferable.”

She didn’t turn around to see the look on Sombra’s face at the words. As much as part of her wanted to. Longed to see the shot strike, to crack the hacker’s armour.

She thought she kept it all held in so tight, all so covered, but Widowmaker could see it all. The orphan who grew up alone, taking advantage of a lack of attention given whilst still desiring it. Finding family wherever she could, throwing up her walls when convenient, but in behind that, desperately craving that connection and trying to find it anywhere.

The worst thing she could have done was not to say that she would rather do anything, but instead to say that she would rather do nothing than spend time with Sombra.

Widowmaker could feel her mask slipping - the smile was a frown now, though still hidden from view, and her whole face had shifted along with it.

She didn’t feel guilty, though. Not really.

There was a dim reminder of it. Charcoal grey pretending to be white and doing a poor job of it. Perhaps.

Sombra, after a shocked moment of silence, laughed abruptly and threw her hands in the air. “Wow! Okay, well, fine then. I’ll watch my own shit. Fuckton of Telenovelas, right here - I know how much those piss you off.”

“Whatever.” Widowmaker walked out of the room easily. “I don’t care.”

She legitimately didn’t expect what happened next - she thought Sombra would angrily watch some shows and leave, or perhaps storm out immediately. She did catch sight of the thrown beacon as it flew forward over her shoulder, and from that point on she knew that Sombra would be emerging from it shortly, which she did.

Widowmaker still didn’t expect the look on her face, though. Didn’t expect to be presented with a wide and angry grimace, tears glistening in purple eyes. “W-what the fuck chica?” Sombra’s voice shook a little, and Widowmaker knew she was having an effect. A large one.

...and it wasn’t good. She didn’t like it.

She needed it, though. She stayed the course.

“What?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow, keeping her face placid even as some part of her thoughts told her how wrong this all was, but it would be foolish to listen to that part. Some remnant, some piece that hadn’t been successfully scooped out.

Was it wrong to push away someone who could have been a friend? Perhaps. To push away a person who one might end up being close to? Perhaps.
How much worse it was, though, to get close and then to lose them.

“Why are you-” Sombra cut herself off, swallowing back something - sharp words or a cry - as a tear broke free of its well in her eye and streaked down a cheek. Still, the assassin kept looking back like she didn’t care in the slightest.

Derisiveness, Sombra could deal with. She knew what that really meant, but this wasn’t that. This wasn’t Widowmaker looking at her like something on her shoe, this was just looking at her like… anybody else. Anyone at all. Some random Joe off the street. Like a mannequin.

Like nothing.

“What are you doing, alright?” She let out a laugh again, a strained one, shaking her head, trying to figure it out but trying to just play it off. Just move past it. Maybe that could work.. “Clearly something’s going on, just- whatever, it’s all cool.” She wiped at her cheek with the palm of one hand. “Just tell me what’s up, alright?”

“Nothing.” Widowmaker frowned slightly. “You have been presuming so much about us. You have been wrong. That is all that is happening here.” She shrugged slightly, carelessly, not looking away - not feigning particular disinterest, but rather, simply flat existence. “I was obviously not being clear enough about it. Now go away.”

“Go a-” Sombra’s face twisted angrily and she took a half-pace closer, leaving very little room between them. “Go away?”

Widowmaker stood perfectly still, not looking annoyed, not looking anything.

She didn’t want to, though. She wanted to step forward, to grab at Sombra’s hair and pull the hacker’s forehead in against her shoulder - to let those warm tears trickle down her skin instead, where at least they could do some good.

She didn’t, though.

“Yes.” She nodded. “Go away.”

That wasn’t friendly talk at all. “Need I remind you,” Sombra raised a hand, one shaky finger extended as she hissed, “that I’m the only one who’s helping you right now? And you’re telling me to just fuck off and leave?”

“Oui, that is what I am telling you,” Widowmaker murmured softly but flatly with a shrug. “You are not helping anyway. I do not need your help. I do not want you here,” she lied. “Go away.”

Sombra wasn’t sure if she was in some fucked-up kind of dream, or if she’d taken some bad drugs somewhere along the way, but something was obviously fucked up and she didn’t like it. It didn’t make any sense.

“Wh- how-” the words stammered out of her mouth, piling up in her confusion as she stared at Widowmaker’s total nonchalance - not her trademark crafted disinterest, not looking elsewhere, not rolling her eyes and pretending she hadn’t heard. Just didn’t care.

Widowmaker sighed, waving a hand blankly. “Do whatever you want. Even this wastes my time - adieu.”

She turned away, but a hand caught her wrist; she slipped loose of it and simply kept walking, didn’t turn around and lash out or hiss. Didn’t let herself think about how nice the moment’s warmth of skin
had been.

“N-no fuck that,” Sombra shouted, stomping after the assassin. “Fuck that *chica* and fuck this too, and fuck you, and fuck your horse - what, you don’t give a shit?”

“No.”

“Well fine then! I’ll just follow you around fucking shouting and annoying you until you tell me what the *fuck* is happening right now!” Sombra felt like the rug had been yanked out from underneath her, and now she was reeling while a woman she’d *thought* was her friend just walked away, didn’t even wait around to watch her flounder, and she hated it.

Maybe Gabe had been right.

He’d been talking about that. Saying she should be careful about getting too close to Widowmaker. That the assassin might not be the way she’d seemed.

Had he known, somehow - had she *said* something to him? That didn’t make any sense, but maybe he knew some other way.

Sombra stopped following Widowmaker. Planted her feet still in the hallway and just stood as her former friend continued to walk away in total disinterest. She didn’t look back over her shoulder. She didn’t call back. She didn’t wave.

She didn’t seem to care in the slightest.

...she *did*, though. Widowmaker *did* care, in the slightest at least - a little irritating fragment of thought lodged in her mind and refused to be loosened, setting her teeth grinding against each other as she walked down the hallway, but she let no outward appearance show.

No sign.

Sombra stared. Widowmaker just kept walking away.

Had Gabe been right?

Had Widowmaker been lying this whole time?

...was this finally the truth coming out?

He’d warned her.

“No,” Sombra grunted to herself, and then shouted it out louder. “No! *No*, fuck that - you want me gone?” She sprinted down the hallway and caught Widowmaker’s arm, tugging her around. “You want me gone you’d better fucking tell me *why*, alright? Because after all this *bullshit* I deserve a fuckin’ explanation at least!”

Widowmaker frowned, tugging her arm free a little more energetically than she’d meant - there were all these impulses. The impulse to snap, to shout, to grab Sombra and pull her close, to hit her, to choke her, throw her against the floor or the wall; they ran into each other like vehicles in some catastrophic road accident and left her mind a muddled mess, but she kept to her act, kept to her script.

It had all been decided. All she needed to do now was play the part.

“There is nothing to explain.” She shook her head. “I simply do not care to have you around.”
“Nope!” Sombra forced a defiant laugh. “Nope, fuck that, not buying it. Fine, you wanna be silent? I’ll just annoy an answer out of you like I always do!”

Widowmaker’s jaw clenched, just for an instant, just barely. Sombra was right. She did always seem to manage that; it was infuriating, and Widowmaker knew it. It occurred to her, in the back of her mind, that her heart rate was oddly high at the moment. A ten percent increase, but she refused to give in.

“Nope,” she shook her head. No scoff. “It was all an act. Every faux moment.”

“Nope.” Sombra grinned widely, shaking her head and crossing her arms. “Nope, not buying it. Fuck you and fuck Gabe too and I don’t give a shit what either of you say about it, you’re my friend. Fuck off.”

*Oh, how friendly indeed.* Widowmaker resisted the urge to say that, to roll her eyes, to scowl or smirk - she wanted to, but that would only make it worse. That would only draw them closer, only let Sombra in more to where she could be ripped away to devastating effect.

It was better to amputate a limb early - better to lose a finger than let the sickness spread and risk losing the whole arm. Better to waste ten dollars on the slot machine, than to win five thousand and then lose it anyway.

The next time might not be a test. The next time bullets might fly, straight into Sombra’s head, and she would have no recourse save for to watch it all over again, and she would not mourn in the aftermath, and she would not feel guilty as she picked up her once-friend’s corpse, and she would shoot her a hundred times if she was ordered to. A thousand.

She would never feel a shred of guilt for it.

If she was going to lose Sombra anyway, it might as well be on her terms.

That was the reason. The reason she refused to say.

“There is no reason.” She turned away to leave. Again, Sombra darted in front of her, and Widowmaker stifled a noise - bit it back entirely and kept it silent. It was closer that time, though. Closer to escape.

“No, there is.” Sombra glared openly. “Don’t treat me like some kind of idiot, you don’t do shit without a reason so fuck off.”

She wanted to roll her eyes again, and wanted to throttle Sombra as well - to pick her up and slam her back against the wall. She did none of that, though, only looked at her blankly. “Wrong again. Perhaps it is not only my treatment of you as an idiot, hmm? Perhaps it is fact.”

“Ha, an insult!” Sombra pointed at her with a grin. “Now we’re getting somewhere, now fucking-”

“You are getting nowhere, because there is nowhere to get, nothing is happening,” Widowmaker interrupted with a sigh, keeping the noise from drifting too guttural - but it was getting harder. She wanted to press a hand to her forehead, to pinch the bridge of her nose, to elbow Sombra in the solar plexus or pull her close for a hug, or both.

“Yes I am!” The hacker laughed. “I’m getting there. I know this shit *chica*, it’s what I do - now tell me what’s happening.”

“Nothing is happening.” Another turn away, another dodge, Sombra in front of her again.
“Yes it is! Just tell me-”

“You are wrong.” Widowmaker turned again, Sombra dodged around in front again, and Widowmaker could only think of how she’d looked through the scope.

“What the fuck is going on and-”

“You are wrong.” How she would have looked an instant later, shock and fear and betrayal and pain etched across her face as blood splattered and she slumped to her knees.

“And why the fuck you want me gone so bad and-”

“You are wrong!” How she’d look a minute later, cold and limp and flat and dead on the floor, forever, gone forever and dead just like Gérard, relegated to paintings and photographs and a tombstone.

“And would you just GIVE ME A FUCKING REASON ALREADY!”

Widowmaker snapped. The mask shattered, her lips curling back dangerously as she grabbed the front of Sombra’s jacket with both hands, picking her off of the floor and slamming her back against the wall.

“BECAUSE,” the sniper shouted angrily, violently, before forcing it back down to a simmering growled hiss between her teeth, “because if I want you here, that can be taken away from me!”

There it was. Out in the open between them, in every angry line on Widowmaker’s face and in the shine of Sombra’s wide, wet, and shocked eyes.

The truth.

“And if I want you gone, it cannot.” Widowmaker’s words came out as a whisper as she stared blankly into Sombra’s eyes.

There wasn’t that pain there in those purple eyes anymore, or at least not of the same sort - not the confused pain at what was being done to her, but something much softer and more distant that looked disturbingly like pity and Widowmaker hated it.

She looked away in disgust.

“Okay.”

In an instant, her eyes were on Sombra’s again. “What?”

“Okay,” the hacker repeated hoarsely. “Okay, I get it. I’ll leave.”

“Sombra-”

“No, it’s-” the hacker swallowed heavily, looking down at her own hands, off along the hallway, anywhere other than into Widowmaker’s eyes. “It’s fine, chica. It’s… I get it, alright? Trust me. I do. It’s fine, I can just-” She tried to push herself out from the wall, to walk away, to leave.

She couldn’t, though.

Widowmaker still had her pinned.

Fighting back tears, fighting back a whole lot of shit that she wanted to do, Sombra forced herself to
look at the sniper’s face and offer her a smile. The best one she could manage.

It was shit.

It was the worst smile she’d ever forced, but it was a fucking smile at least. She was sticking this thing out. If Widowmaker needed her gone, then… well, there was only one thing to do.

For a friend.

“Amiga? It’s alright, okay, but you- you gotta let go.”

“...non.”

Sombra frowned at the soft whisper. “What-”

“I-” Widowmaker sighed in frustration, letting her head fall forward until her crown rested against the point of Sombra’s shoulder. “Putain, either way I lose you, it-” she laughed, letting her head rock left and right against Sombra’s shoulder.

Even if the feelings weren’t real - a fact that Widowmaker was less certain of right now than she had been ten minutes ago - they were there. That hollow pit of loss, that emptiness. Imagined or not, it was present.

It had, perhaps, been so easy to emulate because it had been what she was headed toward. Perhaps even what she had already been mired in.

Widowmaker sighed, long and low and resigned before raising her head and shaking it. “You are already too far in.” She let out a chuckle as she met Sombra’s eyes. “There really is no keeping you out of anywhere, is there?”

Sombra snickered, wiping a tear from her cheek. “Yeah, I know, right? Hey uh-” she swallowed heavily, her lower lip trembling in the moonlight that drifted through the window. “D’you uh… you wanna… watch a movie?”

For a moment, a long moment, Widowmaker just stared back at her. Eyes glistening on the very verge of tears, face shifting with little muscular tics that spoke of an expression only barely being held under control, breaths short and sharp and uneven.

All of that, and the foolish girl still wanted to watch her movies.

There was only one answer. She nodded slightly, wordlessly, and smiled softly at Sombra’s sigh of relief.

“Okay, just do me one favour,” Sombra muttered as her feet touched the floor again, as she caught Widowmaker’s elbow with her own and laid her hand on the sniper’s forearm for them to walk down the hallway. “Never do that shit again.”

“Mm, no favour required,” Widowmaker grumbled in response. “Quite unpleasant, the entire experience.”

Sombra laughed. “Yeah, you’re telling me! Damn, you owe me some shit after that.”

Widowmaker let out a laugh, high and bright and just slightly mocking. “Ahh, chérie, always trying to find some way to twist a situation to your benefit, aren’t you? Quite the little weasel.”

Chuckling, Sombra nodded. She liked the sound of Widowmaker’s laugh and it wasn’t common
enough. It always felt like a success when she could get it. Even if the cost had maybe been a little higher this time, but she had a feeling she wouldn’t be asked to pay up again. Not like that. “Yup,” she sniffled, “that’s me - greedy, greedy bitch.”

Widowmaker scoffed a single laugh. “You and I both, cherie, now come - what will we be watching?”

---

She didn’t care about the movie.

Unbeknownst to her, neither did Sombra - Sombra only cared about two things: the fact that Widowmaker wasn’t pulling that fucked-up shit anymore, and the fact that she’d basically admitted entirely that they were friends. Other than that, she didn’t care about a single thing.

Except for maybe a little bit about the arm wrapped around her middle and the fingernails scratching gently at her scalp. The slight chill on her sensitive skin. The soft noises of breathing behind her.

And a whole lot of other feelings and internal shit that was just straight-up terrifying her. A whole mess of thoughts and emotions that she was trying to just not think about.

So she cared about a lot. Mostly, though, just the first two things.

Widowmaker, on the other hand, didn’t care about much at all. Not actively, not right then - she certainly didn’t care about the movie, and in fact could not have said three things about the plot if she’d been asked.

Her mind was lodged on a thought. An unpleasant enough occurrence and frustratingly more common these days, but she supposed that perhaps that was the price to be paid for certain improvements.

It was commonplace that she would not stop thinking about blood. Some might even have called it ubiquitous, in fact; it was ever-present in her mind, her thoughts painted in bold red strokes by an unseen brush.

This, though, was different.

The idea stuck uncomfortably in her mind, jutting out sharply and derailing any other thoughts - the idea of what would have happened, had she taken the shot.

A tiny, brief glimmer of optimism that perhaps this was guilt was swiftly shot down. It was not guilt. She did not feel guilt for Gérard, nor for her mouse’s imprisonment, and she certainly did not feel guilt over not having shot Sombra.

Yet, at the same time, there was something of a parallel there, Sombra to Tracer. The idea of the shot - the location, the precise placement of the bullet - lodged in Widowmaker’s mind not unlike the sight of those red-raw and bleeding rings around Tracer’s wrists.

She didn’t even realize when the movie ended.

Sombra did notice when it was over. She just didn’t care. The screen disappeared at a gesture from
her and she pushed herself a little bit back on the couch, into Widowmaker’s waiting arms as they laid down front-to-back. After being so close to leaving, she wanted to stay.

It wasn’t often she got legitimately scared. Earlier that night had been disorienting enough though that it was one of the few times.

After a while - five minutes, or ten - she noticed that one of Widowmaker’s hands had migrated to her shoulder. Her arm wrapped around Sombra’s chest and her hand resting on the shoulder, and her thumb rubbed circles in one very particular spot.

It would drift for a moment, outward or upward, or still in its movements, but it would always start up again. Always the exact same motion, the exact same place. It reminded her of Satya, that fixation.

“Chica?” Sombra was, given the night’s events, more than a little hesitant but more than a little emboldened as well. A near miss was scary, but averting one always left her feeling the tiniest bit invincible. She didn’t look back, didn’t turn around to face Widowmaker, but she did need to ask. “What’s up here? Something else you’re not saying. It’s got something to do with this, doesn’t it?”

She raised a hand and touched it to Widowmaker’s, chilled, staying its tiny circles for a second. Normally, she wouldn’t have mentioned it, but none of this was normal.

A slow sigh of cold breath tickled at her neck and sent goosebumps down her back, congregating particularly at the metal ridges emerging from the skin over her spine where her cybernetics protruded.

“This is where I was going to shoot you.”

Sombra’s breath stopped - it didn’t leave her, didn’t leap from her, didn’t cut off in a sharp gasp inward or outward, it simply stopped dead exactly where it was, halfway through an inhalation.

“A few days ago,” Widowmaker sounded somewhere between tired and bored as she explained, her thumb pressing a little harder. The left shoulder. “Just below the arch of the subclavian vein. Just above the lung. Painful, traumatic, but… not fatal.”

Sombra wasn’t quite sure, but that almost sounded like a request. Like a plea. She slowly flipped around - Widowmaker didn’t want to let her at first, tightened her embrace, but Sombra continued and the assassin relented.

She wasn’t crying when Sombra saw her face. No tears in golden eyes, but a slight frown on blue lips. Her hand remained on Sombra’s shoulder. It wasn’t a huge couch and didn’t leave a massive amount of room for them both to be lying on it face-to-face, and for a moment, the hacker was stunned by Widowmaker’s eyes. She’d seen them before, sure.

Never from this close, though. Not like this.

“What?” Sombra barely breathed the question, and Widowmaker’s eyes dropped instantly to the spot in question, the entry wound that had never happened.

“It was a test,” she explained softly, her voice incrementally quieter than Sombra’s. “Reaper was… doubtful of my conditioning. He said as much himself, said he prized loyalty. Asked what I would do if I was told to shoot you.”

“Gabe wouldn’t make you shoot me.” She didn’t want to believe anything about what she was hearing right now. Not that Gabe would put her life on the line like that, and not that Widowmaker
would weigh it up that easily either.

Widowmaker frowned. It was what had happened, regardless of what the foolish girl thought. “He is not your friend, cherie. You are - as we all are, to him - a means to an end.”

Sombra didn’t respond to that, not in words, but she did in the silence of her mind. Yeah, he said the same thing about you, amiga. Fuck that. Fuck you both, we’re all friends. I’ll just keep hammering it in until you dumbasses get it.

“...so you were gonna shoot me?” Sombra’s brows drew inward, instinctively.

“It was only a test.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Widowmaker’s eyes flicked back to Sombra’s - purple and shining but resolute, the ever-present smirk lacking from her lips. A flat and stony expression. She was almost impressed at it, and wanted to laugh, to congratulate Sombra on - for once in her life - being solemn.

She didn’t, though.

“Yes.” Widowmaker blinked. “I was going to shoot you.”

She sighed out what was left of the breath in her lungs, her eyes dropping away. “It was only after that point that I considered truly what this might mean, and the negative effects that having you torn away would have. This was when I resolved to take early action - to remove you now, rather than let you work your way further in. That was my plan tonight, but…”

She laughed lightly, barely breathed a laugh as her eyes searched upward. Her words were almost impossibly soft, wry and plain. “Ah, there really is no keeping you out, is there? There is no plan you cannot ruin. You… chaotic mess.”

When she looked straight ahead again, the few scant inches between her eyes and Sombra’s, she found that the hacker was crying. Tears welled up and slid cleanly from wide eyes, dripping sideways into the couch.

Ah. Widowmaker sighed, shaking her head just slightly. I was hoping to avoid this again.

This was all the truth accomplished; pain. Perhaps it was best, though. It would ensure the distance she sought, at least - and it would ensure Sombra’s safety more as well. Tests were always more effective when they involved something close, something prized, and there were not the same options with Sombra that there were with Tracer and Emily.

Widowmaker could ensure her distance from the other two. They could all three promise to keep separation, and if she never saw them she could never shoot them - it was that simple. Sombra, though? Widowmaker knew she would always be at the hacker’s back.

This would be better. It was lamentable that Sombra had been hurt in it, but it was only her heart that had been hurt. Yes, it was perhaps a betrayal to know that a friend would kill her, but it was the truth.

...and conveniently, would lead to a situation where Widowmaker would not need to kill her.

That was all she had wanted out of the night anyway. She’d always known it would hurt Sombra. From the moment her finger had graced the trigger, Sombra was going to get hurt.
Better to survive in pain than die without it.

Widowmaker’s lips parted to say something else, to state that it was better this way. They could part, go their separate ways - they could state that they were unable to work together anymore. Get assignments to different teams, and Sombra would never need to be within range of her rifle again.

It still felt like loss. It still felt infuriatingly like loss and she cursed her past foolishness for letting things get to this point. If she’d acted sooner, this would not need to hurt.

Hurt Sombra, of course.

She never got a chance to say any of it, though - not a thing she had planned, because as soon as her lips parted, they were blocked by another set. Purple-painted and so very warm, pressed softly against hers. Just for an instant.

The unexpectedness of it shocked her into stillness for a second, which was all it took for Sombra to withdraw and look her in the eyes with an expression Widowmaker couldn’t peel apart into its components.

“Don’t read too much into that,” Sombra whispered softly, then chuckled and wiped at her tear-streaked cheek with a hand as she set her mask back into place, smirk returning to her lips. “You can be a real stupid bitch sometimes, you know that amiga?” That hand came to rest on the side of Widowmaker’s face and she turned instinctively to the warmth, just barely, still looking on in surprise. “Damn I gotta teach you how to trust your friends.” You and Gabe both.

“Ha!” Widowmaker scoffed. “Friends. Trust. Oh, you are foolish though.”

“Sure, I’m the foolish one,” Sombra sighed as she pulled her head in to rest against Widowmaker’s shoulder. “We’ll see about that.”

She cleared her throat a little, shaking her head into Widowmaker’s shoulder. “Hey uh… listen, I need a shower, so I’m gonna go do that. Mind if I spend the night? Just a real pain in the ass to get home. So like, make some room in your fuckin’ bed, chica. If you think I’m gonna be all cuddly and shit, well,” she laughed, “you’d be right. So get ready for that shit too. Don’t read too much into it.”

Widowmaker laughed, half-derisively, shaking her head. “Oh, of course. Simply make yourself at home - what else would I expect, by this point, hmm?”

Whatever it had been, her expectation for the night, it certainly wasn’t this. Shock and outrage and pain - anger she had been prepared for, or perhaps dismissiveness in turn as Sombra brushed the whole incident off, but this was… unexpected.

Perhaps Tracer and Emily weren’t the only ones capable of surprising her.

“Good.” Sombra chuckled, pushing herself back off of the couch. “And if you make fun of my fluffy bunny pajamas, I’m gonna do something real mean.”

“Like what?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow.

“I’m gonna mix red wine and white and drink it in front of you.”

The sniper’s eyes narrowed, her lips pulling back as she growled, “You would not dare.”

Sombra flashed her a defiant grin. “Try me. Now I’m just saying, there’s some spots on my back I got real trouble reaching in the shower, so…”
Widowmaker rolled her eyes as she rolled fluidly off of the couch and onto her feet. “Am I right to believe that you will tell me not to read too much into that, either?”

In response, Sombra threw her a wink. “Oh no, that you can read plenty into...”

Chapter End Notes

There are a few lines and a few passages in this that I really, really liked and am quite proud of; there are others I'm more tentative toward as well, heh. In general it's a highly emotionally charged and rapid-fire, very active scene in the latter half of the chapter, and those can often be tough to realize. What do you think - did I do a decent job?

So, realizations all around! Tracer realized she loves Widdy, and Widdy realized she uh... doesn't want to throw Sombra away. Something. She kind of realized that she has feelings? Some, at least. I think the denial's starting to come out a little bit more; it's a powerful thing, denial and self-delusion. We create our own worlds in some ways.

I'll be honest, I wasn't originally calling Spiderbyte for this story, but that's where it went. Kinda. I mean it's still pretty soft and I think it'll sort of stay that way, but uh - ehh, we'll see, eh? I underestimated the strength of Sombra's feelings and also the way a coupe of things that happened would influence them; truth be told, this scene was not in my mind from the beginning of the story. At the start, Sombra was going to have a much smaller part.

It really is impossible to keep her out of anywhere, isn't it? XD

I hope you like it, though. I do. I realize that it might upset some hardcore Widow/Tracer fans, but honestly they might already have been scared off by the inclusion of Emily? I don't know, and I hope that nobody feels betrayed or overturned by this development (or possible developments which may come), but I think I can be safe in assuring you that everything will end well. Eventually.

...it may take a million words, but it will eventually end well. Between here and there? Oh, there'll be a lot of ups and a lot of downs, believe you me, my friends..

So, winter's here and holidays with them! How about that Orisa emote, eh? Puppies == good stuff! I can imagine Winston getting her that puppy, definitely, and Em and Lena sitting off to the side just dying from the cuteness.

I may or may not end up releasing holiday-y fics? Because I'm writing a bunch (in theory) as gifts for people, but I'll leave it up to them as to whether they're already with them being released to the general public.

As always, I would love to hear from you - the word count just keeps rising, but this is actually looking good from my end of things. With the eye behind the scenes, it's all going well; I want to thank you all again for reading, for commenting, leaving kudos, mentioning it to friends or what have you - even just for being cool people. Everything you do, I appreciate, so thank you! :D

EDIT: An absolutely awesome, unexpected, and beautiful piece of fanart was done about this! Thank you so so much to IceImagines (icewuerfelchen on tumblr) who did
this!
I think it's really awesome! The hair's beautiful, the shadows are great, and I also really like the expression and body language - Widowmaker's eyebrows drawn in like that, she doesn't exactly look certain about it, but with the hand at Sombra's back it's also clear that she's not pulling away. I think it captures the dichotomy and disconnect pretty well, with Widowmaker trying to force herself into pulling away where she actually wants to be close. I like it a lot! It's really awesome, and I love it, so go shoot them a thanks or something like that if you like :D

C'mon back next week when Widdy places a call, and surprise surprise, it gets a little interrupted by a certain purple-haired hacker (who shall remain nameless). Widowmaker, Emily, Lena, and Sombra, all in a phone call - it'll be just like movie night, right? Mmmmaybe not.
**The Spider and the Flies**

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker calls the pair, Tracer and Emily, to talk about an incident. The incident in question being the previous night's events with Sombra, and it leads to some unexpected frustrations and problems. Feelings can always cause difficulties and this is hardly any exception, as Tracer struggles with the pain that comes from not being able to tell Widowmaker she's in love.

JFL Summary: Sombra sings poorly, Tracer's like a flag, and everybody joins a nudity club and takes a shower. Widowmaker's grumpy, because she's Widowmaker - but then she mixes things up by being grumpy instead. Emily denies being the sensible one.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker tried to push Sombra away - to convince the hacker that she didn’t care in the slightest, that there was no point to pursuing any sort of friendship or anything at all. She hoped that she could make Sombra leave before she was required to kill the hacker, an event she had begun to see as far too likely. However, she evidently had underestimated Sombra's determination, because the hacker managed to eke an actual response out of Widowmaker, and the truth as well. After that, Sombra offered to leave - to make herself scarce, as it were, but Widowmaker refused to let her. The two instead spent the night watching a movie which neither paid attention to, and they talked a little more, and in a moment of panic and other emotions, Sombra kissed Widowmaker. Just briefly. Sombra assured Widowmaker that she would be staying the night. Widowmaker let her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Widowmaker wondered what exactly it was that coloured her thoughts.

Some form of worry it seemed, but over what, she couldn’t imagine - although, she did grin slyly to herself when she considered the similarities between this situation and the situation she’d attempted to leverage months and months ago, when first becoming entangled with that intriguing and annoying little mouse.

Quite different, of course… but not without its similarities.

However, it was not her mouse who answered the call, anyway.

“Ah, cerise,” Widowmaker nodded slightly, “is… she there as well?”

“Shower,” Emily explained simply, nodding her wet-haired head back over her shoulder and rubbing at it with a towel.

“Ahhhh,” Widowmaker nodded knowingly with a grin that matched. “And she made you leave in
order to answer the phone, I see.”

“Hardly made,” Emily retorted softly with a roll of her eyes and a slight blush that was half from lingering heat and half from piercing gold eyes. “It’s nice to see you!” She couldn’t separate the conversation from new knowledge, the realization Lena had confessed to her, and her grin was particularly wide as a result.

“So it would seem.” Widowmaker eyed her through the screen, lamenting two things: the fact that it was a screen at all, and the fact that it cut off at the freckles a few inches below Emily’s collarbone. She could see a droplet of water sliding over them, and then it disappeared, and it was unfair to be teased by an inanimate object. “We must be finished with this soon,” she growled in conclusion to her own thoughts.

“Well, you’ll hear no complaints from me on that front,” Emily sighed, prodding the tip of the towel into her ears to get the water out from them. “And as always, if there’s anything I can do to help…” she shrugged, draping the towel over her shoulders to catch at least some of the drips from her hair. They were so much colder out here in a room than they had been in the shower.

Widowmaker had a lot of respect for Emily’s reaction to helplessness - or perhaps, it was simply that the redhead had such a drastically different definition of helplessness. She herself grew irritated at the thought of fetters and restrictions, the concept that she was being withheld and provided no path to walk to ensure it ended swiftly, no opportunity of escape.

Which was not to say that she didn’t appreciate occasionally restricting someone else.

Yet, Emily seemed not to mind. Not in the same way, at least - she grew determined and resolute in it, rather than hopeless. She had her glimpses of the latter perhaps, but by and large she only dug in all the firmer for it.

“I do wish that there was, chérie,” Widowmaker murmured with a soft shake of her head. “We are doing all we can, and we are-”

They didn’t seem to truly be making much progress. She didn’t, at least. That mission which had nearly resulted in Sombra’s injury (or death) had seemed so successful at first, but then Reaper’s suspicions persisted into the dropship and beyond.

The next day, at the base, he had left the firing range the instant she arrived, stalking past her with a growl as if he refused to even be in the same room with her - yet she saw him moments later, up in the observation parlour which overlooked the range. No doubt he’d thought himself hidden in the shadows, but she had seen him.

She could swear that she knew when his eyes were on her, regardless of whether she saw it. Swore that she could always tell, despite not actually seeing his eyes, whether he was fixated on her or something else.

Lately it had been, all the more frequently and all the more frustratingly, her.

“We are doing well enough,” she grumbled. “Sombra particularly. She has… been making more progress than I in deciphering his true intentions and concerns at least. He does certainly suspect me, has begun to warn her off of me.”

Yet, even with that, it hadn’t been enough to drive Sombra away. Perhaps she was more rebellious, more anti-authority, than Widowmaker had given her credit for. Interesting.

“In the meantime,” Widowmaker shrugged with a slight sigh, “I have been holding his suspicions at
bay and playing the perfect part of my prior self. The plan continues, though at an *infuriatingly* slow pace.”

Emily nodded with a reassuring smile as Lena walked out of the bathroom behind her, towel wrapped tightly around her body. Upon seeing that it was Widdy on the screen, she waved delightedly and pulled the towel off to dry her absurd hair.

“In the pursuit of which,” Widowmaker continued unhindered and unperturbed despite her eyes’ new focus, roaming her mouse’s body, “I nearly shot Sombra a few days ago.”

“What?” Emily exclaimed, wide-eyed, but Lena only scoffed.

“Oh, love, that hardly means anything.” Lena waved a hand, flashing a teasing smirk to the screen. “Pretty sure that’s how they *flirt* anyway.”

“No, it is true,” Widowmaker insisted with a small nod. “He was probing at my loyalties, wondering over what would happen were I ordered to shoot her - there could be only one answer, and that is that I must do what I am ordered, so I nearly shot her.”

“Yeah! What kind of friend does that?”

The words drifted in from elsewhere, a distant call from a different room, echoing amidst a rhythmic sound.

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed just slightly, as she’d evidently underestimated Sombra’s ability to hear into another room. The woman took a truly prolific number of showers - whether for warmth or cleanliness or simply because she liked being naked, Widowmaker couldn’t guess, but she’d thought that having the hacker away and submerged in running water would be enough to prevent her from overhearing the conversation.

Evidently, not.

“The kind who is trying to not murder her g-” Widowmaker’s head turned back over her shoulder, but when she reached the word which was ever so hard to correctly grasp, her eyes flicked momentarily to the screen where Emily sat looking amused and Tracer looking stunned sitting next to her.

*Merde.*

“Whatsoever they are,” Widowmaker called back dismissively (over quite audible laughter that echoed out of the bathroom), “I am trying to not murder them, and it is to that end that I nearly shot you, *sous les, fermez-la, et si tu-*”

“Anybody else get turned on when she speaks French?” Sombra’s voice came out cleanly through the speakers of the phone then, though overlaid with the loud splatter of water.

A second later another floating screen joined the first one projecting Widdy’s face from Emily’s phone. Sombra’s grin was on it, hair slicked down entirely by wetness and water pressure from the shower as she waved. “*Hola, amigas!*”

“Heya,” Tracer waved slightly and then shrugged with a bit of a smirk, “and uh, yeah, I do too.”

“I knew I liked you, *chica,*” Sombra grinned as her eyes flicked that way, but Widowmaker was evidently not prepared to be so suddenly and so totally interrupted.
“You are the most infuriating-” she cut off in a groan, pinching at the bridge of her nose. “It was my own mistake to involve any other person in this call. I should only have spoken with the sensible one.”

Emily glanced around as if in confusion. “Well, I know you can’t be talking about me, love.” She giggled slightly, waving to the screen - whilst, at the same time, ensuring that it was at least an angle that maintained some decency. She liked the hacker well enough from their interactions, but that didn’t mean she was going to go around flashing her without at least saying something first. “Hi Sombra.”

“Ah, it’s nice that we’re all wearing matching outfits,” the showering hacker smirked at the pair of them before flashing an irritated look off slightly to the side. “Hey, when are you gonna join the club, amiga?”

“When you go and-” Widowmaker sighed. “Never. I am never joining the club. There, are you happy? I will be clothed forever. Now shut up and finish your shower, and let me talk to my-” a noise was suddenly strangled off as a word was aborted before it could be fully realized. “To my…” another sigh and she waved at the screen. “To them. D’accord?”

Sombra sighed, rolling her eyes. “Yeah, yeah, fine - on one condition, you gotta come in here and wash my back. I wasn’t kidding about those spots I can’t reach; all this tech’s got its price, you know?”

“Showers are immensely well-suited to bloodletting, Sombra,” Widowmaker seethed, “now shut up, hang up, and I swear if you start singing again I will strangle you.”

“Sure thing, chica! See ya in a minute.”

Sombra’s face disappeared and the sound of her shower cut out from the speakers, and a few seconds later, the sound of particularly bad singing in Spanish drifted in through Widowmaker’s room.

The assassin just took a deep breath and sighed it out slowly, shaking her head the barest amount. When she was empty of breath, one shoulder lifted in a tiny shrug. “So. Sombra is here.”

“I can see that!” Emily chirped brightly with a grin that nearly overran her face. Lena laughed, but the sound cut off suddenly as her eyes flew wide and her jaw dropped. “Oh god could she see that whole time? I was flashing meself about like a bloody flag!”

“Mm, et merci,” Widowmaker murmured thoughtfully with a smirk which she followed with a shrug. “I suspect she could see, yes. I suspect she already has. She is infuriatingly difficult to keep out of anything.”

Emily cleared her throat a little, settling back against the headboard of the bed. “Yeah, it would seem that way. S’pose some would stop trying, eh?”

Widowmaker frowned a little, nodding, her thoughts mostly distant. They stretched back through the prior day and touched on things further - Sombra through the scope, and further back than that, to earlier days of initial meetings and clumsy attempts on the hacker’s part at winning favour.

“Yesterday… I did just that.” She shook her head with a sigh, eyes focusing on the screen as she offered the other two a smile. “I suppose I should explain from the beginning.”
Briefly, she ran through the events of the prior night - she did put a bit of a different spin on some specifics, however. Emily and Tracer both sat in rapt attention, loosely snuggled against each other, and Widowmaker was unable to pull her mind away from the thought of how much she would prefer to be there.

Yet, she could not be. She had her part to play, and right now, it consisted of the explanation. Annoyingly.

“So you figured if you could get Sombra pissed off enough,” Lena nodded her head slowly as she tried to paraphrase it all succinctly, “that she’d get herself assigned to a different team or summat? And then she wouldn’t be near you, so you couldn’t kill her as easily if you were ordered.”

“Because she’s helping you with all the concerns,” Emily provided, with a look in her eyes that Widowmaker suspected she recognized.

She suspected she recognized it, because it was one of her own - the one she used when she repeated a partial truth, a convenient concealment, and when she knew that it was so. She wasn’t surprised that Emily might suspect there was something more to it than simply protecting the aid that was being rendered.

At the same time, she was glad that she was not being asked exactly what. She suspected that, as with most things, this was an intentional extension on Emily’s part.

However, the redhead wasn’t the only one in the conversation.

“So what went wrong?” Lena frowned at the screen, raising an eyebrow. “No offence love, but I think it’s tough to imagine a person who you couldn’t drive off.”

“You have clearly not met yourself,” Widowmaker retorted swiftly, drawing a splutter from Tracer and a grin from Emily. “Nor her, nor Sombra. She is… very adept at certain things. I…” she hated failing, “failed.”

Lena nodded at the screen a little, snuggling up underneath Emily’s draped arm and wrapping one over her belly in turn. “Is…” she trailed off, suddenly a little nervous at what the whole thing was implying. If Widdy was trying that hard to drive her off - well, it didn’t bode well for anything. If Reaper was starting to grow suspicious not just of Widowmaker but of Sombra as well, that would be very bad indeed.

“Is it really that serious though? D’you really need Sombra’s help that much - I mean, not to speak ill of her or anything, but-” she blinked, shaking her head slightly. “Speaking of, how d’we know she’s not still listening?”

Widowmaker shrugged. “Je ne sais pas, mais, I can say with confidence that that is not the case. I do not need her help, not in the slightest - indeed, she has been quite the opposite of helpful this entire time. Unhelpful and un-funny, and entirely unattractive. She is quite ugly, in fact.”

She paused for a moment, expectantly, as the other two slowly frowned in confusion. Then, with a chuckle, Widowmaker spoke again. “Ah, there we are - as much proof as I believe can be offered. Sombra is not listening in. She would be unable to resist some comment at insults such as those.”

Grinning, Lena chuckled in relief as she caught on to the words’ purpose. “Oh, well, good then. So… d’you not need her help then?”

“It.” Widowmaker sighed, frowning slightly as her eyes searched the blank space in front of her for some answer. She shifted on her chair, subtly, slightly, but uncomfortably.
Nothing had been uncomfortable previously, but nothing had truly been comfortable either. Save for one or two exceptions, and sadly she could not always be killing.

Perhaps discomfort was the price of contentment.

Yet, it never had seemed to matter quite as much with Tracer, with her mouse. Perhaps it was her own knowledge of how quickly she knew she could spin the situation around - how easily she could pull the conversation back and onto rails she liked. For whatever reason, uncomfortable conversations were often less uncomfortable with her mouse.

“I realized during the mission,” Widowmaker murmured softly, eyes still unfocused, “that I would lament Sombra’s loss if I killed her. That it would count as loss, as so few people would. I did not want her to be dead - I wanted to kill her, but I did not want her to be dead or gone. It is an uncommon desire…” her eyes found focus again on the screen, on the faces of her two- whatever they were, and she nodded once. “A worrying desire in that circumstance. I resolved to rid myself of it, of the worry.”

“You what?” Lena laughed slightly.

“It is not so uncommon to feel that way toward friends, is it?” The assassin raised a teasing eyebrow. “Wanting them to live?”

“Well-” Lena laughed again briefly. “No, yeah, it’s- I mean, that makes sense. But generally when you have friends and want them alive, you also want them to… y’know, not be scared off from you and stuff. You want ’em close by.”

Slowly, Widowmaker’s head tipped to one side - not a nod, exactly, but it felt almost like one. At the same time, she was studying Tracer quite closely. She wasn’t surprised when it was Emily who spoke next.

“Harder to lose a friend who’s already gone, innit?”

Soft words, accompanied by a little squeeze that drew Lena’s head over, her eyes seeking out Em’s in confusion.

“Remember how you felt about your dog Dave, love? When you were little.” Emily stroked a hand idly along Lena’s bicep. “How - toward the end, when he was doing more poorly, every time you got home from school…”

Realization settled over Lena’s face as a frown as she thought back to him - a big old shaggy sheepdog, so many cataracts he just sat on the floor for fifteen hours out of the day. She’d loved him, she’d absolutely loved him - even though he hadn’t been hers, not technically, not really - but dogs only live so long and his days had been numbered.

“...I kinda hoped I’d find him gone,” she finished pensively, sadly, remembering back to younger - if not necessarily happier - days. Hoping to see the door cracked open, to find her ailing and beloved friend simply gone, vanished, rather than anything worse. “Rather than finding him dead.”

Emily nodded, tipping her head over until their foreheads touched; she held the gesture for a moment before pressing a soft kiss to Lena’s nose, a kiss which Lena reacted to swiftly, lifting her chin to catch a second one on her lips.

“Oui, exactement,” Widowmaker nodded, pleased that her motives had been so easily understood and explained. “Sombra is to me as your pet, then, perhaps.”
“She’s in your shower, love,” Emily reminded gently with a raised eyebrow and a smirk, but Widowmaker only shrugged.

“Wait- you said all this happened last night? So she spent the night then?” Lena frowned at the screen a little, trying to work out the math and wondering - for a moment - whether it was that apartment in London.

She quickly realized that it couldn’t be, because that apartment had no shower, and no other rooms - which could only mean that Sombra was now in an apartment or a home that she herself had never been in.

That realization - maybe piling on top of sad memories - struck uncomfortably close to her heart; a whole section of Widowmaker’s life which she wasn’t a part of, but Sombra was. Hardly the only one, either. How much time did they spend together? Enough that Widdy thought it was dangerous.

There wasn’t much the sniper thought was dangerous, as far as Lena could tell. Pretty much only things she cared about.

“Mm, yes,” Widowmaker nodded, “but that hardly matters.”

“Wow,” Lena let out a single laugh, “I thought I was joking when I called you two a couple.”

Even as she said it, she realized that the words sounded more flat than she meant, more hollow. Not exactly bitter, but far too close to it for her comfort, and heat rose into her cheeks from a sudden tight feeling in her chest as Widdy’s face started to shift.

The words were nothing new, but they had only ever been joking in the past. However, they suddenly seemed not to be - as she studied her mouse’s face, the little pout of her lip and the way it started to tremble, it was instantly clear that this was no joke. Her first instinct was to scoff and retort that Sombra and her were not a couple in any way, shape, or form.

However, Sombra had kissed her last night, albeit briefly. She had said not to read too much into it, but Widowmaker was no fool. She’d known all along where Sombra’s desires had lain - she’d made her foolish attempts at flirtation and seduction for a long time.

It was her own desires that were all that had ever been in question.

The response died on her lips before it could be given voice, the instinct to say that Tracer was being foolish, and her face shifted to introspection.

The remainder of the night had been chaste. Sombra had, indeed, worn fluffy bunny pyjamas. Widowmaker had donned a silken nightgown herself, the same one she wore now, and the hacker had curled around her tightly. Widowmaker had enjoyed the warmth that it brought, brushes of skin on skin or easy transmission of body heat through thin clothing and warmth trapped in by the covers, the pleasant feelings of her fingers stroking through Sombra’s hair.

At one point, the hacker had cried a little more - whether she was asleep, awake, or partly conscious, Widowmaker could not have said, but Sombra’s arms had tightened around her and a few minutes of soft tears had ensued. Silently. Then, they had been finished.

It had been nice, overall. She had missed holding someone while they slept. The remainder of the night was without incident, largely. A few words or shifts in the sleep every now and then, as Widowmaker lay awake.

Smiling gently in the moonlight. Stroking at Sombra’s hair. Appreciating her warmth, her nearness,
the fact that she wasn’t gone. Wasn’t dead. Wasn’t cold.

Lena’s frown deepened a little as she looked at the screen, the feeling of anxiety and guilt within her intensifying as Widowmaker’s eyebrows drew in but she remained silent. She really had been glad that Widdy had someone else nearby.

…but she really wanted it to be her.

The next heartbeat felt like a hammer on a spike, deep in her chest. One of her hands flashed to a cheek which suddenly bore a tear, and she wiped it away with a sniffle. “I- I don’t—” she cleared her throat.

“It’s alright if it’s a problem, love,” Emily whispered softly into her ear, nuzzling the tip of her nose against Lena’s temple and stroking at her arm. “You should say so if it is, we can deal with it, but it’s—”

Lena cut her off with a shake of the head though, and a little noise that stuck in her throat. “No- I just,” her voice wavered a little as she looked at the screen, at that stupid screen which separated them - separated her from the woman she loved and hadn’t even told yet, all because of the stupid screen.

She wanted to say it, too. Right then. She wanted to say it so badly, but that was a piece of news that deserved better than this. Better than frowns and tears and holoscreens.

“I- I really am glad you’ve got someone there with you.” Lena forced the words as whispers out of her tight throat, tears now streaming freely down her cheeks. “I just— I love you “-I wish it was me. That- that’s horrid, I know, it- I just- I- I—” I love you.

I love you.

Why are we so far apart?

Where even are you right now?

Without me?

With her?

Words failed her entirely, her face twisting into silent agony as Em stroked at the back of her head with a gentle frown.

“How could that be horrid?” Widowmaker scowled in confusion. “Do you think I would not want you to be here? Cherie, I am doing this to regain that, we both are, we all are.”

Tracer managed a few more hoarse words. “I know.” She swallowed heavily. “B-but what h-happens if I’m just… not worth the effort?” Not when there was someone right there who could give the same. Widdy wouldn’t need to work to be with Sombra, she wouldn’t need to hide the relationship, she wouldn’t need it all to be a risk and a secret.

The tense muscles in Widowmaker’s face dissolved into flatness at Tracer’s obvious pain, but it was not due to any lack of thought or reaction. It was, in fact, borne out of much the same impulse that had led her to try to drive Sombra away.

It was easier to be cold and distant.
Tracer deserved better than that, though.

“Cerise,” Widowmaker barely whispered, eyes momentarily flicking to meet Emily’s. “Please, do what I cannot, for her.” A little nod of the head, the briefest of indications. She’d come to feel, at times, as if Emily could almost read her mind.

It was useful to be able to rely upon it.

The little shard of discomfort within her mind eased as the redhead nodded and shifted over, wrapping her arms tightly around Tracer’s slim frame and nuzzling her neck, kissing her shoulder, doing all of the things that Widowmaker wished to but couldn’t. The thought of that limitation gave rise to an entirely different irritation, but now was not the time for that.

Widowmaker locked onto Tracer’s streaming eyes, shaking her head slightly at her mouse’s soft noises of pain. This was not supposed to happen - this was never supposed to happen.

“Ma souris,” Widowmaker murmured, smiling slightly as Emily kissed at Tracer’s ear, Lena’s - just the way she would have, herself. “Nothing will take you away from me. Do you understand? Nothing. I will not let it.”

“D’you wanna talk about it, love?” Em whispered softly into Lena’s ear - she responded with a choked sob that didn’t answer the question at all, but a moment later she nodded and buried her face in the crook of Emily’s shoulder.

Or maybe you just want me to talk about it. Close enough. Emily stroked at the back of her head, turning a soft smile to the screen. “You alright for a bit of uncomfortably genuine and sentimental conversation?”

Widowmaker smirked, a faint chuckle sounding in her chest. Emily was good at that - defusing the tension with jokes. Not the way that Sombra did, not at all; the redhead was subtle with them, and always gave a way out. “Only because I know it means so much to you,” she responded wryly with a slight eyeroll.

Emily laughed brightly, burying her fingers in Lena’s tangled mess of still-wet hair as she continued to cry not too softly. She’d excused herself from the conversation, though - as much as Emily wanted to hear what she thought on the matter, there would be time for it. There was no need to push it.

“I think… I’d like to hear what you want, Widdy.” Emily raised an eyebrow slightly. “And I hope you know there’s no wrong answer to me.”

The assassin tossed her head back for a laugh, light and almost derisive. “Ah, cherie, but of course I know this! With the number of times that I have responded that I want to kill somebody, I would think that this would be obvious. Alors, aussi, I remain unconvinced on that nickname.”

The teasing smirk on her lips twitched toward a more genuine smile as Tracer sobbed a laugh into Emily’s shoulder. Widowmaker’s eyes stayed fixed on her, even as her thoughts drifted away toward the woman who now seemed to be singing two songs at once as she showered.

“What I want…”

A long, drawn-out sigh, as she debated what to say.

“I want you to be here with me. Both of you.” She frowned lightly. “This bed is far too cold without you, and my hours far too empty, it-” a twitch of the face as something she couldn’t quite put into words caught on her thoughts again.
She still couldn’t decide what to call them.

“Alors, je ne sais pas,” she shrugged in defeat, “I do not know how to say it, but suffice to say yes, I want you both here.”

Emily only looked back at her - nodding slightly, encouraging, but still expectant. Of course she was. Widowmaker had known that her thoughts on the pair of them had never been in question: she’d demonstrated them time and time again.

No, it had been her desires regarding Sombra which were the question at hand.

Widowmaker sighed. “And… I believe that some part of me wants Sombra as well.”

Golden eyes snapped to blue fingertips as she felt a little tingle there - some fragment of longing for warmth or contact. “My hands,” she murmured thoughtfully, “perhaps. A part or two other, as well.”

Her eyes sought out the screen again, meeting Emily’s there - or at least, the projection of them, frustrating as that was. Nothing so foolish as my heart, of course.

She knew she couldn’t say that, though.

It would mean needing to admit that her heart didn’t want them, either. That it wanted no person anymore, could feel nothing for anyone without it being so strong as to break her, to render her entirely incapable, to destroy her.

Punishment. Payment. The price to be paid for her first murder. Her first success.

Instead of saying that, she drew in a deep breath and let it out in a sigh. Things had changed so much, shifted so slowly but so drastically, and it was not hard to see looking back. She didn’t, though, generally - never looked back on it, because if she did, it was easy to interpret everything as a path she had been led down, and that had her wanting to snarl.

Tracer had not tricked her into paying attention, had not trapped her with intrigue; Emily had not been laying snares with confusing moments and undeniable requests.

Sombra had, perhaps, been laying a trail of bait for the entirety of their interactions. That was a bit different, however.

“Personally,” Emily replied softly, one hand bracing the back of Lena’s head against her shoulder, “I don’t have any problem with it. Whatever parts of you want her, and however they do… it doesn’t change how those parts want me.” Widowmaker nodded fervently, a look of determination on her face, and Emily laughed lightly with a smile.

“I miss you.”

The sobbed words came mostly muffled by flesh, and Widowmaker could only frown all the deeper again. This had happened before, Tracer overreacting to the situation - or at least, reacting more deeply than she’d expected.

She didn’t understand. Even worse, she was distinctly aware that she didn’t understand - that something was happening which she couldn’t see, and it was intensely irritating.

“Souris,” she caught her words and let out a brief sigh in their stead. Sharp words wouldn’t help. She needed to be soft, and she knew it - but it was so much easier in person. Where she was calmed by Tracer’s presence rather than irritated by her absence. Widowmaker shook her head, trying her
best to recapture that softness - even if it was only a mimcry, even if only for a moment. “I miss you as well. This will all be over soon, I promise.”

“C-could we-” Lena pushed herself up and turned around with a hopeful smile on her face. “D’you think we could run into each other somewhere? On a mission or something maybe? Just- anything. Just a minute.”

Images flickered through Widowmaker’s mind, as if projected onto the walls of her skull, the backs of her retinas - Tracer, zipping from place to place, Reaper whispering into her ear, her own cold and glassy golden eyes looking down the scope, a finger on the trigger, a flash, blood.

She knew exactly where she would shoot, too. She knew exactly where she would shoot if Tracer was standing still, or was moving from left to right, or coming closer, or rising, or falling; for every situation a different location, and she knew them all, and she didn’t want to.

She didn’t want to think about how good it would feel, to let Tracer’s warm blood run over her hands. Maybe even to kiss her as she gasped her last-

“No.” Widowmaker tensed up, shaking her head abruptly, sharply. “No, no- no, we cannot. Cherie, it cannot be risked, it-”

Tracer nodded, the hopeful smile melting away entirely as she whimpered, but she’d known it all along. It wasn’t going to happen and she knew it, but for a moment, she’d hoped. Maybe it had been stupid to, but she’d done it.

Widowmaker’s lips pulled back as her mouse sank, shrank away; she growled softly to herself as Emily wrapped arms around her slim shoulders, and she should have been there to do the same. As they had been before, all three of them, together - when she’d failed to kill them, when she’d failed to apologize, when she’d failed so many things.

How could failure with them feel good? How could she be missing it - lamenting the fact that she was unable to be there for what should, by all rights, have been the most unpleasant thing? Owning up to a failure and providing comfort over it.

“I did not mean-” Widowmaker cut off with a quiet grunt, dropping her eyes from the screen. “This is frustrating.”

“I don’t want to frustrate you,” Tracer whispered, shaking her head and wiping heavily at her cheeks with her palms. She flashed the screen a weak smile. “I’m sorry, I- I don’t want to frustrate you and I don’t want to worry you and I don’t want to control you, I don’t mean-”

“Souris,” Widowmaker interjected tersely, almost desperately, “you are not the one frustrating me, it is the situation quite simply.” Her scowl set a little deeper on her face as she shrugged. “Alors, you are admittedly not making things much better for either of us right now.”

She didn’t understand it. Maybe if she’d been there it would have been different, but this felt helpless and she couldn’t just do what Emily did. Tracer was sad and frustrated and she should have been able to fix it, but she couldn’t. Who didn’t get upset by failure? Widowmaker certainly did.

Emily hugged Lena a little tighter, before letting her reposition to face the screen again. She felt a little bit like she was between the two of them - but that was where she wanted to be, anyway. In more ways than one. “It’s a tough situation,” she murmured softly, stroking at Lena’s upper arm. “Think we’re all getting tired of it by now - makes sense that tensions would be running a little high, and that’s okay.”
“I just feel bloody awful for being jealous about a bird who’s pretty much only done good things,” Lena muttered glumly, shaking her head and dropping her eyes. “I mean, maybe she’s taken the Mickey a little more than I’d like, but that doesn’t really—”

“Why are you doing this?”

Tracer’s eyes snapped back to the screen, to see Widdy’s looking back at her - narrow and scrutinizing - and she knew what the answer really was. It wasn’t Sombra, it wasn’t even barely Reaper, it was that she wanted to say something and couldn’t, she wanted to do things and couldn’t, she missed cold kisses and chilly hugs and soft chuckles against the back of her ear and it hurt.

The whole thing just hurt, and she was sore over it.

Sombra wasn’t even the problem. Maybe she was a focal point - Tracer had to admit that she was a little bit annoying, a little cocky, and seemed to enjoy making people squirm just a little bit too much. At the same time, the exact same things pretty much applied to Widdy, too. She just took it differently from the two sources.

The problem was all the things she didn’t have right now, not anything Sombra did.

Tracer laughed slightly, wiping at her cheeks and smirking at the screen. “Come a long way, haven’t we love? For you to be asking me that question!”

For just an instant, just one beat of time, Widowmaker’s expression of consternation remained. Then it dissolved as she tossed her head back for a laugh. If Tracer was laughing, then things were well; she could hardly be concerned over her own feelings, after all. “Ah, ma souris, what nonsense.” She grinned widely to the screen. “I am constantly wondering what inspires your actions - it is only that I hold my tongue so much more often than you.”

“Yeah well,” Tracer chuckled a little hoarsely, straightening up in Em’s embrace and taking comfort from those warm arms wrapped around her, “maybe there’s still some learning to be done there, ha! Anyway uh…” she sighed, leaning back against Emily’s chest and looking at that stupid screen again.

It had always been annoying, right from the start, but now it was legitimately heartbreaking. She wanted to reach out and stroke a cheek, to hold a hand, to do any of the thousand things that one does for the person they love - she still had it all with Emily, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t miss it elsewhere.

Just like Widdy finding it elsewhere didn’t mean she couldn’t also be missing it from the pair of them.

She knew it, too. “Y’know the stupid part?” Lena laughed, the sound a little bit derisive but directed only at herself. “I’m not even jealous about the shower or anything, it’s... I’m literally just jealous of the fact that she’s there with you and I can’t be. Fact that she’s in some house I’ve never even seen, not even a little bit.”

“Mmm, both circumstances will be rectified,” Widowmaker responded easily with a shrug. “You will be able to be here, and I will personally show you around the Château. There. Does that satisfy your frustrations?”

The teasing smirk on those dark lips felt so familiar, so comforting and wonderful - Tracer’s eyes flicked from it to her golden eyes which held just a tiny fragment of pain; she knew that Widdy knew it didn’t make the frustration go away.
Lena laughed, and it was full and wet and leapt from her throat. “No! Not at all! Not in the slightest!” She laughed more, shaking her head and wiping at her cheeks.

“D’accord,” Widowmaker nodded, smirking still. Foolish thing. How I miss you. “I agree, the frustration is undiminished. Yet, it will come to pass, and when it does then the irritation will be in the past.”

“I know,” the brit sighed. “I know it will. It just sucks, is all.”

Emily’s arms squeezed a little tighter around her, wrapped around her torso and pulling her back against the redhead’s warm chest. Lena sighed, letting the air be compressed from her lungs as her eyelids slid slowly shut.

Widowmaker watched it, as she had watched them before. Months ago, through the scope, through the windows, through the streets of London - them laughing, and living, together. She’d been only an observer then and she was only one now. The sole differences were that now she had memories to lament, but also hope for the future.

Yet, as they’d just established, hope for the future hardly helped now.

“I am… jealous of you two, as well.” Widowmaker shrugged slightly. “To an extent - something akin to jealousy, at least. You have each other for all of this.” Perhaps that was where some of the thoughts about Sombra sprung from - no, though, that was foolish to even think for a moment.

As if she could fill their niche, ha! Widowmaker’s head shook just slightly. No - whatever it was that she had for Sombra, it was something different. Something quite unlike her mouse, unlike her cherry as well.

Interesting.

“Nothing wrong with wanting something, loves,” Emily murmured softly into Lena’s hair, smiling up to Widdy’s eyes in the screen. “Nothing wrong with it at all. S’all about what you do with it - that’s what makes the difference, I think.” She tipped her head forward a bit, planting a kiss on the top of Lena’s head

Lena couldn’t help but feel comforted by it all. Arms around her shoulders, the familiar touch of fingers on her skin, the precise way that Emily sighed into her hair. Widowmaker breathed in and then held it, and she could never feel an exhalation, but Emily would hold the breath and the scent for so long until her lungs sent it rushing out of her forcefully, hot against Lena’s scalp.

Comfort. So much comfort, and all that Widowmaker had was Sombra. At least, right now.

Lena might have missed the first few inklings of jealousy, but she had no problems recognizing her feelings now. She just felt bad about the whole thing. Then, she felt guilty that it felt bad to think about Sombra comforting Widowmaker, because it should have been her - should have been her on the couch, and Emily in the shower singing, and those were terrible things to think.

They were terrible, because Sombra - while she was annoying and frustrating - hadn’t even done anything bad, not really. Tracer couldn’t help but think about how the hacker had toyed with her toward the start just to get what she wanted, and maybe that was what was happening now.

Maybe.

On the other hand, how much had Widdy toyed with her? Immensely, certainly, and actually to far greater detriment than Sombra anyway.
“If it’s not alright, or if it is, I think you should say so dear.”

The words were murmured softly into her hair, into her scalp; encouragements from Emily that were based in experience. They’d talked about her life and her history with relationships, hoping that Lena could learn from a few of her mistakes rather than needing to make them for herself.

Hoping a feeling would just ‘go away’ was a very common mistake. They tended not to do that, if nothing was done with them. Set up on a shelf and left alone, they tended to fester instead.

She didn’t even need to try hard to understand that, not generally; she’d seen it happen in friends and in herself as well. Not in a situation quite like this, sure, and it really was easy to just tell herself that it was all because Sombra could be there and she couldn’t right now.

At the same time, she knew she owed it to all of them to actually think about it. Not to shy away from that discomfort and even pain that sprung up, the pang of jealousy and then the guilt that followed - the urge to simply close her eyes and say it would pass.

That wouldn’t help.

“I think… I really do think it’s just the situation,” she murmured softly, eyeing Widdy with a slight - and slightly pained - smile. “Being stuck apart and all. Couple um, other things, maybe,” she shuffled um a little bit and cleared her throat gently, Emily squeezing her shoulders with a little smile. “Nothing really big though. Just… stuff, y’know.”

Widowmaker raised a slow eyebrow. She didn’t know - whatever it was to which her mouse was referring, it was a mystery to her. Her cherry seemed to understand, however, with her little gesture of support and perhaps even commiseration.

Were things not going well for them in their new abode?

That, too, was her own fault and she knew it - their dislocation, their forced egress, the way they’d been made to flee. There were often pains when settling into a new situation, at the least, and they could be quite great in certain circumstances. Perhaps it was contributing.

It would make sense.

She only nodded, though. It might have been a bit of a stretch to say that she trusted Tracer to know her own feelings, but she did trust that Tracer was at least smart enough to recognize her own foolishness when it sprung up. Usually.

At the least, she was… something. Smart enough, or determined enough, or something else enough for it not to have caused any irreparable problems. They had had their disagreements and their problems, certainly - ranging from death threats on her part to insults on Tracer’s - but they’d never broken things entirely.

Even times they perhaps should have. Indeed, they only seemed to be strengthened by each successive incident.

Again, Widowmaker found her mind trailing back to the question of what it was that she offered each of these two, except now there was a third name on that list and it was Sombra’s. At least that answer was readily available and clear: Sombra saw a desirable object and she moved to take it. Widowmaker had seen it happen time and time again, with the hacker stealing souvenirs off of missions - jewelry from targets or from bystanders, money or information from sites, small statuettes or the like.
One time, she’d stolen a guard’s clip from his rifle, on a challenge from Widowmaker, and the sniper had to admit that she’d been impressed by the stupidity and skill required to successfully pull off the heist.

Surely, it was the same with her. Sombra found her attractive, found her desirable - for which she could hardly be blamed - and she wished to partake.

At the same time, Widowmaker knew that there was a time in which she had applied exactly the same reasoning to Tracer and to Emily as well. Somewhere along the line, though, that had clearly failed to sum up the entire situation…

Lena didn’t know what Widowmaker was thinking. She didn’t look upset, nor that kind of blankness that meant all kinds of things - she only looked thoughtful, and that was encouraging at least.

Still, she knew that her girlfriend, her partner, her love, deserved better than just that. Better than just to have a conversation dropped because it could get a little rough, and better than to have her shrug it off and say it was only a passing thing - Widdy deserved to know what she could or couldn’t do.

The only reason they were even here right now - in the good ways - was because Em had given her that. She knew that she should pass it along. She had with Emily, and now it was time for the other side of things.

Closing her eyes with a sigh, she pictured the hacker and the sniper holding each other not in that unknown building but rather in the tiny London apartment she knew, standing next to the little cacti, and it only hurt until she thought of herself being right at Widdy’s elbow. Holding her arm. Leaning against her. Stretching up to kiss her ear, or just wrapping her arms around from behind and laying forward against her back.

Thinking of the two of them together now in that building unknown, without herself there and without Emily, well, that still wasn’t the best, but then Widdy had no idea what it was like in Apeldoorn either. It wouldn’t be fair to hold something like that in only one direction.

In known locations, known situations, in places where Emily or herself could be as well, there weren’t those sharp jolts of worry. Emboldened, she let her mind wander a little further, more and more possibilities pulling into her mind’s eye, and they didn’t feel as bad.

“Yeah…” she sighed, shrugging with her eyes still closed, “more I think about it, the more I think it’s just that difference. I mean it’s not a problem if I think about you two kissing or whatever-” not really. She was interrupted before she could continue with the sentence, however.

“Oh, bon. That is good to hear, because… well, she did kiss me last night.”

“You what?” Lena’s eyes flew open, but the first thing out of her mouth after those words was a laugh, and for one particular reason.

Widowmaker looked intensely uncomfortable. There was a certain upright aspect to her chin that looked like she was trying to keep her head held high amidst allegations, but her eyes flicked swiftly, nervously, and her lips twitched a little, and Lena found it hilarious. Hilarious and cute.

All the little bits of bad feelings that had been hanging around, melted away. There was still a bit of lingering longing, a desire to be there with her, to be able to tell her, but all the rest of it passed in that instant.

“I-” Widowmaker started, but then frowned. “It was only brief. It… caught me by surprise.” She shrugged a shoulder, waving a hand as she tried to put on an unaffected air. “She made up some
farce about not overreading into the gesture, but I have known for long that she desired me. She can hardly be blamed for this; I am quite desirable. I… admittedly, never expected it to come out quite so, but…”

Emily laughed brightly. “Cor, both of you now? One of these days I’ll learn about it before a kiss,” she teased, eyes flicking between them both. Widowmaker rolled her eyes and tipped her head, admitting a single point gained in their long-running game. Lena giggled softly, blushing a little. Emily just grinned at them both. “C’mon though - we doin’ a little better now? Less anxious?”

Widowmaker instinctively went to respond that she had been fine the whole time, but she knew in an instant that it would have been a lie. Not that that mattered, normally. She could recall the way thoughts had stuck in her head like too large a mouthful in her throat; like an acrid breath in her lungs.

Now, no longer.

She nodded slightly, face falling briefly back to confusion again but swiftly being overtaken by a wince as Sombra hit a particularly drastically high note.

“Putain de merde,” she muttered as the other two laughed through the screen, “how does one silence such a creature?”

“You’ve never had problems shutting me up!” Tracer chirped brightly, Emily snorting a laugh and rolling her eyes.

“That is different, chérie,” Widowmaker half-sneered. “The two of us are-” no, there was no word there, she’d tried before, so she tried a different tactic instead. “Sombra and I, on the other hand, are-”

...silence. Tracer and Emily’s grins grew as slowly and as surely as her own frown did.

“Merde.”

Lena giggled brightly, nudging Emily softly with her elbow. “Is this what it’s like to be on the other side of the teasing and all? Bloody brilliant, this is - see why you two like it so much now!”

“You are not teasing me, souris,” Widowmaker shot back darkly with narrowed eyes. “I only- I am experiencing a language barrier. That is all. French once more proves its superiority.”

Emily smirked, raising an eyebrow. “Dis-moi, en français?”

Her eyes shifted from narrow to truly slitted, all but closed. Tracer’s wide grin, Emily’s little smirk - Sombra screeched something horrid behind her and Widowmaker lost all determination to hold her head upright, letting it fall forward into her hands.

“Il y en a trois, maintenant,” she muttered darkly to herself.

Giggling, Emily nodded swiftly. “Oui! Donc il semblerait!” In her arms, Lena shivered a little.

“Bloody unfair to be carryin’ on like that when I’ve not even got any knickers on,” she muttered - and she knew it would only open up more teasing. She was counting on it, in fact, because as fun as it was to tease Widdy, she really didn’t want to run over a line there.

She wasn’t disappointed, either, as Widdy and Em launched in in unison, clamoring over each other to describe how much luckier she was for that situation - comments ranging from enticingly crude to
excruciatingly cute; it would mean one less pair in the wash, it meant nothing in the way, it was a better look on her anyway, it was a shame to think of her in any clothing at all.

More than a few comments in French, as well.

It felt familiar, and comfortable, and *wonderful*, and Lena let her eyes slide shut as she snuggled back into Emily’s arms, giggling as the other two carried on - but she tuned them out for a moment and thought about Widowmaker, about Sombra, about them holding each other in the shower, embracing, looking into each other’s eyes...

In more than one way, she was surprised to find how blank the thoughts were. All in all, though, it was a good thing. The situation might still hurt, but at least *that* didn’t. Not now.

The laughter and jokes carried on for a moment or two more, but soon Lena found herself looking at the screen and meeting Widowmaker’s eyes thoughtfully. “Y’know… you’re looking a mite cold there, love.”

The sniper shrugged easily, brushing off the conjecture without a second thought. “Nonsense. You know I don’t feel the cold.”

It wasn’t *quite* the truth. She *always* felt the cold. Until recently, she *only* felt the cold.

After a while, you grow numb to it.

“Just saying,” one of Tracer’s bare shoulders rose in a shrug, “bet your shower’s pretty warm, eh? Gotta be by this point.”

Widowmaker took a breath, opening her mouth to respond, but silenced herself before a word could come out. Her eyes shifted to the side, in the general direction of the shower, of the singing, of Sombra, and then back to the screen. She raised an eyebrow, and Tracer nodded with a little laugh.

“Go on,” she urged. “I mean, if you want, or whatever. We should be getting off anyway-”

“Not without me, you shouldn’t,” Widowmaker murmured swiftly and Lena laughed as Emily raised a wicked eyebrow.

“Also a good plan,” the redhead smirked, “but we’ve got plans that sadly require clothing. Wouldn’t mind a chance to say goodbye to Sombra, though, if you don’t mind?”

The question was directed to them both, really, and neither objected; Widowmaker shrugged idly, of course, as was expected, and Lena nodded her head happily. Almost urgently. Emily leaned over heavily against her, draping arms across her shoulders and pressing kisses indiscriminately to her skin.

“Love you so much,” she sighed, not caring which one of the two of them heard the words. She knew Widdy would only think they went to one place anyway, but it was nice to say it more openly.

“Love you too!” Lena grinned, kissing Emily on a forehead which had a single stray hair strung across it. *Both of you.*

---
Sombra - the instant that she turned her camera off - rolled her eyes and started to sing. As if she was gonna have a shower and _not_ sing.

She could’ve kept watching their conversation, of course. She _could_ have, but Widowmaker had said not to, and while she might not listen when she was told not to sing, there were lines you didn’t cross. She wouldn’t do that shit to a friend.

Friend.

...or whatever.

With a groan between verses of her song, Sombra let her head thump forward softly against the shower wall. It was immaculate, of course - hand-laid tile that probably cost more than some _cars_ , and every other bit of it matched. Beautiful shower head, a mirror built into the wall, every little detail attended to in the shower and throughout the bathroom.

Not that she really gave a shit. It was hot and wet, had no rats, and nobody was getting a free peek at her. Those were really the only four things she cared about in a shower.

Luckily, though, this one was also something she didn’t normally care about. It was _big_. Plenty big enough for her own groan to echo in her ears.

“The fuck did you do that for, _chica_?” She sighed, looking herself dead in the eyes in the mirror, accusing herself. “The fuck did you _kiss_ her for?”

Immediately, her stern expression split into a smirking grin. “Uh… ‘cause she’s hot? Do I need another reason?”

Sombra rolled her eyes at herself in the mirror, letting her external conversation become an _internal_ one as she carried on singing and cleaning herself, paying careful attention to gentleness around the areas where her implants met her skin.

All that tech didn’t come without a price.

Plus, the kiss had had nothing to do with Widowmaker being hot.

She _was_ hot, and Sombra knew it, and she’d _always_ known it, but the night before had been her losing control and losing her mind for two minutes, and not a damn thing more than that. Her freaking the fuck out over some confusing shit, and panicking, and hearing Widowmaker say all that shit, and then…

...and then they’d done nothing about it. Gotten dressed up in pyjamas and cuddled up in bed and that was it, and they hadn’t mentioned it. _She_ hadn’t mentioned it.

All of which left Sombra feeling like a total idiot.

Widowmaker _always_ had been that perfect mix of aloof, hot, teasing, and _French_ to just hit the spot and bring out Sombra’s stupidity, and she’d known it. Hell, she’d played along with it, and it had all been great.

Then Widowmaker had gone and done- _that_ - and Sombra had to be stupid and lose it, and kiss her, and then nothing.

She sang louder to cover the sounds of her thumping a fist against the wall a couple of times, some of the vowels coming out a little staccato as she laughed at herself and her own idiocy.
Now Widowmaker was out there, talking to her two little chicas, and Sombra was in the shower alone, and if that didn’t feel like a metaphor she didn’t know what did.

She didn’t try to overhear their conversation, but she did catch a couple of snippets. Words didn’t stop working just because a phone was turned off, and Sombra’s ears didn’t stop working just because she was having a shower.

As Widowmaker threw in an obvious attempt to goad her into revealing some eavesdropping - Sombra didn’t catch much more than “unhelpful” and “quite ugly” along with her name - she couldn’t help but chuckle.

Widowmaker was always doing that kind of shit.

...she really, really hoped it wouldn’t stop now.

That had been the whole fear yesterday, that all of it would just stop. That she’d have a friend ripped out of her life - because she didn’t have many of those, not really. Real friends.

Now, she was worried again that she might end up with one less by the day’s end.

True, since waking up, everything had been fine. Teasing and fun - and waking up with a hand in her hair was always nice. She found that her scalp was a lot more sensitive now than it had been before the implants.

At the same time, she knew Widowmaker wasn’t an idiot. She’d tried to cover her ass and play the kiss off as nothing, but she knew Widowmaker hadn’t bought it.

Sombra’s songs carried on without her even thinking about it, trying to twist her arms around to clean at the implants along her spine - large, thick chunks of metal that protruded from her vertebrae, rising right out of the skin there. They were awkward to clean. She had disinfectant showers at most of her safehouses, thin sprays of yellowish-green solution that ensured everything would be good, but there wasn’t one of those here.

What she really wanted, though - what she really wanted - was for some nice soapy fingers to be doing that cleaning for her. Long, thin, cold blue ones; half of them soft dark-skinned flesh and half of them firm metal; harsh metal talons or twisted flesh beneath crackling like it was charred - or all of them, she didn’t give a shit.

All of them obviously would’ve been best.

Nope, though, all she had were sore elbows as she tried to spin them in a way they wouldn’t go, and she started to wonder whether it would be worth getting some more mods installed.

A little noise drew Sombra’s attention and she pushed the shower door open, glancing out with a raised eyebrow. Widowmaker was standing there, slipping her silk nightgown off, and Sombra’s eyes followed its slide intently as it fell to the ground.

She opened her mouth to crack a teasing joke.

“Oh.”

So maybe it wasn’t the cleverest joke in the world. Clearing her throat and snickering as Widowmaker spun on heel, Sombra quickly gave it another try - eyebrow high and smirk firmly on. “I thought you were never joining the party, huh? Staying clothed forever. What, your little chicas talk you into it?”
“Oui,” Widowmaker shrugged idly, stepping smoothly over the tile floor. “You have no problems with this, I trust?”

“Problems with what - what?” Sombra blinked. Wait, they- what? Nope, too fucking much happening there. Whatever. Naked lady nearby. Stop thinking. “What’re, they-” she laughed slightly, resorting to jokes as she so often did, as Widowmaker drew closer. “They gonna be joining us?”

For a moment, Widowmaker paused where she was. About five feet away, one arm behind her back, looking Sombra over with those golden eyes that had never failed to be stirring - and they didn’t fail now. Sombra felt like she might just melt under that gaze.

I’m not fucking dreaming, am I?

“In a manner of speaking, yes,” Widowmaker admitted. “At least for a moment, to ensure their comfort. They requested that I ensure yours as well - I assured them that it was of no consequence, but they did insist.”

“Oh, thanks,” Sombra rolled her eyes, stepping further back into the shower and picking up the bar of soap again. “Way to make me feel appreciated, chica!”

“Just didn’t wanna go sneaking a peek without saying something first, is all!” A voice chimed in from behind Widowmaker’s back and Sombra’s eyes flashed over, and she turned on a few extra filters in her cybernetic implants - Widowmaker still held her phone, it was still active, and Emily and Tracer were both waving at the screen. It was Emily who’d called out.

Sombra burst into laughter for a few seconds. “Oh shit! Oh you mean like, right now? Damn, alright, well - for starters,” she waved a hand, bringing her screen back up - it floated in front of the mirror, pointing back over her and toward Widowmaker. She fixed the screen with a sharp grin, eyes flicking between Tracer’s and Emily’s.

“For starters, perverts. You two are kinkier than I thought.” She glanced over with a slight frown as Widowmaker stepped into the shower as if she owned the place - and admittedly, she did, but still.

“You too. Damn. I’ve been way off-base with that shit lately.”

“Foolish as always,” Widowmaker agreed with a soft smirk, reaching out and taking the soap from Sombra’s hand as the hacker gaped in shock.

“Hey! If you think this is gonna count as paying me back for all that bullshit last night…” Sombra started off shaking her head slightly, meeting Widowmaker’s eyes and holding them with her own. Then, though, she grinned and turned around, facing the screen again and pulling her long hair forward over one shoulder to ensure it was free of her back.

“Well, it’s a start at least. We’ll see how good a job you do, then I’ll tell you what else you owe me.”

“Mm, how generous,” Widowmaker muttered dryly, rolling her eyes as she leaned in to inspect the modifications that had been carried out on Sombra’s body. She frowned slowly, tracing lines with her fingertip - lines where metal met skin, or where slight bulges spoke of sub-dermal implants - and with every touch, Sombra twitched or shivered.

“Hey, it’s all sensitive back there and shit, amiga,” Sombra murmured softly. “Gotta be careful otherwise your little chicas are gonna get a whole ’nother kind of show.”

“Who says we’re complaining?” Emily laughed brightly, grinning and leaning back against Lena’s chest. They’d swapped places, for no particular reason, and she giggled softly as she looked at the screen. Purple eyes and gold, Sombra’s grin and Widdy’s almost confused frown, and she was just
glad that each of them had someone to rely on.

Her eyes flicked up, briefly, her head tilting to look at Lena’s face. What she thought she saw there was a sort of slightly surprised and pleasant acceptance, but of course she couldn’t be sure.

Lena saw her movement, though - saw it and matched it and looked down, and flashed her a grin that leapt straight to her heart and told her in an instant that it was all okay. That it would all be okay.

“If you think this means you both get a free ride on this train,” Sombra scoffed, waving a hand over herself even though the screen cut off about four inches above what she would’ve called the good stuff, “well… I mean, yeah, sure. You’re hot, and you’d be fun to tease-” she held up a finger, “-and I’m not telling you which one’s whi-”

“We know which one’s which,” they replied in unison, quickly falling into laughter after that as Sombra rolled her eyes and muttered dismissively to herself.

Tracer was a little surprised to find how okay it all was. Small sighs and noises of relief, or a little flicker of something on Sombra’s face, a slight noise of displeasure or pain, and Widowmaker noticing it and pulling her hand away from that location. Not that she could see the hand behind Sombra’s back, but she could see the rest of it, and…

...and it was fine. It didn’t hurt. Widdy smiled slightly - she had a fondness for tasks she could accomplish, almost regardless of what they were, Lena knew - and then it was better than fine, it was good, because Widowmaker was happy.

She couldn’t feel bad when she saw that.

“You take care of her for us, alright?” Tracer raised an eyebrow to the hacker, grinning. “Make sure she’s looked after right proper.”

Sombra rolled her eyes. “Ugh, keep that mushy shit to yourself,” she groaned, relaxing back into Widowmaker’s hands as they started to massage at her shoulders and neck. “All that romantic stuff, pfft, yeah right. Feelings.” She stretched a hand behind herself, just to touch Widowmaker’s leg, just slightly, just to remind herself she was really there. “This here’s purely friendly and sexual. No feelings involved.”

Lying was pretty much second nature to Sombra, and she could’ve done it flawlessly. Could have lied so convincingly that everyone and their mother would’ve believed her.

She didn’t, though. Not quite.

“Sure, of course,” Emily smirked, clearly disbelieving that point.

“Oh yeah, obviously,” Lena agreed, half-rolling her eyes.

Sombra flashed them a wide grin, meeting their gazes each for just a moment. “Good to see we understand each other,” her grin grew a little wider as she nodded.

She could tell that they knew. It was better that way.

Not that Widowmaker needed any help surviving, she had that in spades, but Sombra knew that - left to her own devices - her chica would get all glum again and sink back into it. She needed somebody else there to help her have fun, that was all. To help her make that step from surviving to living.

“Well, we’d best be heading off,” Emily sighed through the screen, tipping her head over to rest on
Tracer’s shoulder.

“Yeah, sure - hey, tell Athena-” Sombra started, but was cut off by a groan from Tracer.

“Ugh! She’s always doing this - do I look like some kinda chess messenger?”

Sombra raised an eyebrow, grinning wickedly. “If you do, then I gotta hire one more often - that the official uniform, chica?” She snickered at Tracer’s blush, turning her grin over her shoulder a bit as she heard Widowmaker chuckle softly. “Okay, I see why you like it.”

“D- wh-” Lena stammered, then just abandoned all hope with a sigh of a groan and hung her head. Truth be told, she hadn’t really expected that sort of thing from Sombra. She probably should have, she knew, but she hadn’t.

“Might have to make it the official pastime,” Emily giggled, wrapping an arm around Lena’s shoulders and pulling her in close with a bit of a squeal. “Just too cute, isn’t she?”

“Ugh, roja, you’re ruining it,” Sombra muttered with a grimace on her face. “Cutesy shit again.”

“Oh, am I?” Emily’s grin widened, hazel eyes dancing with delight. “Hadn’t the foggiest clue!”

Sombra rolled her eyes, smirking. “Sure you didn’t. Now c’mon, say goodbye so I can hang up already - pretty sure shower vids are supposed to be second-date material anyway… but for you, I’ll make an exception.” She threw in a wink and a lopsided grin.

She hadn’t really thought about that kind of stuff with Tracer or Emily before. Not even really with Widowmaker - not in any way that she’d thought it would ever happen, just little fantasies every now and then.

Maybe once or twice she’d thought about running off on a mission or catching Widowmaker in a particularly heated moment, angry with those flashing golden eyes and just looking for something to grab on to, somebody to slam against a wall. Maybe she’d considered having Tracer a little bit trapped, maybe holding onto a couple of juicy tidbits of information, having a little fun making her squirm. In a couple of ways. Maybe she’d thought about Emily - chica had some pretty impressive pictures of her out there, not that half were credited to her name but Sombra hardly needed a name to dig them up and flip through them when she was having a boring night. So what if she thought about recreating some of those paintings for herself - maybe with edible paint, that she could help clear up afterward?

...so she’d thought about it a little bit. Maybe.

They all said their goodbyes, they waved, and the link shut off. Sombra sighed heavily, half in relief and half in just plain happiness; Widowmaker’s hands were just a little bit cooler than the water, just barely enough to be noticed, and her fingers were strong but gentle. Precise, too - fingertips unerringly following the lines where metal met skin, and bringing up scattered patches of goosebumps in their wake that died down a few seconds later.

“You’re good at that shit, amiga,” Sombra muttered, letting her eyelids slide shut as the hot water streamed down over her. “Shoulda got you to do this earlier!”

Widowmaker laughed, slightly, and then Sombra was surprised to feel her face suddenly pressing against the wall as those same strong, precise fingers tightly held a clump of her hair.

“By all rights,” Widowmaker purred in her ear, leaning against Sombra’s back in a way that had her a little bit struggling to keep her knees locked in place rather than wobbling. The tight grip on her
hair didn’t help matters there, either - nor did the gasp-inducing shock of relatively cold tile pressing against her cheek. “I owe you a strangling.”

Sombra chuckled, the sound coming out breathier than she’d intended. “D-do you now? Well, I’d be a real bitch not to pay back a debt, right?” She couldn’t pull her head away from the wall, but she could turn it just a little, just enough to look back over her shoulder with one eye and catch Widowmaker’s gaze - just enough to latch on to those sharp golden eyes which practically shimmered with reflections of the shower. “Hardly any way for me to treat a friend.”

Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed and she smirked before quirking an eyebrow. “Oh, _friends_?” She leaned her head in a little closer, tugging Sombra’s hair firmly more off to the side, positioning it until Widowmaker’s lips could just brush at the hacker’s neck.

It was one of her favourite positions - was with Tracer, and the two were perhaps reminiscent of each other somewhat. It was a good one for teasing, certainly.

“Is _that_ what we are, now?” She whispered just barely loudly enough for it to be heard over the sound of the water, and her lips quirked into a smirk as Sombra trembled just slightly underneath her.

It was _surprisingly_ fun.

“We can be whatever the fuck you want, _chica,_” Sombra groaned softly, eyes pressed tightly shut at this point as she tried to will Widowmaker to lean in closer, to kiss her or lick her or suck a mark into her neck, or to bite her. Anything.

What happened _instead_ was that Widowmaker let go of her hair, spun her around, and held out the soap. “Wash me. I was _covered_ in your tears last night,” she grimaced slightly, “and the lingering salt is not _nearly_ as pleasant as the warmth was.”

Sombra took a moment to steady herself on the wall, not realizing how hard she’d been leaning back into Widowmaker’s hand - but turned the motion into something else as she snatched up the soap with a chuckle. “Pfft, sure - and if you think teasing me’s gonna work, think again, _chica._”

Widowmaker let out one of her signature dismissive laughs, shaking her head. “Ah, you foolish girl - of _course_ it is working! I know this, I have _always_ known this.” Her eyes narrowed a little, playfully, as she smirked. “Do not read too much into it.”

Sombra grinned widely, chuckling as she started to lather up the soap and focused _entirely_ on working it into places that she _wanted_ to on the sniper’s body, rather than places that she’d cried on, but Widowmaker wasn’t complaining.

...and if her heart was beating faster than normal, that hardly mattered. If her blood was pumping in her ears, that wasn’t a big deal.

For a moment, though - just a moment - she thought back to last night, and the fact that Widowmaker had had a bit of a point with it all. In a lot of ways, it was risky to _like_ somebody. To want them.

If you didn’t want something, you couldn’t lose it.

She wouldn’t lose shit, though. She was done losing - now, she took, and she held on to what she wanted.

A friend like Widowmaker? Friend, or whatever - somebody like that, she wasn’t planning on letting go of anytime soon. Not in the slightest.
Lena sighed as the phone call ended and Emily relaxed back into her arms. The pair of them slumped back until they were laying down on the bed, hands idly stroking at damp hair, at arms, at sides. At each other.

“You alright, love?”

It might have been Emily’s most frequent question, at least around her - it could mean a lot, too. Sometimes it was more pointed than other times; sometimes it wasn’t really a question at all, it was Em trying to mention to her that she wasn’t alright, but to do it softly.

This wasn’t one of those times, though. This was a genuine question, soft and open.

A little smile flew to Lena’s lips as she chuckled. “Eh… pretty much, yeah. Not on some things - but they’ll get fixed.” She drew in a breath and let it out through her nose in a sigh. “I wanted to tell her. So bad - I almost did once or twice, I think.”

“Aw, I know, love,” Emily murmured gently, rolling over to give her a kiss on the lips and to stare into those eyes which she’d loved so much and for so long. “I know you do - we’ll get there, though.”

“Yes,” Lena hummed a single laugh, meeting Em’s eyes with a smile. “We will. I know it, too, and… that doesn’t make it all better, but it helps. You help too. So much.”

Grinning widely, so widely that her freckled cheeks were practically spherical, Emily stroked a bit of hair behind Lena’s ear. “Thanks, love. You help me too, you know.”

“Good,” Lena sighed, letting her eyes drift up to the ceiling as her mind slowly shuffled through things. Just about everything, it seemed. They weren’t exactly directed thoughts, or anything like that - just the sort of mind rambling that happened when you weren’t focused on anything at all.

“So…” Emily mused softly, shrugging a shoulder. “Sombra.”

Lena snickered. “Yeah! Guess so, eh?”

The redhead smiled, pressing a kiss to her cheek and laying down against her shoulder for a moment. “Mmm, not bad, eh?”

At first, there wasn’t a response - just for a moment, as Lena took a breath and her mind wandered that way. Into the past, to what Sombra had done and how they’d met, how they’d interacted as time went on. Sometimes though - sometimes - the past didn’t matter that much when the present was set up a certain way.

The past with Widowmaker had looked an awful lot different than the present did, but that didn’t mean it interfered. Not usually, at least.

“Nah,” she chuckled, shaking her head. “Not bad at all…”

Emily hummed her agreement, nuzzling into Lena’s shoulder with a smile on her lips. She was glad for it - all of it, really. She’d only had good experiences with Sombra, and thought that - despite the
outward appearance - the hacker probably cared as much about Widowmaker as the two of them did. Probably had for longer, too. At least as a friend.

...and probably it was more than Widowmaker cared about herself. There was a difference between a survival instinct, and truly caring about yourself, and Emily felt like she had a decent idea of which one Widdy tended toward.

It wasn’t a bad thing. Just a thing - just part of what made her her, and Emily wouldn’t change it for the world, but at the same time it did mean that it could be handy to have a few extra people to help keep an eye on it.

Everyone needed another hand every now and then, and Sombra seemed to be a good one. From the moment she’d seen them together on the screen during the movie, Emily had suspected it - even before that, probably. From that moment, as well, she’d thought it was a pretty wonderful thing.

It was just about perfect, then, that Lena hadn’t had an issue with it - or had worked over her issue, at least. If it came up again, though, or if something else did, Emily wanted to talk it over if they could. She knew Lena knew that, too.

“I love you,” she murmured as she snuggled up close. The heat of the shower was long since gone, now, and it was too cold just sitting out in the empty air.

“Love you too,” Lena replied with a grin, stroking a hand down the back of Emily’s head.

She hadn’t thought about Widowmaker getting involved in anyone else, mostly because she’d never really seemed like the type. It wasn’t as if she went out to bars or anything like that - she wasn’t going to meet anybody at work.

Although, that turned out to be exactly what happened. She chuckled a little at the idea.

Since things had shifted in their relationship, she’d talked over a lot of this kind of stuff with Em - while she’d maybe been the first of the pair of them to have someone else lined up, it hadn’t ended there. In hindsight, though, she was glad it had started there, because it probably made some things a little easier to get used to.

Lots of things were easier when you were the one doing them, rather than somebody else - but she knew that Emily had been with other people since then. Not counting Widowmaker, of course. She definitely knew Emily had been with Widdy, and she would be again. They all would, all three. ...maybe even all four.

She was a little less sure of that idea, at least for the time being. Sombra wasn’t actively offensive, really, but Lena wasn’t sure she was exactly attracted.

Physically, sure, but other than that... maybe less so.

She knew those things changed, though - and it hardly needed to be decided right then. It would be what it would be. The thought brought a little smile to her lips - whatever happened, would happen. She could only act now to try to shift it a little bit, left or right; she couldn’t stop the future. Just make sure it was the one she wanted to end up in.

Right now, all that meant to her was a future in which Widowmaker was beside her in the bed, one arm wrapped behind her back, annoyingly long hair still soaking wet from the shower and practically ice cold - that was the future she wanted, her and Emily and their French girlfriend all laying
together, and she wanted to take a deep breath and whisper out the words, “I love you.”

...and if Sombra was laying in the bed too, well, that was fine. Maybe, one day, the words would even apply to her too - truth be told, Lena couldn’t see that future from where she sat right now. Then again, she couldn’t have seen it with Widdy, either, not a year ago or probably even a month.

Nor with Emily, way back when, before it had suddenly happened and snapped into place.

Whatever would happen, would happen. She didn’t want to close off the idea that anything good might happen - and even if it didn’t for her, even if she and Sombra never ended up being that close, even if they always annoyed each other a little… that didn’t matter.

Even if that happened, Widowmaker would have another person on her side, another hand at her elbow, another warm body to pull close and draw comfort from, and that was beautiful in its own right.

Quite frankly, Tracer didn’t give a shit at that moment about what she thought or felt about Sombra. It really only was Widdy’s thoughts that mattered, and if they were good ones? Well, how could that not be a good thing?

A wide smile stayed on her lips as she stroked at Emily’s hair, the redhead humming happy sighs against her neck, shifting her head just a little to trace the tip of her nose against the sensitive skin there.

She couldn’t decide the future, not necessarily, but she sure as hell wasn’t going to get so caught up in it that she forgot to enjoy the present. Even if things weren’t perfect...

...they were very, very good.

Chapter End Notes

Translations!
"Putain de merde" == "Fucking shit"
"Dis-moi, en francais?" == "Tell me, in French?"
"Il y en a trois, maintenant" == "There are three [of them] now"
"Oui! Donc il semblerait!" == "Yes! So it would seem!"

This one! This one was really difficult for me, actually; I had to get a lot of help from several friends. Basically, I don't get jealousy? It's not an emotion which occurs to me, it's not something I understand, and so... it was really hard for me to write, and really hard for me to edit, and I honestly don't know if I've done it well. I don't know how well it's going to come across here, heh, but uh, I hope it was alright?

Also, I'm sorry, this one's a day late, oops - holiday season and all, things have been crazy, sorry about that. Hopefully won't run into it again! Uh, if you're wondering, I wrote a couple of things as Secret Santa things and I'm also still writing some more winter/holiday things so those'll be coming out over the next few days.

Started developing a bit of a headache about halfway through the edit here, heh, so uh, not a load of thoughts to say right here right now? Always happy to answer questions though!
Come on back next time, when Sombra and Gabe get locked in a little room - oh no, how terrible, right? On the upside, it gives them a chance to have a good, thorough talk - about Widowmaker, and about them. Only thing that's in the wind is how exactly he'll take it.
Bottle

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: An installation in the Steppes never knows what hits it when the Talon Trio come calling, but there's tension amongst the crew. Tension that Sombra's determined to fix. She may or may not succeed - because there are two other people with their own wildly different mindsets.

JFL Summary: Sombra likes fudge ripple ice cream. Widowmaker thought she'd prefer cotton candy. Reaper, on the other hand, only comments that fudge ripple sucks. Eventually. First, there's a whole lot of death and anger.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: death, thoughts of death, painful recollections and thoughts, mentions of gore and blood

Previous Chapter Summary: Lena and Emily found talked with Widowmaker about Sombra, and about their situation in general. There was a bit of confusion, mostly over what Lena didn't want to say yet - that she loved Widowmaker - but it resolved well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was quiet in the dropship, and Sombra didn’t like that - this stupid tension that hung over it all now.

She’d tried to joke with Widowmaker a little, earlier. Made a crack and snickered, glanced over to Gabe to try to draw him in - he’d been sitting there like a bear-trap again, spring steel locked down tight and ready to snap, so that had been the end of that.

Time for a little bit of silence.

Then she’d tried chat with Gabe a bit. Not a good plan. All of a sudden, the sniper had needed to disassemble and clean her rifle - sharply, mechanically stripping it down and checking every piece, looking for all the world like a robot following an instruction set.

So that had been the end of that, too. Silence, instead.

Sombra hated silence - at least, this kind of silence. She slumped glumly in her seat, equidistant between the two who were practically cold-war opponents at this point, not hostile but just flat. Wracking her brain for anything that could inspire something else. Some unity. Some fucking
conversation at least.

“Wanna go over the plan?”

“It’s simple,” Reaper grunted in response, trying to keep his eyes fixed out of the window, but unable to peel them away from the reflection there. Sure, the rifle was in pieces right now. He’d seen her kill a dozen men with less, anyway. It didn’t matter. Didn’t mean he was safe. Didn’t mean Sombra was either.

“It was in the dossier. Even you could not be so foolish as to need an explanation,” Widowmaker grumbled softly under her breath. She didn’t like how Reaper was looking at her - had been for weeks now, maybe months. Every time she thought about it, the actions stretched further back; had he trusted her in Venice? St. Petersburg? Numbani?

She didn’t mind the distrust, not explicitly; only fools trusted. Fools like Sombra. To trust her, and to trust him - still, even now, even after he’d dangled her on a thread in front of a trained hound.

Or at least, a hound he thought he had trained.

Slowly, she let out a breath as her heart rate registered a two-percent uptick; it was getting less regular lately, as impulses grew. Regular fluctuations within five percent were no concern, and wouldn’t be automatically reported - unless somebody bothered to look up her vitals, they wouldn’t even know.

Unless somebody bothered to look up her vitals, exactly the way he apparently had when Tracer had been in their clutches. He’d suspected then, clearly. What if he looked now? What if he checked after every mission, mapped it all out and found that they weren’t random spikes of a percent or two here or there: they were, in fact, related to the conversations.

They weren’t supposed to be. Nothing save for combat was meant to consistently spur her blood. Had he been anyone else in the world, she would have thought that level of paranoid investigation beyond him - but he wasn’t.

It used to be an admirable quality, his steely determination and ability to cut through a situation. Admirable until it was her own throat the steel was held against.

Widowmaker slid the firing pin smoothly back and out, cleaning the slightest figment of cordite residue off of it to ensure it would never stick in the least; it was so small and so seemingly delicate, but so very capable. There were few things in the world that put up with the stress of the firing pin of the Kiss - to operate under the tremendous shock stress of a single shot in sniper mode, whilst also absorbing the jarring repetitious hammer of automatic fire…

She found her thoughts doing this when she was irritated, lately. She wasn’t sure what it was, exactly, that inspired it, but she had two ideas. Either, it was a conditioned protocol to return her to normal - an implanted impetus to think about the rifle, think about the mission, think about death, and nothing else. An urge to eschew all else and instead fixate only on what she was made for. That was borne out by a few other things, too.

The other possibility was that, quite simply, she cared about that firing pin. The firing pin and the magazine, and the barrel, and every piece of the Kiss - whether through design or through evolution. Thoughts of it calmed her in tumultuous times, because it was perhaps the one thing she truly cared for that she could think of freely right now.

She wasn’t sure which of the two options was the truth. She only knew that trying to think about something else that often brought a smile to her lips - Tracer or Emily - only soured her thoughts
further, given the situation. Thinking of Sombra did much the same with her sitting over there, three seats distant with the same number empty between her and Reaper. Halfway between her and a man who cared nothing for her survival - who put his own suspicion as a higher priority.

The sliders alongside the barrel, set into the forestock: they could use some lubrication. They spun freely under her fingertip, but one of them caught ever so slightly on some fragment of soil and she couldn’t run the risk that that would evolve into some larger problem.

That had already landed her in enough trouble.

Sombra rolled her eyes and slumped back glumly into her seat, arms crossed. “Oh, great,” she mumbled to herself. “Sounds like an excellent plan.”

“What’s there to go over?” Reaper growled back to her, eyes fixed on the window still - Widowmaker had looked up, just briefly, not to him but to Sombra. Had his questions stuck in her mind? She’d thought of it as an instruction, she had been on the edge of killing Sombra. What if that hadn’t faded? What if that interpreted instruction still lingered in her mind, tickling at the edges and turning her trigger finger to a new target?

He felt raw inside, but in a new way; sick and acidic, like he was made entirely of ulcers and bile. He felt disgusted and disgusting, and he hated it - but at least hating was nothing new.

He needed to focus on something else.

“The vault’s in the rear building of the compound, underground; sloped ramp leading down and in to blast doors to accommodate their transports. Used to be a military bunker. High security - maybe the most secure in the world. Particularly the vault, but the compound’s no easy egg to crack either. Straightforward, maybe, but not easy.” He rattled off the details of the briefing package he’d provided, although an actual pre-mission brief was standard.

So was not killing your teammates. Sometimes exceptions begot exceptions, but if Sombra needed a run-through, he damn well wasn’t going to deprive her of it. Anything that made it even slightly more likely that she’d make it through the encounter - particularly if Widowmaker’s eye was drawing her way, now.

“Yeah, you’re telling me, chico,” Sombra muttered, bringing up a screen that splashed over with schematics. “Turrets and signal-blockers, backup generators, redundant systems for the redundant systems. Took an Omnic-era bunker and made it even more over-the-top.”

“I will eliminate the electronic defences,” Widowmaker’s tones were clipped, but a grin set onto her lips as she locked the last piece of the Kiss back into place and snapped it into position at her shoulder, sighting down the scope. “And the guards, as necessary.”

“We’re pushing through,” Reaper grunted. Was he afraid? His thoughts turned into internal sneers, directed at himself - but they would be safe in the vault, at least. He found himself doing that, these days: thinking of the next safe place away from her, the next spot that wasn’t downrange. “Quick job. In and out. Infiltrate, acquire the target, exfiltrate. Any further questions?”

“Yeah, can we get ice cream afterward?” Sombra smirked, glancing between them with a raised eyebrow. “I’d kill for some fudge ripple right about now.”

Widowmaker rolled her eyes and Reaper sighed, neither one responding in words, and Sombra laughed at that - but it didn’t go anywhere else. There had been a time where it would have; where the two would’ve joined in at shooting snarky comments her way, deriding her and mocking her, just
Sombra hated that kind of silence, and her eyes set through with fire above her slight resting smirk.

*Oh, this is ending today. You dumbasses wanna be dumbasses? Well, fine, I’ll have to knock some sense into you whether you like it or not.*

---

It was a pretty cool-looking compound, and Sombra added it to her list of potential properties to acquire - not expecting that it would be available anytime soon, but it was interesting. An Omnic Crisis era military depot, seven buildings dotted around and every one specifically built to resist aerial drops and bunker-busters, and all that sort of stuff.

They’d only improved on the security, too - even thirty years ago the electronic countermeasures had been formidable to deal with the machines, but now? They were damn near untouchable.

At least, they would’ve been for anybody else.

They whole place was separated from the grid - no external data connections at all, almost as if they were paranoid that *somebody* might worm their way in. Sombra grinned as she thought about that - couldn’t imagine *who* these guys might be trying to keep out of their dataframes.

The hacker glanced over as Widowmaker stepped to the edge of the dropship - ithovered a little over a hundred feet in the air, a long way away from the compound. She said she needed the angle for her shot. The sniper stood at the edge, knees bent and shifting slightly to absorb the minor movements of the dropship.

She waited. The time on her visor ticked on, past the twenty-fourth minute of the hour, eight seconds past. Nine. Ten. Eleven.

The rifle shot was a shock, an instant percussion that split the still air with no forewarning - no movement on her part seemingly at all. Sombra had been looking at the trigger and could barely detect a motion, even with her ocular implants. The assassin’s finger had moved only the barest hair, she knew the rifle that well.

Widowmaker’s lips twitched, just slightly, her heartbeat ticking up by three percent - immediately, the gain started to decay, but it had been a beautiful shot. Six and a half kilometres, through wind and rain, through a wall, through the throat of the guard standing at the switchboard and then through a second wall before shredding to pieces the primary target - the ECM main response module.

She could see through her visor, a light flickered on - the gasping guard reaching out for the switchboard but with no hope of sounding the alarm; he was dead seconds later and the light went unattended, notifying the now-empty room of the ECM system going down.

“Clear.” Widowmaker stood with a faint smile on her lips.

They would have just short of twenty minutes until the system failure was noted by another detection sweep - short-term failures happened sometimes, when power blinked or things like that. It would be
wasteful to pull out all the stops every time a lightbulb flickered, but if the system stayed off consistently - if the now-dead guard in the watch room didn’t notify the maintenance department, didn’t sound the alarm, didn’t take any action - then all the stops would be pulled in twenty minutes. All hell would break loose at ten seconds past the fifty-fourth minute of the hour.

It had taken a lot of digging for Sombra to find all the schematics, all of the timeframes, everything they’d need. Now that they had it, though, it would be not exactly a piece of cake, but a simple matter of hitting their gateways. Like a maze. She’d been wanting to hit this place for a while, and conveniently Talon had some interests here too.

Even more conveniently, she’d found a new purpose for the whole thing. She was going to end this conspiracy bullshit pronto.

“Mark.” Reaper hit his watch. A timer in his helmet was counting down as well, but he liked having a spring-powered backup. Something that couldn’t be tampered with so easily. An eighteen minute countdown, to give a little leeway for exfil and dustoff.

The dropship began to speed in, flying low and fast with Sombra at the controls - at least, manipulating the autopilot. She kept the open side door facing the compound, Widowmaker’s eyes down the scope being their only warning of early detection.

She said nothing, though. Saw no sign of anyone noticing their approach.

The fences approached quickly, topped with razor-wire, electrified, but of course they swooped right overtop. Normally, the ECM system would have notified the guards - would have set off an alarm across the whole compound, but that wasn’t a concern at the moment.

Reaper swirled out in a cloud of smoke, Sombra’s Translocator beacon falling down alongside him as he splashed thirty feet down to the ground. The raindrops struck through his insubstantial form and he felt their disturbances; they didn’t hurt, but he couldn’t exactly say that having himself shunted out of the way by falling water felt good.

His boots touched the ground already moving. Sombra appeared in a cloud of pixels, also already in a sprint and quickly disappearing. That was good, at least - behind them, the dropship retreated slightly, waiting tucked between two hills where it could shirk the notice of any guards physically looking. They counted on their detection systems too much, but every chain had a weak link.

It was all a matter of knowing where to strike.

There was a noise above him, some sound of notice - the sound of a hand clutching at a rifle, a body moving to the edge. The sound of an alarm just about to be confirmed, just about to be called out.

Reaper swirled into smoke, flashing up the side of the building and grabbing at the guard’s head, clamping a hand over his mouth to silence any warning shouts - clenching hard enough to crack bone as he drained the man’s life, dropping to one knee to lay the empty husk down on the ground. The falling rain started to pound it to pieces, each heavy droplet knocking dusty dessicated flesh off and turning it into mush.

He might have stopped and watched for a second, smirking and letting his thoughts drift - except for two things: the mission, and his hunger. In that order.

At least that was a welcome change.

He stood, spinning and whirling through liminal space; stepping outside of the physical reality as others knew it in order to move fifty feet away, emerging from the ground just ahead of Sombra, still
sprinting.

“Thanks boss,” she chuckled, voice somehow deadened in the real world by her camouflage, but still coming clearly through the radio link. “Ready to get into an unbreachable vault?”

The knowledge that the dropship was out of line of sight right now was immensely relieving - although he sneered slightly at the thought that it was also relieving to know that she could have a bead on their area within seconds if they called for it. The thrusters would spool up, the ship leaping into the air and giving her a view of the area, ready to take out any threat.

She was a weapon. Point her at your enemies, and they died. He still respected that.

Didn’t mean he trusted it. Her.

“Always,” he grinned behind his mask. Sombra snickered softly and increased her speed, easily overtaking him as she sprinted off toward the vault.

Stealth missions weren’t exactly their norm, but it was good to get the chance every now and then. They felt tactical, they felt like a battle of wits as much as bodies, and lately…

...lately, his wits had been what were worrying him. They were all that could save him, in a situation like this; Talon Councilors and senior members often made grabs for each other’s power. Sometimes they simply tried to settle arguments in a more permanent and abrupt fashion. Reaper’d had his life threatened before, he’d been near enough when Vialli’s men had tried to eliminate Doomfist and Widowmaker as well.

That was the thing. They didn’t just go for you. They went for everyone around you as well.

Reaper’s teeth set firmly against each other as he sprinted through the rain, water running down his cloak and trickling off of the plates of his armoured chestpiece. Sombra was pretty capable. Not that he’d ever give her the satisfaction of actually openly admitting it like that, but it was true.

Gabriel Reyes had been capable, too. From head of Overwatch to head of Blackwatch, leading strikes and missions for years and years - yet, still, they’d shredded him to pieces so very easily. Reaper was capable, formidable even, but that didn’t mean infallible. Invincible, maybe, but not infallible, and he knew it.

That stupid monkey.

He had a purpose now, his list, but the thought wormed its way into his mind that that might not have been all of it, not anymore, because he’d been thinking about Sombra more and more in certain terms. Teammate. He’d called her friend.

...and he’d meant it, too.

If they came for him - when they came for him - it wouldn’t just be him , it would be everyone nearby. Being who he was, he knew, would only inspire a firmer hand and a heavier strike. They were more likely to send a nuke after him than a bullet.

Luckily, there wasn’t time to let his thoughts dwell on any of that too much. The bunker was approaching, its long, low blast door slanted at sixty degrees to match the tunnel behind it. He came close and saw water droplets splattering off of nothing, a hole in the rain.

“Not as invisible as you think you are,” he muttered, clamping a hand on Sombra’s shoulder.
She didn’t jerk or twitch at the contact, but it did send a little jolt of surprise to her heart. “Yeah, well, even I’m not perfect, apparently,” she joked, fingers tapping rapidly at the buttons of the access panel.

“Apparently,” he chuckled as he turned around, keeping an eye out on the compound. Any sign of detection, any sign of movement.

Sombra grinned, though it was as invisible as the rest of her, but it wasn’t a wholly happy expression. Yeah, it was good that Gabe was loosening up a bit, but that also just reinforced how tense he was around Widowmaker.

It was hard enough to find friends in the first place. She shouldn’t need to make them get along, too - but if somebody needed to, it might as well be her.

Gotta get myself a big treat for this one, she thought to herself as the door started to raise - it weighed a thousand tons, at least. “Alright, cover’s gonna be blown the second they see this, we-”

“Widowmaker.” Reaper’s voice went out over the comm, but he didn’t need to say anything else.

“D’accord,” she responded immediately, tapping at a control on the wall. The dropship raised into the air, raindrops sizzling around its repulsor engines as she brought down her visor and a grin fixed on her lips. Her heart was beating two percent faster with just the prospect of what was to come.

“Quick. In and out.” Reaper spun on heel, ducking to slip underneath the blast door. One of the guards would notice it opening soon, if they hadn’t already - the patrolling guards only numbered a dozen or so, though, easy fare for Widowmaker. The others, the ones who would start to mobilize when an alarm went off - there were an unknown number of them.

Still, he couldn’t shake the feeling that - if it came down to it - she could deal with the pair of them as well.

It felt wrong to be relying on her. To be resting his weight on a bear trap, to be hanging off the edge and holding onto a rope made of razor wire. If there was a day, if there was a mission, it would be this one. If there was something from which they were not meant to return, this was it.

A hundred ways, he could see it playing out. A bullet through the head the instant he stepped out of the vault. Not killing the guards, and letting their numbers accumulate outside until they shredded him to bits upon exiting. Locking that blast door down so he simply withered away inside here, trapped for eternity.

...and then, with Sombra… what?

He didn’t want to think about that either. He was even reasonably sure that he couldn’t be killed, but he couldn’t rely on that. He’d also thought Jack Morrison was good. Sometimes you ended up just being wrong.

That thought had his talons curling inward, clenching tight against his palms as they sprinted down the sloped hallway into the vault.

Sombra immediately turned her eyes out to the shelves and the storage - everything from physical boxes to memcards and data servers, disconnected from any network. She sprinted through the space - they had several targets, and she didn’t know where any of it was.

“Thirteen minutes,” Reaper’s voice came over her radio and she rolled her eyes.
“You think with all this shit, I don’t have a clock, amigo?”

He chuckled back, bringing a grin to her lips. “With how many times I’ve seen you sleep in? What do you think?”

Taking a sharp corner and snatching up a datastick off of a shelf, Sombra smirked. “Hey, there’s a difference between missing my alarm, and just deciding I don’t wanna come to work that day!” She started to peel the info off of the stick as she ran, downloading it all into her own internal storage.

Reaper stalked between the shelves, eyes out for the target - flicking back to the blast doors as well as they continued to raise. Two of them, one on each end of the sloped tunnel, being lifted up and away from the ground even still. No soldiers came pouring beneath them, yet. He couldn’t even hear gunshots.

Between glances back that way, Reaper’s eyes fell on a metal briefcase. He thumbed in the combination they’d been provided and it flipped open, a dark chuckle seeping out from behind his mask as he noted its contents all in order and snapped it shut again.

“Target acquired, we’re on our way-”

“Mierda!”

He was cut off by Sombra’s sharp swear, and in the same instant, the blast doors started to fall. Inner and outer, both - not lowering smoothly the way they’d ascended, but dropping like guillotines as if they’d been cut loose.

“Reaper-” Widowmaker’s voice through the radio, sounding urgent and underlaid by a gunshot - the rest was drowned out by a massive boom as the huge and heavy slabs of metal slammed into the floor. The words did not continue.

Reaper’s finger jabbed at his helmet. “Widowmaker! What happened, what did-”

Sombra grabbed at his shoulder with a grin, holding a finger over her lips. She took a pace back, crossing her arms over her chest as energy built up inside her; it unleashed in a whirlwind, a massive conflux of electromagnetic energy, frying all the electronics within a large radius.

The hacker quivered slightly as goosebumps rippled along her back and her arms, and she grinned as she let out a sigh. “Ahh, it always feels good to let it off like that.” Her eyes opened and fixed on Reaper’s mask, and she quirked an eyebrow. “Now, weren’t you saying this is the most secure vault in the world? She can’t hear us - nobody can hear us. No signals in or out, amigo, and I just fried everything in here, so… let’s chat, shall we?”

---

Widowmaker watched sharply through the scope, unblinking, unerring; there were two weights on her shoulders, now. The first an onus of proof - herself as a perfect puppet soldier. The second, of course, was that if she missed something here, Sombra would be at risk for it.

She saw every flicker of movement below. The guards hadn’t looked over yet and seen the blast door at the back of the compound silently raising, hidden by the constant sound of the rain, but they would notice it soon. With every inch it rose, it became more obvious, and her scan became faster.
and more focused. Her eyes flickered between the guards intently, catching sight of the alarm lights as well which sat now dim and unilluminated.

Even with that focus, she saw the instant the doors started to reverse direction.

Her eyes widened just slightly as they started to fall. The bunker had a lockdown protocol - the blast doors were huge slabs of metal, thousands of tons each, and they rested in hydraulic carriers which lifted and lowered them. In the event of an emergency, however, they detached from their cradles. They fell down their rails rapidly under gravity’s pull like hammers of the gods and sealed off the vault from intrusions.

They did this now, as she watched - she didn’t wait for them to hit the ground. The noise would notify the compound. A finger snapped to her visor, switching to open mic rather than push-to-talk, and she’d let off two shots and one word before the doors hit the ground.

“Reaper-”

The boom echoed through the compound and beyond, striking right into her chest as she squeezed at the trigger again - a guard in the middle of whirling around to face the sound was deprived of a large portion of his torso, and crumpled to the ground.

“-the doors have sealed. The alarm is raised,” the lights illuminated then, sirens wailing through the compound as Widowmaker’s lips pulled back from her teeth.

What have you done?

Her teeth ground against each other as, for a burning instant, she fixated on the doors with Sombra and Reaper behind them. She knew from the briefing package that it would take ten minutes for the doors to raise again - for the hydraulic carriers to lower back down, reconnect, and then begin to lift the titanic metal slabs.

Ten minutes, they would be trapped in behind there.

Was he questioning the hacker already? Would he wait a moment, perhaps, to sharpen her fear?

She’d wanted to tell him, too. She’d mentioned to Widowmaker that Reaper should be informed of the situation - a laughable idea which the sniper had immediately and scornfully dismissed, of course. Why would one ever want to confess one’s crimes to the jury? It would be foolish.

Sombra had tried to assure her that Reaper could be won over, somehow; some idiocy about teammates and working together. She was, in many ways, a stupid girl.

Teammates meant nothing. Widowmaker knew this more than any other person alive; Gérard and all of his team had been unable to lift a finger to help Amélie, or perhaps unwilling. They’d abandoned her, there had been no rescue - nor had there been any for the mouse, during that period of internment. It had only been her own actions and Sombra’s aid which had ensured safety.

That was somehow the great secret of life, and Widowmaker dwelt on it darkly as she slayed three more guards with a sneer. Somehow, it was a secret - that no other person could be trusted save for yourself. That relying on anything else was foolish, and bound to lead to downfall.

She felt it even now, the truth of the matter, because Sombra knew her secrets. Some of them, at least - and now she was locked alone in that vault with Reaper, and he…

...he was a formidable extractor of secrets. Widowmaker had seen it before, she had been somewhat
in awe of it even - the way he was able to reach into a person and twist around and pull out everything they didn’t want him to have. More than once, she’d seen him carry out interrogations without even touching the target, yet still left them weeping and divulging everything they knew.

It was beautiful - or would have been, if she could have divorced the thoughts from Sombra’s face. Sombra’s tears. Sombra’s lips twisted in agony as he ripped at her flesh.

Widowmaker blinked as she autonimically shot one guard through the head twice. She needed to focus. She needed to prevent distractions, more now than ever - now that she’d made so very many stupid and foolish mistakes.

The rain on her face. That would help keep her mind straight.

She leapt from the dropship as if propelled, soaring through the air - a guard in a tower, taking hold of a machine gun, took a bullet through the head. As the grapple bit onto the wall just next to the tumbling corpse, Widowmaker ejected the empty magazine of the Kiss - knowing full well just how every piece of it slid and clicked to pop the cylinder out and accept the new one, locking it down and into place.

Comforting thoughts.

“The alarm is raised,” she repeated over the radio. She needed to keep up appearances. To seem as if she was the perfect puppet. “The compound is alert. I am clearing a path for you.”

She couldn’t even think about shooting him, couldn’t even begin to think about it - but, there was a woman about whom Widowmaker thought sometimes. A woman who had had her life torn away by a shadowy group of people sat around a table - a woman who had been forced into a shell but had worked her way out, slowly. A woman who had two people she wished to hide away from the world entirely and protect, and had recently found perhaps something of a third.

A third who was now locked in a room with a violent madman who the annoying girl thought of as a friend.

It was an unpleasant story to say the least, but she could picture that woman shooting the madman. Strangling him, stabbing him, ripping him to shreds if he did anything to the annoying girl.

It was only a story, though. It could never translate to life. Comforting thoughts, perhaps; she could picture that shadowy group of people around the table, alight, on fire and burning to the last - and perhaps, that would bring her some warmth, the thought of some distant woman enacting her vengeance.

Of course, it didn’t actually help her. It couldn’t. She couldn’t do such a thing to the Council, she couldn’t even think about it, and she could no more consider harming Reaper.

Regardless of what happened with Sombra.

No, she simply need to play her part. “The generators must remain active for the doors to open,” she insisted over the radio. “I shall ensure their safety and clear the way.”

More soldiers were starting to react, now - the more ready amongst them spilling out of doorways below and into the compound as she crouched atop one of the watchtowers. They held assault rifles clutched in their hands, helmets on heads and body armour.

She laughed as she split it all, her shots passing effortlessly through every measure they employed to try to stop her - the fools, to think they could ever stop her - and with every round, every kill, her
heart rate increased just another hair. Six percent. Six and a quarter. Six and a half.

The rain made her hair cling slick to her back. It ran over her face, her hands, and in gorgeous shimmering rivulets over her rifle where it even sizzled slightly on the barrel which was beginning to heat from consistent use, and she smiled.

She could do this all day. As long as she kept her thoughts free - and that was so much easier here, out in the rain, with her finger on the trigger and death singing in her blood. Her mind leapt from shot to shot, seeing the next even as she took one; every one was a hammer-blow on the Kiss’ firing pin, a searing flash to its barrel, a percussive strike to every component within it. Sliders and bearings and pins in sockets, all doing their job, every one working perfectly according to plan.

She could only aspire to do the same. To be so beautiful. To be so perfect.

---

At first, Reaper couldn’t force his hands out of fists - the look on her face, the feeling of being trapped in here, how much he’d expected the doors to come slamming down but never like this. He’d never expected it would be her hand on the button and his mind whirled, running through possibilities, running through scenarios and trying to find a way out as he stared back at the smirking hacker. Had Widowmaker trapped them in here? Had they been detected? Had it really been Sombra?

“What… are you talking about.”

Sombra laughed, clapping a hand on his upper arm. “Just chat, boss! It’ll be ten minutes for those doors to start opening again - the hydraulics are slow, but they’re already on their way. For the next ten minutes, though, it’s just you and me. Perfectly alone - nobody listening in, nobody possibly could, alright? EMF shielding through this whole place. So let’s chat.”

Slowly, he managed to straighten out his fingers, managed to move again. His joints freed up enough for him to turn around, grabbing at her jacket with a hand - her hair was soaked and hung down her side, the water beading up on the plasticized jacket. “Chat?” Reaper hissed.

“Yeah!” Sombra raised an eyebrow, leaning her head back a little. “Oh, or-” she raised a hand, a teasing smirk on her lips and a tone that matched in her voice, “or did you not want to know about the spider, huh?”

Reaper fell back to stillness again, but only on the outside. Within, his mind raced as his fingers stayed tightly clenched on Sombra’s jacket, his eyes fixed on her teasing grin.

Know about the spider? She’d found out something about Widowmaker, then - and she’d locked them in here. Where it could be discussed. Safely. He did know this vault, that was the whole point of their strike today - Sombra couldn’t have worked her way in here from anywhere else. Neither could anyone else, there just wasn’t a way. Electromagnetic shielding, no external data connections, and no other people around for hundreds of miles except for the guards and soldiers outside, and Widowmaker herself.

Then her EMP, too, just in case they had any bugs on them. Some people thought he was odd for having made his own outfit, but it was a convenient way to ensure nothing was stitched into the seams, no trackers or microphones hidden in its folds. Sombra’s, though, could have been.
Not now, though. Not after her EMP. Every possibility, checked off the list, unless he started reaching very far for paranoia about telepaths and mind-readers. If those were out there, though, the gig was already up. There was a point at which even he had to admit defeat, and if someone could read his thoughts, it was already too late.

Everything else, though, seemed to have been accounted for.

“Down to like, nine minutes now, boss,” Sombra shrugged easily, nonchalantly, “and lemme tell you, being cut off from everything else like this is none too pleasant, so if you waste this fine opportunity I’m providing? I’m gonna get grumpy.”

She didn’t like how it felt. She was sure Gabe felt trapped, or whatever, yeah - but it couldn’t be as bad as her. She always felt these tendrils of signals: phones and communications whipping overhead and she could practically see them, data-streams of network uplinks, satellite connections, everything. There was a constant warmth and feedback to the world, and now it was all gone. Like being blindfolded, like losing a sense completely, and she didn’t like it one bit.

This shit was ending today, though. Whatever it took, she was making sure of that.

She grinned as Gabe’s claws relaxed from her jacket and she took a step back, hopping up onto a crate and taking a seat, crossing her legs at the knee.

“Tell me about her, then.” His voice was deep and slow - not halting, but sounding more than a little forced. He still looked tense, and stood rather than sitting or leaning back, but it was something. A little crack in the armour. An opening.

Sombra knew that was all she ever needed, and it only widened her grin. “You wanted me to look into her, and I did.” A brief chuckle interrupted her words. “Believe me, chico, I looked deep.”

Sure, maybe she’d been scared shitless about a bit of how it had happened, and maybe she’d made a dumb choice or two along the way, but she didn’t need to say any of that.

Reaper didn’t say anything, though, just stood there and tried to will himself into some semblance of control. Irritation never helped - that slow, twisting feeling of something underneath his skin - but he’d had a snack earlier, which took a bit of the edge off of it.

“I don’t trust easy,” Sombra continued, locking eyes with him through his mask. Or, at least, staring at where his eyes would be. “Neither do you. It’s why we’re a perfect couple.”

“Not a couple,” he retorted.

“Perfect couple,” she stressed with a smirk. “Like I told you last time, I’d tell you about anything that’s a threat.”

“So there was nothing to find out?” A tiny scoff from behind his mask. “Really?”

Sombra studied him shrewdly, keeping that same slight and sly smirk fixed on her lips. She hadn’t told Widowmaker about this plan beforehand, but she had said that she wanted to talk with Reaper. Widowmaker hadn’t liked that idea at all. Had refused to reveal anything, and that did put Sombra in a slightly awkward position.

Reaper wasn’t the sort to just let suspicion go. Nothing at all, he wouldn’t buy, and she knew it - and more than that, there was trust now and that meant a lot.

The two of them were jaded. She knew it. They thought they were better than trusting, smarter than
trusting. As if Sombra wasn’t. As if Sombra had never been betrayed.

They were idiots, sometimes, her friends. She didn’t really mind, though. Reaper thought she trusted too easily, Widowmaker thought she was stupid to trust at all, but she knew that they were both wrong - and she knew what trust really was, too.

She wouldn’t break it for him, nor for Widowmaker, and that put her in a slightly awkward position. The exact position they both feared when it came to trusting someone - to step off a ledge and hold out your hand, and count on somebody else to catch you.

“Chica’s got a couple of secrets,” Sombra started with a nonchalant shrug and a smirk, but Reaper cut her off.

“I know about the castle in the lake,” he sneered, and Sombra grinned and let out a laugh.

“Ha! Well, scratch one secret off the list then,” she shook her head, “but no, there’s nothing going on that you’ve got to worry about. You can trust me on this, boss - I dug deep, there’s nothing there. No threat to you, or me, or the team.”

Behind his mask, unseen, his eyes narrowed. He’d asked a question and she’d half-answered it. “So you did find something.”

Sombra chuckled, shook her head, and stepped off the edge. Metaphorically, at least. “…yeah. Maybe a couple of somethings.”

“What?”

Her head continued to shake, her eyes locked on his, almost pleadingly. “Sorry, chico. Not my secret to tell, but you can trust me.” You both can. Dumbasses.

For a long time, he stood and stared and didn’t move, just thinking. Thinking about how stupid trust was and how stupid teams were, and goals - all the things you could lose, all the things you could be deprived, all of the things which could be snatched away from under you. He was angry at Sombra for having wormed her way in in the first place, but she had. She was a teammate now, and as stupid as he thought he was for it, he did trust her.

Obviously, he couldn’t trust Widowmaker. At the least, because her leash still had too many hands on it - but if she didn’t trust him, either, then he couldn’t trust her. It was a two-way street and he knew it.

Sombra had taken a step though, right here, right now. He had two choices: join her, or let her fall. Trust, or betray.

It felt like hot acid was trying to creep up his throat, burning as it went, twisting his lips into a sneer, but he didn’t say anything. Didn’t move outwardly. Sombra’s smirk shifted slowly to something more blank, and then her eyebrows twitched just a little, her lips as well, just slightly downward.

“You still haven’t actually told me about any of that Overwatch shit,” she pointed out in a mutter, shaking her head slightly, searching those dark holes of his mask for something. Anything. She knew he was back there, in behind it - she’d seen it, she knew it, and she was beyond doubting it anymore.

...still, that didn’t mean this was a good idea. Knowing that she could trust him didn’t necessarily mean he trusted her. She knew they were friends, had been for a while. He still might lose it sometimes, though, and snap - she’d seen it before. She had a sinking suspicion she was about to see it right now, with his every muscle locked in place.
It was all he could do to keep himself still. Everything wanted to lash out, every piece of him flashing in a different direction, to rage against the whole world at once.

“Gabe-”

“Shut up,” he hissed abruptly, one hand flying out from his side and grabbing onto a shelf. His fingers flexed, curling talons through the metal - it popped and screeched as it twisted. Slowly, he turned a patch of the metal shelf into curled ribbon shreds that tinkled to the ground.

He felt like an egg with nails being hammered into it, and every crack just distended him more and more. Words and half-thoughts flickered hotly through his mind, flashes of images and fragments of memories.

She couldn’t be trusted. No more than any loaded weapon could be trusted - safeties didn’t matter. He wasn’t about to let everything hang on some tiny little scrap of metal in a rifle, and he wasn’t about to let it hang on some scrap of programming that had been tortured into Widowmaker, either.

She couldn’t be trusted, not really. Maybe- maybe now she could. Right now. Right here.

...but what about tomorrow? What about the next day, and the next?

Reaper stood there as the thoughts swirled through his head. Tendrils of smoke lifted from him, eking out their way between his cowl and his mask, leaking into the room as he continued to shred the stamped steel shelf into confetti and Sombra just watched.

She was a weapon, a rifle, a bomb. Would anyone ever feel comfortable that close to a bomb?

Apparently Sombra would.

His hands caught in fists for a second, lungs locking up before he managed to free it all and continue shredding steel.

Sombra, the idiot. In some ways. Maybe she just thought Widowmaker wouldn’t strike out at her. The thought felt cold in the back of his mind, hard and sharp, and he could feel it slipping toward his mouth even though he couldn’t stop it.

“She almost killed you.”

Sombra let out a breath, slowly and silently through her nose. “I know. She told me.”

He wanted to look over, but he couldn’t; his neck was locked down, and he didn’t want to see the look on her face anyway.

The hacker shrugged. “I get it. Gotta… test boundaries sometimes, right?” It was a hell of a way to do it, but she understood. Hell, she’d done the same sometimes. “Wasn’t as if you were going to let her go through with it,” Sombra muttered. Right?

“You think you’re safe?” Reaper spat the words, gripping at one of the uprights of the shelf. A flicker of strength rippled through his arm and the post snapped, the chunk of metal being flung off to the side as the corner of the shelf sagged down under the weight on it.

He probably meant from Widowmaker, but Sombra couldn’t shake the idea that it applied to him too and in pretty similar ways. She knew she was safe from each of them until things got out of hand. It was only these moments - Reaper’s steely sharpness or Widowmaker’s burning eyes and bared teeth - that she had any worry.
Just in the moment. Just for an instant. Didn’t mean she was going to shy away from any of it.

“Yeah,” she shrugged, opting for a neutral answer that didn’t indicate either of them specifically. “I mean… I’ve got my eyes open and my ears to the ground, and I move fast, chico. Lot easier to dodge the bullet when you know where the gun’s pointed, right?”

...and you couldn’t do that with your eyes closed.

Reaper’s head tipped forward, slowly, a sigh echoing from him because it made him feel a little bit like an idiot. He couldn’t hope to outrun Widowmaker, nobody could. He couldn’t hope to out range her, either - she was the perfect weapon. Give her a target and they died, it was as simple as that.

He’d been hung up on the idea of some protection, some armour that would stay her bullets and turn away her assault in the worst-case scenario. The concept of loyalty that would hold her hand - but he’d known her before, and he’d known Gérard. None of that had stopped her and she was ten times as formidable now as she’d been then.

Couldn’t run far enough, fast enough. Couldn’t hide. Couldn’t armour up. Doing any of them would only give away his hand, anyway - any eyes watching that were on the fence would see him and decide that they needed to take action now rather than later.

There was only one hope, really. Stay close. Keep your eyes open. Be ready to move when that weapon pointed your way.

Sombra was right.

He didn’t give a damn about Widowmaker’s castle, her little getaway in the lake in France - she could do whatever she pleased on her off days. He knew she did, too; picked up other jobs along the side. They all had their hobbies. Her secrets were her own.

As long as the weapon didn’t point his way, but Sombra was right. You had to be close to tell.

“I really hate it when you’re right,” he seethed.

Sombra’s heart leapt in her chest a little bit. She could hear the difference in his tone - this wasn’t that pained grating bullshit, this was back to teasing again. Not that she’d ever doubted it, of course. Never. It felt like a weight off of her shoulders, like a thick needle withdrawn from a muscle - and having a near miss always left her feeling a little invincible.

“Damn, that explains why you’re always so pissy then,” she shot back with a laugh as he shook his head with a growl. “C’mon though - I’ll tell you if something crops up. I’ve got my eye on it.”

“Yeah.” He pushed lightly off of the shelf, hands coming away freely. To say it felt better would be wrong, but he felt less ragged. A bit of relief for relative calmness - and it was added to by his own admission over what he’d done, holding up her life as bait like that. It still wasn’t the same as if he’d eaten, properly, but he could take care of that in a minute.

Doubtlessly he’d need to, in fact, given the doors.

“Stupid plan,” he hiked a thumb toward the blast doors, still sitting on the floor immobile. “Guards’ll be lined up out there like a firing squad. Your brilliant plan have something involved for them?”

Sombra laughed, grinning widely. “What, I need something other than you, boss?” Her grin widened a little at his dark and self-satisfied chuckle as one of his hands went to a shotgun.
“Got a lot of faith in me, do you?”

Snickering, she nodded a little. “Hey, somebody’s got to.”

Reaper barked a laugh, shaking his head again, but she had a point. That was something else a team could do for you - see the way when you couldn’t. That was the point. Nobody could do everything. Nobody was an island.

He’d never really forgotten that. At the same time, it hadn’t meant he could just trust somebody.

Something which he still felt stupid for doing, but there was no denying it anymore.

Even the fact that she’d mentioned earlier - he hadn’t told her everything about Overwatch yet, what had happened, what had gone wrong. It was true, but it wasn’t because of a lack of trust, not really.

There was a difference between distrust and wanting some safety, and he knew that this was a dangerous thing to bring anyone into. They needed more than just the pair of them. There were a few other possible prospects - Jesse, if he wasn’t a total idiot. Widowmaker would have been a good addition, save for the leash around her neck.

One name still stuck in his mind higher than the others, though: Lena Oxton.

It was that fire in her eyes, he thought - strapped into that chair. She’d been so bewildered when he’d first walked in, she’d been frightened too, but she hadn’t collapsed under it. She kept fighting, kept going, even when it was hopeless.

Even when they’d strapped her into that jet and ripped it out of reality.

He could still remember that moment - Gabriel Reyes, looking at a screen with a grin on his lips. How slowly that grin had slid away when the Slipstream malfunctioned. That momentary hope that they’d just miscalculated something and that it would sort itself out a moment later.

Not a moment later. Not a day later. Not weeks later. It never sorted itself out, it had been that damn monkey - everybody’s got to get something right sooner or later - and Overwatch had just shrugged it off.

...and she’d gone with it. Loyal to the last.

What an addition she’d be to any team...

He shoved those thoughts aside for the moment, but it was something to dwell on. Right now, there were more pressing concerns. “You know, if you’d told me something beforehand,” Reaper half-sneered over his shoulder toward the hacker, “we could have come up with an actual plan.”

“If I’d-” Sombra spluttered. “You f- hey, listen, pendejo, I’m the only one here who tries to say anything! You two dumbasses just sitting off to your sides being grumpy, me in the middle making a fool out of myself.”

“Making?” He scoffed. “You already were.”

Sombra rolled her eyes. “Oh, sure, now you two start agreeing. For fuck’s sake, amigo, we’ve gotta go on some team-building retreats or some shit.”

He barked a laugh, shaking his head. They wouldn’t be doing that any time soon. It was one thing to be close to a bomb, and it was entirely a different one to bring it into your home. He still couldn’t
trust Widowmaker, not really, but he could trust that she wasn’t doing anything at the moment. He could trust Sombra and himself to see when something started to change.

It would be easier if they were closer, but there was a limit.

There was a thump and a clank from the front of the vault, the blast doors, and it drew Reaper’s eyes.

“Hydraulics are hooked up again, amigo,” Sombra swiped on her camouflage and snuck off to the side where she’d be safe from any carnage. “Doors coming up. Hey, have fun, y’know?”

“Last time I checked, gunshot wounds weren’t fun,” he muttered in response, but he couldn’t deny the thrill of oncoming death. There would be dozens of them out there, at least; yes, they’d score a few hits, but what did he care? Everything already hurt anyway. At least with a bullet or two lodged inside, there would be an excuse for all the pain.

Sombra only snickered, peeking around the corner. It wasn’t the safest, but she’d never really been one to take the safest option.

Very slowly, the huge steel doors rose up their rails. The noise of the rain was the first thing in, and the sound of alarms as well. Water started to rush down the inclined tunnel, dribbling through the inch-high gap of the raising blast door and rushing down through a grate.

Reaper’s hands clutched at his shotguns, drawing them free of his belt. He could have slipped to smoke, slithered through the little gaps and then come out in the middle of them. He could have. He wanted to see their fear, though. He wanted to see them standing there, to hear their shouts as they fired and he dissolved, and then swept over them like a wave of darkness.

He wanted to know that they knew just what a mistake they’d made to go up against him. He always wanted that. He wanted that feeling, the power.

The doors continued on their way, and he wondered whether there would be grenades or smoke, or possibly mines awaiting him. They might even roll some under the doors - but it would be no issue to him and Sombra could teleport away. The slabs lifted past his waist and he mentally placed the watchtowers with their machine gun emplacements - doubtlessly they would be trained on the doors.

They weren’t firing right now. Nobody was, nothing was. No machine guns, no assault rifles, no explosions.

No sniper rounds.

His hands tightened up a little more, then relaxed; everything of him did, dissolving into smoke and rushing forward up the tunnel.

The rain split through him, pounding rhythmically into the mud on which were strewn dozens of slain soldiers. The alarms blared emptily, alerting the compound to an intrusion, but it was far too late for any of that.

Nobody was left alive to hear it.

Standing in the middle of the cavalcade of corpses, was Widowmaker. She clutched her rifle at the ready, eyes wide, rain and blood streaming in rivulets down her face, her arms, her body. She stared back at him, still ghostly and incorporeal, and neither moved.

Sombra wasn’t there.
Widowmaker’s fingers tightened around the Kiss, but it was only a move of desperation. She couldn’t hope to do anything. Eleven percent, her heart fairly hammered behind her ribs, but she could do nothing save for stand there frozen as it started to drop, the thrill of battle sinking heavily into the coldness of existence.

Sombra wasn’t there.

She was quite certain that she would be next, and she could do nothing to stop it.

Dozens of them, she’d killed - distractions to keep her mind off of what was happening on the other side of that door, and now it had happened, past tense, and Sombra was gone, and Widowmaker felt…

...nothing.

Rain on her face. Nine percent.

Eight and a half.

“Chica?”

Ten.

Widowmaker’s eyes snapped over as Sombra’s camouflage wore off - no bruises, no ragged gashes on her skin, no blood. Her heartrate continued to drop once more. Nine. Sombra came over. She wasn’t hurt, she stared at the ground, at the bodies.

“Fuck,” Sombra muttered, her eyes flicking up to meet the sniper’s - rain trickled into them, shimmering over the gold, but Widowmaker didn’t seem to notice or care. “You really-” she was cut off by a slap and a shout.

“Stupid-” Widowmaker hissed, the impulse briefly overcoming everything else. A little spark that flared up and drove her hand to lash out, but then it was out and done and her eyes locked on Reaper’s as she caught her words behind her teeth and her hand at her side.

Whatever had happened behind the door, she didn’t know, and it had been driving her slowly further into irritation - winding up that spring until it became too much to be held back, and now it was out there and done. It was never supposed to happen.

A weapon should never fire if there was no hand on the trigger.

Sombra cut into the silence with a laugh, rubbing at her stinging cheek. “Damn, gotta teach you some healthier ways of showing your love, amiga!”

“You think everybody loves you,” Reaper grumbled darkly, his eyes hidden but fixed on Widowmaker’s. It looked an awful lot like something in her eyes. Fear, concern, care, something - something. Not just the blankness that the Council had tried to put there.

“Yeah, and I’m right,” Sombra asserted, stretching her arms and her senses - calling the dropship in to land, to pick them up. “Now c’mon, I’d kill for some fudge ripple right now. My treat.” She could only hope they played along. Widowmaker, particularly.

For just an instant, it was silent, then Reaper scoffed loudly. “That’s a terrible flavour.”

The assassin shook her head, just slightly, in disbelief. Staring at the hacker’s grin. So close to death,
she lived her life so close to death, and seemed hardly to care - dancing out on the edge as if it didn’t matter in the slightest.

Perhaps they weren’t that different after all.

Reaper hadn’t reacted to the strike, either, to the impulse she’d so stupidly fallen prey to. He was watching her, yes, and she could feel it, but perhaps that meant something else.

It was easy enough to leave it behind. The feelings of worry and concern and frustration weren’t real feelings anyway, only fragmented figments of her imagination - they were gone the instant she stopped focusing on them (the instant Sombra was close and safe again), and she rolled her eyes, leaning the Kiss back against her shoulder. “I thought you would want something far more childish. Cotton Candy, perhaps.”

She could leave it all behind, all the worry over what had been happening behind the door; that was easy enough. It seemed like, perhaps, whatever had happened had led to some easement of Reaper’s suspicions.

Confirmation surely would have been acted upon already.

Sombra grimaced, shaking her head. “Ew, no - you ever tasted that shit? Gimme real cotton candy or give me nothing.”

“Mm, nothing then.” Widowmaker responded dismissively with a smirk as she stepped toward the dropship which hovered a foot above the mud.

“Don’t think we need you being more sugared up,” Reaper added with a single dark and derisive laugh.

Sombra only grinned as she followed the other two up into the ship. That’s more like it. “Hey, I deserve a fuckin’ treat, alright? Plus, y’know,” she twitched a hand and the dropship shuddered, pitching hard to one side and making the other two jerk to keep their balance as Sombra laughed, “I’ve got control over the dropship, so, if I wanna get cotton candy, I’m gonna get some cotton candy.”

She always got what she wanted.

The dropship closed up as they took their seats, rain pelting at the hull and the glass. Reaper and Widowmaker groaned, lightly complaining and deriding Sombra as she just cackled in between them.

Widowmaker fell into a different role; not the one she’d been given years ago, but the one she’d developed since - reverting to months ago, before she’d started to break and everything had gone so wrong and so right. She had scoffed at Sombra, twisted around her attempts at flirtation, she had grinned. As soon as her hand had flown, that game was up. There was no pretending she was the perfect weapon anymore, not when she’d so clearly displayed her flaw. There were other plans, however, other possibilities to avoid the Reaper’s scythe as it were, and she’d thought about those many times.

Nothing happened to her heart or her mind as her thoughts flicked once more to her ultimate plan, get rid of the evidence. She wasn’t even sure it was possible. Wasn’t sure she would be able to bring herself to do it, when all came down to the line, but as others were crossed off of the list one by one she suspected she might be finding out sooner rather than later.
“Where would you even find a carnival in this part of the world?” Widowmaker sighed, glaring at Sombra in irritation as the hacker cackled. She was so certain that Reaper could be convinced around - had he?

...had she told him?

Widowmaker’s heart rate increased by a whole percent when the thought occurred to her. She’d explicitly told Sombra not to.

Not that the hacker had ever listened to what she was permitted to do before.

“What, you never heard of looking at a map, amiga?” Sombra grinned, locking onto those piercing gold eyes. Of course, she knew that now that she’d convinced Gabe, she’d need to convince Widowmaker, and keep pulling the breach closed. She deserved a fuckton of cotton candy after this, but she doubted she’d ever get any.

Not that it mattered. The situation being fixed would be reward enough, if she was honest with herself. Which, admittedly, she rarely was - but in this instance, it brought a warm flutter to her chest to think about it. The jokes could keep going, all of this could keep going. Reaper’d stop being all tense because he was worried about traitors or whatever, and Widowmaker, well, she could stop being sour and irritated because she wasn’t allowed to play with her toys.

...her toys, which she obviously prided over Sombra, which was a bit frustrating but it was her own damn fault anyway. Besides, it was hard to actually be annoyed by it when Widowmaker was holding her against a wall, anyway.

“Oh yeah,” Reaper murmured, “I’ll just get out my map of carnival locations in the Mongolian Steppes. Which pocket did I put that in, hmm…” he patted at the pockets of his vest and cloak in mockery.

He was no stranger to the outside not matching the inside, and now was no exception as his mind whirled and twisted despite his outward calm. He just couldn’t get his thoughts away from the look on Widowmaker’s face, that anger when Sombra had appeared. She’d quickly fallen back into line, but wasn’t playing the puppet anymore.

Just what was Widowmaker’s secret? Clearly something she prized, something she held close, in order for her to get so angry over it. Or, perhaps…

Reaper chuckled, the action lining up with Sombra’s snarky retort as she pulled up a screen and called him old for thinking about a physical map.

Now that he thought about it, that hadn’t looked like solely anger. There had been something else in there too - something he was more than familiar with seeing around him. Fear. The only question was what she was afraid about.

...and what her secret was…

He knew he couldn’t trust her. You could only trust a bomb to explode, you could never trust it to be safe - not unless you opened it up and disarmed it, and that was so far beyond him he wouldn’t even know where to start.

Still, he couldn’t shake that rising urge; for months now, slowly creeping higher and higher, that desperation for camaraderie, for unity, for teamwork. A desire to share the truth with people - just a few people. It had started with Sombera, but to tell her alone would just put her at risk, and he wouldn’t do that if the Council’s eyes were pointed in this direction anyway. He was still convinced
that they were, or at least that they might be.

No, they’d need somebody else on their side in order to start taking any steps, and you couldn’t trust a bomb to be safe for your team. They were formidable weapons, though, if you knew how to use them…

There could always be other additions to the team. Maybe.

It was only a question of loyalty.

There was an irritating spark of something, though, deep down inside; some sharp point amidst the sliding morass which he felt at all times. Something wasn’t quite right. There was something he wasn’t seeing, and he could feel it.

Sombra would let him know. He would let her know. They were fast.

...not faster than a bullet, but nothing could escape her bullets anyway. He couldn’t hope to stop a mind-reader, either.

Unless, of course, his thoughts didn’t align with reality. Unless he was able to think something other than his true intent.

With a sigh, Reaper let his head tip back against the cushion of the dropship seat. He knew when his head was running in circles. It didn’t necessarily mean he could stop it - in fact, he usually couldn’t - but at least he knew it.


“Aww, sounds like Gabe wants to buy the ice cream! He loooves us,” Sombra gushed, leaning over to wrap her arms around him.

“Get-” he groaned, pushing at her shoulders and shaking his head. “I knew this was a mistake.”

“Nah, just messin’ with you chico,” Sombra elbowed him in the arm with a smirk, “I know you like keeping stuff like that private. Like behind a couple of thousand-ton blast doors!”

Widowmaker scoffed and rolled her eyes. “You wish.”

Reaper chuckled with a nod, catching her eye for an instant. “My thoughts exactly.” What was behind her eyes? In her mind? Would he even be able to see before her finger was on the trigger, or did he need to be waiting for a barrel to be pressed against his head?

Widowmaker laughed lightly as Sombra protested - foolish girl, but hardly the focus of the sniper’s thoughts at the moment. All she could do was wonder what it was that Reaper was searching for, what it was that she could show him in order to call off this whole charade. What aspect was he looking for? What answer did he seek?

When could she see her mouse again?

That thought brought others, painted in red and black, blood and cordite - a shattered accelerator, spiky brown hair matted with gore or long gorgeous red hair strewn through with the same, or maybe even both side-by-side, and Widowmaker wished that seeing their dead faces and bullet-ridden corpses in her mind’s eye was more of a pain than it was.

She didn’t like it. That was certain - she would have preferred to do almost anything than think about
it, but her mind caught on the thoughts like an animal in a trap and left her struggling to free it. She didn’t want to think about it. She didn’t want to.

Clearly, though, what she wanted didn’t matter.

It was best - though also frustrating - to keep her thoughts entirely distant. If she was not near Tracer, she could not shoot Tracer; if she didn’t think about Tracer, she couldn’t think about shooting Tracer, and would get to avoid the discomfort that brought.

She wanted to, though. She wanted to think about it.

About warmth, and laughter, about teasing and blushes, about the still-running game of points with Emily, the redhead being one point ahead at the moment. She wanted to think about how they fit together - tessellating in the small shower of their apartment, or intertwined on the couch, in a few different ways. She wanted to think about them sleeping, one head on each of her shoulders and both of her hands buried in their hair, and how much she wanted that.

Every one of those thoughts twisted, though. The shower ran red with blood, the hands in hair sank lower and gripped at throats as Widowmaker saw her own face in her mind’s eye shift blankly and snarl as they gasped.

As long as the possibility existed, she could not let herself lose sight of it. The instant she did, it might be too late, and to lose again…

No. She would never lose again. Perhaps Sombra’s foolishness had somehow earned them a way out of this, or perhaps she had only found her way into another minefield, but standing still was certainly gaining no ground.

Maybe soon. Maybe soon they could see each other again. Widowmaker certainly hoped so.

For now, though, she couldn’t think about it - she kept herself distracted with the present instead, whilst keeping half an eye on the future. Keeping conscious of the exits. Being aware of where everyone was, where they were moving, what was going on.

Nothing escaped her sight.

She could only hope that it would be enough.

Chapter End Notes

Bottle episode. Bottle episode!

Well, it's late here and I gotta sleep for work, heh, so I'm kinda rushing the upload but hopefully I'll write more in here tomorrow! As is, I hope this satisfies a bit of the buildup at least, heh; it was long, really long, and I debated splitting it into two but decided that would be a little unfair - this needed the time and the devotion, I think. It's a little over eleven thousand, for those interested.

Anyway - not total truthfulness, not yet, but for some different reasons. I hope this all seems to fit fairly well, and it'll get more fleshed-out next chapter, too; the kind of newly-established resting state of things. I liked several things about this chapter, definitely, and there's some calling back to earlier things - as well as some
foreshadowing of the future.

What'd you think? I always love hearing from you! Thanks for reading, folks!

C'mon back next week when Sombra tries to defend her choices, and Widdy mostly calls her an idiot. Sombra calls the other two in order to clear things up - Widdy calls her an idiot.
The Hammer Raises

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker and Sombra have a bit of a debate, and Sombra decides to call in back-up in the form of Emily and Tracer. At the very least, to inform them. A new development shocks the team and sows seeds of fear.

JFL Summary: Widdy, Em, Tracer and Sombra have a chat late one night. Early one morning. Whichever. Widowmaker, as per normal, gets excessively poetic internally. Jesse and Emily have lunch! Emily gets some time to think about home.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Sombra, fed up with the locked-down situation of paranoia between Widowmaker and Reaper, decided to take matters into her own purple-clawed hands. It went better than could have been feared, but maybe less well than could've been expected - she did allay some of Reaper's suspicions, or even most of them. What she didn't necessarily do was come up with a more solid explanation of what those suspicions were. Widowmaker feared for Sombra's safety, and when the hacker revealed herself in the aftermath, the sniper lost her composure for a moment - just a moment, just an instant, but long enough. Reaper didn't react, outwardly; Widowmaker remained suspicious, however.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Absolutely not.”

Sombra frowned, lifting her head up from Widowmaker’s shoulder. The assassin had demanded she come back to the house - hadn’t given a reason or anything, but Sombra definitely wasn’t complaining. It was nice to feel wanted for whatever reason, and Widowmaker was pretty hot, too, so she wasn’t going to pass up a night’s stay. “C’mon, amiga, I told you he-”

“He lies, cherie,” Widowmaker murmured softly but steadily, one hand buried in Sombra’s long and warm hair, fingertips working small circles at her scalp. Golden eyes stayed focused on the ceiling above the bed, on the barest reflection of moonlight off of the lake that played across the plaster. It was cloudy out, and only the slightest bit of light made it through. Only the tiniest hint, a reflection of a reflection of a fragment of the sun.

“No, he’s-” Sombra groaned in frustration. “Fuck’s sake I really gotta convince everyone of everything, huh? This is like the kidnapping bullshit all over again. Look, he was worried about…”

She trailed off, letting the room’s resting silence reign - she and Gabe had talked, but it had been rushed and agonizingly slow thanks to the amount of time he had to spend just standing there. As a result, the ten minutes had amounted to not a huge amount of actual talking.

Widowmaker let the silence hang for several seconds, before her eyes slid to meet Sombra’s.
“Hmm?” She raised an eyebrow, smiling slightly as Sombra frowned. “Worried about?” She wasn’t surprised to find that Sombra had found nothing of real substance; Reaper would hardly divulge anything, truly.

Sombra scowled. So Gabe hadn’t exactly been super straightforward. “You. Me, him, us - he- look, whatever, alright?” She cut off briefly as Widowmaker laughed, softly, dismissively. “He was worried that you were gonna kill me more than anything else. Or maybe both of us.”

“Mmm, why would I do that?” The sniper grinned to the ceiling. “Although, you do remind me of something. Tomorrow, I will make you wear a floral-print dress and venture around the town.”

“Ugh, why?” Sombra recoiled and Widowmaker followed, leaning over and glaring straight through her with those bright eyes.

“Because,” she purred with a wide and sharp grin, “you seem to like it when I hit you or choke you, so I must find a new and more suitable punishment.”

“Punishm-” Sombra spluttered, falling back onto the bed and waving a hand in the air. “You know what, fuck it, alright? Here, we’re gonna-”

Widowmaker raised an eyebrow, already quite expecting what was about to happen - she was poised to spring the moment the screen came up. Her hand flew out and clamped over Sombra’s mouth, and she spoke swiftly. “Mes cheries, please inform Sombra that it would be a particularly stupid idea to trust Reaper, hmm?”

“M-MmmmmN!” Sombra’s words came out entirely muffled by the sniper’s hand but her eyes were wide and glaring daggers, and she managed to wriggle loose and pry Widowmaker’s hand away with one arm.

“Hey!” She scowled, crossing her arms. “One of these days I’m gonna make you follow through with that shit! Now anyway,” she cleared her throat and faced the screen, “amigas, you wanna tell the paranoid spider here that it’s actually a good thing that I managed to get this shit halfway sorted out already? And that she doesn’t need to put me in a floral-print dress for it? Thanks.”

Emily grimaced at her phone, eyes practically shut. Only the barest slit allowed her to see the very, very blurry faces of the other two on the screen - it was far too bright, and she’d actually hit “answer” by accident, thinking that her alarm was going off and she was hitting snooze.

It was much too early for words. “Mwuh?” Emily frowned, rubbing one hand heavily at her eyes as Lena, beside her, suddenly groaned and tried to bury her face deeper in the pillows as she was pulled out of unconsciousness.

“Bonsoir, ma petite souris,” Widowmaker crooned, laughing when Tracer waved a hand blindly at the screen. “Ahh, is that any way to say hello to me? You might make me pout at this rate.”

“I bloody wish. That’ll be the day,” Tracer grumbled as she flipped over, keeping a hand tight over her eyes in a futile attempt to block out the light of the screen. “H’lo. What time is it.”

“S’two in the morning, love,” Emily muttered as she ran a hand through her hair, “n’say hi to Sombra too, she’s in here as well.”

She kept the hand locked down over her eyes, waving again with the other one. “Hi Sombra. ‘Kay c’n I go back to sleep now?”

“I am surprised you were asleep in the first place,” Widowmaker murmured, quirking an eyebrow.
“After all, it is only two in the morning. I expected you would yet be jumping all around.”

Tracer let out a snort of a laugh, grinning and rubbing at her eyes as Emily giggled softly beside her. “Mmm, not for lack of trying,” she sighed, somewhere between content and simply tired as she pressed at her aching eyes and then dropped her hands away to see Widowmaker’s face, and a quick grin set on her lips. “Heya, beautiful.”

“I think she’s talking to me,” Sombra interjected and snickered, as Widowmaker rolled her eyes.

“Of course you do, you… irritant. Now,” the sniper cleared her throat, seeing that the other two were more awake and cognizant. “Sombra has-”

“-made a big breakthrough, is what I’ve done,” the hacker interrupted, “and I don’t deserve to be put in an ugly floral-print dress for it!”

“Who ever said ugly?” Widowmaker grinned widely as Sombra scoffed.

“It’s a floral-print dress, chica, they’re all ugly, c’mon I’m not that stupid.”

“Clearly, we disagree on that matter,” the sniper laughed lightly, but the pair on the other side of the screen interrupted the teasing with soft exclamations.

“Wait, what’s happening?” Emily blinked hard a few times, trying to clear the last lingering remnant of sleepiness from her eyes. Lena pushed herself upright on the bed, and Emily joined her, tugging up the sheet to keep them each covered.

“Oh, bloody brilliant, love, what’d you-”

“Cherie,” Widowmaker sighed, cutting the enthusiasm short, “we cannot trust this, certainly not yet. I…” she rolled one bare shoulder in a shrug back against the sheets, one arm draped overtop of her loose hair above her head on the pillow. “Admit, he did seem… different, afterward. However, I refuse to take any risk. The stakes are too high.”

“He didn’t even mention anything about this kinda shit,” Sombra insisted, waving a hand toward the screen. She laid on her side now, focused on Widowmaker entirely - the other two were mostly there to help her make her point, really, or to back her up, something. “He was just worried that you were going to snap and kill him, or me, or something.”

“He was just worried that you were going to snap and kill him, or me, or something.”

“Or something,” Widowmaker sneered softly, letting her head fall to the side to meet Sombra’s eyes. “You do not know what he truly thinks, any more than he knows what I think.” There was just a beat of silence before she followed up her own words with ones which worried her. “He does not know, does he? Even you could not be foolish enough to have told him.”

“What, told him about your two chicas? No, I didn’t.” Sombra frowned a little. “C’mon, I wouldn’t do that.”
Widowmaker shrugged. “Perhaps. Now, it is-” her words fell away as she looked back to the screen, to the two faces there; concerned, excited, hopeful. Disappointed. Wide eyes, tight brows, lips that couldn’t decide which direction they wanted to go.

They wanted, so greatly, to be reunited - and so did she, and she could see that now, but it was not all she saw and it was the rest that worried her. The stakes were so high; the idea of continuing before things were solidified was too foolish to entertain, and for one simple reason.

She spoke before she meant to - almost before she even had completed the thought, because there was so little space alongside the concerned fixations of her mind. “I see you dead.”

The words were soft but insistent, slightly confused but firm - she glanced over to meet Emily’s eyes. “You as well.” Her brow drew tight as she took a breath, frowning and shaking her head. “I see it behind closed eyelids, I see it even now, and it-” she cut off, jaw clenching as she shook her head and her words became swift and clipped. “I will not have it. I refuse. We cannot let that come to pass, mes cheries, do not-”

“S’alright love, it’s alright,” Emily smiled softly, wrapping an arm around Lena’s back and wishing she could do more to help iron out some of the obvious frustration in Widowmaker’s voice. At least, obvious for her. “We won’t push it, yeah? Not ‘til you feel comfortable.”

She knew it wasn’t what Lena wanted to hear - knew that she was being more than a little torn up inside by the distance and by wanting to say things she couldn’t, but Emily also knew she was strong. If anyone was, Lena was, and she proved it then by just smiling and nodding. “Yeah,” Lena assured. “It’s really good to hear that there was some progress.” She let a hopeful look flicker through her eyes. “I really hope that… it can all be over soon, y’know? It’s been almost two months now, and-”

“Longer, even,” Widowmaker growled, practically snarling. “Two months, four days, fourteen hours. Roughly.”

Lena couldn’t help but let out a little laugh at that, as her eyes welled up. It hurt to think that Widdy had the time that close to mind, but it hurt in a good way - it made her feel like she was in the sniper’s thoughts, constantly, and Emily too.

It made her feel a little closer.

“Couple of bloody awful months,” she murmured, Widowmaker nodding her assent. “And yeah, I want it to be done as soon as possible, but-” she interrupted her words with a brief laugh and a grin, “no offence here love, but I think I might want to live more than you want to not kill me.”

Widowmaker let out a laugh, grinning brightly. “Oh, but of course, ma souris - alors , let us both get what we want.”

Her eyes lingered for a second on Tracer’s; they’d been so many things over the time they’d known each other. Nearly brimming over with tears of anger, shining with sadness, burning with desire or hatred, wide with shock or pain; she deeply appreciated every look that they’d ever contained, as she did with the look they held now.

...whatever that look was. Something soft, bright, perhaps slightly pained; Widowmaker thought she recognized it, but couldn’t quite place where from or what it had meant.

It was her own eyes that she failed to remember, from years past; a moment of catching them in the mirror, or the reflection of them in the glass of a picture frame when Gérard was away - that very
same look of sadness and love, but she didn’t recall it, didn’t place it.

Still, she recognized some of what that Tracer’s eyes held: longing. “All of what we want,” she sighed, then her eyes narrowed as a smirk took her lips and an eyebrow quirked. “And I do mean all,” she half-growled softly.

“Mmm, been missing you too, love,” Emily sighed happily, smiling as she let her eyes slide shut and nodded slightly. “Yep. Memory doesn’t quite do justice, does it?”

“Soon,” Widowmaker assured again.

“Yeah, she’s been all kinds of pissy,” Sombra grumbled, crossing her arms and looking firmly off to the side. “Seriously, this shit could just be over now - he doesn’t even care, he wouldn’t!”

“You are not telling him a thing,” Widowmaker calmly insisted with the barest shake of her head. She didn’t even bother looking over to face Sombra - Sombra spun to face her, though, lying on her side with one arm held out in a gesture of disbelief.

“Why?” The hacker laughed, shaking her head as she pressed a hand to her forehead. “I- look, we were alone in there for ten minutes, and-”

“And you know nothing, and everything you do know could easily be lies,” Widowmaker pointed out, still looking at the screen.

Sombra growled softly, her eyes flicking that way. “Chica, you wanna tell her not to interrupt me? She listens to you.” Widowmaker rolled her eyes, smirking, and Tracer just shrugged helplessly with an awkward grin.

“Anyway, yeah, fine,” Sombra shook her head, “maybe I don’t know all the specifics of everything, but let’s be honest, neither of you two putas exactly open up easily, alright?” Widowmaker tipped her head to the side with a soft scoff, a gesture of either derision or admission or possibly both, and Sombra continued to ramble.

“I don’t need to know everything to know that he was making shit up and he’s realized that now. He was all paranoid thinking you were gonna kill us - that’s the loyalty he was talking about, not that you were fucking the enemy, alright? He already knew about your little castle, he doesn’t give a shit what you do on your own time as long as it’s not a threat to the team.”

“And you really think,” Widowmaker laughed lightly, still not looking over. Not pulling her eyes away from the screen where the other two sat, as they had for so long, so frustratingly long now. “He will not consider this to be any threat to the team? I am quite literally bringing the enemy into my bed.”

“Can’t tell if it’s hot or offensive when you call me the enemy,” Lena muttered idly, smirking at the screen.

With a snort of a laugh and a grin, Emily suggested, “Bit of both, I think, love.”

Widowmaker’s lips curled into a tight grin, her focus remaining on them - if Sombra wished to be foolish, she could do so, but only so long as it did not endanger the three of them. “You will say nothing to him, Sombra.”

“I know I won’t,” the hacker groaned, tugging at her own hair as her neck curled back involuntarily in frustration. “I know I won’t! What kind of friend do you think I am? I’m telling you you can say something about it.”
Another dismissive laugh from the sniper, a gentle shake of the head. “Oh? And I am telling you that I cannot. Alors, quand je te di-”

“Don’t think you can just distract me out of this with French,” Sombra grumbled, flipping onto her back and crossing her arms with a frown.

Half of her frustration was at how much of a pain in the ass being around Gabe and Widowmaker was when their paranoia was running high like this - it used to be fun, they could have some jokes, they got everything done, it was good. Lately, though, Gabe had been all tense and angry (or angrier than normal, at least) and Widowmaker had been doing her puppet routine and pretending to be all blank and empty, and as much as it was kind of hot, it also felt like all of her work had been for nothing.

It had been hard to even get an eyeroll out of her at first. Forget about a laugh or a grin - but then things had gotten better, slowly, and now it was all back in the trashcan. Sombra just hated feeling like her work was being undone.

She’d done all that work to get LumeriCo exposed, and what had happened? Nothing, nothing at all - the company was still operating, and Portero was still in charge. Everything Sombra had worked for had come to naught.

She just didn’t want to see that happen again. It was frustrating enough when it was out in the world, but right here at home, with friends? Things had come so close to snapping, and they weren’t back in the clear yet, but she was sure they could be. She was so sure of it - she could see things the others couldn’t. She could see things nobody else could.

Her eyes lifted to the screen, meeting for a second a gaze that was fixed on her. Hazel eyes and red hair. With a sigh and a shake of her head, Sombra waved a hand. “Ah, whatever. Point is, things are getting better.”

“On that, we can agree,” Widowmaker nodded once, her eyes entirely occupied on the two on the screen, dancing between Emily’s freckles or the tips of Tracer’s hair as she thought of how much she wished it to be her fingertips instead of her eyes. It had been far too long, and her mind had been spilling over with plans of what to do when they were reunited - ways to make her little mouse cry out in desperation, to have her cherry laughing in glee, to have the pair of them smiling and crying soft warm tears onto her skin. To finally be able to be a part of that whirlwind of emotion again.

Her arms uncrossed, one slipping over and behind Sombra’s neck, pulling the hacker closer so their skin could be in contact, the warmth of another body instantly calming her. “We all want this to be over as soon as safely possible,” her eyes flicked to Sombra’s fixed glumly elsewhere, “we simply have different ideas of what safe entails.”

“Yeah sure,” Sombra grumbled, eating the words she’d rather say but knew there would be not point in. Widowmaker laughed, fingernails tracing lightly at the hacker’s side.

“Ahh, I have made her pout,” she explained to the screen with a grin. “Mais, I think this is just her way of trying to leverage something out of me.” Tracer and Emily laughed lightly, a yawn transferring from the redhead to the mouse.

Snorting a laugh, Sombra rolled her eyes and flashed the screen a smirk. “Yeah, you know me. Greedy, greedy bitch.”

“You and I both, cherie,” Widowmaker murmured as she fixated on the soft grins of the other two looking back at her, and her arm tightened up slightly around Sombra’s back and side. “Alors, let us
risk as little as possible, and in doing so, maximize our rewards, non?”

“Yeah, but have I mentioned I’m also an impatient, impatient bitch?” Sombra quirked an eyebrow and Widowmaker laughed brightly, openly, and it wasn’t so frustrating then. As long as she could keep moments like this one going, it wasn’t such a big deal. As long as she could keep her chica laughing.

It was a rare enough sound. She couldn’t shake the worry when it seemed like it would be getting rarer.

Sombra suspected that Widowmaker didn’t know how much she knew about the sniper’s frustrations. She was sure, for instance, that Widowmaker had no idea that the hacker had noticed her sneaking off during the nights of one extended mission - sneaking off to stalk civilians through the streets, long-haired redhead and short-haired brunettes every time. Every single time.

Although, in her defence, it wasn’t as if there were exactly a lot of people going around with purple hair shaved short on one side. So maybe that explained that away.

Sombra doubted that Widowmaker even saw it, though, really - the depths of her own annoyance and glumness. The sniper who didn’t even know how to have fun when they first met was now dangerously close to losing that all over again, and Sombra hated feeling like all of her work there might be for nothing.

On top of which, she just…

...she just wanted Widowmaker to be happy. To have fun. It was stupid when she didn’t, when she wasn’t.

That was all.

“You need hardly mention such an obvious fact as your impatience, chérie,” Widowmaker murmured as Tracer yawned again - once more she was intruding upon their lives, although this one could at least be faulted solely on Sombra. Or, rather, it could so long as she didn’t let it continue. “Let us say au revoir, though - we have woken them long enough.”

“Aw, no, you don’t have to-” Lena cut off as another yawn hit her, interrupting her words and stretching them out, “dooooo that. Mnm, maybe we should call it a night,” she stretched and settled a little deeper into the pillows, smiling up to the screen, “but I wanna talk to you more, yeah? Tomorrow? Err, later today. Whatever.”

Widowmaker nodded, chuckling at her mouse’s foolishness. Cuteness. Perhaps the words meant the same thing.

They all waved and said their brief goodbyes, and then the screen went dark and Lena rolled over and grabbed at Emily with a groan. “I know, love,” Emily sighed in response to the wordless frustration, “but we’ll be through it all soon.”

“I knooooow,” Lena complained, “and I know that you know that I want it to be now instead of soon. Bloody hell, even Sombra’s getting annoyed over it, and she doesn’t even have a horse in the race!”

Emily chuckled softly, her fingers tracing familiar patterns through Lena’s short hair as her eyes searched the pitch-black room for nothing in particular. “Oh,” she rolled one shoulder in a shrug, a gentle smile hidden on her lips in the darkness, “I don’t know if I’d say that, love…”

With a hum, Lena nuzzled deeper into her - nesting, almost - and Emily laughed, wrapping an arm
around her shoulders and squeezing tight. “Don’t go falling asleep too quick now. Don’t think it’s quite over yet.”

As Lene let out a curious noise, Emily’s phone lit up again - a text message from Sombra, one which Emily’d expected would be arriving since she and Sombra had exchanged a significant-feeling glance during the call. Right about the time that Sombra had stopped voicing her opinions, and given way to Widdy instead.

“Roja - first of all, don’t start expecting this kind of frank and emotional exchange. This is a limited-time offer due to extenuating circumstances.”

She smirked, rolling her eyes softly as Lena sat up a little straighter beside her, leaning forward and rubbing at her eyes.

“Look, I’m gonna keep pushing things forward on this end, because this bullshit’s gotta be done with, but I can’t do it alone. She doesn’t believe it, but I KNOW I have Gabe on-board, alright? I just refuse to give away her secrets, and she’s clearly not gonna listen to me, so if you could give me a hand, I’d appreciate it.”

Emily started to tap at the screen, sending back a response.

---

On Sombra’s end of things, there was no screen. At least, none that anybody else could see - if she wasn’t able to bring up some info without everyone and their dog looking over her shoulder, she’d consider her implants all a waste of time. It might happen sometimes when she wasn’t bothering to try to avoid it, but right now, she very much wanted this all to go unnoticed.

She lay on her side in the bed, darkness filling the room otherwise, and the gentle non-sounds of Widowmaker barely breathing behind her. Still laying on her back and looking at the ceiling. At least, she had been last Sombra had looked.

Her fingers twitched just slightly, sending signals through the ether and straight to the pair tucked away in Apeldoorn, and she could clearly see when Emily sent a reply back.

“Of course - as soon as this is done I’m sure we’ll return to our normal grade-school antics of cruel nicknames and pulling pigtails, but desperate times and all. It’s good to know that things are coming along, and I am so looking forward to this all being behind us. We’ll see about trying to ease her worries, yeah, but I think it might just be a matter of waiting on her.”

Sombra rolled her eyes a little, letting out a slow sigh as she sent back another message. “That’s cute, Roja, but you and I both know that all the waiting in the world won’t bring her around on some shit. You think she’d be doing anything fun if nobody had come into her room and just started playing movies for her?”

Her eyes flicked off to the side as Widowmaker repositioned slightly behind her, made a slight noise - she wondered what the assassin was thinking.

At that moment, she was mostly wondering why Sombra was so far away - only a few inches, but far enough that she gained no warmth from it. She wondered it with irritation and a slight scowl, debating internally whether this was the hacker’s sad attempt at some punishment for disagreeing
with her foolish stance on trusting Reaper.

Emily’s reply was clear to Sombra’s eyes, but wouldn’t have been seen by anyone else in the world - even if they’d been looking. “Fair enough, love, but I think that she’s going to push back in general, isn’t she? All we can do is try to make her feel safe and calm. Seems to me she’s pretty anxious to get this all done with, too.”

Sombra rolled her eyes in the darkness. “Yeah, yeah, I know, but didn’t you hear me earlier? I’m an impatient, impatient bitch!” Her smirk widened a little as she thought about how Emily would probably laugh, reading that. “Anyway, just wanted to touch base there. We’ll keep working on it. Pretty sure you all owe me a couple of tacos by this point and I intend to collect. See you around, Roja.”

She knew that nobody could see the screens, but still, for half a second when a cold arm snaked its way around her side, Sombra froze up. Widowmaker’s other arm slid between her neck and the mattress and then they closed up the circle, pulling Sombra back toward the sniper who let out a soft but annoyed sigh.

“I know that you think you are helping,” she whispered softly, her lips brushing against Sombra’s neck as she tried to soak in the body heat. It collected oddly in the metal implants down her spine, Widowmaker had noticed; they held the warmth longer than skin, but once it was gone, they ended up colder for it.

It was simply something to be taken into account.

“Look, I just-” Sombra huffed a sigh, tipping her head forward and reaching back over her shoulder, threading fingers into Widowmaker’s hair. Holding her head gently forward against her own neck. “I… know you don’t think I’m helping.”

Widowmaker took a slight breath, lips parting against the nape of Sombra’s neck to respond - and instinctive denial, but whether it was because she actually thought Sombra was helping, she couldn’t say. Whatever the words were going to be, they caught in her mouth before they could escape, and she instead let out a soft laugh point-blank against Sombra’s skin.

“The truth is not for us, is it, cherie?” She smiled as Sombra laughed, the gesture telegraphing instantly through her arms wrapped around the hacker’s chest.

“I know, right? Where do you go from there?” With a chuckle, she shook her head, her free hand moving to run through her own hair briefly. It was frustrating to feel like she could only take a step before getting stopped again, but they were on their way out at least. That was also the worst and most annoying possible time to move slowly - to be three inches from the surface and so close to taking a breath, and choose that moment to slow down and take your time and just hang out in the water.

Emily had a point, though. Widowmaker couldn’t be forced into any of it, and even if she could, Sombra wouldn’t have done it. Friends didn’t do that kind of shit to friends.

“Hey, flip over on your back,” the hacker murmured. “You know you don’t like this shit as much.”

Widowmaker laughed lightly, releasing her hold to fall onto her back in the bed. “No, I do not. Perhaps the truth is not always so bad, hmm?” She said it in a teasing way, on the bare edge of mocking - complete with a light prod of her elbow at Sombra.

The truth was, in her opinion, perhaps the worst toxin on the planet. It only hurt you when you held
it close, when you needed it, when it was the only thing of consequence. The truth was a cable which snapped when your weight dangled from it and left you falling. The truth was a rescue which never came. The truth was-

The thoughts cut off as Sombra flipped over as well, slipping an arm behind Widowmaker’s back and wrapping the other over her front, hitching a leg overtop of the sniper and pressing up against her side, and she was so very warm; she had, for once, been right. This position was far preferable to the other, with one or two slight exceptions.

Sombra’s head lay against Widowmaker’s shoulder, and the sniper stretched her arm down the hacker’s back, stroking a thumb across one of the metal plates that protruded there. It was chilled from its contact with her a moment ago, and it would hold its chill, too - Widowmaker didn’t like that, it would have been far better warm, but she knew the chill would fade. It all would fade.

All of life would, in time. She could fight as hard as she wanted, and she would still lose it all in time. That was truth, the ultimate truth: loss. Truth was cruel and unkind, it was harsh and unloving.

Her thoughts flitted back, far back to a strained mouse gripping tightly onto her pistols, tossing them to the side - giving in, giving herself over. To the truth. A different truth, perhaps, but truth all the same.

Candles on a table and roast on the plates, Emily’s slightly sad smile; Sombra’s wide and glistening eyes in the moonlight.

Truth.

Widowmaker’s lips twisted slightly, somewhere between a frown and a snarl, but silent. Truth could be warmth (Emily’s mouth seeking hers for the first time, unapologetic and unafraid). Truth could be some small shard of understanding (Tracer’s face reflected in the window as she looked out over the statue, hands grasping at Widowmaker’s to stop her from leaving). Truth could be a new avenue presented (Sombra, joking, always joking and always smirking, and always leading her forward).

She wasn’t sure when her fingers had found Sombra’s hair, nor why they were clutching quite so tightly, but the hacker had made no complaint. She only let out a sigh through her nose and settled in more. “Comfy bed,” she muttered, stroking a thumb against Widowmaker’s sternum. “Got these nice sheets and everything. You’ll be lucky if I ever leave, amiga.”

Widowmaker let out a laugh. Just one. She would be lucky if Sombra left. She would be so unlucky if Sombra left. Truth.

She hated truth.

No matter what it was, it was uncompromising - it was absolute, it was irrefutable, it was impossible to fight. The truth was. It dashed to pieces any who hoped to stand against it.

It felt like submission, admitting the truth, but what would the alternative be? Some foolishness, to be sure. As surely as Tracer was foolish for caring about the world.

“As if I could keep you out,” Widowmaker retorted softly in the darkness, fingertips stroking against Sombra’s hot scalp. The hacker snickered and nodded.

“Hey, some things just ain’t worth fighting, right?”
Truth didn’t bow. Again, Widowmaker laughed. “Indeed.” Truth was what it was, it couldn’t be reshaped or reformed. Either something was, or it wasn’t; either you admitted to it, or you didn’t.

Reaper would react how he would react.

...if he was going to react poorly, what was her hope? Keep this all hidden and relegated to phone screens? That wouldn’t work. That was pointless, that was - it was immensely frustrating, and even considering the concept had ire rising in her chest.

Widowmaker let out a long, low, drawn-out sigh.

It was foolish to jump into a situation too early. It was equally foolish to stand on the sidelines and expect the situation to sort itself out. There was a reason why the Kiss had an automatic-fire mode - sooner or later, she must leave the rooftops and make it to the objective herself, or risk the whole plan failing.

Widowmaker hated failure.

“\textit{I suspect it will not be long now,}” Widowmaker murmured softly, wide eyes trained on the black ceiling. A thicker band of cloud had passed in front of the moon, blocking out the entirety of its light. “\textit{A few more days at the most.}” It would be what it would be. Perhaps the time really had come to reveal her position and leap into battle.

Perhaps.

Sombra nodded softly, her own eyes open as well. Widowmaker didn’t exactly sound hopeful - more resigned than anything else. “Sure, \textit{chica. Whatever. Few more days.}”

---

It wasn’t a few more days.

They stretched on, days becoming a week, and then two, and Widowmaker continued to find reasons to avoid it. Reaper glancing into the firing range and his gaze lingering for a second - why was that? A mention he made during a mission of “outside interests” - what could that have been?

She began to stew in her own irritation, thinking that Emily or Tracer would raise an issue - she rankled at the thought that Tracer might, again, for reasons unknown, end up tearful and distraught. It was always annoying when that happened. When a smile gave way to sadness because of her.

It didn’t, though. They spoke daily, and neither of the other two mentioned the time, and neither of the other two spoke any differently than they had been for weeks prior - open expressions of desire to draw the conflict to a close, general assurances, offers of aid.

Somehow, it didn’t make it better. She found herself almost frustrated at the fact that they \textit{didn’t} get annoyed by it, because then her own irritation felt out of scope. She felt like she was going crazy - she couldn’t have imagined all of it earlier on. Reaper had gone to their house. Had questioned loyalty. Had made Sombra look into them, into Tracer and into Widowmaker as well - Reaper’s mentions during Tracer’s captivity, and later, his stoniness and tension.

Admittedly, it seemed to have been alleviated somewhat. Widowmaker continued to play the part
she’d adopted after Sombra’s latest foolish stunt, but still, every time she saw the hacker at his elbow looking up with those puppy-dog eyes, she only heard his dark voice whispering in her ear. Only saw how Sombra had looked down the scope.

Every time, something pulled her back. Every time she thought she saw some reason to take a step, something else drove her foot backward. Reaper mentioned a job she might be interested in, outside of the scope of her duties in Talon - something external, entirely, and she would feel as if perhaps he was okay with extraneous exercises. Then he would make some snarky comment to Sombra about relying on friendship and she would be filled with doubt again.

It was frustrating, incredibly so. Even the talks with Tracer and Emily became worse - they reminded her more and more of what she was being denied, as every thought of them did.

It felt like she had gone from being at the end of a shotgun’s barrel, to being in an open field and suspecting that there was a hostile sniper out there somewhere. Open threats gave way to subtle, insidious commentary.

Reaper’s attempts had been so un-subtle, before; asking her if she cared, testing her conditioning. So obvious. Now - now that Sombra had tipped him off to something - he had resorted to his paranoia again. Tiny little mentions that could have been nothing at all, minuscule tests which could have gone unnoticed individually.

Sombra said she was imagining it, and Widowmaker did have moments of doubt. The idea struck her that she had found her way out of the cave, but had gone so blind in the darkness that she could no longer see the sun. That she had been so long in the cold that she was numb to the warmth.

It couldn’t be risked, but she knew it was inevitable.

Still, she kept delaying, and delaying. Waiting until the last possible moment to open herself up to the truth, and let it either support her or run her through.

It wasn’t days. Not nearly.

---

“Y’alright there, miss Emily?”

Emily pulled her eyes up away from her spoon, which had been full until she’d paused with it just above her bowl of soup for long enough that all its contents had dribbled out. She flashed Jesse an apologetic smile across the table. “Oh, yeah - just… thinking, that’s all.”

“Hmm,” he tipped his head in a nod, dipping a slice of bread into his own bowl. “Mighty fine pursuit, there.”

“Thanks,” she chuckled, running a hand through her hair. It just kept stretching on, and as it did, the worries only increased. She was anxious now over Lena’s state, over Widdy’s; as people got more frustrated, more irritated, they were more likely to slip up somewhere. Everyone seemed to think they were laying their lives on the line, which made the prospect of a slip-up very bad indeed. If they’d been making progress, why didn’t matter seem to actually be progressing?

They held it together during the conversations, but every one was followed by a louder and louder
groan from Lena - every time she wanted more and more to tell Widowmaker, and Emily longed for it just the same. They took solace in each other, and it helped, but they weren’t the source of the stress.

“Lena doin’ alright?” McCree raised an eyebrow gently, his hat removed to eat and resting on one knee.

Emily let out a laugh, shaking her head as she relaxed back into her chair. They’d been having lunches for a while now, her and Jesse, and they were always fun. A slight flicker of guilt ran through her at the idea that they were fairly similar to her get-togethers with Widdy, and she worried for an instant that she might’ve been using Jesse as a surrogate.

“You’ve noticed too, have you?” Emily shrugged with a little sigh, reaching out for her drink. “She’s doing… fine. Just a couple things weighing her down, y’know?”

Slowly, McCree nodded. He’d been feeling pretty weighed-down, himself, and couldn’t say he blamed the brit for it. “Yeah. Easy to feel helpless sometimes, when it feels like all your efforts aren’t gettin’ you anywhere.”

He dragged his fingers through his hair with a sigh, closing his eyes and rubbing at them for a second - seeing red-glowing optisensors, and data readouts, and maps, and maps. A dozen briefings and debriefings melding into one in his mind.

They were trying, they really were, and they were making some progress at least. Efi had come up with an old-fashioned solution to hopefully capture whatever it was that Ana and Fareeha had been hit with - the transmission that had started to infect Athena. It had worked, too, and she’d been able to some up with a way to block the signal. Not from an area, but from their comms at least.

Progress, but it still didn’t feel like as much as he wanted. Still, he kept his chin up and kept a grin on - everyone seemed to, really. Most of ‘em were doing quite well. Jack had a spring in his step like he hadn’t for years. Winston laughed and joked in his outgoing and sometimes slightly awkward way.

Lena, though, seemed to be taking it pretty roughly, and he couldn’t blame her. He wasn’t sure if any of the others had noticed the slight edge in her eyes, the way she was just a little more quiet than normal, the subtle shifts in behaviour. At first he’d just chalked it up to the fact that he hadn’t really seen her in a few years, but then it had continued and even worsened.

“She’s been lookin’ a mite stressed,” he shrugged, “and I worry about ‘er. Good kid, doesn’t deserve the strain, y’know? Same goes for you, if’n ya don’t mind my sayin’.”

“You’re telling me,” Emily replied with a chuckle. “I’ve always been a little worried about ‘er. Good kid, doesn’t deserve the strain, y’know? Same goes for you, if’n ya don’t mind my sayin’.”

“You’re telling me,” Emily replied with a chuckle. “I’ve always been a little worried about her in all this, and I honestly couldn’t tell you whether it’s better or worse to be in the thick of it here! On the upside, I know more about what’s going on, but on the downside?…”

“You know more about what’s going on?” McCree made the suggestion with a grin and a sparkle in his eyes and was rewarded with a bright laugh from Emily, a grin and a nod.

“Exactly right, there, love. I used to know when she was gone, but I didn’t always know where, or what she was doing - now, I usually do. I know when she’s expected back so I don’t need to just sit, waiting, wondering, but…”

The cowboy nodded softly. “Makes twenty minutes late seem like a real big issue, doesn’t it?”

With a sigh, Emily nodded as well, meeting his eyes with a soft smile. Lena was off on a mission at the moment, with Ana, and Emily trusted them both immensely. At the same time, she knew that
they were out there fighting. She knew that not everybody made it home from a fight.

He flashed her a grin and raised an eyebrow. “Well, if’n you find yourself wantin’ a little more of an in-depth look at things, hell, I could always recruit you properly. Then you could be on the comms all the time! Sure that’d make it better, wouldn’t it?”

Emily giggled and shook her head as he laughed, knowing full well that he knew that wouldn’t really help. There was an ideal range somewhere, knowing some but not everything - having no clue at all about what was going on would drive her mad, as would being on the radio and constantly worrying she was going to hear a gunshot and a scream.

“Well, I’m delighted at the offer at least, but sadly I’ll need to turn you down there, Mr. McCree - not sure I’m the special agent type, exactly.” She smirked slightly as he fixed her with an appreciative look of assessment and then shrugged.

“Well, depends on the type of agent, I suppose,” he drawled with a grin, “but you’ve got a good head on your shoulders. ‘N I don’t just mean a pretty one.”

Laughter leapt from her throat as a wide grin pulled into her cheeks, her eyes flicking briefly to his before dropping back to her soup again as she lifted another spoonful. “Keep talking like that and I won’t be able to fit it through the bloody doorway, love, and then where’ll I be-”

“All personnel please report to the briefing room immediately.” Athena’s voice interrupted hers, sounding from all of the speakers throughout the base.

The pair exchanged a confused and slightly worried glance, McCree already halfway through pushing his chair back. They left their unfinished lunch on the table and ran down the hallway, taking a turn and then another and leaping up a flight of stairs to arrive at the briefing room.

Every screen held the same thing: news footage, and Emily had a moment of sinking, horrifying dread as she thought that the next thing to show up would be film of the woman (or one of the women) she loved, but it didn’t take long to see that that wouldn’t be the case. All she had to do was read the text along the bottom of the screen, it only took a second - but when she did, she didn’t feel any better for it.

There, written underneath the concerned-looking news anchors were the words, “Virus Outbreak Causes Hostile Omnics”.

“-nd as we mentioned before the break, Atlas News has received information about this outbreak, and we go now, live, to our reporter in the field: Olympia Shaw.”

The screen cut from the anchors to a face that most of them recognized - Emily barely noticed through her focus when McCree stepped away toward Jack and murmured something softly. She heard a noise at her elbow and glanced over to see Winston there with a huge frown.

“I thought… Sombra was keeping a lid on all this,” Emily inquired, and Winston turned his head to look at her, fixing her with those huge yellowish eyes as he shook his head.

“So did I.”

They both returned their attention to the screens as the reporter began to speak. “Hello, this is Olympia Shaw reporting to you live from the streets of King’s Row. As you can see behind me-” she was interrupted briefly be a bang and a clatter.

Far behind her on the street, a row of riot police with their shields held up were trying to contain a
half-dozen omnis, their opti-sensors glowing red. They snarled and lashed against the shields, but to no effect. Another pair of officers flanked the reporter, their helmet visors obscuring their faces from view. Flames flickered in the distance, a car on fire at least, and nearer to the camera two medical responders carried a stretcher with a moaning form on it.

“Haversham,” Emily murmured, recognizing one of the EMTs who bore the stretcher - recognising him from work at the hospital. He looked harried to say the least, and he’d been around for a while. She wondered, with a lurch in her gut, what the injuries were. What the situation was.

Olympia Shaw continued as soon as the din died down, though, not flinching or even barely reacting. It wasn’t the first fight she’d seen and she was well-practiced at working around them. “-there are scenes of chaos. King’s Row has erupted into catastrophe as it has been struck by what is being called, ‘the Black Tide Virus’. Anonymous sources notified Atlas News about an outbreak in the area, and-”

“Why didn’t we know about this?” Jack whirled around, looking away from the screens for a second to just about anything else - the ceiling, Winston, anybody.

“Uncertain. We received no word from our contact, and my own filtering algorithms did not capture any recent mentions,” Athena responded. “I am investigating further.”

“In this letter,” Shaw held up an envelope and McCree hissed a swear, shaking his head and interrupting her.

“Old tactic. Can’t hack pen and paper,” he muttered, thumb resting on the grip of his Peacekeeper just for reassurance.

“Damn it,” Jack grunted. On the screen, the report continued.

“-says that the Virus affects Omnis and turns them hostile. Nothing else is currently known about this disease, but we have filed inquiries with Downing Street and with the NHS to see whether anything has been discovered about this pandemic. The symptoms are terrifying to say the least, and an infected individual can easily be recognized by the red lights on-”

From off-screen, a dark shape flashed, with little dots glowing red. The omnic knocked one of Shaw’s bodyguards out of the way and leapt at her, metal fingers grabbing at her sleeve and ripping it, every motion frantic but the voice was so calm.

“The Tide rises.”

The other officer reacted quickly, dodging around Shaw as she recoiled with a shout, the sleeve of her jacket tearing off at the seam around her shoulder - the officer tackled the omnic to the ground and hit it in the head with the butt of his rifle. Metal legs coiled up and launched him back as his fellow scrambled off of the ground and lashed out with a foot, striking the omnic in the head and cracking one of its optisensors which went dark.

“Turn the camera off,” Olympia insisted, staring at the scene as the other officer joined in, stomping heavily on the omnic’s head as it swung out an arm and clawed at one of their legs, drawing blood and a scream. The other one swung his rifle again, sparks flying as actuators in the omnic’s neck snapped, and then he raised his rifle to his shoulder as the omnic twitched on the ground.

Shaw turned away and grabbed at the camera, pulling it away from the scene, shrieking desperately, “TURN THE CAMERA OFF!”

The last thing before the screen cut back to the shocked-looking anchors was a series of gunshots.
The news anchors were silent, and so was the room.

For about four seconds.

Then the screens shut off and everybody turn around and began to speak at once. “Dammit,” Jack hissed, “Athena-

“Dropships are being prepared, flight paths set to King’s Row.”

“That’ll be you ‘n’ I at least, I reckon,” McCree pointed at the former commander and got a swift nod of the head in return.

“Operatives Amari and Oxton are too far away, and already engaged in combat, but I am notifying them of the situation” Athena provided.

“What the hell happened? Who leaked this?” Soldier: 76 glanced back to the screens, now blank of news footage but instead covered with dozens of stills taken from the report along with a written transcript of all Shaw had said, taken in real-time by Athena.

“Unknown,” she stated.

“Sombra,” Jack hissed.

“I don’t think so, Jack,” Winston grumbled. “Why now?”

“I’m with him,” McCree added in a grunt.

“Who else knows, huh?” The soldier crossed his arms, scowling. “Who else knows this is happening - who else knows that we’re looking out for information on it, too. Who else would know that they needed to hand over something physically?”

“There is an entity behind the virus itself,” Athena mentioned cautiously from the ceiling. “They could be responsible.”

“Get her on the screen. Now.” Jack’s teeth were set tight against each other, and he realized an instant later that he didn’t have the authority anymore to give that order. His eyes shifted to Winston’s, looking back at him speculatively.

“Agreed,” Winston nodded slowly, firmly. “We need to know, one way or the other.”

“It would be a risk to grant her access to these screens and mainframes,” the AI cautioned.

“Either she’s still with us and we can trust her, or she’s flipped sides and she’ll find her way in sooner or later,” Winston grumbled, shaking his head. “I just… I really hope it’s the former.”

Athena hummed, slightly, the room falling silent in anticipation. Everyone kept their thoughts to themselves.

Emily was sure that, if it had been Sombra, she’d had her reasons. Athena was sure of the same, but was less certain that Sombra’s reasons would be necessarily considered good. Winston wasn’t sure she had any reason at all, she might just want to see them squirm. Jack was planning out an offensive for King’s Row, and with all the information they’d gathered it still felt like it wouldn’t be enough. McCree just pulled out a cigar, chewed on the end, and waited, while thoughts of a purple smirk flitted through his head.

It only took a few seconds for Sombra’s face to show up on the screens, and when it did, it looked
irritated. “Yeah yeah,” she muttered, fingers flying over holographic keys, eyes dedicated elsewhere. “I saw it, but I’ve got other shit to worry about right now.”

“Sombra-” Jack started, but she cut him off sharply.

“I said I’m fucking busy, alright? Fuck’s sake why do I need to do everything?” Her eyes flicked to the screen, just for an instant, and Emily didn’t like at all the fear she saw there. “Look, you need to deal with that shit for a minute, alright? It wasn’t me.”

“Can you provide us with any-” Athena was cut off as well, Sombra looking away sharply at a loud thump, the brick wall behind her shaking off dust. Her eyes widened a little and she leapt to her feet, looking back to the screen in panic for an instant before she started to sprint.

“I gotta go. Bye.”

The call disconnected, and all of them were left staring.

“Dropships are prepared - will you be accompanying, Winston?”

“Yes,” he grunted, “maybe cut down on casualties a little.”

“Strength’ll sure be handy,” McCree grumbled, shaking his head as diagrams covered the screen.

Emily recognized the Row, instantly; she knew the places which were circled, highlighted, crossed out. Her feet carried her instinctively forward, one hand raising to trace a finger at the holographic projection.

She’d known the street corner Olympia Shaw had been reporting from - it was circled on the map, and her thumb glossed over it. Nearby crosses and a highlighted zone described the fighting that had been seen on the camera, in the news feed. Lines showed the routes the ambulances would be taking out to the hospital.

As the others murmured behind her, their words escaping her grasp, she was left to wonder what all the other markings meant, but it wasn’t difficult to discern. Disco Electro was circled, and the homeless shelter which was run by an organization affiliated with the Shambali monks, and then-Emily’s finger traced the circle around Gord’s Positronics.

It wasn’t hard to see what they were saying, all the little marks; the rioting was spreading and it was affecting omnic-related businesses. Not omnic-owned, of course, because nothing could be in the Row - Gord’s was named after him but owned by a human, of course. In the eyes of the British government, only people got to own property, and omnics just didn’t count.

A slow chill slid down Emily’s spine as she looked over the map, another circle bringing itself up around another place, and then another. Was it the Tide? Or was it just the people - the ones who spray-painted horrid things in the Tube, the ones who lurked in alleyways with sneers and shouts for any mechanical passersby?

She had a sinking suspicion that it didn’t much make a difference. Whether it was the virus or just the hatred, it would destroy the Row either way.

They’d handle it, though. Together - somehow, they would handle it. She knew that. Lena, and Jesse, Ana and Winston - all of them, and she’d just… keep helping out, however she could.

“Anything I can do to help, love,” she murmured softly, confident that Athena would pick up her words. A gentle hum was her response, her confirmation.
“I have received new information,” Athena spoke swiftly. “Operatives Amari and Oxton are-”

She wasn’t quite fast enough, as an alert flashed up on the screen. Their communication units carried basic biometrics, as well, and trackers - a whole host of little electronics, and the one labeled “Operative Lena ‘Tracer’ Oxton” had just gone blank.

Emily’s eyes fell on it and her heart seemed to take far too long on its next beat. No information anymore - no tracking, no heartbeat, no vital signs. She felt something behind her and mechanically leaned backward into Jesse’s arms, clutching at his hand, still staring, still unblinking.

There was so much cacophony and chaos leading up to it, it took a second for her to realize what even was happening - what had happened, past-tense, what that little indication meant.

A flat line on a screen. That was all it took for her whole world to unravel just a little bit.

A few seconds later, or a few hours - Emily couldn’t have said, they were the same to her in that moment - the other panel went blank as well. “Operative Ana ‘Horus’ Amari”, flatlined as well.

“Their situation is untenable but I assure you they are quite alive, surveillance is in place,” Athena insisted from the ceiling. “Winston, your aid would be greatly-”

“Me too.”

Emily didn’t even recognize her own voice, so hoarse and choked, but she cleared her throat and pushed forward out of Jesse’s embrace and said it again. “Me too.”

She didn’t look around. She didn’t care if they nodded, if they agreed - she wasn’t going to be stopped. Athena said Lena was still alive, then she was still alive, but Emily knew that she couldn’t just sit there and wait anymore.

She turned to leave the room.

Jesse caught her arm, spinning her back - her eyes flashed with fire but he wasn’t trying to stop her, not really. Behind him, Soldier: 76 held his sidearm outstretched in offering, looking her right in the eyes. McCree took the weapon and handed it to Emily. “Just in case, Miss Emily. Here’s hopin’ you don’t need to use it.”

Emily’s jaw clenched tight as she held the gun, no holster in which to store it, but Jesse had taken her to the firing range a few times and assured her it would be fun. It had been. She wondered now if he’d suspected that it would be useful as well.

“Let’s go,” Winston said simply. He didn’t know why Athena thought that he, specifically, would be needed on the field where Tracer and Ana were, but she had her reasons. She was in tactical mode at the moment, and he trusted her. There wasn’t time to explain every decision fully. “Athena, call in Angela if you can, she’s nearby there. Jesse, Jack, we’ll take care of the others and come join you in the Row as soon as possible.”

There was a tense moment, everyone looking between each other as Winston took a deep breath. “Everyone, keep everyone else notified, and…” he nodded, “good luck.”

With that, they all exited the room. Behind them, the screens continued to periodically update with new circles or crosses on the maps of King’s Row as Athena monitored the situation, as she always did.

It was tense, she knew, her databanks distantly whirring and clicking as she considered moves and
countermoves and counter-countermoves. It was strained. It would not be an easy situation to deal with, but they were capable - all of them.

Nothing was impossible.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so... I can't tell if some of this feels rushed. I don't want to rush through but I also don't want to take this agonizingly long time painting an excruciatingly detailed portrait of longing. I mean, I *kind of* want to do that, but not here and not now; there's important stuff to be done so I'm doing a bit of... smoothing.

I hope it feels alright. I hope it doesn't feel like a pointless montage to just say "SOME TIME LATER" because I want it to be more than that, but I'm not gonna lie, Widdy, Tracer, Em, and Sombra aren't the only ones who are getting antsy for some relief at this point. I think we all are too - I know *I* am!

I used to have a buffer of over a dozen chapters - by the time I posted one, I had read through it at least a half-dozen times. Catching errors, shifting little things, subtly rephrasing things. The past uh... four, I think, I've not had a buffer at all - they've been written, looked over, edited, polished and all, all within the space of a week. So, I really hope that they're still good; I do worry over them. It also doesn't help that I've developed a habit of forming headaches on my weekends - and a few days of this past week I was working two jobs, so I've had less time than normal. Not trying to make excuses, but just pointing out that there might be a higher-than-normal incidence rate of typos and the like.

Then, on to a little bit more bad news: probably no update next week. I'll be spending my weekend out of town with friends who are returning to their home country soon and I really want to make the most of it - honestly, I didn't anticipate or intend this chapter to end on such a cliffhanger. I feel bad about it. I wanted to show that Emily had become integrated into the group, to an extent; that some of the suspicions and hang-ups from earlier had been cleared. There was one thing that needed to happen and two that I wanted, and in weaving those together, this is the story that came out.

It's not the only option - if you're displeased with this ending there is a slightly alternate version that could be worked out; if Tracer and Ana are still on the base, things go quite differently. It'll still work for the overall story but it will mean another chapter in between now and resolution. I leave it up to you, largely, but I realize I've set a substantial finger on the scales by publishing this - I think it's unlikely people will vote for a retraction and a rewrite. As I said, it won't change the overarching plot either way, it'll only make a day's difference. The difference between Emily being in a dropship when something happens, and her being at home, that's all that will change other than the scene which is at the end of this chapter here.

I wanted to do a few things in this chapter: a little more exploration on Widdy's end, an establishment of a sort of a balance or even impasse, I wanted to show Emily's inclusion around Apeldoorn which has been hinted at. I wanted to show some more of Sombra's feelings, why this is important to her; we got some in the chapter where they fought and we're getting a little more now. I think I did those things pretty well? Several bits of this
which I quite liked, heh! I hope you did too.

As always I'd love to hear back from you folks! I've been writing little angsty one-offs this month as part of a prompt challenge, heh, so that might explain some of this, haha!

Come on back next time when, and this shouldn't be sugar-coated, the shit will hit the fan. We find out what happened with Tracer and Ana, and what Sombra was so frightened about. Trust and truth will be tested in more ways than one, but I promise you, if you hold out and trust me there is brightness just on the other side of the tunnel.

First, though, there will be some enclosing darkness.
Serious Summary: A situation can only ever get so tense before it snaps. Everything reaches a breaking point sooner or later.

JFL Summary: They all try to do a good thing, they all try to help, they all try to make their way forward in life. Unfortunately, they all fail.

Chapter Notes

Warning: a lot of sadness and a fair bit of anger. Death - of unnamed NPCs, and also of a main character. Sorry.

Previous Chapter Summary: Sombra tried to convince Widowmaker that Reaper trusted them - she tried to get Widowmaker to call an end to the strained hiatus which was taking its toll on them all, but to no avail. She was quite worried for Widowmaker, worried that the stress was getting to her, but it was to no avail; Widowmaker refused to end things just yet. She assured them all - Sombra, Emily, and Tracer - that it would be ending soon. It turned out to not be that soon, though. Days stretched into weeks and she was still suspicious over Reaper's intentions. News of the Black Tide Virus was leaked through Atlas News, and Emily's concern over King's Row was shortly overtaken by a far steeper terror as Lena's vitals went flat, followed shortly by Ana's. Athena assured the group that Ana and Tracer were still alive. Winston and Emily went to Ana and Tracer's last location, while Soldier: 76 and McCree went to King's Row.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The city looked so much worse. Seeing it now, it would have been easy to feel disheartened - they’d been giving it their all, trying their damnedest, and it seemed to be having no effect. The city, and the world as well, seemed to be resolutely determined to sink into chaos.

It probably wasn’t being helped along by developments in her personal life.

Tracer let out a slow sigh as she leaned her forehead against the glass, the dropship whipping through the air above the conflict. There were relatively safe channels in and out, but only relatively, and they only went so far. There would be distance to cover on the ground, yet.
Right now, though, Tracer couldn’t bring herself to think about the mission to come. She was too caught-up on the reflection of her own eyes and how very much she wanted them to be replaced with a different pair, sharp gold and gorgeous.

It had been too long.

“Saghir? Are you going to leave an old woman on her own?”

Her eyes left the window, her own reflection overlaid on the now-almost-ruinous city, and shifted to meet Ana’s lone one which was crinkling kindly at the corner. Tracer laughed slightly, shaking her head. “Course not, love - just getting a little wrapped up in my own head, that’s all.”

Ana nodded with a knowing hum, but didn’t press the issue any further as she slid the bolt on the Biotic Rifle, checked through every part of it to ensure proper function. Practiced hands moved steadily but rapidly - in the same way that an expert pianist or guitarist turned out intricate music without it looking like their hands moved almost at all. Her motions only seemed slow because of how fluid they were.

“We will succeed, you know.”

Tracer looked up and away from the rifle, from Ana’s almost hypnotic hands, but the sniper’s single eye was looking down at her own lap. It flicked up to meet Tracer’s gaze, and a faint smile took Ana’s weathered lips. “I know it.”

It was hard to argue with her. Probably impossible, at least in Tracer’s mind, and the assurance drove a large portion of her cloudy anxiety away in an instant as she sighed a faint laugh. “I know,” she nodded, “I know we will. We’re making progress, even. We’re doing good work.”

What did it matter if they were talking about two completely different things? Tracer hadn’t felt selfish about it before, getting involved with Widowmaker - not around Emily with whom things had been perfectly clear, and not around her team with whom they’d been perfectly straightforward. Emily was solidly in place, and Tracer would never risk her team, and for a long time that had been all she’d needed to avoid any guilt over the matter.

Lately, though, things had been a little different, because while everybody else and their mother (quite literally, in one case) was simmering over this Black Tide nonsense, Tracer’s biggest concern was just one blue woman out of the whole world.

“We are.” Ana lifted a hand away from her rifle, laying it briefly and comfortingly on Tracer’s shoulder. “We will win the fight yet.”

With a laugh and a nod, Tracer slid in to sit on the bench next to her. “Yeah. Yeah, we will - things are getting better.”

Her eyes shifted to the window again. The city below was in ruins - but how much worse would it have been without their intervention? It wasn’t as if they could get truly involved, anyway. Overwatch still didn’t technically exist, was still banned, and so were all of them by association.

The U.N. had started to rear its head on the matter, too - the footage from the Museum had been the first step, but it had progressed from there. Every time somebody snapped a blurry pic of Tracer in action, or Winston, or any of them, it got a little harder for them to wander around.

Luckily, they had someone helping them on the tech end of things now - along with Athena, who was ever-vigilant in maintaining just the right amount of exposure. Still didn’t change the fact that they could’ve been doing more in the city below, but that didn’t eliminate the good that they had
done. The progress they had made.

...and even if Widowmaker wasn’t back yet, she seemed a little less concerned these days, at least. Sort of. She also seemed anxious, and irritated; she’d been a little more short-spoken, she’d lost some of her teasing edge, and it worried Tracer.

The city mattered a lot. She wanted to help them, she really did - but if she couldn’t, anyway, why was she here rather than helping her girlfriend get everything all sorted out?

Ana could see that she remained less than entirely convinced of the matter, and wrapped an arm around Tracer’s shoulder, turning her head to plant a gentle kiss on the top of her head. She breathed deeply, letting it out in a warm sigh as Tracer patted her knee.

“I really do know it’s getting better,” the Brit murmured softly. “Every day. Every step we take. Just… don’t know how many steps it’ll take to get there, that’s all.”

A soft and slightly hoarse laugh, like all the others, leapt from Ana’s chest. “Yes, saghir; that is exactly the problem - as it always is. Footsteps in the sand are so misleading. You look back, and the wind has blown them clear, the desert reclaiming the marks. Look forward, and they give you no guidance. We must not look at our footsteps, saghir, or we will be lost.”

“Everyone’s a bloody poet,” Tracer muttered with a grin, giggling as Ana ruffled her hair.

“Only us old ones,” the sniper corrected with a smirk, pushing herself up and to her feet as the dropship’s engines increased in pitch, coming in to land.

“Yeah, right! You and Jesse and Zenyatta, my own bloody girlfriend,” she chuckled, shaking her head as she stretched out her hands. Her bracers opened up and her pistols popped out, right into her hands. “It’s nice, though. Who doesn’t like a little poetry, right?”

“Don’t get me started,” Ana quipped with a slight smirk, tapping at her communicator. “Athena?”

“Present. Operatives Amari and Oxt-”

“I think Ana and Tracer will be fine, Athena,” she murmured, her one eye scanning the terrain already as the door began to open. Just because they said this would be a safe zone to drop, didn’t mean it would be so.

“Of course, Ana,” the AI responded. “My fullest tactical capabilities are being provided at the moment and my attention is split. Apologies if certain other systems have decreased in functionality.”

Ana’s hands gripped a little tighter on her rifle. She knew every piece of it now, every shape and measurement by feel - but it was not the first, and she still sometimes compared it to her old Kinamura. “Not at all,” she murmured, “no apology necessary. I understand the changes a battle can bring.”

Athena made a small noise, a little electronic hum to indicate her acceptance, but she wasn’t certain that she’d say it was correct. It was, of course, impossible to tell; no person could be both a human and an AI, none could experience the changes that occurred within her when systems were shuffled out to higher or lower priorities, as well as experiencing the natural processes of an organic brain.

Perhaps, though, it was more similar than she’d expected, and she filed that idea away as something on which to reflect later.

It wasn’t the time for that, though, and Athena carried on seamlessly with mission data. “As per the
briefing, a stash of the chemical weaponry has been uncovered. Worryingly, it would account for a total amount recovered or destroyed by our organization, which would be in excess of the calculated total stored in the original facility.”

“Either they are making more or they have discovered more,” Ana murmured darkly, “and either situation is a bad one.”

“Agreed. Other possibilities exist: dilution or disguise, amongst them. We will of course be doing whatever possible to obtain further information, but-”

Ana stepped out of the dropship briskly. “Don’t apologize, Athena.”

“Of course. The destination is guarded. Recovering a guard is considered of high importance, to retrieve information.”

Ana nodded softly. That was the worrying part of this mission, to her - in one way. In another, it was the joyous part.

As much as she might have disagreed with Blackwatch’s tactics, she couldn’t deny their results.

Not that this would be a Blackwatch interrogation, of course. Everyone had assured everyone else of that until she had been on the edge of rolling her eyes and leaving the room - Jesse had, in fact, refused to even be in the room when they brought a guard in. As had Jack. It was determined that Reinhardt and Tracer would be the ones doing their best to encourage information. Everyone agreed that they would do nothing with which the team was uncomfortable.

“Takin’ prisoners again,” Tracer muttered softly - not over the radio, simply to the air as she followed Ana out of the dropship. “Not sure I like that.”

If the sniper heard, though, she made no mention of it.

“What d’you say we mix it up a bit, eh Cap?” Tracer zipped forward, briefly abusing the laws of time to catch up to Ana’s even strides and nudge her elbow. “I’ll take the high ground and you can be on point, eh?”

Shaking her head, Ana laughed. “Ah, I do not have the knees for it anymore, saghir, but I appreciate your confidence in me.” Her eye returned to the surroundings, ever searching, ever seeking - trying to sight out any possible threat before it became real.

She’d lost too much already. She would never blink again, never hesitate again, to whatever extent she was able.

“Come, the compound is three kilometres away,” she sighed, dropping her chin very briefly and shaking her head. “My old bones are feeling it already.”

---

Contrary to her complaints, Ana didn’t slow down in the slightest. Endurance always had been a strong point of hers, and even if she wasn’t quite as lithe as she once had been, she still had more than her share of agility. She only pretended as if she didn’t.
“Old bones my perky arse,” Tracer scoffed as she realigned with time on a rooftop, just as Ana pulled herself up over the edge.

“Oh, I think I might fall from the strain, *saghir,*” Ana quipped darkly as she stretched out a hand. “Quickly, pull me up.”

Rolling her eyes, Tracer leaned down and clasped the sniper’s forearm, hauling her up onto the rooftop - Ana didn’t leave all the lifting to her, of course, and helped out. However, that didn’t mean that Tracer couldn’t complain about it. “Next you’ll be having me line up your shots, too, complaining ’bout your eyesight!”

“Oh, if you ask nicely,” Ana retorted with a grin which widened slightly at Tracer’s giggle. She stalked over to the edge of the roof and crouched, one elbow falling instinctively to her knee as her hand tucked tightly into the crook of the strap against the forestock.

She felt so whole, like this, perched and ready to take a shot. It was a naturally stable position, internally and externally - designed to keep her arms firmly locked in place to hold the rifle steady, whilst also keeping her stabilized on the ground. She became a tripod, or a turret almost, as stable as any piece of machinery, and it always had felt good.

With a soft, contented sigh, Ana scanned the grounds of the compound through her scope. “Three guards per watchtower. Four towers. Teams of two and a dog, each, patrolling the fence - I see five teams. May be more hiding.”

Tracer crouched behind her, squinting and peering over her shoulder as a grin curled her lips. “What kinda dog?”

Ana made a slight noise, not moving as her eyes flicked briefly away from the scope. “Large.” She smirked. “Not for petting.”

“Luckily, I’m quicker than most mutts,” Tracer boasted proudly with a giggle.

Ana chuckled, deep in her chest, continuing her scan. “Standing guards, fewer than a dozen. I see eight on the rooftop. Weaponry should be inside, I will see if I can confirm.” She searched the windows and the doors, her cybernetic eye hidden under the eyepatch providing a little extra help, and she smiled softly as she saw it. “Confirmed. Look at that, it is already in a truck - do you know what is dangerous about trucks, *saghir*?”

“Mmmm, they explode?” Tracer quirked an eyebrow with a grin, then scoffed and grimaced. “God, I really am our Junkrat, aren’t I?”

The sniper barked a laugh, shaking her head slightly enough as to not disturb her own view down the scope. “Personally, I think that would be Reinhardt. If you tell anyone I said it, I will deny it.”

Tracer chuckled, nodding, but she could actually see that - something in the enthusiastic flair for destruction, albeit through different means.

It was useless patter, useless conversation and joking. In fact, it was even a slight detriment to the mission, but it was vital to the *people* on that mission. Ana did understand some of Athena’s changes, shifting into a tactical mode - she did the same. They all did, to varying extents, but sometimes you needed an injection of humour to soften the situation. Sometimes you needed that little reminder that your teammates were people, too.

Or that *you* were.
“I will cover you,” Ana nodded once, her rear hand squeezing at the rifle’s grip in preparation. Her fingers wouldn’t be tight when it came time to actually shoot, of course, but it was a way of stretching beforehand. “In and out, as quickly as possible - and, saghir? Do be careful. I would hate to need to tell Emily over our next tea, that you were hospitalized.”

Tracer laughed as she stood, shaking her head. “Bloody hell, feels like everyone gets more time with her these days than I do - you’d think moving her closer would’ve done the opposite!” She didn’t mean a word of it, though, and even if it had been true she wouldn’t have felt bad in the slightest. Her friends, her team, the people with whom she’d made her life - they were getting to see the other side of her life, the other person she’d chosen.

Or, at least, one of them.

It occurred to her then that there might be some awkward confessions coming up, once Widdy sorted things out on her end - but at least things were smoother there than they had been. Working with Sombra had been met with a lot of suspicion but people seemed to be accepting it more, now. Things were getting better.

It all was.

“How, love,” Tracer took a breath and huffed it out with a grin, patting Ana on the shoulder. “Last one back’s a rotten egg!”

“That hardly makes sense when…” Ana cut off briefly as Tracer dissolved into light, streaking forward and reappearing on a distant rooftop with a shout of glee. The sniper rolled her eyes and continued in a mutter below her breath, “When you are the only one departing. Nobody ever bothers to listen to me.”

For all of her practiced grumpiness, though, she wore a hint of a smile on her lips, almost hidden entirely from the world. It would be a good day. She could feel it in her old bones.

---

Reaper grunted as he slammed the man back against a wall which cracked, chunks of masonry and plumes of dust falling. He didn’t even twitch as a bullet zipped over his shoulder, instantly ending the soldier’s struggles - but as he dropped the body, he glanced over his shoulder to see Widowmaker standing behind him.

“Maybe leave me the next one,” he grumbled. “I’m hungry.”

Widowmaker smirked slightly and tipped her head to the side, murmuring a quick “d’accord” before walking off to take her next position.

She would admit that she liked this game better than the last; it was far more enjoyable to play this part, even if she did not trust it any deeper than her last. The only joy of playing the perfect puppet was nostalgia, and that was a bittersweet dessert at best. This, though, she could truly enjoy.

Of course, she still could not trust it. She could not trust him, not with all of this at stake - perhaps, she had begun to consider, it would be best to begin by divulging some truths about Sombra. Something smaller and of lower risk, something in which he had other vested interest so he would not react so harshly, and thus to warm him up to the idea of a larger and more potentially destructive
truth.

Truths.

She felt disheartened even thinking about it, or at least as disheartened as a heartless one can feel to begin with. She was playing a dangerous, pointless game in delaying, and she knew it.

The truth was what it was. It would be what it would be. She could no more hope to alter it or to avoid it, than she could hope to avoid any of the deaths that she had caused. Any more than she could hope to turn back the tide or still the moon in the sky. Or the sun.

It was out, now, that sun - regardless of her wishes on the matter. Truth, burning in the sky, inescapable but for the occasional moment of shade. Passing into a shadow only emphasized how much less warm it was outside of the sun’s glow, anyway, and who would not have been frustrated at that?

She certainly was.

Her steps sharpened as she stalked through the blasted-out building, up a set of stairs to the second story, jabbing at the button on her headset. Truths. Delay. She could not step out too early, or risk all being lost - yet, by delaying, she risked all being lost. It was irritating, and not in a good way.

“Sombra. Are you quite finished, yet?”

In a different building - one which was, in fact, in far worse shape generally - Sombra snickered and flicked a chocolate-covered raisin into the air with her thumb. “Easy, amiga. Usually I’m the impatient one! I’ll be done when I’m done. Sometimes it takes a girl a minute, don’t worry, I’ll get there.”

Widowmaker sighed and rolled her eyes, shaking her head - she heard Reaper do the same over the radio, or at least it quite sounded like a sigh. It could have simply been one of the noises he naturally made.

It wasn’t as bad with him on the ground, in sight, but she didn’t like the feeling of him behind her. It irked her greatly, these days; felt like a thread under her skin, simply pulling slowly along. Irritating. Intensely irritating.

Or, at least, as intensely as she could feel anything. It was still so very pale in comparison to true feeling, so she knew she could bear it, but that didn’t mean it was pleasant.

She stood at a window. Rather, she stood at what had once been a window - it was now simply a hole in the side of the building, through which she looked. He was below, dark cloak flapping in the breeze. She smirked at the thought of how hot he might be in there with the sun streaming down, and wondered whether sweat beaded and dripped from his brow, whether it ever got into his eyes and stung. It was an amusing thought.

Amusing and almost certainly false, as well. He, like she, was barely human anymore and she knew it. Neither of them were like any person alive.

Yet, that did not mean they were alike to each other, either.

A soldier spun around, pulling his rifle to the ready; Widowmaker sent a round lazily through his bracing shoulder and Reaper took a bound toward the man and grabbed him by the neck as the soldier reeled from the bullet’s impact.

It only took a few moments for the soldier to be reduced to crumbling nothing as Reaper drained
every bit of vitality from the corpse, laughing as he did. He’d taken a few rounds today, and was hangrier when he was hurt - and when he was hangrier, he was angrier.

In the past years, he’d come to care less and less. He’d sunk down into his anger, stewing in it, embracing it; the Talon troopers feared him, good. He wanted them to. They’d listen better that way and that might mean they’d survive another mission or two. The Council even feared him, largely, and he liked that too. Everyone should.

Lately, though - very lately - he’d come to realize that there were limits to it if he wanted other things. Things which he’d previously written off as impossible.

Team.

That single word still managed to mean so much. Some tiny fragment that had managed to escape the thick bubbling black pool of hatred and anger which fueled him, some little glittering spark which remained untarnished despite it all, and recently he’d polished it off.

They weren’t large enough to do what he needed, not yet, but Sombra had proven herself.

Widowmaker…

He couldn’t accept her into the team. Not that team - on the Talon mission squad was one thing, and there, she continued to perform admirably. Excelled, even.

Still, she’d taken aim at Sombra. Slowly. Deliberately. Full foresight and full disclosure, and she’d chosen to shoot her.

Sombra assured him that it was going to be a non-lethal shot, and he wasn’t actually sure how he felt about that. It could have been Widowmaker lying in order to improve her own position - but what reason would she have to do that, if she didn’t have any loyalty in play? Simply a way of easing her own time, maybe.

If the sniper could even be believed on that point. Then, though, if she had intended to kill, why would she lie? If she was going to kill, she was on the leash, and there would be no point lying. If she lied to spare Sombra’s feelings or deny her suspicions, there must be a reason for that.

Perhaps to avoid the hacker taking any further measures at self-defence. To allay her suspicions. Widowmaker did seem like the type who wouldn’t wilfully help any person avoid her own shots or evade her tactics, but then, that didn’t seem to line up well with some of the rest of it, either.

He wasn’t sure.

Regardless, though, she couldn’t be trusted with all of that - and at the same time, Sombra and himself weren’t enough to hope to breach the walls that had been built up. No, they’d need at least one more.

In the distance, he heard a noise - high and bright, a delighted whoop that cut clearly through the gunfire and sounds of combat, and he spun to look in that direction. At first, there was nothing. Guns, shouts, an alarm somewhere, an explosion.

Then, a flash of blue.

Reaper’s teeth gritted together, his lips pulling back into some combination of a grimace and an outright grim grin. “Oxton,” he grunted to himself and chuckled. He remembered all she’d said. All that he’d said to her, too - back during the Overwatch days, and also during her capture a few
months back.

He hadn’t been able to find out what had happened since. If she’d ever asked Jack - that would be the question.

That would be the determining factor, some voice from deep inside chimed in, and he knew that it was the truth. It settled in his mind, in his gut, exactly the way the truth did sometimes - if she’d asked, she might be worth a shot. If she hadn’t, she wasn’t. It was as simple as that.

They all had their thresholds. If Widowmaker hadn’t had her leash, if she’d had some loyalty, then it would’ve been a different matter entirely - but she was over her threshold. Too far gone, couldn’t be trusted. If Jesse wasn’t an idiot and could be counted on not to run away again and hide, then maybe he’d be worth a shot, but that still stood to be determined, and Oxton...

Someone who didn’t even have the guts to ask a question didn’t deserve a place on his team, definitely.

He hadn’t been able to find out, not yet - hadn’t asked Sombra to hack in that day, and hadn’t heard since, but now that the thought had occurred to him, it refused to leave.

“Sombra.”

“Yeah, amigo?” Her voice filled his ears along with a crunch that he suspected was the result of potato chips.

“Situation update.”

“Damn you’re stiff,” she muttered over the link, “you need a back rub or something? I volunteer.” She laughed, but continued before he even had a chance to sigh and growl at her. “Everything looks good here, boss. No problems, almost done with the job, just need another minute.”

“Need cover?” His eyes flicked back to Widowmaker, standing at a hole in the wall, firing downrange - every shot was a death, he was sure of it, now that she wasn’t under any instruction to incapacitate.

“Nah, boss. Haven’t even seen a guy since I got in here - but if you wanna come keep me company, y’know, you could-”

“Thinking about moving to a different position. Pulling your support for a few minutes.” He knew he was cutting her off mid-flirt, but he didn’t really care. The biggest downside was that he wasn’t there to smirk at her annoyed eye-roll, anyway.

“Yeah whatever fine,” she muttered, sounding quite annoyed, and he chuckled. “I love it when chicos just pull out suddenly.”

“Good. Keep me updated. The spider’s going to be spinning a bit of a web…”

---

Widowmaker’s eyes didn’t widen as she heard the exchange, nor did her heart increase its beat - neither happened because they had already happened, when she saw a flash of blue light to which
she had become attuned.

It stood out instantly to her, almost drawing her eyes away from the scope; uncomfortably close to her zone of fire, but then, in an instant, it was gone. No more blue.

Still, the knowledge that Tracer was nearby had an effect on her which she could not deny. Eight percent, immediately, on her heart - *eight*, and she hadn’t even seen the foolish girl. Hadn’t even felt the trigger under her finger yet.

Ten.

Reaper spoke to Sombra, the hacker flirting pointlessly but that was hardly new; Widowmaker took another shot, a soldier who set up position to fire on Reaper who stood in an almost-courtyard below.

*Spinning a web.*

There was no room in her for a true sense of dread, no support for a weight in her stomach, and she felt neither. She had been too hollowed-out for that, too perfectly purified; *fear* was a stranger to her now, but she had something else in its place.

She always had, it was a necessity to have some negative impetus in place. Not fear, but a sort of worry, a sort of unnerved anticipation, a desire to avoid mission failure, to avoid falling short of established goals, and that drive kicked into fullness now.

Reaper dissolved below her. Not into smoke, but in that way he did when he was stepping outside of the world into some void known only to him. She heard him emerge behind her, but did not look away from the window. Didn’t pull her eye from the scope.

“So.”

She stroked at the trigger again, another soldier falling as he took a step closer behind her. He was behind her, and she didn’t like that. She could not trust his words anymore - they had become so subtle and soft, so very much unlike the angry creature he had become over their time together, and so very much *more* like the Gabriel Reyes he had once been, the Reaper in the early days, and if there was *anything* of which Widowmaker was afraid…

“So,” she responded softly, unsure of what else to say. Her eyes studied the battlefield below, as they always did - exits, entrances, paths, routes, hook points, slide points, jump points, sightlines, possible ambushes, possible traps…

His dark chuckle sounded too close to her shoulder. She could feel him there, just behind her, even without looking over; the metaphorical string pulled along under her skin. Her finger slid at the release for the Kiss’ clip; it popped out freely, spinning slightly from the momentum imparted by the eject mechanism even as she swung a new cylinder into place and clicked it in. The rifle accepted it beautifully.

A weapon, waiting for its next target.

She would struggle to call it *foreboding*, what she felt, because it was not amorphous and dark, not some empty fear of nothing. No, what she felt was the cold certainty of an upcoming collision with the truth.

There were only two options: she would be borne out by the truth, or she would be destroyed by it. She took a breath to speak, but was pre-empted by Reaper’s words.
“Did you see her out there?” He leaned in a little, over her shoulder - as if he could look down the scope himself, as if he would be permitted that privilege. Not that she could deny him if he asked.

“You must have. Seems like nobody pays as much attention to her as you do.” They were practically nemeses. He knew she would have known Oxton’s whereabouts on the field as surely as he would’ve known Jack’s.

Widowmaker’s eyelids slid shut, slowly, and opened again. So, it was to be the latter option. The destructive truth. She saw in an instant all that had passed: he had never truly stopped doubting her, never stopped suspecting her. He had only changed his tactics, as any good extractor did, and when it came to extraction he was the best.

“Seems like it’s been an awfully long time, doesn’t it?” Reaper tipped his head to the side slightly, studying Widowmaker’s reactions. Her lack of reactions. She was all stiff again and it was impossible not to notice it. Irritation at Oxton, maybe. Something. Something tinging in the back of his mind, some second sense; he’d felt it with Sombra, and now it was saying something else, but he didn’t know what and he couldn’t spare the time to find out right now. Couldn’t afford to let Oxton slip away again, not when he was so infuriatingly close to getting the answer that he now knew he needed. “Haven’t seen her since we had her in our claws… but this time,” he sighed happily, chuckling through the gesture, “oh, this time, she won’t be escaping so easily.”

Widowmaker winced internally, but her face was a carved monument to stoicism. She would give away nothing. There was a contingency plan, anyway. Get rid of the evidence.

Her thoughts turned, as they sometimes did, to that imaginary woman. So helpless, she was; thrown out of her life and into something that she didn’t understand, and only did her best to scramble together enough knowledge for survival. She did very well, but no person could hope to stand against what she stood against.

Whatever her name was, was forgotten, but Widowmaker remembered her, still.

“You know her so well, don’t you?” His dark words drifted like smoke into her ear as she nodded, faintly, almost mechanically. “Know her equipment. Make sure it’s drained. I don’t want her zipping out of this.”

“Of course,” Widowmaker murmured, her thoughts elsewhere as much as they could be. That woman in her stories had so little, and what little she had was now at stake, and she was poised to lose it all again. What could be done about it? Only one thing - there was only one thing which ensured that loss was minimized.

Reaper nodded, slowly - drained, yes. He didn’t want her running away before he could get his answer, and after he did…”

...he wasn’t quite sure. He wasn’t certain what the next step would be, either way - possibly kill her if she’d failed, but if she’d succeeded? If she’d asked the question, if she was having doubts, he didn’t quite know. He hadn’t known with Sombra, either. Eventually you had to stop planning, and just trust. Maybe that was what the tingle was saying.

“Go and get her for me.”

That dark command hissed into her ear like some venomous thing in the jungle, poised and ready to strike. Any doubt she’d ever had was eliminated - this, then, was to be the final act. The curtain call.

Her chin snapped up, her spine straight as she pulled the rifle in to rest on her shoulder.
If this was to be the final act, then it would be the grandest of all. She raised one booted foot, bracing on the blown-out brick of the building’s wall as she extended her arm to launch off her grapple.

“D’accord.”

If this was to be the curtain call, then she would ensure that it was the most dramatic moment on the stage. The grapple flew true, gripping into a stone tower across the small rubble-filled plaza.

“Maintenant.”

If this was to be the end of it, then - the end of it all, then she would make it an ending she would be proud to sign her name to. Her eyes narrowed in the sun’s harsh glare, the cable winding swiftly into her bracer and pulling her forward and off of her feet.

“Je vais.”

The only words she ever said when receiving a mission.

---

“Not half heavy, is he, love?” Tracer huffed as she had one shoulder of the soldier’s harness held in both of her hands. Ana held the other, and together, they were hauling him back toward the extraction point.

“Next time I will-” Ana grunted with exertion, “-tranquilize a thinner one.”

“Good plan,” Tracer agreed, straining through a clenched jaw but half-laughing as well, “but maybe let’s hope there is no next time, yeah?” He’d be well looked-after, the soldier they’d captured; she’d make sure of it herself. They all would, they’d watch out for each other and keep it all good - but at the same time, she didn’t want them doing this any more than they had to.

Noises of combat continued around them, mostly distant but some more pressing as well. Occasionally a missile would streak overhead, usually to bury itself somewhere else with a thud and then a small plume of smoke, blown away fairly quickly by the light winds.

A few soldiers tried to impeded their progress, but they were quick - either Tracer would blink over and clock them, or Ana would whip off a dart, and it would be dealt with in a moment.

“Athena,” Tracer grunted, hauling hard on the fallen soldier’s harness. “Bring the ship ’round, yeah? We got one. The chemical weapons are dealt with, too - mission accomplished, both of ‘em!”

There was a pause, a solid silence which spoke of Athena’s attention elsewhere. Her processes were complex and she was adept at maintaining multiple presences, but there were limits on anything. Tracer didn’t really want to think about what had pushed her to those limits, though - what was so pressing that it had drawn that much of Athena’s attention elsewhere, distracting her away from the active mission.

It only lasted a moment, though. A nervous moment, still, as they each glanced around at the rooftops and crumbling facades of buildings. The dropship had flown off for safety, but was ready to return at a moment’s notice.
“Apologies,” Athena’s voice came in abruptly, “the dropship is already on a return course.”

“Somethin’ have you distracted, love?” Tracer’s words were expectedly nervous, one hand dropping from the soldier’s harness in order to grip at a pulse pistol tightly.


“What?” Tracer gasped, looking up as if it would help her somehow - Athena wasn’t there, even less so than she was around base, but at least on base there were the cameras to look at.

Ana sighed darkly, shaking her head. “I knew she was only biding her time to let the information out. Any good sniper waits for the perfect shot - they do not take the first one which presents itself.”

Tracer’s eyes flicked to Ana overtop of a frown, and instinctively, she wanted to say no. Athena interrupted before she could.

“The source of the information is currently unknown, but Operatives McCree and 76 are responding to the outbreak, along with Winston-”

If there were more words, they were cut off in a sharp and sudden crack, a familiar one which made Tracer’s heart leap as it always did - the sound of Widowmaker’s rifle. The sound of the Widow’s Kiss.

“Cover!” Ana shouted, leaping to the side and grabbing Tracer’s shoulders, pulling her to the ground. “Saghir, are you hit?”

Shaking her head, Tracer patted at herself, her eyes still searching the sidelines for the sniper. “N-no, I didn’t- she wouldn’t, anyway, it-”

“I don’t want to hear it, saghir,” Ana shook her head, crouching behind a piece of rubble and looking around. A first glance was only with her eyes, and then she raised the rifle to her shoulder.

Before she could look down the scope, it was destroyed; another round from the Kiss neatly eliminating the optics and causing Ana to lurch back and land on her rear with a shout. “I knew it - we’ve suspected Talon involvement, and-”

“Thirty seconds to dropship arrival,” Athena intoned overtop of Ana’s words as Tracer shook her head.

“No, no, she wouldn’t, it’s-”

“She is, saghir,” Ana hissed, searching the surroundings and clutching her rifle close. Another gunshot, another flinch. “She is firing at us.”

Then Tracer saw her. Saw the barrel of the rifle poking over the edge of a hole, and saw those glowing, glittering red eyes of her visor illuminated in the dark. Why Widowmaker needed the visor in the daytime, Tracer didn’t know - but she knew one thing at least, and that was that this fight couldn’t happen.

It needed to be averted.

“I’ll get ‘er!” Tracer announced abruptly, leaping to her feet and jumping forward. “Don’t worry ‘bout it, love - you guard the prisoner and wait for the ship! Won’t be a mo!” She spun around, snapping a quick two-fingered salute with a grin before she dissolved into light and flashed away.
A bullet kicked up clods of dirt in the instant after Tracer disappeared, right where she’d been standing, and Ana shouted after her. “No, saghir, you-darn!” She grunted heavily, embedding another sleep dart into the captive’s neck and vaulting the low pile of rubble that had hidden them. She flicked her communicator onto open mic.

“Athena! Chase us in the dropship as well as you can. Primary mission remains unchanged.” She felt like it was all happening again, and she didn’t even have room to be grateful that nobody had died to the Widowmaker’s shots yet, because her mind was fully fixed and occupied with the task at hand. She heard the burst-fire as Tracer rematerialized and gave chase into the building which the Widowmaker had been occupying, and she heard Tracer’s pistols returning fire.

“Saghir,” she hissed, running as quickly as she could for the building’s street access, “you had better hope you survive this. If you do not, I will be very cross.”

---

Widowmaker stood perfectly still in the opening, surveying the scene below her.

*Go and get her for me.*

To drain the Accelerator’s charge, keep her from fleeing.

*Go and get her for me.*

To prevent her escape, ensure there was no escape.

*Go and get her for me.*

To make her helpless at a madman’s whim.

*Go and get her for me.*

That woman who had so little - she walked a tightrope, and it was wound around her neck as well; one wrong step would mean not only failure for her, but doom for all she held dear. Total loss, again.

Widowmaker, of course, could think of nothing of the like for herself. All she could do was console herself with stories of some woman. Fairytales, which could never truly be.

*The woman stands beside the conflict rather than engaging, but dark compulsion drives her forward; she cannot refrain, not forever, so she knows she must be careful. She would need to make the shot perfectly.*

The other sniper - Amari - moved, just slightly, as Widowmaker pulled the trigger. The shot went wide, burying itself in brick as she hissed and lined up for another, but Amari was quick. This all felt too familiar to her, and she felt just as incensed by it now as she had on that day.

Anyone would, to see a former friend looking at them with that horror.

*The woman would need to avoid so many things, so many pitfalls and traps. Any misstep would mean her death - if a shot was taken too soon, she would be undone. If it was taken too late, just the same. If she was influenced any further, the same. Every path, save for one, ended in damnation.*
A moment later and that biotic rifle was up like a periscope - with a grim smirk, she eliminated that particular scouting tool. Amari would be helpless in the long distances now, without her scope and without her cybernetic eye which had been removed so many years ago. Widowmaker let out a slight laugh at the thought.

Tracer - the foolish little mouse - leapt out from behind cover, and the rifle pulled over automatically to track her. Luckily, Widowmaker had not been given the command to kill.

Not yet.

She was certain, though, that it was now coming. When Tracer was at this path’s end, when Reaper had had his fill of torture and vengeance and extraction, or perhaps the moment he arrived - this road, though, ended with her being told to murder her mouse, and then doing so. There was only one thing to do - only one path left open to her.

A tiny little surge, just for an instant, as Tracer seemed to solidify through the scope - to grow more real in some indescribable way - and Widowmaker knew what that meant. She stroked at the trigger, loosing off a shot which passed straight through where the Brit had been, and into the ground.

Widowmaker sighed slightly, an unsettling but lovely tremor passing through her heart as she saw the familiar blue flash coming at he. Outside, a missile burst and scattered the opposite rooftop, everything moving just slightly slower as it did in combat, as her eyes dwelled only on that blue streak. Her target. Her nemesis. Her...

Her…

...there still was no word for it. No one she could bring to mind. Plenty of joking labels or ones which were inadequate, but a true descriptor? There was none.

As her lips curved into a gentle smile, Widowmaker released her hold on the Kiss’ foregrip - it was such a gorgeous weapon, crafted with such care, just as she had been. There might be others made in the same blueprint, but they would never be truly the same.

*The woman stands with sword drawn, deflecting the blows of battle - she moves on dancer’s legs, long and lithe but powerful, skilled, she knows what she is doing. She knows the steps to this dance. She knows how the performance ends.*

As Tracer rematerialized, Widowmaker squeezed the trigger, a hail of automatic fire illuminating the interior of the building and the sound almost deafening her. Tracer’s eyes flashed, her face a mask of something - and she returned a burst. Widowmaker rolled backward, slipped on a brick slightly and twisted for it, smashing her visor to pieces against the ground. She recovered her feet, though, and sprinted away around a corner.

*The woman knows that words have power, that there are sorcerers which can bend the will of listeners. The only hope is to deafen herself. She takes up a hot nail in the midst of battle and plunges it into her ears, removing her own hearing to save her mind - she will be unable to hear the battle. She will be unable to hear the sorcerers.*

“Wait!” Tracer’s hand flew out as Widowmaker dodged around a corner. She was running - she was running, again, and…

...and when she ran, she wanted to be chased. When she ran like this. Tracer recognized it: the faint smile, the intentional misses, Widdy being just a little slower and less perfect than she could’ve been. She liked a close race.
With a grin and a laugh, Tracer leapt forward, spinning up the Accelerator to speed again. “Ready or not, love, here I come!”

She only needed to catch up for a minute. Just ten seconds - a touch, a kiss… and maybe three words.

That was all she wanted. All she needed.

---

Sombra popped a bubble, and then unceremoniously spat out her gum onto the wall. It wasn’t as if the building would survive another week, anyway. A notification popped up in her view and she expanded it, hissing and swearing as she saw Olympia Shaw pulling some bullshit on a street corner in King’s Row.

“Who the fuck,” she grumbled under her breath, tapping at a screen which hadn’t existed a half-second ago, “thought they could spoil my shit like this? Some dumbasses in on this-” she cut off with a grunt as the news broadcast ended anyway, before she could draw it to a close, and she punched lightly at a nearby wall.

Not particularly lightly, though.

“Alright,” she half-growled over the radio, “all done here, amigos. Also, some asshole leaked the info on Black Tide, so queue up one more shitshow for Sombra to clean up. You’re welcome in advance. How’s your little spiderweb going, chica?”

There was no response, not immediately, and Sombra frowned. She brought up another screen and swiped, tapped a few things. “Boss? You hearing me?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” he chuckled in response.

“Spider’s not responding. What’d you have her do anyway?” Sombra deftly wove her way around security measures - hardly anything was left of the city’s infrastructure, but every military force here had their own. Hacking their drones was as easy as anything else, and she grinned a little at the idea that, somewhere, a bunch of army guys were staring at a screen and shouting at their drone to turn around as it started to disobey their orders.

She’d return it. Probably. She just needed to get some eyes on a situation, first; she cut any link the hoverdrone had to its original owners as Gabe chuckled over the comm.

“Oh, I have her laying out a line. A trap. She’ll be back soon enough.”

Sombra frowned as she got the drone situated - there was Widowmaker, and she was taking fire at a huddled trio. Two conscious, one unconscious, and the hacker instantly recognized a pair of them.

She swallowed thickly, fear gnawing at the back of her throat as Tracer dissolved into light and swooped up to meet the assassin. She didn’t have any worries that the Brit would cause Widowmaker any harm - but then the other sniper started giving chase as well, and that was very worrying.

“What the fuck, Gabe? What’s going-”
A call came in, from Athena, but she doubted it would be just Athena on the other end. A small message from the AI in question confirmed it.

“Yeah yeah,” she muttered instantly as the call connected, blocking herself off from the Talon radios and equipment for a second as she continued to steer the drone around. She could see signatures showing gunfire within the building, could see the chase and combat through bomb-holes and skylights, and it didn’t look good.

It was leading back toward Gabe.

“I saw it,” she muttered to the people on the screen, “but I’ve got other shit to worry about right now.”

“Sombra-” one of them, the kidnapping prick, started to speak.

Sombra wasn’t in any mood to deal with his bullshit, though. Athena was one thing, but he was another. “I said I’m fucking busy,” she snapped, “alright? Fuck’s sake, why do I need to do everything?”

Her eyes darted to the screen, and much to her surprise, Roja was right there with them. Whether she’d really thrown her hat in, Sombra didn’t know and didn’t care, but she just wished she could have half a second to ask for a little comfort right then. For some reason, Emily was weirdly good at giving it.

“Look, you need to deal with that shit for a minute, alright?” Her eyes returned to the other screens as she tried to balance everything. “It wasn’t me.”

“Can you provide us with any-”

It was Athena’s voice, and would surely have continued save for the fact that an explosion shook dust from the crumbling walls. It had hit on the screen, on the side of the building - it knocked Widowmaker to her feet, and when she stood again, she didn’t have her rifle. She leapt out of the building with a grimace on her face, twisting her expression as her grapple shot out.

She never dropped that rifle.

Sombra’s eyes widened at the sight of it, sitting on the floor next to the hole in the wall as Tracer zipped right past it without seeing.

“I gotta go. Bye.”

Sombra had never sprinted as fast in her life, her heart already hammering and pumping blood hot through her veins as she keyed the Talon radios back in.

“Boss! Call her off. Call it off, right now - I don’t have time to explain, just stop her, alright? Call her off, call of that whole little mission.”

“Sombra-”

“I’m sorry,” she pleaded, “but seriously. Just once. Please. Trust me.”
Reaper’s talon hovered a half-inch away from the button in the side of his mask, anger roiling within him. A thick black cloud which burned away at the sheathes of his nerves acidically, and left him feeling raw in the aftermath as it always did.

_Trust. Team._

He wasn’t proud of the fact that he paused for two seconds before he could bring himself to respond.

“Fine. You’re explaining this the _instant_ we get on the dropship,” he hissed, “but fine. Widowmaker. Abort mission. Return to the LZ.”

His eyes tracked her. He’d repositioned to a high tower, able to see the whole thing - how his soul had _sang_ at the yelp Amari had let out when Widowmaker had taken her scope away. He could only barely restrain himself from going down there himself to finish her off, but he wanted to be ready to jump down and meet Oxton.

Things were usually better when people couldn’t see you coming, so that was what he planned to do. _Had_ planned to do. Now it was all done. Now it was all worthless.

If it had been anyone other than Sombra, asking, he would have told them to go to hell and then sent them there personally.

...except Widowmaker didn’t respond.


Nothing. She couldn’t have remained silent.

...if she’d heard it.

“Radio must be out,” Reaper grunted over the line to Sombra, pulling out his shotguns as his nerves screamed with vitriol. This was wrong, something here was suddenly _very_ wrong and he didn’t like it at all. He felt an unseen reticle on the back of his neck, some weapon somewhere aimed in his direction, the invisible hand of fate, moving.

He _hated_ fate.

“For _fuck’s_ sake,” Sombra cried across the radio, “no, no- you don’t fucking _understand, chico_, this is way out of hand and it needs to stop. Alright? Just- please get in there. I’m coming too. I’m pulling out all the fucking stops, this needs to end.”

Growling, he tightened up his grip on his weapons as he stepped off of his rooftop. This level of ordering he wasn’t _nearly_ comfortable with, but it could be addressed later. If someone on the team saw something that bad going on, it deserved to be heard. _Needed_ to be.

Whatever it was.

Reaper didn’t bother dissolving as he fell, just let himself fall heavily the three stories to the next ledge of the building. Moderate injuries sustained started healing, leaving him just a little _hungrier_ and feeding his anger, and he let out a slow sigh at the feeling of it.
That was what he wanted. At least Amari was still here. He could get her.

Even if Oxton got a pass this time.

---

Ana sprinted through the low hallways as best she was able - she wasn’t the youngest anymore and her bones and joints complained, but she refused to listen to them. Her one eye was squinted to prevent any dust from getting in - it sloughed from the walls, joining the rubble which littered the floor, but she didn’t care.

She wasn’t losing another team member. Not now. Not ever.

“Saghîr,” she hissed over the radio, “you have no cover and no support. You cannot count on this friendship to mean anything - it does not. Listen to an old woman for once when she tells you-” she huffed a groan, shaking her head. “She is not listening.”

“That would appear to be the case,” Athena hummed in her ear. “I am attempting contact as well, to no avail. Perhaps there is a communication difficulty?”

“Of course,” Ana grumbled as she dropped her rifle into one hand, using the other to help pull herself swiftly up a set of stairs with the bannister. “You are monitoring vital signs, yes?”

“Elevated but of no concern, particularly given her unique-”

“Good,” Ana grunted back. “Keep me apprised of changes.”

“Of course,” Athena hummed. “Attempting to gain visual confirmation of situation. Dropship holding position at Landing Zone. Prisoner remains unconscious.”

As she went, Ana nodded slightly, just slightly, to every note. It was good to know, good to have a larger view of the battlefield. Here in this hallway, in this building, it felt so very cramped - she could not see, couldn’t hardly breathe, and she felt compressed. Tight and constricted.

She shouldered a door heavily out of the way, just a moment too late as an explosion sounded somewhere - she raised her rifle quickly to her shoulder, but Tracer was just blinking around a corner at the other end of the hallway.

“Saghîr! Tracer, damn you, get back-” Ana called after her, breathing heavily and shaking her head, continuing to force herself to run. “You will give an old woman a heart attack!”

The brevity, the humour - they were what they always were, for her. Sharp and deft deflections, a hand rising up to swat away a strike that was aimed at her heart. She knew, should she let herself sink into the fear and worry, what would happen. Angela’s medications had been of some aid, but when it came down to the end of the day, Ana knew herself.

She knew she must keep her head above water, or she would drown. Metal hands reached out of the shadows of her mind, the screams of former and now-fallen friends, but she kept them at bay with jokes and smirks.

Her feet pounded against the floors of the building, feeling very much like something from decades
ago. It had been so very long since she’d been in the field like this - rather than sitting in some perch or overlook and waiting for others to make their move. There was an exhilaration to it, as there always had been, and it went a little bit further than the fact that it got her blood pumping in a literal sense.

She chose to focus on that, on the thrill, instead of the fear. It was her only option.

The next corner, she rounded too late once more - there was Tracer, just leaping out through a hole in the wall. Ana ran forward, unable to determine how long it took her to close the distance. Measured in the space of heartbeats, or of breaths, or of footfalls, it could only be said to be too far, too many.

Every bone and joint ached when she made it to the wall, particularly her ribs, and she knew that her chase was done; she slid easily in on one armoured knee, her rifle rising to her shoulder on instinct, but the scope had been removed. She could see Tracer down there, and Widowmaker too, but she could not really see them, and she could hope to do nothing with her scopeless rifle. She would have been firing blindly and crossing her fingers that it was for the best.

In a moment of intense disgust and terror, she dropped her head and cast her eyes off to the side, and that was when she saw it.

The Widow’s Kiss.

It sat off to the side, clattered into the corner - discarded or knocked away during the chase, it seemed, but the chase looked to be over now. Ana’s hands flew out and grabbed the rifle up.

It reminded her, instantly, of her old Kinamura. The biotic rifle was soft and almost organic, but this one - this was cold, harsh, and mechanical. It was a masterpiece, there was no denying that. As she lifted it to her shoulder it seemed to react to her movements, the forestock collapsing to extend the barrel and make the scope protrude. Every piece of it seemed perfectly crafted, and it fit so well into her hands, as if it was made for them. For an instant, she was entranced by it.

The only problem was how cold the metal felt in her hands which were so used to the composites of the biotic rifle.

Finally, though, she had a scope and could see the scene. That was her only wish, anyway.

“Ana,” Athena’s voice came through her communicator, “abort mission. Situation critical. Stand down immediately.”

She heard the words. She did hear the words, just at the same moment as she saw the scene - Tracer standing, facing away, with her pistols held up in surrender, and Widowmaker was facing her with a sneer and a pistol gripped tightly. Pointed at Tracer.

Ana had done her thinking already. She would never hesitate again.

The trigger, much like the rest of the rifle, was so fine as to react almost to her thoughts rather than her actions. The crack was almost deafening, but the rifle barely twitched into her shoulder - a perfectly balanced and tuned machine, a gorgeous instrument of death, and the impact of the shot struck directly into Ana’s heart.

As surely as the bullet had struck into the Widowmaker’s.

She heard a distant scream, but it was not Tracer who fell to her knees, and the sniper’s weathered lips turned up in a small smile.
She had saved another one.

---

“C’mon love, easy up—” Tracer called as she realigned - just for an instant, as Widowmaker spun on heel while sprinting, spattering bullets around the hallway and forcing her out of time for a second to avoid getting hit. “Oi! Really giving me a run for it, aren’t you?” She laughed, brightly, delightedly.

It was good to be close again, it was good to be doing things again, and this always had been a favourite pastime. It was easy to slip back into - even if Tracer was a little out of shape with it, and Widdy really was running her hard.

Tracer didn’t need to try to miss with any of her shots, the occasional small bursts of pulse-pistol fire were only ever going to hit walls and ceilings anyway with the pace that Widowmaker maintained.

“Saghir,” Ana’s voice hissed over the radio, “you have no cover and no support. You cannot count on this friendship to mean anything - it does not.” Tracer rolled her eyes and shook her head - she definitely needed to get Widowmaker to keep running, far away from Ana. Hopefully she’d stayed in place back at the extraction point, watching the prisoner.

Tracer highly doubted that, though. Ana - like herself - had a bad habit of interpreting instructions. She grinned a little at the thought, though.

“Listen to an old woman for once when she tells you-” Ana groaned briefly. “She is not listening.”

Tracer laughed again, shaking her head. “Nope,” she called out - not over the radio, just out to the air, “not even a little!”

Ana continued speaking - Tracer heard her voice, and heard Athena’s as well, chiming in her ear, but she paid no attention to the words. She figured she could chalk it up to a comm error, some bug in the radio.

In any other situation, she would have listened, but she knew what was happening here. She knew Widowmaker, and she knew there wasn’t any real danger here - at least, not for her.

She knew that because she was still alive.

The thought had occurred to her in the first moments after the first shot - Widowmaker didn’t have full free will. If she was ordered to kill in the right circumstances, if she was ordered to anything in the right circumstances, then she would. She had no choice in the matter.

Tracer knew she was safe because she was still alive. If Widdy had been ordered to kill her, she would already be dead.

“We’ve gotta be more specific than just schedules,” she muttered under her heaving breaths as she realigned with time for an instant before blinking off again.

Everything changed when the Accelerator spun up. She felt suddenly weightless, every law of momentum and friction and force acting a little bit differently - she could twist an arm and send herself into a spiral or stick out a hand and barrel-roll to the side, and it had taken her so long to map it all out but she had it now. She knew this, now.
All it had taken was trusting her instincts. All it had taken was being willing to grab the controls and do something, and maybe it was wrong the first time or the first ten, but eventually she’d get it right.

She was a master at it, now, and she let all of her skill shine. With a grin firmly fixed on her lips she curled around corners and streaked down hallways, smiling at every bullet which lazily passed her five feet away.

They did need to be more specific in the future, because this could have ended really poorly. If Widowmaker had been given the wrong order - but she’d said herself that Reaper seemed different.

Although, Tracer had to admit, she wasn’t sure that different meant better.

An explosion rocked the building, Widowmaker stumbling in front of her. Tracer let herself realign with time, but the sniper was already off again, carrying on as if it made no difference to her at all. She’d dropped her rifle but that hardly mattered.

Tracer watched her leap out of the building, grappling hook flying off to god-knows-where, and she spared a second to just grin and watch her. So gorgeous, as she passed from the building’s shadow out into the glaring sun; it glinted off of her armour and made her skin practically glow, and Tracer wondered how she’d ever doubted that she was in love.

Now, she was finally going to get a chance to say it.

Sure, maybe it wasn’t perfect - but Ana was way back somewhere and they could have a moment to chat, at least. What was more romantic for a couple who had started out as enemies, than that big confession being carried out on a battlefield?

Tracer stepped forward and leapt out of the building, zipping after Widowmaker. The taxed Accelerator complained and whirred down on its own, but she didn’t care and she didn’t feel afraid - she knew she was safe.

Even if Widowmaker was pointing a handgun at her.

“Wow,” Tracer gasped breathlessly with a grin, “really keeping up the act there, eh love?”

“You… foolish girl,” Widowmaker half-hissed, half-sneered, golden eyes narrowed to slits. “After all this time you should have known better than to follow me.”

“You what?” Tracer laughed slightly, still winded. “Wow, tough one, that - really gotta work out more, ha!”

“Silence.”

She was still holding the handgun, still had it trained right at Tracer’s chest, at her Accelerator. It glowed only dimly, on a self-recharge cycle; she’d overused it coming in, but it didn’t matter. Hadn’t mattered.

Didn’t matter.

“You what?” Tracer frowned, chuckling as she raised her hands instinctively over her head. Widdy was probably grumpy because she hadn’t yet explicitly said they could see each other in person - and Tracer was sorry for that, but she could apologize later. “Steady on, love - I only wanted to say something!”

“Silence,” Widowmaker repeated flatly with a single shake of her head before softly rolling her eyes
and sighing as she took a step forward. “You foolish little thing - you knew you should not follow me. Knew it was unsafe to be near me.”

“W- yeah but,” Tracer swallowed, lungs still desperately drawing air, “didn’t know you’d be here. Just figured we were taking advantage of the situation, yeah?”

Widowmaker laughed, that old laugh - the dismissive one, the derisive one, the one which still sent a little shiver down Tracer’s spine. “Oh? Oh yes, souris, there will be advantage taken,” she shook her head slowly, locking gazes, “but it will not be yours to take. No, the situation… is already set.”

Her eyes dropped to the gun in her hand, and Tracer’s widened. “No.”

“Oui.”

“No, you-” Tracer shook her head, “you can fight it, you can-”


She didn’t listen, though, she didn’t care - and couldn’t have done a thing anyway, the Accelerator was out of commission for another moment at least. Her eyes were locked onto Widowmaker’s and so was every one of her thoughts. She’d been ordered to kill after a chase? That didn’t seem to make sense, and what was that look in Widowmaker’s eyes, anyway? So…

...sad.

“All I can say for you now? This will not hurt.”

She didn’t move in the slightest, but still gave the impression of stepping closer - some minuscule shift in her that gave an impression of a great increase in intimidation, and she became in that moment so terrifying.

There was a gunshot.

Tracer’s hands instantly dropped from where they had been - raised in the air - to her gut, but there was nothing there, no wound and no pain. For a moment, a brief tiny moment, her heart soared as she started to laugh.

Then, though, realization sank in as Widowmaker dropped slowly to her knees.

Tracer screamed in horror, the shriek tearing her throat as she tried to spin back time, but it didn’t work like that - it never did. She could only reverse her own wounds, not anyone else’s, and the Accelerator was too overtaxed to manage a rewind anyway.

All it could do was slow time for a second, for an instant, so that Tracer saw the gradual shift of Widowmaker’s face from a fake sneer to a genuine smile.

The Brit dropped to her knees, catching Widowmaker by the shoulders and pulling the sniper’s head into her lap - her eyes were fixed on the hand that Widdy had clasped to her chest, just below her breast.

“No, no, nonono,” Tracer stammered, “no, you didn’t, you can’t’ve- you can’t!”

“It is alright, cherie, it is alright,” Widowmaker sighed, her eyes facing up at Tracer’s face. “It is
Alright. You will be safe. You are safe."

“No, you’re-” she gulped, shaking her head as tears started to overflow her eyelids. Her throat felt raw and hoarse but she cleared it, one hand gripping tightly at Widdy’s shoulder and the other grabbing at her hand - there was blood there, thick blood, and her skin was cold. Cold even for her.

“All- all those,” Tracer whispered, forcing out the words despite her throat, “all that bollocks, you can’t- can’t- not like this, please, don’t-”

“Right through the heart,” Widowmaker laughed softly, her words barely whispers, her eyes still open. The sounds of battle elsewhere faded, everything faded until all Tracer saw was her face, all she heard saw her voice, all she felt was the hand in hers.

“I knew I was right to trust her,” Widowmaker murmured, raising her other hand to stroke at Tracer’s cheek, wiping away a tear with her thumb and with a smile. “I go… with angels now…”

Her words slowed, lightened, as the life faded from her. Maybe it took longer with her slow heartbeats, maybe it didn’t come in an instant, but Tracer couldn’t find it in herself to think that that was in any way better.

“I regret only… that this ends. Do… give my best… to Emily…”

“Nononononono-”

Widowmaker’s head settled back into her hand, her eyes sliding closed, the smile still fixed on her blue lips, but they weren’t quite finished moving yet.

“Au… revoir… ma souris.”

“No,” Tracer whispered in desperation, leaning down and kissing at Widowmaker’s head, “no you can’t- you can’t do this, you can’t die, not now, not yet. God we only just got to- I never even got to say-” her throat clenched, her heart and fist followed suit, but she refused to be stopped. “I never even got to say I love you.”

There was no response.

“I- I love you.” Tracer’s face twisted from pained and hopeful to solely agonized as the sniper’s face didn’t even shift. “I love you? Widowm- Widdy? Please? God, no, you-”

She broke down entirely, wailing and pulling the sniper’s head in, cradling it close - nothing else in the world even existed for the space of a few seconds.

It couldn’t be over.

Not like this.

Not so suddenly.

She refused.

Her sobs turned to cries, grunted and rough sounds of effort and anger as she struggled to her feet and took Widowmaker with her. Ducking down, Tracer slung the body over her shoulders in a fireman carry, and then looked out to the city in determination. She ripped the communicator set from her ear as Athena continued to say words to which she paid no attention, and threw it to the ground, crushing it under her heel.
“No,” she shook her head. She refused an ending like this.

The Accelerator chirped softly, notifying her that it had enough charge to carry out its purpose once more, and as her heart slammed against her chest like it wanted to jump out and join the splotch of blood on the pavement, Tracer activated the machine and was gone.

She never heard Ana’s cries of anguish that filled the space behind her, never turned back to see the wearied sniper with a wide eye and an outstretched hand.

---

Widowmaker snarled as she rounded the corner, spinning on heel to unleash a hail of bullets; they couldn’t act as a deterrent, though, they could not even be intended as a deterrent now that she had been given an explicit order to draw Tracer on, no, these and everything she did could only be bait.

She was bait. She was a weapon. She was an instrument. She was a puppet.

The woman had been a dancer before her life had been stolen, before years in the wilderness had turned her into a huntress, and her practiced feet carried her gracefully away from the battle. The bow gripped tightly in her hands; it could mean so much, and if she meant to have any hope of her target making it out alive, then surely she must drop it. Yet, it was frozen to her hands.

Widowmaker didn’t think of her own situation. Her feet knew the way, her hands knew the grip - it was automatic, the way she ducked and rolled, the way she sprayed back bullets, the way she reloaded. She knew what every piece of the Kiss did as she carried out each action - sliding, clicking, riding upon each other.

She loved that rifle. She could never think of throwing it away.

That woman, though, that unnamed and unknown woman; she would need to divest herself of her weapon if she hoped to succeed.

Of course, it was only a story.

Widowmaker fired off a Venom Mine, but Tracer was already past it by the time it armed. She hissed between her teeth, heart running as quickly as it had in a long time.

She could not deny the thrill of being chased again, and by her, of all people. She ached for it in the most dull and distant way possible.

Some tiny breath of air amidst asphyxiation.

The woman ran from the battle, fleeing with the aim of her affection in pursuit. Her ears were seared, her hearing silenced, she could not fall prey to the sorcerers’ ploys. No more words would have any effect on her. She only needed to drop her weapon.

An explosion made her stumble. The Kiss’ barrel slammed against the ground, ripping it from her grip; Widowmaker snatched out a hand after it but her fingertips brushed against it and didn’t manage to regain their purchase - she had to keep moving, though.

She couldn’t stop to regain her weapon. She had a primary directive which spurred her onward.
The assassin leapt from the building, launching off her grapple as the sun flashed against her skin. The cable pulled her forward and she hit the ground in a roll, pulling out the sidearm of a fallen soldier - some weapon was needed. She could kill with her hands as easily as anything else, but a weapon was needed regardless. It was important.

Widowmaker stopped as her feet brought her to the centre of the courtyard. Her eyes flicked up - Reaper was not in that window anymore. She was unsure if he had given her commands since her visor (and the communicator embedded in it) had broken against the stones.

Tracer came to a halt in front of her, and Widowmaker could barely suppress a smile at the sight of her. So near, looking so overjoyed - that brilliance on her face, in her eyes, the grin on her lips. She wondered if the systems at Talon would flash a warning for the brief skip her heart experienced, double-beating once.

“Wow,” Tracer gasped breathlessly with a grin. Her brown eyes were shining in the sunlight, her cheeks flushed with exertion - how Widowmaker wished to step forward and touch that cheek again. “Really keeping up the act there, eh love?”

The act. Keeping up the act - this final act before the curtain call, and then it would all be over.

“You…” Widowmaker hesitated for a second, shaking her head, “foolish girl. After all this time you should have known better than to follow me.”

“You what?” Tracer laughed, “Wow, tough one, that - really gotta work out more, ha!”

She was still winded, and Widowmaker thought of all the other times she had been breathless. Fights and debates, shocks and moments of passion - if she was not careful, they would all be lost. There was only one way which they could possibly be maintained, living at least in memory.

“Silence.”

Widowmaker’s eyes flicked to the Accelerator - as she’d expected, as she’d known, it was flickering slightly and glowing dim. The foolish mouse had overreached, again. She always did. Again, Widowmaker’s heart did something, but there would not be much longer now.

“You what?” Tracer frowned, chuckling as she raised her hands. Keeping up the act or simply being confused, Widowmaker didn’t know - but she could not let up. Could not stop playing her part while the stage lights were still on.

Desperately as she wished otherwise.

“You…” Widowmaker repeated with a shake of her head. Then she sighed and took a step forward - maintaining sight-lines. She needed to be able to see. That was all it was.

The woman knew this clearing, knew the beasts which lurked; she knew from which direction they would spring, always, and she knew how to shield herself. Knew where to stand so vicious claws would strike another before they caught on her. This also meant she knew the opposite.

“You foolish little thing - you knew you should not follow me. Knew it was unsafe to be near me.”

“W- yeah but,” Tracer was still panting, “didn’t know you’d be here. Just figured we were taking advantage of the situation, yeah?”
The assassin let out a dismissive laugh, shook her head. “Oh? Oh yes, souris, there will be advantage taken,” she shook her head again, slowly, her eyes burning into Tracer’s, “but it will not be yours to take. No, the situation… is already set.”

Golden eyes flicked to the handgun she gripped tightly.

*The woman could hear rustling in the bushes as her hands tightened on her weapon - she could only hope to hold out long enough for the plan to succeed.*

“No.”

“Oui.”

“No, you-” Tracer shook her head, “you can fight it, you can-”

She cut off for some reason, shaking her head - lost in sorrow, perhaps, and Widowmaker wished she could comfort her. There would be comfort, though, in a way.

She refused to lose again.

“Alas, ma cherie,” Widowmaker shook her head with a sigh and a laugh, thoughts flickering to a hundred places like a broken wire sparking. She leaned to the side slightly - sightlines - seeing moonlight and Gérard’s dead face of shock, “All I can say for you now? This will not hurt.”

Sightlines. Gérard’s face. Tracer’s face - in her arms, in her bed, at dinner with Emily; Emily’s eyes looking shocked in horror, or in amused surprise, the frustration in her voice sometimes. Her home in the lake, so beautiful. The gun which was in her hand. The rifle which wasn’t. That woman, unnamed and unknown, standing in a clearing and waiting.

Waiting on the bears to attack.

There was a gunshot.

Widowmaker felt it in an instant, and immediately began to grin; a one hundred percent loss in heart rate. Such a beautiful, simple, gorgeous thing.

Her curtain call.

She would never lose again - there was only one way for it. Slowly, she sank to her knees, even as her mouse shrieked in shock.

*The bears tore the huntress to shreds, leaving the object of her affection to flee the clearing.*

*...except she didn’t flee. She caught the falling huntress and held her, pulled her in tight.*

*Silly thing.*

“No, no, nonono,” Tracer stammered, “no, you didn’t, you can’t’ve- you can’t!”

She was surprised, and Widowmaker could not blame her. She was a perfect actress. This could only come as a surprise, but she shook her head softly up to Tracer whose wide eyes were filled to the brim with horrors and tears.

“It is alright, cherie, it is alright,” Widowmaker sighed through her smile. Hands, so warm, even through her outfit. “It is alright. You will be safe. You are safe.”
That was the important thing. That was the only important thing now.

“No, you’re-” Tracer swallowed heavily, one of her hands seeking out Widowmaker’s own, clutched over the wound. Left side, chest - a beautiful shot. If she had had the chance, Widowmaker would have given her regards and admiration.

“All- all those,” Tracer whispered, forcing out through a tight-sounding throat, “all that bollocks, you can’t- can’t- not like this, please, don’t-”

Ah, the modifications. She laughed lightly - the only reason her consciousness lingered was that it had still only been the space of two heartbeats for her. Any other life would have been snuffed out in an instant, but her life?

Well, it had never really been a life to begin with, had it?

Now, though, whatever it had been, it was ending. “Right through the heart,” Widowmaker laughed softly. Her consciousness shifted oddly, wavering at the edges; all she could see was Tracer’s face and the sun over her shoulder, but it looked all wrong. It should have been happy - this would be over now, all of the stress and the strain, but it didn’t look happy. It looked wrong.

Her mind kept running on the same tangent. “I knew I was right to trust her,” she murmured, lifting her free hand to touch Tracer’s face, to stroke that cheek once more. A tear came with it, still warm, and Widowmaker’s smile widened. “I go… with angels now…”

She could feel it fading. The light. The warmth. Tracer’s tear had cooled, her fingers interlaced no longer felt warm. That was a shame.

Still, Widowmaker’s lips carried on. There were words yet to say. Important ones. As important to deliver as any bullet she’d ever sent. “I regret only… that this ends.” She would never take it back, not for an instant, not for the world. Whatever she could offer. As promised. “Do… give my best… to Emily…”

“Nononononono-”

She barely heard the protests, the complaints; they made no sense, anyway. It was finished. The curtain had come down. Widowmaker wasn’t sure when she’d stopped being able to see, but she had, and that… that was a shame. To not be able to see Tracer’s face anymore, that was a shame. There was enough left of her, though, to hear her own final words. “Au… revoir… ma souris.”

Just enough. Then, even that faded, and the sun…

…the sun felt cold.

---

Sombra hissed sharply, yanking out her machine pistol and a Translocator orb for good measure - Widowmaker had dropped her rifle, and she would never do that by choice. Sombra had seen her keep hold of the thing in chaos, in battles, in a literal crashing bus. She never let go of it.

She had now, and it meant nothing good, and her radios were out.
The hacker tried Widowmaker’s phone, but that was in her apartment.

*Fuck, chica, dammit you need to be easier to contact.*

She couldn’t see everything, and she knew it now, but she saw cars speeding at an intersection and it needed to be stopped. Gabe and her couldn’t pull Widowmaker out, so there was only one other option.

“*Athena!*”

“Sombra, I am occupied with—”

“I don’t fucking care!” Sombra leapt around a corner, keeping eyes on the scene as it unfolded, the drone hovering overhead. “Call them off, pull your people out, now.”

There was no response. Tracer joined Widowmaker in the courtyard, the assassin holding a gun, and Sombra felt something crawling up her throat.

“Athena,” she swallowed heavily. “*Amiga,* I’m begging you, just—”

“I am trying, Sombra.”

Her feet kept slamming on brick and stone and mortar as she ran, as hard and as fast as she could but she knew in her heart that it wouldn’t be enough.

She stumbled when she heard the gunshot, sliding to her knees in a screen of rubble down a hallway. The Translocator tumbled uselessly to the ground as Sombra stared wide-eyed at the drone feed, just stared, Widowmaker slumping to her knees as Tracer screamed. She could hear that with her own ears.

Her heart didn’t want to beat straight. It skipped and sped and slowed, doing all sorts of things other than being stable. Sombra just kept staring.

Then Tracer stood. Stood and took Widowmaker’s corpse with her, and zipped away, and Sombra’s hand clenched tighter on her machine pistol.

The bitch had stolen her away in life and now she stole her away in death, too.

...then, though, Sombra realized the *direction* that Tracer was going, and a dark grin spread across her lips. She stood up slowly, sending the drone on a course to follow those blue flashes across the rooftops and through the alleyways of the city.

“Athena… I’m going to need a dropship. You can either help me out with that or I can get one myself.”

There wasn’t a response, but right now she didn’t care what the response was going to be anyway. Sombra snatched up her Translocator beacon and clipped it onto her belt again, but kept her machine pistol in hand as she waved on her camouflage and sprinted off in pursuit.

Never know when you’ll need a gun, after all.

---
Reaper wasn’t surprised by the sound of Widowmaker’s rifle, not in the slightest. It meant so little to him - it was so commonplace to him - that it took him a second to realize that he was looking at her, standing in the clearing which was to be their meeting place, and she didn’t have her rifle in hand.

Then the sniper slumped to her knees, and there was a scream.

*That* surprised him.

His mind reeled, his talons digging into the grips of his shotguns - at some point, though, he dropped them to the ground and his gauntlets began to eat stone instead, crumbling it away from the low wall in front of him as he stared.

She was down. Widowmaker was down.

Unsinkable ships were a laughable concept, but even in the depths of his own paranoia he’d never thought he’d see *this*. Himself defeated, he could easily imagine, but Widowmaker? Bested *in battle*?

It was unimaginable. He couldn’t wrap his mind around the fact that it was happening - couldn’t even *begin* to unravel how it *had* happened.

She was down. Widowmaker was down.

A *teammate* was down.

With a growl, he tore out a massive chunk of stone and flung it to the side, but it was too late.

She was gone.

Oxton stood up and with one last defiant look, she crushed her comm unit underfoot and disappeared, taking Widowmaker - or what was left of her - away.

Reaper had nothing to do but stare for a moment, vision tunneled in on the space where she’d zipped over a building’s roof, before he turned around and punched through the wall behind him. He lost himself in rage as he tore through the building’s interior - walls and ceilings and what furniture remained, all shredded to pieces by his talons as his mind whirled darkly.

In time, he came back to himself, came back to consciousness as that nigh-on impossible maelstrom - that black bubbling morass of hatred and anger and vitriol - boiled away, leaving behind only one single burning thought.

*Nobody gets left behind. Not ever.*

“Sombra,” he demanded as he leaned forward against a wall, heaving as black ooze dribbled down his arms from spots where rubble had torn at him, “tell me you have eyes on her.”

There was no response. She was busy, or she was gone, or something else - he didn’t know, but he knew that he wasn’t losing another teammate today.

With his hands shaking slightly in barely-controlled rage, he pulled out another pair of shotguns and clutched them tightly before taking off in pursuit.

He would find her. He’d find them both.

He’d find them *all*.
Ana’s smile died slowly. Almost impossibly slowly as she watched through the scope, the unmeasured display of anguish that proceeded, and the horror of it began to settle in.

*What have I done?*

The thought echoed in her head the way nothing had since a bullet was lodged in her face, as Tracer clutched at the fallen sniper and wept. She was left with nothing - no thoughts to grab onto, nothing on which to gain purchase, everything slipping away in blank horror and intense confusion until Tracer began to stand.

Began to stand *to leave*, Ana realized.

In an instant she pushed herself upright, automatically grabbing the biotic grenade from her side and flinging it down as she leapt from the high perch, repairing the damage of the fall in a moment as she started to sprint forward.

“*Saghir!*” Ana cried out, her voice tearing as she stretched out a hand, “Wait! Please!”

Tracer didn’t. Didn’t hear, or didn’t wait, and an instant later, she was gone. Ana heard the high chirp of her realigning with time, and a brief sob, and then the whirr of the Accelerator again. Again, and again, each time softer, until they were swallowed up by the sounds of battle and she was left, standing there, one hand outstretched and one eye wide.

“...I’m... sorry...”

The rifle in her hands felt so perfect.

The weight of it, the form; it was the most beautifully crafted machine of death that she had ever beheld, the most perfect thing she had ever touched, and she looked down at it now in disgust and barely held back the urge to retch.

“*Ana?*” Athena’s voice sounded in her ear. “The situation has devolved but is not beyond saving. All that is required is—”

Her hand moved of its own volition, gently tugging the earbud out and dropping it to the ground. She didn’t need to stomp on it. Slowly, deliberately, she ground it into powder as she slung the rifle over her opposite shoulder - one over each, now - and she tugged her hood on a little tighter.

Maybe she was missing her mask, but she wasn’t missing any of her skills, and she would never abandon a teammate. She’d gone AWOL before. She hardly cared about repeating it, and she knew it would not last as long this time around, anyway.

The Shrike had returned, for at least a moment. At least for long enough to fix her mistakes once more.

As she stepped forward, she unslung the biotic rifle from her shoulder and clutched it, firmly but not overly tightly. She would need it in a city like this.

She certainly didn’t intend to use the Kiss ever again.
That perfect, crystalline moment when the falling hammer shatters the glass.

Soundtrack: Suggested order of songs, and a few choice lyrics from each, as well, to form a bit of an ambiance for the chapter. I like how they flow together, I like how they line up with the action of it. The chapter was written to nothing but these five songs on repeat, constantly.

"This One Moment" - OK GO
Lyrics: "You're right, there's nothing more lovely,
There's nothing more profound,
Than the certainty,
Than the certainty that all of this will end,
That all of this will end, that all of this will end,
So open your arms to me, open your arms to me!
And this will be the one moment that matters,
And this will be the one thing we remember,
And this will be the reason to have been here,
And this will be the one thing we remember at all."

"No Way Out" - Immaculate Machine
Lyrics: "I didn't wanna stay, I didn't wanna stay, I didn't wanna go,
I didn't wanna fight, anymore.
I didn't wanna stay, I didn't wanna stay, but I didn't wanna leave..."

"...I knew that I was trapped, on those rocks.
So I just had to jump, I closed my eyes and jumped, I had no other choice!
A scream replaced my voice, in the sea."

"Love Will Tear Us Apart" - Joy Division
Lyrics: "When routine bites hard, and ambitions are low
And resentment rides high, but emotions won't grow
And we're changing our ways, taking different roads...
Then love, love will tear us apart again.
Love, love will tear us apart again."
“Listen [Listen, Listen]” - Wintersleep
Lyrics: "And even if the words don't sound right,
I will love you 'til the day my heart dies.
'Til the day my heart dies."

"And even if this ain't the right light,
You're prettier than anything
You're prettier than anything that I'd...
Prettier than anything that I'd write."

"There's something in the way our lips touch...
There's something in the way we're stuck together
They don't build love like that no more..."

"You said you'd like it when the thunderstorms came
Said you'd like if the thunderstorm just...
...pulled you piece by piece away..."

"Happy Ending" - MIKA
Lyrics: "This is the way you left me
I'm not pretending.
No hope, no love, no glory
No happy ending.
This is the way that we loved
Like it's forever;
Then live the rest of our life
But not together.

Wake up in the morning, stumble on my life!
Can't get no love without sacrifice.
If anything should happen, I guess I wish you well
Ooh, a little bit of heaven, but a little bit of hell...

This is the hardest story that I've ever told,
No hope, no love, no glory, happy endings gone forever more.

I feel as if I'm wasted, and I wasted everyday!"

Try that soundtrack on for size.

I'm proud of this one.

There's either not much to say here, or perhaps too much to say. Honestly I think it'd be best for me to just answer questions and respond to comments, which I'm more than happy to do and I certainly look forward to. All I can offer at this moment is the same as Sombra: just trust me. We're not done yet. Nothing's over until it's over.
A few notes:

- Last chapter brought me over ten thousand hits for this work - thank you all so much for your support! I plan on doing a bit of a thank-you event, more about that later. Start thinking, though, about noteworthy scenes from this story - things you'd like to see as an art piece. I plan on commissioning a few as thank-you gestures to all of you wonderful readers.
- This chapter brings BSN up to being the longest Overwatch fic on Ao3 by wordcount. Thank you so much for hanging around with me through this; we're not out of the woods yet, but it's been one hell of a ride so far, hasn't it? :D
- This chapter also tips me over the milestone of three-quarters of a million words published on Ao3, total. Over 750,000 words published here in all my various stories and works. Again, thank you all for your support!

Come back next week for aftermath and what comes next. Tracer's not giving up yet, and I really hope you don't either.
Encore

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Aftermath, aftershocks, whatever you want to call it it continues to wreak some problems. Tracer goes to the one person she can trust, the one person she thinks can help: Mercy. However, nothing's ever quite that simple. Complications lead to complications, and every step seems to require a new person's help as events spiral inward tighter and tighter.

JFL Summary: Mercy's grumpy because her girlfriend's gone, but is there anything that a bit of coffee and a little light hostage situation can't fix? Nah, you're not a hostage if nobody's pointing a gun at you - right? Sombra and Tracer almost kiss, kinda, but they also almost punch each other's teeth out so that might be a wash. Widowmaker doesn't do much, she pretty much just lays around, but she deserves a rest after, y'know, dying.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: violence and anger in a few directions. Moderately graphic descriptions of wounds and surgery.

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker made a decision - that she was the greatest threat to Tracer's life, and that such a threat could not continue. It was a careful game, to set the pieces: getting her rifle into Ana's hands, getting the placement just right, ensuring sightlines and opportunity and motivation, but she played her game well and was rewarded with a bullet to the heart. Tracer was unwilling to accept that, and lifted her away. Everyone else - Sombra, Ana, and Reaper as well - took pursuit at varying times and varying speeds.

Doctor Angela Ziegler was not having a very good day.

Fareeha had been called away from camp, along with her whole team - brought in to a Helix facility for some debriefing and rebriefing or something else Angela couldn’t bring herself to quite care about. All she knew was that Fareeha’s replacement was gruff and impolite, trigger-happy, and that her days felt far more frustrating without Fari’s warm eyes and strong arms waiting at the end of them

She let out a groan of a sigh as she walked along one of the camp’s many improvised boardwalks. When another doctor came over, she did manage a brief smile as she handed him a clipboard full of sheets. She was on her way out from a twelve-hour shift, and he was on his way in, and that brief smile was all they had time for.

One thing was a guarantee, though: she was very much looking forward to sleep.

It would have been better, of course, to call Fari and chat for a while, but she was quite busy with
Helix and their schedules didn’t match up in the slightest.

Angela’s eyes turned up to study the gorgeous blue sky, squinting from the brightness as she tried to figure out just how long it had been since they’d talked. It had been about a week since Fari had left, she thought - she pulled out her phone and turned it on with a yawn. Checking her phone disproved that estimate, though.

It had been ten days. Today was Tuesday, not the Saturday she’d thought in the haze of tiredness.

Checking her phone also gave her a moment’s worry, as a series of messages came through from Athena, leaving the doctor to shake her head softly. Something about a mission nearby going wrong - asking whether she could help.

It was a big question.

Angela had been cautiously guarded about the whole thing, this revived Overwatch of sorts. She still planned to visit the new facility, to meet with all of the people, but after that she was substantially less certain. What level of involvement she actually wanted to have was something which plagued her, which always had - she was more than happy to attend to any of them here, in her camp, but to leave? To step away from all of her patients here, and go out into the field, maybe to heal or maybe to carry out other ancillary support roles…

She stopped for a moment and leaned over against a wall, sighing heavily as she scrolled through the messages and tried to make up her mind, weighing the pros and cons against her own flagging energy and wearied self. Then she noticed one more, not from Athena - from Lena, instead.

“Doc, you need to help me. Please.”

It had only been sent a minute or two ago, and Angela’s fingers tapped at the screen, all thoughts of her soft bed and sleep forgotten as soon as she knew a friend was in trouble. Whether that trouble was an injury or, just as likely, a recipe gone wrong which now required fixing and cleaning up. “Of course, Lena - what’s wrong?”

A response only took about ten seconds. “Just come to building 14D. Please.”

A brief frown crossed her lips; 14D was a storage hut, at least in this compound. Was Lena there, somehow?

Angela’s feet left the boardwalk, carrying her swiftly across the mud of the compound, practically flying to the door of the storage. She heard soft noises from inside even before she twisted the knob.

Immediately upon opening the door, a gun was pointing into her face. It dropped an instant later, though, and was replaced by a weak cry as Lena wrapped her arms around the doctor’s chest and hugged her tight. “God, Ange, I- I’m sorry. Thank you. You need to help, please, just- come quick.”

She dropped her guns and they slid back up into her bracers as she caught Angela’s hand and pulled her inside - the doctor tugged the door shut behind them, wondering what had Lena so distraught. It was written clearly across her face in tears and pain, but she didn’t seem to be injured.

Although, Angela immediately noticed that one of her hands was coated in blood. There were splotches on her outfit as well, her jacket and tights, and a smear on the glass of the Accelerator. The outfit itself didn’t seem to be damaged with gashes or holes though, so it wasn’t her blood.

Somebody else had been injured, then. Was this what Athena had been asking for assistance on?
Tracer pulled Mercy quickly to the back of the room, dodging around crates and equipment and folded-up cots that leaned against the hut’s walls. Her heart had long since slowed from its panic and she felt half-frozen now, cold and sludgy and thick. Rounding the last small pile of crates, she tugged the doctor forward gently with a sob and then let go, moving to hold Widowmaker’s hand instead. The sniper was laid out overtop of a few boxes pulled together like a table.

Laying completely still, of course.

Angela’s eyes widened and she stepped forward instinctively, fingers moving to the blue neck in order to check the pulse. There was none. Not at first, at least, but she recalled that Widowmaker’s heart was slower; a moment later, though, she dropped her hand anyway. With where that bullet wound was, there was no doubt.

“I’m… sorry, Lena. She’s gone.” Angela shook her head, but the pilot returned the gesture sharply.

“No, you- you can bring her back, you can do something. Something, I know you can.” Her eyes were full of such fervor, such certainty, such hope. “You can do anything.”

Doctor Ziegler raised her hands flat in a helpless shrug. “I-I can’t, I’m sorry. The staff- it has a very limited window, a few moments-”

“Yeah but with all the bullshit they did to her,” Tracer protested, her voice ragged at the edges as tears leaked from her eyes, cutting paths through the dust on her cheeks and the smears of blood, “with all of that, it’s gotta be longer. Gotta be. Right? Slo- slower heartbeat and-” her hand clutched tightly at Widowmaker’s, limp at her side.

Angela frowned, swallowing slowly. It was possible. It might extend the situation, slightly - clearly, Widowmaker’s body didn’t have normal operations. She couldn’t bring herself to get Lena’s hopes up, though. “It’s… it is possible. Unlikely, but possible.” She stepped closer, clearing her throat slightly, practiced hands beginning to carry out an examination. “How long has it been?”

“T-ten minutes,” Lena whispered, barely, her eyes fixed on Widowmaker’s face. It was still smiling, still had that beautiful soft smile on it that broke her heart but she couldn’t bring herself to look away. “Maybe fifteen. Tops. I came straight here, I- I didn’t know what else to do.”

It had all been a blur, time-twisted and hazy through grief and fear and panic, just sobs and anger and rushing, so much rushing, and then she’d been in the camp. Almost without knowing she was coming here - almost, but with just a burning drive at the back of her mind that if she made it to Angela, it would all be okay. If she made it to Mercy she’d be safe.

Instinctively, Ziegler shook her head with an unconvinced little hum as she heard the time, but Lena was clearly distraught and she at least deserved a full investigation. Widowmaker’s body was certainly exhibiting uncommon symptoms - the progression of some symptoms would have been difficult to determine at best as time went on, but even already, oddities were present. Her jaw and neck were already tense as if through rigor mortis, though that would not normally have started for some fair time. Body temperature was colder than she would have expected for such a short duration.

Whether Widowmaker being closer to death to begin with was a good thing, or a bad one, the doctor couldn’t possibly know. She simply didn’t understand enough of the sniper’s functioning, but she checked what she could for a moment. For Lena’s insistence, if nothing else.

She pulled out a machine from her pocket, clamping a sensor lightly over one of Widowmaker’s fingertips and inserting a needle into a vein; the machine worked quickly, taking readings of many things. Blood pressure, zero over zero; heart rate, zero, unsurprisingly; O2 saturations surprisingly
high; cellular function at levels which didn’t seem to align with death.

Brain function wasn't zero. Not quite. More akin to a coma than death, and Mercy could only pray that Widowmaker wasn’t conscious.

Death had been an eternal question amongst doctors and scholars. When a person truly died - at first, the explanations had been religious, rooted in the soul; later, medical science had said it was when the breath stopped. Resuscitation, when developed, struck this down - lack of breath didn’t mean death, one could be made to breathe again and be revived. Medicine decided then that it was when the heart stopped. The advent of other technologies had disproved that marker, though - a heart could be restarted, much as breath could. The heart could even be removed on the operating table and replaced with a machine. Almost every part of a person could be replaced and they would still live.

Further and further the goalposts moved, and now the lines were very hazy indeed.

Hazier still in Angela’s experience, specifically.

There was also the slight, or perhaps monumentally large, issue of her own remaining guilt. She still very much saw the face of Amélie Lacroix, a former friend who she’d failed in a previous life. It was a face which arose in uneasy dreams sometimes, or in those intrusive and unpleasant thoughts that strike one when one is alone with nothing else to do. Every thought of her, every thought of what Angela thought she should have done - if only she’d done this differently, if only she’d compared that statistic to a baseline, if only, if only, if only.

Now there seemed to be a second chance of sorts to come to Amélie’s aid - or, if not that, at least to help the woman who had somewhat supplanted her. The woman who remembered her. The only other remnant of the friendship they’d once had.

Selfish reasons, less selfish reasons...

Still, she knew what she could and could not do - what the Caduceus staff could and could not do - and right here, right now, all she could do was to shake her head slowly, sadly, and offer some comfort. “I’m sorry, Lena.”

The Brit’s eyes snapped up to meet hers. “No - no, not- you need to do something, Ange! Something, anything, please. Y-you don’t understand,” her words choked up as she squeezed tightly at Widdy’s hand again, her eyes dropping to that heartbreaking smile. “I love her,” she whispered.

They were quiet words, but impossible to miss. Impossible to avoid or to evade, Angela heard them plenty well, heard them and felt them in her heart and her gut as cold and hard jabs that spread like frost on a window but they didn’t change the facts.

“I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do.”

“Bollocks,” Lena hissed angrily, eyes flashing up instantly, “y-you brought back Genji! Why can’t you do it for her, huh? What, ju-” she coughed, pained, swallowed, “-just because she’s Talon? I don’t care! I d- I don’t-” her shoulders shook as her hand squeezed at Widowmaker’s again. It was only then that Angela noticed Lena’s other hand: clutching a pulse pistol tightly. Had she not put it away earlier? Or had she produced it again?

“That was different,” the doctor insisted softly and sadly. “This has nothing to do with personal alignments. I had the facilities and personnel of Overwatch behind me at that point, I had the most cutting-edge laboratory in the world, Lena, and now…” she shrugged emptily, “all I have is a little aid camp in a warzone. I can’t do anything with that. I’m sorry.”
Tracer gritted her teeth, hissed in a breath to try to say something but lost it and then lost her breath as well in a sob. She managed, though, to pull together enough for something. “No,” she whispered, staring down at Widowmaker’s face, “no she s- this can’t be over, she promised, she said au revoir. Not adieu. Not goodbye.”

“She… lied, Lena,” Mercy sighed, leaning forward to lay a hand on her shoulder.

Tracer gripped her pistol tighter, snapping back, “She didn’t! Not about that!”

The doctor froze at the force of the rebuttal and had no recourse but to hold out her hands emptily again. “Lena, please, I-” she shook her head, “you must believe me. If there was anything I could do, I would, but I just can’t! If I had access to a hospital, a research facility, maybe that would be something but-”

“So you need a hospital.”

Angela looked around quickly, trying to place that unseen voice - warm and soft, and the chuckle that followed it. It seemed familiar to her, somewhat.

“So what? No big deal. I can get you a hospital.”

Tracer knew the voice. Knew it instantaneously and, in that moment, hated it. “Sombra,” she hissed swiftly, “you’d better bloody show yourself this instant or so help me, I will-”

“Aww, is that any way to talk to a friend, chica?” Sombra sneered softly before pressing her machine pistol to the back of Tracer’s head, and none too gently either. “Put your little peashooter away and calm down now, and let somebody help, huh?”

Tracer’s hand shook for a second, didn’t want to relinquish its grip on the pistol, but she let it retract into her bracer as she glared daggers around blankly at the room. With her other hand, though, Tracer refused to yield - it stayed clasped on Widowmaker’s. “Fine.”

The Accelerator was fully powered. If Sombra tried anything, she could flash all around her in an instant. It gave her some comfort at least.

“I don’t have a lot of friends,” Sombra murmured softly, reaching out an invisible hand to stroke at Widowmaker’s cheek. It was cold, but that was hardly anything new. The assassin felt just like she always did. “Don’t really feel like giving one up today,” she chuckled. “Greedy, greedy bitch, that’s me.”

Tracer wasn’t sure what Sombra meant with those words, that reference back to an earlier conversation - that she was still the same person who had been on-screen, the same one who had helped Widowmaker when she couldn’t, had been there when she couldn’t? Or was Sombra only taunting with that?

Either way it didn’t feel good. It felt like a low and sickening punch to the gut but Tracer couldn’t see any alternatives so she kept her mouth shut and quietly seethed.

Angela’s eyes fixed on a screen that appeared suddenly, a hospital displayed on it. One she was decently familiar with through magazines and announcements. She’d even done a walk-through of the facility, once, as part of a press junket of sorts.

“This work well for you, Angel-dust? Not too far away in my nice fast dropship, got a good surgical ward, organ synthesis lab. Figure you’d need all that.”
The doctor nodded slowly, swallowing around a dry tongue; it might work, it might, but Genji’s chances had only ever been a coin toss to begin with. Admittedly, there was less bodily damage in Widowmaker’s case, but the unknown modifications and experiments which had been carried out on her - their effects couldn’t even be guessed at, positive or negative. At least, not by her, not without knowing more.

It didn’t take more than a glance at Lena’s hopeless face, though, to know that she needed to try. “Alright,” Angela nodded, once. “I can’t guarantee anything. I’m not a miracle worker, but… I’ll try.”

Tracer just nodded, wiped at a cheek with her free hand and moved to pick Widowmaker’s body up. An unseen pair of hands lifted the opposite end and she recoiled at first, but she could hardly fight back against it.

It was an easier weight to bear with two people, anyway.

They carried her out, Lena following almost zombielike - she couldn’t say what route they took to get to the dropship, where it was, whether anyone stopped and asked them anything along the way. All she knew was that faint smile on blue lips. They looked exactly the same, exactly the same as in life, but…

...more peaceful.

She figured her eyes would run out of tears sooner or later. They only trickled occasionally now, one joining another on their slow march down her face, and she hardly cared about them. She hardly cared about anything.

She thought that she should feel hopeful now that Angela was here, but she only felt tired.

It was a familiar dropship. An Overwatch dropship. Tracer looked over - Sombra was visible again now, talking swiftly with Angela as the ship closed up and lifted off, and she wanted to be angry. Wanted to shout and leap over and smack the purple hair off of her head, but she didn’t.

It would’ve meant letting go of Widdy’s hand, and she wasn’t doing that if she could help it.

“We’ll get you back, love,” Tracer whispered, leaning down to kiss her on the forehead. She didn’t feel cold.

Not compared to normal, at least.

---

“Everything I’ve got on Project Widowmaker,” Sombra muttered to the doctor as she transferred some files onto her phone, “which is to say, everything there is. At least everything that’s left, along with a little bit that wasn’t. You can thank me later.”

Mercy only nodded as Sombra turned - the hacker didn’t seem concerned with her, not really, and she needed to see the data as soon as possible. Start figuring out what had been done, and what might be possible moving forward. Arrange for a plan.

Sombra took a deep breath, stalling two steps away from Mercy and looking over at the despondent
Brit and the dead assassin. A whole lot of emotions were struggling in her, a whole lot of shit, but she was well-practiced at just swallowing that down. She hadn’t survived Midnight and decades of bullshit to just give up now and let her head slip underwater.

She wasn’t sure she wanted to walk over there.

In fact, she was almost entirely sure that she didn’t.

Regardless, she did.

Tracer didn’t even look up at the sound of approaching footsteps. She knew who it was. “Go away.”

Softly whispered words, but as a result of them, Sombra didn’t have emotions warring in her anymore - no, those tiny little words let pissed-off anger right to the forefront and made everything else fuck off into the back of her mind.

“... excuse me?” Sombra seethed. “Go away? Really? You’re gonna-”

“Well you should’ve done more!” Tracer shouted back, eyes flashing up; yep, she wanted to punch Sombra right in her sneering lips the instant she saw them. There was the anger, burning horrifically overttop of a yawning pit of fear. At least the fire’s light drove back the pit’s darkness.

“Hey, I’m not the one who was standing right in front of her when she got shot, chica!” Sombra prodded a finger into the glass of her Accelerator.

“No, you were the one watching from the sidelines, and you could’ve stopped it!” Tracer yelled, reaching out and grabbing at Sombra’s jacket with her free hand.

“So COULD YOU! You think I didn’t try?” Sombra’s hands caught on the Accelerator’s harness and they held each other like that, seething from inches away; Tracer’s eyes looking like fire with dirt and blood smeared on her cheeks and tears gently streaming, and Sombra’s simply angry and cold, but they didn’t hold each other close quietly. No, they continued to shout and hiss insults at each other from point-blank range.

“You stupid bitch you-”

“Pobrecita you don’t even fucking begin to understand how-”

“-couldn’t stopped it right from the start, you could’ve-”

“- cago tu puta madre, not my fault in the fucking first place-”

“-fucking lying fucking cow-”

“-calling me a liar? Well that’s rich, chica, ‘cause I got news for you-”

“-still don’t understand how bloody Atlas ties into all this but-”

“-you think I did that then you’re even dumber than I thought because-”
“-what just because it was gonna be over?” The pilot let out a sharp, weaponlike laugh. “Because she was gonna back with us again, was that it? ‘Cause you were afraid she wouldn’t be paying as much attention to you anymore?”

Tracer could tell immediately that she’d touched a nerve - up until then, Sombra’s face had been a constant sneer, a mask of almost placid annoyance, but when she said that, it changed in an instant, twisting into open fury.

Sombra’s eyes shot wide and she yanked Tracer in closer, roughly, and shouted in her face, “You’re not the only one that loves her, alright?!”

That shout shocked the whole situation into silence for a few seconds.

Their noses were almost touching and Sombra stared back, unblinking, unmistakably hostile but also calmer than she had been a second ago she took a breath and shook her head just slightly. “You’re not the only one that cares,” she growled quietly, intensely. “If you think you are, then seriously just get the fuck out of here right now because—”

“I’m sorry.” Tracer swallowed, barely containing the urge to break down and collapse - she knew she’d gone too far with that one, she’d known even before she said it but she just couldn’t stomach the idea that Sombra was able to stand there all calm and collected while she flailed around helplessly. She wanted to see some flaw in the armour, she wanted Sombra to be just as hurt as she was. More, even.

She wanted to blame Sombra, she wanted to be angry at her. It was easier.

It was so much easier, but it was also a lie.

The hacker saw something flicker in the depths of Tracer’s eyes and let her grip on the harness soften, just slightly, as she swallowed. “I’m scared too, alright?”

Tracer nodded quickly, tears springing freshly from her eyes; she let go of the hacker’s jacket in order to wipe her cheek, looking down to the fallen sniper who was laid out on a table. “I- I just…” she could barely whisper, but she did anyway. “I want to be angry… so I don’t need to blame myself.”

For a moment there was no sound but the dropship engines, before Sombra’s soft voice broke the reigning silence. “...yeah. Me too.”

Sombra was looking down to Widdy when Tracer looked back, but those purple eyes swiftly rose to meet hers. “Myself,” she clarified and sighed. “This... was a good idea.” Sombra tipped her head back, over toward Mercy standing off to the side. “This whole- I mean, I’m not saying I wouldn’t have thought of it,” she protested lightly, “but- I mean, I couldn’t get her here as fast as you did and uh…”

...and regardless of whether she would have thought of the idea, she hadn’t, and she knew it. She’d heard the shot and seen Widowmaker fall, and that had been the end of it. Right up until Tracer had stood and zipped off. Sombra had given up - as soon as Widowmaker had fallen, so had she.

She couldn’t quite bring herself to admit it though.

“Yeah.” Tracer’s voice hurt as it croaked out of her throat, like vinegar on a burn, and her eyes felt just the same. “St-still might not work though, and I mean—”

“Hey, don’t do that.” Sombra urged gently. “Don’t start with that, don’t… make it harder than it
already is.”

Tracer nodded. “Right. S’hard enough without- yeah,” she sighed heavily, ragged, not a sob but close. “We’ve gotta just… get through it though, don’t we?” Tracer’s voice was hoarsely soft, that sort of whisper that comes out when the only other option might be a scream. “For her.”

“Yeah,” Sombra sighed, dropping her eyes and muttering something in Spanish that Tracer couldn’t catch, but then she caught her gaze again. “For her. Hey, uh… look, when we get her back… don’t tell her I said that, alright?”

Tracer frowned in confusion and Sombra chuckled. “It’s just, uh… I mean, we’re not really like that. It’s cool, whatever, but- just don’t tell her I said it. The, uh…” her eyes fucked away briefly, “the love thing.”

“Yeah,” Tracer croaked weakly, nodding. “Of course, no problem. It- you sure?” She knew it had been destroying her to not say it, to hold it in, to keep it quiet.

“Yep.” Sombra answered instantly, no hesitation. Then, she took a breath and sighed it out through her nose, turning it into a chuckle at the end as she took away her hands and shrugged with a grin, defaulting back to what she always had, the easiest thing in the world: jokes. “Yeah, you’re really gonna help me dodge that bullet, chica. Fall on that sword for me, yeah. You know how much I hate all the mushy shit.”

Tracer wasn’t even quite sure what was happening anymore as Sombra laughed. She felt detached from her body, like something out of a dream. The joking felt almost comforting, almost, or at least familiar. Something. Whatever it was, something drove her to blindly catch Sombra’s hand, but the hacker didn’t pull free.

For a moment, they both just stood there, looking down at a smiling blue face.

“You people got a fuckin’ problem with this,” Sombra whispered, squeezing at Tracer’s hand slightly. “All this hand-holding and shit. Not healthy.”

“Yeah well, I deserve a little unhealthy comfort today,” Tracer retorted softly, automatically. “So just… lemme, alright?”

Sombra let out a rough laugh, and when she spoke again her voice cracked a little. “S-sure thing, chica. Personal favour, just for you. Don’t read too much into it.” She knew that Tracer wouldn’t place the words. She was counting on it.

They hadn’t known each other long, they hadn’t talked much. Whenever they had, Tracer had felt like Sombra was at least half-toying with her, and in a less-concerned way than Widdy did, a less safe way, but she still found comfort in the words and the interaction. She still felt like, maybe for the first time, she and Sombra were on the same page. Not just that they were working toward the same goal, but working toward it from the same place, even.

Or maybe she just really needed a shoulder to cry on.

Either way, whatever it was, she turned and wrapped her arms around Sombra’s back, buried her face in the hacker’s jacket, and started to sob.

Sombra didn’t mock her. Didn’t make any jokes, because nothing really seemed to be funny at that moment. She just let out a sigh that seemed to carry the weight of the world and held Tracer’s head in tight against her shoulder - tight against - and let a few tears trickle down her own cheek for the first time since she’d heard the gunshot.
They couldn’t do anything right then anyway. They deserved a minute to just decompress.

She just really, really hoped that decompress was a more accurate word than mourn.

---

Mercy’s eyes flicked away from her phone when the other two got heated, when they started to shout. When they grabbed at each other and yelled, she eyed them warily, but then the worst of it seemed to pass and no guns had been produced and no punches thrown. No injuries apparent.

Not yet, at least.

It wasn’t hard to see that emotions were high, to say the least, and tensions as well. They were only likely to get worse. Angela knew that even people with the best intentions were so much more likely to make mistakes or do the wrong thing in a situation like that.

She could recall Overwatch, after all.

It worried her, as much as everything else; her eyes flicked to Widowmaker’s motionless form, to Tracer’s soulful eyes, to the shaven back of Sombra’s head. What would come of this all?

Normally, when she was afraid for the safety of herself or of others, Angela would have called Fari. She was away, though, and busy - next on the list would have been any one of a few people. Possibly Jesse, now that they’d reconnected. They’d always been good friends, and he was entirely capable, but he was also integrated with the team and Angela was as concerned for Lena’s safety - today and moving forward into the future - as she was for her own.

That made her choice fairly easy, then. Someone capable and uninvolved, and able to remain calm. She sent off a message as the other two seemed to reconcile somewhat, Lena catching the hacker’s hand.

“Satya. I understand you may be busy, and I apologize for the intrusion, but is there any possibility that I could ask for your assistance? I’ve found myself in a possibly worrisome position and I feel that it might worsen. I would deeply appreciate any aid you could provide, if you have the time and capacity to do so. -Angela.”

She let out a slow breath as the message sent off, as Lena turned away to cry into Sombra’s shoulder. Sometimes that was a necessary thing, a vent, an outlet; Angela wondered what would happen for herself when she came down from her adrenaline rush. She was already fourteen hours awake at this point, not that that was anything new to her.

Coffee. She needed coffee.

With a groaned sigh, Angela pushed off of the wall and moved toward the cockpit - near the stairs up was a sort of a snack nook and she almost-automatically slid a cup into place and thumbed the coffee button, holding it down for three seconds before giving it a quick tap to trigger the “double-brew” protocol as Jack had showed her once, a decade ago.

A lifetime ago.

As she waited for it to dribble out into the cup, her eyes flicked to her screen again as she half-
mindlessly scrolled through her conversation history with Satya. She was a sweet woman, she really was, and in a situation which must have been so intensely frustrating at times. At first, Angela had thought - and even worried - that her own concern and sympathy were lingering guilt over the woman’s internment, but that concern was placated with time.

Satya was a friend, and a good one. On top of that, she was possibly the only person Angela had met who shared a similar view on the taking of a life - she was possibly the best person in the world to have in a situation like this, where de-escalation was the biggest concern.

Fareeha, if things went wrong enough, would kill; Jesse - as much as Angela loved him - probably would have done so sooner. Ana would have, or Jack, or Winston as well - even if he managed to maintain control over himself.

Although, as her eyes flicked back toward the other two huddled near the corpse of their fallen friend, Angela had to admit to herself darkly that she wasn’t certain who she was the most concerned about getting out of hand.

She trusted Sombra less, that was certain, but the hacker also gave off an air of controlling cockiness that she seemed to back up. Not calmness exactly but a commitment to a certain aloof facade.

Lena, on the other hand, was capable and trustworthy - one of the most capable and trustworthy people Angela had ever met - but she was also mercurial at times. Not usually violently, not usually angrily, but…

...today was perhaps an exception to that general rule.

The phone in her hand beeped softly and drew her attention away from thoughts and back to the present as a message came through. “Angela. No apology is needed - I would of course be delighted to render any aid which I am able. I have no other tasks at the moment, no plans, and no concerns. What would you ask of me? Satya”

Mercy picked up the coffee cup with one hand, tapping at the screen with the other as she breathed the brew’s fumes deeply and then sighed them out. She sent off the address of the hospital - Satya’s access to a teleporter network would doubtlessly come in handy, but even if she needed to fly herself it wouldn’t take her too long to get there.

She was happy to come and help out, to offer some safety and a cool head and an extra set of hands. Eager to, even, and delighted; Angela smiled softly at the phone screen, the tone of the Architech’s words evident even without any voice to accompany them. So to speak. Literal tone wasn’t a strong point of hers.

They’d talked a fair bit since Satya’s imprisonment, and Angela had found a fairly deep commonality between them, albeit with some standout points.

In some ways, she saw a younger version of herself in Satya - a version who was still with her Overwatch. She only worried about what the future might bring for the Architech, should Vishkar prove to be as unstable as Overwatch had been.

Her gaze drifted toward the two she shared the dropship with, as her thoughts went further still - beyond the hull and beyond the clouds, to distant lands and distant friends.
Sombra would never admit to how good it felt to hold someone else who was crying, but it did. It let her get away with a few subtle and slippery tears of her own, and it was reassuring to know that someone else was hurting over the same thing. Like they could share the load between them. Share the pain.

In a way, maybe that was what was happening.

Whatever it was, though, she didn’t really care. Sometimes things went wrong if you thought about them too much. Sometimes it was best to just go with it. It was a specialty of hers, too.

They deserved a minute or two, at least.

It didn’t even take Tracer long to stop crying. Thirty seconds or so - less than Sombra had expected, though she wasn’t really sure why.

“I’m gonna-” a voice croaked from the crook of Sombra’s shoulder as she stared blankly up at the ceiling, “-gotta let Winston know. He’ll be right panicking that I’ve dropped off the radar.”

Sombra snickered softly, patting at the back of Tracer’s head. “Ahh, rapida, when are you gonna learn that I’m two steps ahead, huh?”

It sounded softer than it normally did, though, less teasing and sharp, and when Tracer pulled back it was with a slight smile on her face rather than a slight frown as Sombra snapped her fingers.

“Athena, chica, thanks again for the dropship. Pass it along to Mono and Roja that we’re safe. Angel-dust is riding shotgun, just so you know, but uh… they may not need to know that.” She’d switched almost everything off earlier, turning on data channels one by one now, dealing only with the information she chose to let in - to let herself focus, rather than being flooded with everybody’s everything all at once. This needed her full attention, and had it.

In an instant, the pilot and time-twisting wonder perked up. “Athena?” She shook her head slightly. “God, I just dropped off the grid, I should’ve-”

“I already filled her in,” Sombra muttered, frowning up to the ceiling rather than looking over. “She passed along that you’re alright. Nothing else, though. Didn’t want Winston knowing everything, not now at least. Afterward maybe. We’re gonna be doing some uh, how would you say it, ethically questionable actions, so maybe the gorilla doesn’t need to know.”

For a second or two, Tracer just stared. She herself hadn’t thought to even pass along a message that she wasn’t hurt - Athena had been actively talking in her ear and she’d just pulled out the earbud and dropped it so she didn’t need to deal with any of that.

Couldn’t have dealt with any of it on top of everything else, maybe, but at the same time she realized she probably should have at least tried. “Thanks,” she muttered quickly, and Sombra nodded but kept frowning toward the dropship’s speakers.

“Athena,” the hacker inquired again, “you get that?”

There was silence for a few seconds. Athena’s voice, when it did come through the speakers, was choppy at best. “Of cou-se. Apo- gies, my systems appear to b-”

There was a soft beep and Sombra scowled. “Amiga? What’s going on - you need a hand with something?”
Another moment of silence, and then a thoughtful hum from Athena. “Interesting. It would appear that-” she laughed, “-oh, I see!” Her voice sounded clearer, for the moment at least. “Apologies. Third parties are attempting to gain access to several of my ancillary subsystems. The situation is causing substantial diversions of resources but I can enact a workaround for short periods at least.”

Sombra recoiled, wrinkling her nose. “Ew, DDOS? On you? You kidding me? That’s like throwing a fucking rock at a bus to try to stop it.”

“Over three billion rocks, unfortunately, says the bus,” Athena murmured and there was another soft beep. “Apologies. Ancillary systems must be pared back to cope with the load. Good luck.”

With a groan, Sombra tugged at her hair and swiped up a screen into existence. “Fine, fine, I’ll do it the old-fashioned way, then - why not, right? Not like I’ve got a hundred other things to do.” Despite the complaining tone, there was a wide grin on her lips and a sharp gleam in her eyes as her fingers flew over holographic keys. “Gotta call in a few favours, I guess…”

“Yeah, no-one’s got it as hard as you,” Tracer quipped as she held out a hand through the screen to catch Sombra's attention. “Hold up though, did you say- Winston and Emily? She’s, what, involved now?”

Sombra rolled her eyes and smirked. “No, I said Mono and Roja, geeze. Yeah, though. They don’t know exactly what’s going on but your little stunt with the comms gave them a bit of a scare there, chica. Going dark will do that, you know…”

“God, I didn’t think-”

“No, you didn’t, did you?”

Tracer shot her an irritated look as once more it seemed like she’d stepped into what the hacker had planned, but Sombra just smirked back and held her gaze with those wide purple eyes until Tracer rolled her eyes and tipped her head in soft concession.

She hadn’t thought, not really, she’d just gone. Caught on a feeling, caught on a word, caught on refusal, she’d gone and never paused to wonder what might come of it. Not that she needed to admit that to Sombra.

“I’ve gotta get in touch with Em.”

Sombra snapped her fingers and waved a hand, the screen in front of her enlarging and shifting, and a call connecting symbol displaying across it. A moment later, it was replaced with a picture of Emily’s smiling face - one Tracer recognized as a profile pic of hers.

“Em?”

“Lena, oh, god you’re okay,” Emily gushed, letting out a sigh which she knew full well she’d been holding for twenty minutes since they first saw the signals go dead. Her next breath followed it just the same, rushing out and leaving her lightheaded as she held the phone to her ear.

“What’s- Winston and I are flying in, he’s-” she cut off for a second, glancing over toward the cockpit where Winston was frustratedly shouting, “Athena told us you were alright but the mission turned sour, she was monitoring, but now she’s having some sort of problems of her own? What-” she swallowed tightly, the handgun sitting forgotten in her lap as she opted instead for the far more familiar comfort of grabbing tightly at a lock of her own hair and tugging it straight. “What’s going on, love? Are you alright?”
“I’m, uh,” Tracer coughed to clear her throat, her eyes trying to shift to look at Widdy but she forced herself to refrain. Even just the thought was bringing fear back again and she couldn’t have that, not now. “I’m alright, yeah. I’m fine, not hurt or nothing. It’s… something went wrong though, yeah. But we’re gonna fix it.” She forced a laugh. “Nothing to worry ‘bout!”

Emily chuckled softly, wiping a tear from her freckled cheek as she relaxed back into the dropship seat, relieved just to be hearing Lena’s voice. She was telling the truth about being uninjured, Emily could tell that easily enough, but she could tell a little more as well.

There definitely wasn’t nothing to worry about. “You’re a terrible liar, love.”

“Nah, she’s telling the truth,” Sombra muttered offhand, fingers working furiously at a new set of screens. “Really. Everything’s great on our end.”

“Yeah, and you’re not much better, Sombra love,” Emily swallowed heavily. Two voices, and not two she’d expected to hear together. Not anytime soon, not while separation was still the course of action. She waited for a moment, and then another.

No third voice joined them.

“Ah,” she whispered. “So… she’s either not there, or…”

A few seconds of silence, and Emily found herself not really wanting to finish the sentence. She wanted to say ‘incapacitated’ but it didn’t feel right. Not with the amount of obvious distress on the other end of the phone line, but she was far too afraid to say anything else. Anything more.

As it turned out, though, silence was sufficient.

Sombra kept staring at her screens dedicatedly. She’d figured the redhead would put it together from that. Didn’t want to spring a bunch of info on her all at once, but - like when Tracer had been snatched - she probably deserved to know.

Tracer glanced over, Sombra’s eyes flickering to meet hers for an instant and then dropping away again. “S-second one,” her voice wavered and she almost lost it again, but Sombra’s hand came to rest on her shoulder and she clutched at it like a drowning woman grasping a rope as she wiped fresh tears away with her other hand. “We’re- we’re gonna fix it, though, love. Promise. Got Angela here, and… yeah.”

Emily let out a single laugh, relief mixing with her trepidation but failing to eliminate it, because she knew of Angela, but she knew Lena. Knew her voice. Knew how it trembled when she was on the edge of losing everything. Knew when she was putting on a brave face.

Also knew when to return it.

“Well, it’ll be alright then,” Emily sighed contentedly, and she felt some of the same sinking into her. Some, at least. “Woman’s a miracle worker.”

“Ha, yeah! You’re telling me,” Tracer shot, happy for anything that would let her stop thinking about and fearing what was to come. “Anyway, um- you said you and Winston were in a dropship? Flying in? What, are you a field agent now?”

Emily’s eyes dropped to the gun in her lap which she slid off to the side, to sit on the seat next to her as she laughed. “Oh, of course. Got a code-name picked out and everything! Get ready for your new partner in crime, Red Dawn.”
Tracer’s shaky lips pulled into a grin and she tipped her head back, groaning a laugh up to the ceiling. “I’m gonna bloody kill Jesse when I get back. Where are you headed, anyway?”

“I’m sending them to where we’ll be, give or take,” Sombra muttered in response, eyes narrowed as she worked. “They’ll take a lot longer, though. Should be all done by the time they arrive.”

For just an instant, her gaze left the screens - rising to meet Tracer’s, pointedly, with a little tip of her head. Tracer nodded to her unspoken point. Another way of keeping Winston from stopping things before they got going. “Probably for the best, that. Yeah. Anyway uh, Em, listen - I should be off but… but it’s really good to hear from you.” She sighed, slumping a little against the wall beside her. “I’m gonna need a hell of a shower when we get home.”

Sombra snorted. “Yeah, you’re telling me, *chica*. I’m gonna take about eight.”

“Deal,” Emily responded, her voice emanating from the screen with her worried smile unseen. “Be safe, yeah? All of you.”

Tracer smiled, her eyes drifting to Widdy for the first time since the call began. “Always. Love you.”

“Love you too. Bye, Sombra.”

“Talk to you later, *amiga,*” Sombra replied and waved a hand. The screen dissolved and she reached out blindly to pat Tracer on the shoulder. Omission didn’t exactly seem to be her strong suit. “Hey. Good job. It’s- look, it’s better if they know less. Especially Winston. Not saying to lie to him forever or anything, but-”

“-but he can’t be held accountable if he doesn’t know what’s happening,” Tracer muttered back, shaking her head. “God, we really made a mess of this, didn’t we?”

Sombra blew a raspberry and laughed. “Pfft, please! You think *this* is a mess? You’ve clearly never seen my apartment - and *yes* that is an invitation, now hold up a sec, I gotta call some people before we land. Don’t have long.”

The hacker worked in silence for a few seconds before frowning, and then groaning as she grabbed at her head. “Damn, can’t like *one* thing go right today?”

Satya wasn’t answering her phone.

It happened not infrequently: whenever she was on one of her little missions, or doing other things that required her attention. It wasn’t out of the ordinary, but it was a frustrating coincidence because - at least judging by the news feeds she was trawling - there was only one other person near where they were going to be.

Or rather, two people, to be precise.

Sombra wouldn’t exactly consider either of them *trustworthy*, but they were at least close, and the three of them inside the hospital would need somebody holding the doors.

Grumbling darkly to herself, she connected the call.

---
Somehow, for reasons unknowable - or at least, unknown - this particular establishment had no ice cream.

“No ice cream!” Junkrat clapped his mechanical hand to his chest as if it were a personal affront, intended to wound him, directly, out of all the people in the world. “None at all!”

Roadhog grunted.

“Why should I care about that?” Junkrat snapped back, whirling on his peg to shoot his associate an accusatory glance before stepping backward out of the shattered glass door through which they’d entered a few minutes ago. “Convenience stores have ice cream! Everybody knows that!”

This time, Roadhog sighed first, and then grunted.

“Not this convenience store, you say,” the Aussie muttered with a roll of his eyes, “well you don’t say. Or- you do. You did - you just did say that. Why’re you going trying to say that you didn’t?”

Without a word or a noise, Roadhog shook his head and jabbed a thick finger at Junkrat, prodding him in the harness. The smaller man hadn’t noticed his phone ringing. Probably the Tinnitus.

“What’re you jabbin’ at me for ya bloody-” Junkrat batted Roadhog’s huge hand away, but cut off when he noticed the vibration buzzing out of one pocket of his harness. In confusion, he pulled out a ringing phone which he didn’t recognize, hit ‘answer’, and put it up to his ear.

“Yyyyyeeeesssss?” His voice rose in pitch as he stretched out the syllable like something out of a cartoon.

“Ai, Jamison, do you really need to be that fuckin’ weird when you answer the phone?”

“Oh, it’s you!” Junkrat giggled brightly. “Well, how’ve you been, princess?”

“I’m not your princess,” Sombra grumbled, “and madre de dios don’t let the big guy hear you calling me that, alright?” She sighed as she heard Roadhog grunt, and she shot Tracer an annoyed glance to which the Brit only shrugged with a hesitant smile.

“Look, I wouldn’t even be calling you if I had another option,” she muttered swiftly, but before she could explain further, Junkrat had cut her off.

“Oh! Oh, so now she doesn’t want to talk to us?”

He’d clearly pulled the phone away from his head but hadn’t put it on speakerphone. Rolling her eyes, Sombra spun a small holographic circle to crank the gain so she could hear what he was saying.

“-some people, I tell ya mate - you think they’re calling to ask how you are or say thank you for a very thoughtful gift basket-”

“It was a letterbomb,” Sombra grunted in explanation to Tracer. “His gift basket was a fucking letterbomb.”

“-turns out they only want you to do a job for them! I mean, what’re we, a pair of mercenaries-” Roadhog grunted, and Junkrat snapped back, “Well of course I know we’re mercenaries! That’s why I said it! Oh- ohhhhhhhhh! I see what you’re saying. Wait… no I don’t.”

“Look, I’ll pay you or whatever,” Sombra growled, “but we don’t have time for this, alright?
Widowmaker’s been hurt and we need to secure a hospital—"

“-and then you need it BLOWN UP!”

“No, no, no, Jamison- focus. ” Sombra held out her hands as if she wanted to strangle him through the phone call. That was just because she did very much want to do that, though. “I’ll clear the place out myself. I just need you to hold the doors out front so nobody comes in after us. That’s all. Explode all you want but not the hospital and no deaths, alright?” They didn’t need this being worse than it already was.

“Well of course no deaths!” Junkrat’s voice snapped loudly through the line. “What’re we, a couple of heartless murderers? No, there’s only one of those here, thank you very much, and he’s- wait who’d you say this was about again? Windy Raker?” He hummed hesitantly. “Don’t know ‘im. Don’t think I’m int’rested in helping him out. Sounds like a real piece of work, if you ask me!”

“The- fucking-” Sombra almost choked on her own words, forcing out a seething sigh as Tracer patted her on the shoulder and then glaring daggers at the screen. “No, not- whatever you said. Widowmaker. Talon chica, sniper, assassin - you know, the blue French one.”

“Oh, Bluey! Yeah, I know her! Well, if it’s a favour for her, then of course we’ll-” Roadhog grunted and Junkrat gasped in shock. “What! No we will not! She may be a bitchy blue lady but she’s our bitchy blue lady, thankyouverymuch - we’ll see you at the hospital, princess, ready to blow the doors right off and explode everybody inside!”

Sombra swiped a hand through the air and screeched for a second before silencing herself and gesturing again. “Yeah hey line cut out for a second Jamison - weird, random, anyway, hey, hand me over to the big guy, will ya?”

There were muffled sounds of the phone being handed over, and Roadhog’s muffled grunt sounded loudly.

“I’ll make it worth your while, cerdo, just- keep him from doing anything that’ll get us all killed, alright? Distract him with some fucking cheetos or something, I don’t know. Just keep the situation under control until we’re clear. I know you can do that for me.”

There was a pause, several seconds’ worth of silence punctuated only by laboured breathing, before a gravelly voice came over the line. “Fine.”

“Thanks.” She tapped a few controls to send a meet-up location and then swiped her claws across, dashing the screen into pixels as she groaned, dropping her head into her hands. “I already regret inviting them. I mean, we need somebody to hold the doors, but I still regret it.”

“Much as I hate to admit it,” Tracer mumbled, “or to work with them, it’s hard to imagine anywhere that Roadhog couldn’t block.”

Sombra let out a laugh. “Ha! Good point, chica. Alright, alright… seems like everything’s in place, lemme just get everybody out of the building.”

The systems were guarded, they really were, but she got in with no trouble and no delay. First the fire alarms went off, followed by a few other things - an evacuation of the hospital was underway mere moments later as the dropship continued to speed toward it.

Then there was nothing left to do. The dominoes were set, and all that was left was to see how they fell. With a sigh, Sombra slumped into a seat.
Tracer did the same, right next to her, but without the sigh. Her face tingled, she felt lightheaded - when she lifted her arms it didn’t feel right. They felt slightly numb; she did, all over, and inside as well.

She slid in her seat, leaning to the side until her shoulder rested against Sombra’s, and that was the end of it. Both of them just sat there, shoulder-to-shoulder, and looked over at Widowmaker, and thought.

They didn’t say anything. Neither of them - not a word about how sad and horrified and angry they were over what had befallen their mutual interest, not a word about how scared and worried and hopeless they felt about the near future.

Not a word about how much better it felt to be leaning up against somebody else’s shoulder rather than up against a wall.

Not a word.

---

The ship landed in an alleyway. Mercy had stayed to herself, focused on her phone the whole time, and Sombra and Tracer hadn’t spoken at all. Sombra stood as the ship touched down, though and waved the other two away.

“We don’t need your faces all over the news here,” she murmured, glancing out of the window. “Cameras are already offline along with every non-vital digital device I could easily get at within two blocks of here, but there’s no telling when some artsy weirdo will wander along with a film camera or some shit. Stay put while I clear the place out and get it set up, alright?”

Tracer nodded softly, moving to stand by Widdy’s side and holding her limp hand. “Hey…”

Sombra turned and caught her eye curiously, and the Brit shrugged a shoulder in unease. She wasn’t sure exactly what to say. What to feel. “Just uh- be safe, y’know?”

After a bare moment’s pause, Sombra just nodded and turned away. The door opened, her camouflage went on, and she ducked out of the doorway.

Tracer sighed, shaking her head as she looked over to Angela’s face - softly smiling as it always seemed to be. She’d known longer than anybody else had about the two of them, with the exception of Emily, and yet Tracer still felt like she hadn’t given enough warning. Like she hadn’t explained. Like she probably should.

It was never too late, though.

“It all started out… so simple,” she attempted softly, thumb stroking idly at the back of Widdy’s hand. It was so easy to forget - if she didn’t look over, it was so easy to forget. As long as she didn’t see that same stuck smile, it was so easy to pretend that the sniper was just being quiet the way she sometimes did, just relaxed beyond her normal steely tension, just there.

Still there.

“It always does,” Angela offered in response, shrugging a shoulder as she thought about Fari. By all
rights there should have been more of a rift between them, a soldier and a pacifist. Not just any soldier, either, but then she wasn’t just any pacifist. Maybe that was what made it work.

Tracer’s chin tugged over of its own volition, head swiveling on her neck to look but she retained enough control to slide her eyelids closed and spare herself the sight of Widdy laying there. “Now we’re robbing a hospital and- and lying about all-” she cut herself off with a sigh, rubbing at her eyes.

Somewhere along the way she’d taken her goggles off and they hung around her neck now, but she couldn’t remember doing that. Couldn’t recall much at all, in fact; most everything was a blur. It was like a dream: she knew she was here, and she knew that she had followed a path, but the stones of it were so hazy. Each footstep seemed certain in hindsight, but the path overall?

Her mind hung up on some of the last words she’d heard from that gorgeous soft voice that had always held such power over her, “I regret only that this ends.” Another tear slid down her cheek, joining countless fellows that had splattered on her journey.

She didn’t disagree, though. Despite it all, despite the frustrations and the fears and even the pain and horror of the past hour, she couldn’t bring herself to regret a single step - the destination, yes, but the journey…

Alone amongst the world, she had the power to turn back time. Maybe not on that scale - maybe - but it didn’t matter anyway. Even if she could have, she wouldn’t. She wouldn’t change a single step, for fear that the rest wouldn’t have followed.

It was futile, anyway. Regardless, she couldn’t change the past. Just the future.

She could, and she would. “It’ll be alright,” she whispered, half to herself and half to her fallen lover as she blindly lifted a hand to her lips and pressed a gentle kiss to it. “It’ll all be alright again.”

Her phone buzzed, a message from Sombra indicating that the path was clear, and when Tracer set down Widdy’s hand and stepped away it was with resolute determination clear in her eyes and across her face. “I’ll make damn sure of it,” she nodded, voice firmer than it had been a moment ago.

Carefully, she and Angela picked Widowmaker up and carried her out of the dropship and toward the place where all the hope resided. Into the hospital.

---

Sombra heard an argument in place the moment she left the dropship, and she recognized the voices. “Hey! S-” Sombra cut off after the first syllable of the name, grinning wide as she rounded a corner and actually saw her. She always seemed to grin at the sight of the Architech. Satya was in her work clothes, though, which meant the alias was in play. It wasn’t hard to figure out. “Symmetra! I didn’t think you got my messages!”

Symmetra frowned slightly in confusion. “I did not. I do not carry my phone during operations of any sort - you know this.”

“Well, yeah,” Sombra replied with a chuckle, “but I mean, you’re here and you’re all prepped so you must’ve-”
All at once, she realized that she wasn’t the Architech’s *only* link to the current situation, and her head spun around to glance back behind her. When she faced front again a second later, Satya’s expression had changed slightly. That never necessarily meant much, though.


“Indeed,” Symmetra returned with a single nod, her sharp eyes flicking in the direction Sombra had looked. “Is she… will she be here shortly?”

“She’s… kinda got some other stuff to deal with right now. She’ll be here in a bit, after it's done.” Sombra stepped forward with a sigh, toward an irate-looking Junkrat, and Roadhog who looked just as he always looked. Angry and murderous. “Alright, so we double-booked this party, but I hope it won’t be a problem.”

All three of them started talking at the same time, protesting, and Sombra dropped her head and pressed a palm to her forehead. “Ai, look, look, I- yeah, I get it, I know, alright? Just- an hour. That’s all I’m asking here. *Cerdo,* you know I’m good for the money or some other favour within reason, and *chica-“*

“No offer will entice me,” Symmetra responded curtly, cutting her off mid-word.

Purple eyes shot that way in a mixture of confusion and shock - Sombra knew that Satya didn’t like this kind of stuff. Didn’t generally like working with other people, didn’t like chaos and mess and disorder and she couldn’t really think of anybody who summed that up *more* than the two who shared the alley with them, but she still never thought that Satya would turn her down when she was asking for help.

Symmetra didn’t understand the look, the things with which Sombra’s wide eyes were loaded, but she knew that silence often meant a lack of comprehension. “My assistance has already been assured,” she explained, “and you know I would ask for no repayment for this.”

Grinning easily, Sombra nodded. “Of course I did, *chica,“* she half-lied. She’d *thought* that there wouldn’t be a need to repay her, but nothing like this had exactly come up before. They’d helped each other out on some little things, but nothing big. Not like this, at least.

The idea that maybe it wasn’t *her* that Satya was really helping did occur to Sombra in the back of her mind, but she just left it there. An unattended thought to gather dust as she glanced back to Roadhog with a raised eyebrow. “Well, *Cerdo?* How about you, huh?”

His sighs always sounded a little like death-rattles, in an entirely different way from Gabe’s; they were wet and thick, sounding like the last ragged exhalation of somebody about to die to some horrific affliction, and for all she knew, that was exactly true.

“Fine.”

“Wait!” Junkrat protested, “don’t *I* get a say in this whole matter?”

Roadhog looked over at him for several seconds, then just shook his head. He turned and walked away, flashing a thumbs-up over his shoulder. Junkrat followed, at first irate but quickly losing his focus on that in order to start talking about all the explosives he’d brought along.

“You gonna be alright, *amiga?“* Sombra glanced back to Satya, Symmetra, her friend. The world wasn’t the easiest in some ways for her and Sombra knew it, and she suspected that Junkrat might be a bit of a particular iceberg.
Symmetra’s eyes stayed focused down the alleyway in the direction that the two men had gone. Unblinking, hawklike - even as there sounded a thump followed by screams and a mad cackle from Junkrat. Then, Symmetra took a slow breath through her nose and let it out just the same.

Not every puzzle was easy.

She nodded and looked back to Sombra, meeting her eyes before she spoke. “Of course I will be.”

“Worst comes to worst you can just knock ‘im out, eh?” Sombra grinned and gestured with her elbow, a practiced indicator of a joke that helped clear up conversations between them.

With a chuckle, Symmetra smiled, hefting her photon projector. “Mm, I don’t know whether to hope that such a course of action remains un necessary… or to hope that it doesn’t.”

Laughing, Sombra nodded. “Yeah, well, have fun either way, right? Call if you need anything or things go wrong - shouldn’t be long. Thanks, amiga.”

“You’re welcome, my friend,” the Architech returned as she headed down the alleyway toward the front of the hospital. “You do the same.”

Sombra chuckled as she stroked a hand over an emergency exit door. They were designed to only open from the inside, but she didn’t give half a fuck what something was designed to do. Today of all days, particularly.

A quick glance at the hospitals schematic showed her all she needed to know. The alarms she’d set off had done a decent job of pre-clearing the place, but of course now people were looking around for the source of everything and they’d already clued into it being software-based. They had IT people in troubleshooting the system to find the glitches - she could see them on the cameras, she could see them prodding around in the code as well.

Some of the patients couldn’t be moved so they hadn’t been, and the security staff had all stayed as well; all in all, she guessed around a fifth of the people were still there.

Not bad.

Her machine pistol rang loudly through the main atrium when she reached it, drawing instant screams. A security guard leapt at her, pulling out a sidearm, but she was faster than that - a jump, a handful of hair, and gravity’s assistance left the man incapacitated and facedown on the floor.

“Hey, everyone,” Sombra announced with a wide grin. “Get out.”

---

The hospital looked a little wrong to Tracer, but they always seemed to. You could feel it in the walls, somehow; they just exuded an air of sterility but also of illness. A sort of staleness that crept out of the very foundation and deep into the heart of you.

She realized that those were probably unhelpful and generally pretty bad things to be thinking as a nurse’s girlfriend, but she couldn’t shake the feeling. Maybe it was just the specifics of the situation right now.
Sombra appeared out of nowhere, beside them. “Got everyone who wouldn’t leave, rounded ’em up. Nobody’ll see us as long as we stick to the ground floor here, and number seven. No cameras running in the place - not for them, at least. I, on the other hand,” she grinned, “can see it all. Got the table all set. Your turn now, Angel-dust.”

Tracer glanced over briefly as they carried Widowmaker into the elevator. The way Sombra carried herself, the way she spoke, the smirk as she stroked purple-glowing fingernails along the metal panel of the elevator and the doors snapped shut in an instant before it rose far faster than any elevator had any right doing - it was all part of the package, she suspected.

At first, it had been frustrating and angering, to think that Sombra was able to maintain aloofness through this all. Now she was starting to see it as something more like Widdy’s flatness. Just an easy way of getting through a trying time.

Maybe.

She still couldn’t tell, couldn’t put her finger on Sombra or tell what was real and what was wishful thinking, and she had the sinking suspicion that that was just the way the hacker liked it. She did manage a weak smirk at that idea as well, though, shaking her head a bit as the doors opened and they carried Widdy down toward an operating room.

---

Mercy worked with a sort of nervous but focused energy that had defined her for large portions of her career; her teeth worried at her lips almost constantly, but her eyes and more importantly her hands were dead steady.

There were two vitally important steps to this process, and neither of them was easy, and neither of them was nearly a guarantee - and she was either a willing contributor to all of this or she was a helpless captive and hostage, and she wasn’t sure which one she’d prefer.

Luckily, she wouldn’t need to find out, as long as she didn’t try to escape. As long as she could be like Satya - as long as she could see the walls as safety rather than restrictions, see them as things to keep the world out rather than to keep her in, she would be fine.

That got easier as the dull sounds of the outside world increased. Sirens, at first. Emergency services had been deployed as soon as Sombra had started setting off alarms, while they were still in flight. The hacker tried to slow them but there was only so much to be done there.

Shortly, as the responders heard what was happening from the people who had been ejected from the building at gunpoint, the world outside started to shift.

Helicopters and hovercraft came in, and drones as well. Police, military, news - Sombra dealt with them all, chuckling as she leaned her elbows against a huge window that ran the entire length and height of the operating theatre and looked out over the gorgeous city.

Mercy did her best not to pay it any attention. The task at hand - crafting replacements for the damaged tissues - could use every ounce of concentration she could afford.

...and that was the easy part.
She’d made sections of veins and arteries before, grown skin grafts, cultured organs - even manufactured a few more ambitious pieces. A whole nose, once, with all of its pores and nerves and follicles.

Never something as ambitious and vital as a heart, though.

So far as she knew, it was a world first. Creating such a pivotal organ from scratch.

Not to mention that she was making one custom-tailored to a person whose measurements she barely understood, so to speak. What had been done to Widowmaker was clearly extensive and required a lot of juggling and a little bit of guesswork to account for.

Needless to say, she was glad the other two were mostly keeping quiet.

The sounds outside drifted slowly higher but she tuned them out, the same way she did any battlefield. One hand pulled at her coffee as the other tapped at keys and adjusted dials and sliders on the holographic display.

All at once, it was done. She didn’t stop to marvel at it, though, nor to congratulate herself - not even to take a deep breath and relax.

Time was tantamount and she would not waste any of it.

Her phone rang. She recognized the ringtone. It was Fari.

Without even thinking about it, she pulled out the phone and answered it, pressing it desperately to her ear. “Hello, hello my-”

“Angie what the hell are you doing?”

The doctor blinked slightly, frowning, not expecting such an urgent hiss from the other end of the line. “I don’t, um… what are you talking about, Fari?”

“Angie-” a sharp sigh that replaced a word and Angela cringed just slightly from it, guiltily. “I can see you in there. Helix called us in for the debrief and reassess, remember? Why-”

“Oh! Oh, I- forgot that entirely,” Mercy laughed half-heartedly. She’d missed the fact that the hospital was in the same city, if she’d ever even known to begin with. She couldn’t be certain. Her mind wasn’t on the right track for that right now.

As her eyes flicked out to the window, though, there was a tiny silhouette in the distance - one she recognized, and waved to hesitantly. Fareeha in her Raptora suit, standing on a rooftop. Responding to a call.

...Angela had never been on this side of a situation like this before, and she was immediately unnerved by it. She knew Helix, and more than that she knew Fari, and neither of them tended to fail much.

Fareeha didn’t wave back. There was silence for about three seconds. “So, would you like to explain to me why you’re in a hospital, in the midst of a hostage situation, consorting with known criminals and fugitives?”

Angela swallowed heavily. “I- I would like to, yes.”

“...are you going to?”
“I am afraid not.”

A sigh from the other end of the phone, and Angela knew she was in trouble. If Helix had been called in, there wasn’t much time - they didn’t need to bother coming in the front doors, they could easily flank around and be here in moments, and that wasn’t enough time.

She scrambled to think of something, some explanation or deal which could be offered, some way to delay the inevitable.

“You have twenty minutes,” Fareeha hissed swiftly over the line. “I’ll buy you whatever other time I can, but I can’t guarantee any more than that. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“You’ll be making this up to me over a very nice dinner.”

Angela laughed in relief. “Of course I am, I will - and I will explain, but-”

“Don’t,” Fareeha interjected. “Not now. It’s for the best if I know as little as possible. Twenty minutes. Be gone by then. If I need to shoot you, I’ll be very cross.”

The doctor giggled softly to that, shaking her head as she pictured the slight smirk that was surely on the soldier’s lips. “Oh, I don’t think there’s much concern of that. Please be safe, Fari.”


“Goodbye, Fari.”

Then, it was over as the phone hung up. Twenty minutes. Angela looked at the organ, sitting, unbeating, a lump of sculpted and designed flesh in a small metal basket, floating in fluid. She reached in and took it gently in hand.

A smile held her lips as she felt at it, caressed at the form of the heart. It was such a simple thing in some ways, the heart. Maybe their plan wasn’t really that complex. Maybe it wasn’t really that outlandish.

“Let’s save a life,” she announced out of nowhere, smile growing into an outright grin as she rolled the cart over to the operating table. “Sombra, we have twenty minutes - if you wouldn’t mind counting down for us?”

Suddenly, there was no doubt in her mind that she would succeed. With twenty minutes and Fari’s voice still ringing softly in her ears? There was nothing she couldn’t do.

---

“You should head over there,” Sombra muttered at one point, eyes still fixed out of the window. A whole lot was happening, and she didn’t just see it - she felt much of it. As vehicles started to fill the space outside, first ambulances and police cars but then gradually getting overtaken by huge black armoured trucks and military dropships. Drones in the skies and attempts at countermeasures as they tried to look inside, but she kept their cameras shut off and left them blinded.
It was a lot to juggle, but she’d always liked juggling. This was exactly why she’d cut out everything else she could, though - it was noisy, it grated on her every nerve and every fibre of her implants, the constant exchange of data, and she didn’t need to add any more to the mix. She was glad the others below were doing a good job of keeping everyone back. Things even seemed to be slowing a little. Maybe.

Tracer glanced over at her words, Angela standing past Widdy’s still form, and from this far she could easily convince herself the sniper was sleeping. Unconscious. Something like that. As time went on and the world blurred more and more, she started to think that maybe it was even true - had Widowmaker been shot? Or was that another one of those lingering false memories, another glimpse of a different world from an instant which had consumed her and left her scattered?

She closed her eyes and pressed a hand to her forehead, holding her other one over the shallow glass dome of the Accelerator - felt its gentle pulse and thrum, holding her here, holding her safe. She wouldn’t fall out of the world again.

“Dunno if I should,” she grumbled in response. “Kinda feel like I’m on the edge already. One more surreal thing happens, I might just…”

There wasn’t really an end to the sentence. There never had been despite all the times she’d tried, she only ever shrugged and let it end in silence as she did now. It was impossible to really describe it, what happened when things went wrong, because how could you describe losing contact with the world?

Still, she always tried.

“I try to just forget it all,” Tracer muttered as she rubbed at her temples, “but I saw a lot during-” a sigh, “you know. Just snippets of things but- all through bloody history, and I don’t just mean the past and I don’t just mean our history!” She laughed briefly, shaking her head as her eyes stared at the sky outside. It wasn’t always blue, or hadn’t always been, and she’d seen that amongst a million other things.

“I saw… Swastikas flying over parliament. Cities on fire. Wooden walls with spiked tops covered in bodies and blood.” It wasn’t something she liked to talk about, and that was clear from the way she talked about it. No looking over, words quiet and small like they were barely escaping through the cracks. “Giant steamships in the air, tentacled- bloody things wearing caps and parasols and walking the streets as dapper as you please, and I-” a single laugh interrupted her explanation again.

Sombra didn’t know exactly what had happened to her, but she probably knew better than almost anyone else - she’d used the Accelerator tech in designing the Translocator, along with Vishkar’s Teleporters, and in doing that research she’d learned quite a lot. She would guess there was only one person who knew it better, save for Tracer herself, and unfortunately she wasn’t there right now.

The pilot was shaken gently from her reverie by a buzz in her pocket, her phone receiving a text, and she pulled it out with a frown. She’d turned it off - a flood of texts from Winston outlined exactly why. She needed to be focused right now, thinking about only this as much as possible. She needed to hang on.

It seemed that the phone hadn’t cared that it was off, though; it had powered itself on anyway and got a new text from an unknown number. “You should text Roja.”

Tracer’s eyes lifted from the screen to Sombra’s face, but it looked just the same - facing out at the city, eyes studying the situation, seemingly unaffected. Still, with a soft sigh, Tracer took a step to close the distance and wrapped an arm around Sombra’s shoulders for a moment’s embrace.
“Good idea,” she muttered softly. Emily always helped, even just by being there - even just being reminded of her helped. “Thanks.”

“No problem, *chica.*” Sobra chuckled as one of her hands rose to rest on Tracer’s forearm for a second. “Geeze, you’ve got a problem with all this touchy-feely stuff.” She didn’t pull away though.

A few seconds later, Tracer did, and leaned back against the window - she looked down at the screen, at Em’s little icon and all the previous messages they’d sent to each other, and all of it brought a slight smile to her lips. A slight smile to her lips and an edge of pain to her heart, but that was still better than the fuzzy emptiness that was threatening to envelop her and strip her away from the world.

What to say, though? Something to explain? There wasn’t really anything to explain, though, or at least nothing she thought she could afford to focus on that heavily. Nothing she could afford to relive in memory.

Sombra was right, though. She had to say something.

Interminably long moments of staring blankly at the screen came to an end when her fingers started moving seemingly of their own will, and she tapped out a message. A simple one, but she felt instantly better looking at it. Like her heart was beating right again. “I love you.”

A response didn’t take long, and had her feeling even more solid again - firm and real, with her feet planted rather than hanging off of the edge of the world. “I love you too, so much.”

Smiling slightly, wiping a tear from her cheek, Lena replied, “Thanks. I really needed that.”

“You’re welcome, love, and thank you too. Think I did as well.”

That even managed to draw a laugh from her, though it wasn’t a funny situation. It was a real one, though. It was happening - it wasn’t just in her mind, it wasn’t just some hallucination, it was real.

“Thanks,” she sighed, leaning in to kiss Sombra on the cheek, just quickly. Quickly enough that she didn’t even think about it beforehand, or during, and she didn’t pause to do so afterward either. She just turned and walked over toward the doctor, ready to give whatever help she could.

“Any time, *chica.***” Sombra muttered behind her. The doctor called out that they had twenty minutes, and she started a timer with a frown. “What are you talking about, Angel-dust?”

“Helix,” came the reply, and Sombra’s eyes snapped out to the windows. She couldn’t see any of their drones, visually or through their electronic signatures, she couldn’t see-

There, over there, on a rooftop. Raptora suits, a response team; Sombra’s cybernetic eyes shifted, zooming in, and she groaned. She’d kept everyone’s digital eyes blind, but one of them - one she recognized - had a pair of fucking *binoculars* in hand, and she couldn’t hack glass.

Not from this far away, at least.

“Twenty minutes,” she called back over her shoulder as the world outside continued to fill with shouts and sirens and the occasional concussive thump. There was a lot going on, very much a lot, and it taxed her systems - both installed and natural. Not just her dataways and mem units, but even her brain’s own reactions times and span of focus.

“Three billion rocks,” Sombra chuckled softly to herself with a shake of her head. “Well, time for *this* bus to get a little fuckin’ payback…”
It wasn’t hard to steal up one of the city’s vehicles, elsewhere - she smirked as she took control of the cargo truck and steered it gently through lampposts and a bus stop. Didn’t hit any people, but caused a fair bit of damage before the hoverpads took enough of a beating to send the truck grinding to a halt.

Then, she did the same with a hovertaxi on the other side of the city, slamming through a holographic emitter for a billboard before lodging it firmly in the seventy-fourth story of an office block. Unoccupied at the moment, but still, it worked.

She could feel the response almost immediately, as the responder units below began to get notifications that drew their attention elsewhere, outward. Her efforts redoubled, a soft chuckle underlying everything as her fingers flew blurringly fast and her mind did just the same. Too many cooks in the kitchen, too many players on the field.

Time to trim back the numbers a little bit.

---

Angela offered Lena a brief smile as she walked over, looking more stable than she had been. That was good, at least.

“Here to help, doc,” she chirped with a little half-salute. “Any way I can, at least.”

“Not much to be done,” Ziegler shrugged slightly, “and you may not want to watch, but I won’t stop you from it. You could help gain access to the wound site, though? While I finish preparing the implant.”

They didn’t have much time and she couldn’t afford to hesitate or delay. She lined up her tools as Lena nodded and stepped forward, hands moving swiftly in seemingly practiced motions as she lifted the sniper’s shoulder up and peeled back her uniform; it seemed to stick to the skin beneath, not adhered through glue but through some other means, and Angela wondered what purpose that served. There were a few possibilities but she couldn’t afford to spend time on them.

She lifted a scalpel and began with the first incision.

Tracer’s hands, when they were done with their work, dropped to hold one of Widdy’s. It looked so surreal, but it wasn’t exactly disgusting. Wasn’t exactly pretty, as Angela pulled back flesh and pressed in what Tracer could only guess was a bone saw of some sort from the noise it made. She stopped focusing on that and looked to Widowmaker’s face, instead.

“We’ll getcha back,” she whispered softly, smiling, caressing the sniper’s blue cheek. Her face still looked just the same, still looked like she was sleeping. Not that Tracer knew what she looked like when she slept. Her hands rubbed at Widdy’s, stroked at her forearm, smoothed down the lifting edge of the piece of tape which held an IV in her arm. It was some sort of diagnostic probe, too, and a cable led out to a screen.

Heartbeat, blood pressure, everything read zero of course, but Tracer didn’t let herself focus on that. She thought of the smiles, instead, and the laughs - the way Widdy liked to tease her, to hold her. They’d get it back.

What they were doing was completely and absolutely insane, but that meant it had to work. All her
best plans were completely and absolutely insane. This whole mad thing had been, right from the start.

Angela hardly blinked as she worked, that familiar semi-stale sensation of breath behind a respirator mask and filtered air serving to calm her and almost disconnect her from the normal world. When she slipped it on, she always felt an immediate shift; it was a marker of the job, a clear and unforgettable indicator of what was happening, and it helped keep her in the mindset in a very grounded way.

Her gloved hands worked swiftly, pulling back ribs to make space and grant access; one had been shattered by the bullet and she spent a minute extracting shards of bone with forceps, dropping them into a glass of water.

The damage was extensive. Primarily, the bullet itself, but then there was also the matter of impact and damage from the pressure wave as the round had passed through. None of that was much of a concern, though; Mercy knew her staff would heal that almost immediately with no concern.

As long as the new heart took, as long as all the other systems allowed themselves to be restarted…

She held her breath slightly as the scalpel cut through thick arterial flesh and various interstitial tissues, and then the ravaged organ was free. Free and utterly mangled, destroyed; not just from the bullet. Fragments of shrapnel and shards of metal, long thin wires as well - as Ziegler extracted the heart from the patient’s chest cavity, she stared in a combination of horror and wonder.

It looked as if the whole organ had detonated, almost; one ventricle which the bullet hadn’t even hit was splayed open like something from an anatomy textbook, and all throughout it were clear signs of modification. A bright glint of silver from some implant, a line indicating a surgical expansion - the records Sombra had provided had told her much, but she still hadn’t quite been ready for all of this.

An increased capacity, increased volume, drastically improved strength amongst others - measures to counter the slower beat, it seemed - along with things she couldn’t quite put her finger on, and those shards of shrapnel as well. The files had mentioned a fail-safe, an explosive.

Her mind flickered darkly back to Genji and she set the destroyed organ down with a slight frown. They’d wanted her to do the same with him, just in case he grew out of control, in case he started causing problems. Not an explosive, in that case, but a sedative measure - still, disturbingly similar and she felt a little ill thinking about it.

The new heart - her creation - looked much better. There was no angry flesh alongside laser-sutures from expanded ventricles or atria, they’d been grown that way from the start. No tiny implants or grafts to thicken up the walls with more musculature, and best of all, no little explosive.

It fit perfectly, too. She’d known it would, but it still brought a slight smile to her lips to see it.

The laser-suture worked swiftly, mending together the veins and arteries - not entirely, not to full strength, but she only needed it to be strong enough to let the organ start its function again. Normally an operation like this would be followed by a month of bedrest while the body healed the damage resulting; slowly repairing the ribs that had been cut through and stitching together every bit of flesh that had been cut or torn or disturbed.

Normally, that would have been the case, but normally they would not have had Mercy and her Caduceus staff. Much as the name still had her wincing sometimes - it should have been called the Rod of Asclepius, but the name had been assigned as a bit of a joke and had stuck. Still, she trusted the instrument, regardless of its name.
She closed up the operation site, quickly laserig the skin back together again before setting down the suture and removing her gloves, taking the staff in hand. A glowing gold stream emitted from the end, enveloping Widowmaker in a soft haze of the same, as Mercy picked up a small device and held it to Widowmaker’s chest, just below the breast.

She pressed a button on the side and the device started to emit electrical pulses. Starting off with a low rate - one every two seconds, still very fast for Widowmaker, but any lower and she risked no response. After twenty seconds, the heart had yet to respond; Mercy dialed up the frequency to one beat per second.

Tracer’s eyes fixed on the screen intensely, her hands clutching Widdy’s tight in to her chest, tight to the Accelerator. “C’mon love,” she whispered, “c’mon you can do it. You can. I know you can.”

Mercy began to stimulate the new organ in waves - ten seconds of artificially-induced beating, followed by a pause. Ten seconds of beating and then fives seconds of nothing. Ten more seconds of beating, five seconds of nothing. Ten of beating. Five of nothing.

She adjusted the settings as best she could, making subtle changes with the inducer and with her staff as well, even to the chemical flow into the IV line - this situation was so far away from the only other attempt at something like this that it was hardly even worth mentioning, but at the same time, she knew they’d succeeded there. With no prior attempts, they’d still succeeded. The fact that she’d never done exactly this before held no real bearing.

Ten seconds of beating - twelve beats, after Ziegler adjusted the machine slightly - and then five more seconds of nothing.

“Come on,” Tracer urged softly, but her eyes were hard. Hard and determined, soft brown shot through with steel and focus. “Come on! You can’t give up like this. I won’t let you.”

Ten seconds of induced heartbeat, five seconds of nothing.

Tracer lowered her head, pressing a kiss to Widowmaker’s lips - one hand clasping hers, the other moving to her head. “Get back here,” she whispered against Widdy’s lips. “Right now.”

Ten seconds of a heartbeat. Five seconds of nothing.

... almost five seconds of nothing.

At the last instant, just as Mercy’s thumb was about to flick that button on again - just as but just before as well - the screen let out one more beep. A thirteenth heartbeat. Mercy held her hand still, lifted the device away; blue eyes stared at the screen as Tracer straightened up and looked as well.

A second of nothing. Two. Three. Four.

Another beat.

Tracer let out a brief, triumphant laugh, turning to look at Angela - the mask covered her lips but her eyes were clearly smiling, smiling and shining with tears as Lena leant down again and kissed Widowmaker’s lips, firmly.

“Come on,” she commanded, “c’mon love, come back to me. Wake up. Wake up!”

Her fingers stayed tightly intertwined with Widdy’s, grasping onto that hope as she straightened up and watched in anticipation. Another heartbeat, sooner this time, and then another even faster still.
When she breathed, it didn’t seem like a breath, so much - it was more like she was inflated, like some air line had been run into her lungs and opened up for a moment, filling her. Her ribs rose, the breath wheezing through her throat and nose as her face shifted for the first time in an hour, into a frown.

Tracer squeezed her hands, and felt like she might collapse as those golden eyes fluttered open and fixed on her.

“Salut encore, ma souris.”

Chapter End Notes

Soundtrack:

"Waiting for the Night to Fall" - Depeche Mode
Lyrics: "I'm waiting for the night to fall
I know that it will save us all
When everything's dark
Keeps us from the stark
Reality.
I'm waiting for the night to fall
When everything is bearable
And there in the still
All that you feel...
...is tranquillity"

"Origin of Love" - MIKA
Lyrics: "Some love's a pill and some love is a candy cane:
It tastes so sweet but leaves you feeling sick with pain.
Your love is air, I breathe it in around me,
Don't know it's there, but without it I'm drowning!"

Whew! Long, long, long long, this one was; longest chapter yet!

Okay, so, I'd like to say first that I'm sorry, and I'd like to follow that up with a different apology, heh. I've been really busy these past couple weeks so I haven't had lots of time, and I'm rushing a bit through these notes right now, heh, but hopefully they'll still be good!

So, last time, well - that happened, and I'm sorry for it. From the start, Widdy was going to die; from the start, it was going to be Ana, from the start it was going to be a misunderstanding. For three hundred thousands words, more than, I've known that that was going to happen - as I've known that all of this, this chapter, was going to happen, and pretty much just like this.

In my original thoughts, Widowmaker and Sombra weren't together as much as they are now - but the events of this chapter were the same. Sombra still showed up, still had that line about not giving up a friend, her and Tracer's confrontation went pretty similarly. Nothing ever doesn't change, but nothing changes much, eh? Haha!

Kinda curious: do people actually listen to my soundtracks/suggested listenings or
whatever? It's cool if you don't, but I'm interested to see because I don't think anyone's mentioned it if they do.

A lot of people guessed this one right! With Mercy in the story, well, this was always going to happen, wasn't it? I wanted it to still be impactful, though. I almost split this into two chapters, to let it dangles a little longer, but nah. This deserves to be tied up, heh - although we're not nearly out of the woods yet. A few more players yet to step on the stage, oy.

Any guesses for what comes next? :D

I want to thank you all for being wonderful. I got a lot of comments last chapter - and a lot of them were worried and a lot of them were scared, and that's totally fair and I understand, but I'd like to say thank you because none of them were really angry at me, I think. None of them seemed to be really holding it against me (I mean, so long as I brought her back, heh), and that's nice. You're all really wonderful! I write for me, but I publish for you! <3

Developments between Sombra and Tracer here, a little bit - some common ground, at least. The Return of the Pharmercy (that's right, it's important shit, I toldja :D). Little mentions of some Sombra-Symmetra something and, oh, what's that? Some kind of hint of something between Symmetra and Angela as well, perhaps, hmm? Well... maybe! ;D

Ahh, honestly it feels good to have Widdy back. It's a relief! I mean, on the flipside, I know that things aren't out of the woods yet and the roughness ain't over, there's still some tough stuff to work out (hoo oy is there ever because guess who's coming to dinner?) but, she's back! She's breathing, hot damn, and good to see.

Come on back next time, next week, when a bit of confrontation leads to good things and deeper understanding between Widdy and Tracer. A glimpse from the other side of death's black curtain. A few snippets of the front doors, and some establishment between new and perhaps uneasy friends. All things must come to an end, though - good, bad, and ugly.
Reciprocation

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Widowmaker has returned to the land of the living and conscious, but all is not necessarily well all at once - and there may be a few small rivers to ford. Symmetra deals with the stresses of her momentary "teammates", but is granted a little relief by a friend. Pharah worries over the situation, but she's well-practiced at handling a team in stressful and high-stakes scenarios. Previously she'd had the whole world on the line, but today, she wishes it could be that easy and simple. Today, she's risking her girlfriend.

JFL Summary: Widowmaker gets overly poetic. Like really overly poetic. Literal self-comparisons to Mary Shelley here. Symmetra hates Junkrat, and Roadhog, and things generally - but, she doesn't hate Sombra. Sombra wants to let Widowmaker seem perfect so she keeps her eyes off of the cracks and out of the window instead. Pharah? She's just up high looking down through an antique.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer did the only thing she could think of - brought Widdy's body to Angela, knowing that Angela would know what to do, that she'd be able to fix it. The doctor wanted to help her friend, but balked, saying that it would be impossible to revive Widowmaker after such a long period of death with the resources at her aid camp. She said it would be different if she had access to a cutting-edge hospital, and that was when Sombra interjected from the shadows that she could provide a hospital. She could steal one for them. Didn't feel like losing a friend. Tracer begrudgingly accepted the help, as the fire and heat began to drain from her veins to be replaced by numbness.

They flashed up again briefly in a confrontation with Sombra which led to confessions and a little more solidarity. Tracer caught moments of comfort where she could, crying on Sombra's shoulder or catching her hand, and speaking with Emily twice, momentarily at least

Symmetra was called in by a concerned Angela to help keep the situation under control in a safe and non-lethal way. Junkrat and Roadhog were called in by an agitated Sombra who saw no other options because Symmetra, her first choice, wouldn't answer her phone. Athena, besought by a DDOS-like attack on her servers, was forced to withdraw her tactical presence and aid in order to focus on her own issues.

The hospital was breached easily enough and, after some strenuous and high-stakes guesswork on Mercy's part and a whole lot of suspense, Widowmaker was revived. Helix are on their way - Pharah having warned Mercy that they have only twenty minutes to clear out of the building, whilst downstairs, Symmetra and the Junkers are preparing to weather a siege.

The Shrike and The Reaper have yet to show themselves or play their hands.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Darkness wasn’t the right term. It wasn’t really dark - she liked the dark.

She didn’t like this.

Cold wouldn’t be accurate, either, because she didn’t feel the cold, normally, but this sank through right to the core of her. Not only into her bones but into her heart, into her soul if she had believed in such a foolish thing as souls.

There was a reason she slept as little as possible, and only under medication when she did. Her mind did odd things, and she recognized this through the haze of incomplete consciousness as an unfiltered sleep.

Why had she done that? Gone to sleep without the normal measures?

Full consciousness was beyond her right now, and memory as well - she couldn’t recall what day it was or anything of the sort, she couldn’t even truly remember what sleep and waking actually were. It was more of a deep certainty than a real understanding that she was dreaming.

The world shifted so quickly, regardless. Whether it was the real world or the dream world, and it certainly felt real.

Flashes of moonlight reflecting off of waves and off of flying blades, gleaming in candlelight as well and then with blood which glinted in the moon, the glints growing to gun-flashes as she was left running with legs that refused to work. She collapsed to the ground - right through the ground and continued to fall, and then she was a bird with no wings, and when she hit the ground she was a mole swimming through the earth like a fish swims through a river, except then the river dried up and she was left gasping for air on land but unable to draw a breath.

She hated sleep, she hated dreams, so why had she done this? If she had done this. Maybe she hadn’t, maybe this was the real world and she simply couldn’t remember it. It was impossible to know.

Noises that didn’t align with the world; a gunshot, a scream, a silence - that thick sound of silence, she could taste it bitterly on her tongue as the moonlight spread over the sheets that surrounded Gérard with his trimmed moustache and his long purple-and-red hair and the bright blue glowing device strapped to his chest, but then the glass cracked and the glow came rushing out like a flood which ignited everything it touched.

Things which should have meant nothing meant everything. Things which should have ravaged her had no effect. Her hands dug into her mouse’s chest, tearing out her flesh as the foolish girl squirmed, and she didn’t even notice - she walked away halfway through, but then there was a vase on the table and the way the light glinted off of it was so terrifyingly foreboding that she was left crumpled in the corner in terror hiding from it.

She hated dreams. Was this one? She thought it might be, but maybe this was the world. Vases were real, she was quite certain, and she was afraid of them so that must have been real as well. Blood was real. The vase was full of blood - she couldn’t see it, but she knew it, so that must be normal too. Maybe that was what she was afraid of, though, the blood filling the vase. Not the vase itself.
She thought she heard a noise. A voice.

The wall disappeared behind her, releasing her into the fishtank, but she didn’t know why the fish were all so large. At least she didn’t need to breathe. Everybody knew you couldn’t drown in a fishtank - otherwise the fish would all die. Was she a fish? Maybe she was.

A familiar voice. Did she know it? Was it a voice, was that what a voice was? Words. It had words.

The glass shattered and everything spilled out, sights and sounds and touches of fish and water gushing from the cracked aquarium and over the strained desert ground, but the parched dirt refused to absorb any water and the trees all died.

She knew the words she’d heard, knew what they meant, but she still couldn’t hear them. It was as if she’d missed them, just missed them, and she recognized their passage but still couldn’t describe their shape.

The dirt remained dry and it crackled in the sun, the dead trees burning in the heat and flashing into flame, and she didn’t know if she was a tree or the desert or the sun - she was none, she wandered through them with her lips cracking like the dirt and her heart burning like the trees and her skin glowing like the sun, and she couldn’t recall feeling pain like this when there wasn’t a tombstone nearby.

“Get back here.”

Those were the words, that was their shape - she’d known their meaning already, that was why she was running through the desert. Trying to get there, to get to whatever, whoever. The sun pulsed as her heart did, flames leaping up higher from the trees as she cried out silently, breathless still. Something pressed against her dry, cracked, and bleeding lips; they were healed when it left, that ghost of sensation - that glimpse of water in the desert as it burned around her.

She ran as quickly as she could, still unable to breathe as the land itself gave over to the fire. The flames spread over the hills and up into the sky, the entire world engulfed in heat and light and she couldn’t breathe in the smoke. Blinded, but running still - she had to make it, somewhere, something. She didn’t know but she felt, deep down below knowledge, that she needed this. Needed to get back.

All at once, the flames flashed higher. They flared into impossible brightness as everything gave itself over to them, gone in an instant and then she could breathe. A huge, deep lungful of air filled her as the brightness gave way to blackness, immediately.

Her eyes were closed. She was lying on her back. Soft noises in the background - beeping and noises of a person. A thump. A hand held hers tightly. Her lips twisted into a slight frown.

What happened?

Recollection returned to her mind swiftly as she opened her eyes, at first seeing nothing. Out of the murky blackness, though, swam a face; a familiar face, that of her mouse.

It would seem that there was an afterlife, and that she was granted access to it - and, that she was to be provided company.

None of the three were what she had expected.

“Salut encore, ma souris.” She thought she could still feel the gunshot wound, her heart seeming to beat oddly beneath it - or through it. It was odd that her heart would even beat at all, but it would
seem that ghosts or spirits or souls, or whatever she was now, had hearts and they continued to beat.

“Y-” Tracer cut off in a choked laugh, squeezing a hand tight to her chest, a hand which Widowmaker recognized as her own but she could not feel the woman’s warmth. Could not feel anything, not until her heart beat once more, and that was then all she could feel. Like a hammer’s blow on heat-softened steel.

Something was wrong with it. It didn’t feel right.

Tracer stared down, shaking her head softly, overwhelmed with shock and delight and pain and everything else, she stared and she realized that she hadn’t given a single thought to what she was going to say, because she hadn’t wanted to think about how likely it was that she’d never get to say anything at all.

Didn’t want to be forced to turn a greeting into a eulogy.

Now Widdy was back, and she couldn’t seem to find any words. She was back, though. That was enough. Tracer laughed brightly, clutching at Widowmaker’s hand with one of her own and wiping away a fresh stream of tears with the other. She started out simple.

“Y-you’re back! You’re- god I was-” she couldn’t talk, she couldn’t speak, there were no words to express it all.

Instead, she dropped her head down, covering Widdy’s face in kisses - her lips, her eyelids, her brow, her chin, her jaw - while she held on tightly enough to that hand that she worried she might break a finger or two. It felt like all of her emotions were back, flooding in to fill that hollow space that had been growing in her chest, and she started to sob gently into Widowmaker’s shoulder.

“Cherie,” the sniper whispered, unable to find the strength for anything else. Unable to move, unable to do anything save for breathe and speak softly and widen her eyes as another wrong heartbeat struck her.

Swallowing heavily, Tracer pushed herself upright a little, shaking her head. She could still scarcely believe it all but she was here, and Widdy was here; the Accelerator’s gentle thrum and the thoroughly room-temperature hand in hers left her no doubt.

It was real.

She let out half a laugh as she met those sharp golden eyes, looking up in seeming wonder and curiosity, so different and yet so very much the same. Exactly what she’d been needing, exactly what she’d been missing.

“Y-you,” she struggled, grunted to clear her throat, and managed a shaky smile. “You lied to me, love.” Another laugh, genuine but shot through with pain as well as she stroked at Widowmaker’s cheek. “You told me it wouldn’t hurt, ha!”

At first, momentarily, Widowmaker frowned, but then her expression cleared. Her mouse was referring to what she’d said before the curtain call - perhaps this was not some afterlife, then, and as someone took her other hand and Widowmaker glanced over to recognize her former friend and seeming saviour, she let out a soft laugh.

“Ahh, the angel to save us all, yes,” she murmured softly as her head lolled over to face Tracer, “mais, cherie, I did not lie. Are you wounded?”

“Bloody yes!” Tracer half-shouted before letting out a disbelieving laugh, staring in shock and
confusion. “It- how’m I s’posed to not be after watching a thing like that?”

“What, you have never seen a person shot before?” Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow. “I know this is not the case. It was foolish to bring me back, anyway, you should have known better than-”

Tracer looked up aghast, as Widdy continued to talk softly, and met Angela’s eyes in confusion. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing, but Widowmaker hadn’t pulled her hand away - in fact, she had hardly seemed to notice. Seemed to be a little out of it, like she was still halfway through waking up, which Tracer supposed made sense.

“N-no, it-” she leaned down, quieting Widowmaker with a quick kiss and meeting her eyes from very close, shaking her head. It seemed to take Widdy’s eyes a second to focus on hers, for her to realize what was happening. Tracer knew, then, that she needed to be clear. “It wasn’t seeing somebody shot,” she whispered, one hand clutching Widowmaker’s and the other one resting against her cheek, “it was seeing you shot, you daft fool.”

Widowmaker frowned. “I had to protect you. Whatever I could offer. It was the only way to-”

“I love you, you bloody idiot,” Tracer laughed gently, staring deep into Widdy’s eyes, hoping to find some spark of realization, of recognition. Hoping to spur that transition from waking dream to full consciousness.

Or maybe she just couldn’t have held it in for another second.

She’d been waiting so long, struggling not to say it, to give the confession the sort of situation it deserved. Whether “you just died in my arms and came back” was exactly the right situation, she honestly didn’t know, but she knew that it was what she was going for.

At first, Widowmaker didn’t react. She frowned slightly, tried and failed to shake her head, tried maybe to deny it; she could see it in Tracer’s eyes, though, the truth of the matter. Love. There it was, as plain as the nose on her face or the tears streaking her cheeks.

Love? That could not have been the case, though - nobody would love someone who could not return it, but she knew immediately that that wasn’t true. Firstly, because her mouse was foolish enough to do anything if it occurred to her, and secondly, because love did not care for that sort of capacity.

It could not have been the case because of Emily, with fire in her eyes and her heart - no, Widowmaker had seen them together and they were truly in love, but she knew in an instant that Tracer’s admission wasn’t false. She could, in fact, see the same look in her mouse’s eyes as when she looked at the redhead.

There it was, plainly in front of her. The truth. Love.

“I-” Tracer stammered as she clutched Widdy’s hand in tighter to her chest, “I know you- you don’t or you can’t, whatever, and I don’t care. You don’t need to return it, and I don’t want it to change any-” her voice caught in her throat as she pulled her head back and looked up to the ceiling for an instant, “god I don’t want it to change anything at all, but I just,” she looked back down to Widdy’s face with a smile, right into her eyes, and she couldn’t have denied it any longer if she’d tried. “I just love you. So, yeah. It… hurt.”

Widowmaker stared, unable to blink as another heartbeat hit her like a detonation, like a concussion in her chest and it blocked out the sound of the world for a second. Tracer didn’t want it to change anything, but that was expectedly foolish.
It changed everything.

“I… had no idea…” her frown deepened as Tracer’s smile wavered and fell, “cherie… I am so sorry.”

Though, as her mouse crumpled and started to cry softly into her shoulder, Widowmaker couldn’t quite decide - whether she was apologizing for the pain which must have been caused when she forced Tracer to see someone she loved die, or whether she was apologizing for her own inability to reciprocate, or whether she was simply sympathizing with the Brit’s poor luck to fall in love with someone as broken and hollow as she was.

...that wasn’t true, though. She may not have known which one it was, but she knew which it wasn’t, and she tried her best to turn her head. Mostly, she failed, but managed to tip it slightly toward Tracer’s buried deep in her shoulder, because while she might not have been able to love she could at least return some sentiment. “Whatever my heart has to offer, it is yours, cherie. Love or not, I could not say - and I can only suspect not, mais… whatever it is, it is yours if you would have it.”

“Of course I’d bloody have it. Whatever it is, it’s for me, and I love it,” Tracer half-whimpered into her shoulder, and Widowmaker wanted to take a handful of her hair - to caress the back of her head, something, but she could not find it in herself to move her arms.

“Doctor.” Her eyes, over which she did seem to have control, flicked over. Things were clearer now, more in focus than they had been as the haze of everything wore off - even her mind was sharpening with every passing moment, every worrying heartbeat. “Why can I not move?”

“You’ve been dead for over an hour,” Mercy pointed out with a tip of her head and a pointed expression. “All things considered? I would say you are doing quite well.”

“Ah, she develops a sense of wit,” Widowmaker murmured as the doctor smiled slightly and carried on about her work, adjusting machines and taking measurements or running tests. Widowmaker couldn’t guess what any of it entailed, she only wanted to hold her mouse’s head. “Would you lift my hand to her hair?”

Mercy nodded, lifting the hand and pressing her fingertips into the nail beds at first, frowning as she watched... nothing, really, no noteworthy return of colour as blood welled back into the area, but she couldn’t begin to guess at what a normal nail bed test would look like on Widowmaker anyway. Consciousness had returned and other things didn’t seem to be going wrong, at least not yet. She set the hand on the back of Lena’s head, then, and one of Lena’s hands rose to meet it, to intertwine fingers and hold it there as she started to laugh through her tears.

Widowmaker didn’t know what to do about it; she saw in that moment another one so similar, moonlight glistening off of Emily’s tears, and as she had then, she knew that there had been a time when she had known what to do. A time with dinner parties and social convention, a time before coldness and blood, but she could never go back there.

However, she thought that she could perhaps go somewhere new.

“I did not know,” she explained softly - softly because she could do nothing else, softly because she could not manage the strength to do so loudly. She couldn’t even manage the strength to hold her hand in Tracer’s hair. Had the mouse not kept it in place, it would have slipped free, but Widowmaker was glad that it was being held up. Even as another worrying heartbeat struck her, and with it a pulse of strength - and with that, a pulse of something else. A small but sudden rush of something that felt worryingly close to pain.
“I did not-” her already weak words faltered further as her eyes turned to the doctor in concern. “Docteur. My heart- it is… wrong. I cannot say how, but-”

“I tried my best to replicate it,” Mercy murmured thoughtfully, a slight frown on her lips as she flipped through diagnostics screens and readouts, trying to find some hint of what might be going wrong - comparing the data to what she had from Talon’s files as she continued to speak. “Within reason, of course. The cybernetic controls and implants, I considered to be a bit… barbaric. This one should serve you even better than the last.”

The silence that greeted her fell on deaf ears for a moment, which was an irony in itself - quickly, though, Mercy realized that Widowmaker hadn’t responded, wasn’t responding, and she looked away from the screens that held her focus.

She wasn’t prepared for the look that greeted her, the unmitigated confusion and upset. Relegated to eyes only, the rest of the face almost immobile, but still unmistakeable. It was clear in her eyes: Widowmaker hadn’t known, hadn’t put it together. The level of damage she’d sustained.

“The organ was… destroyed.” Mercy shook her head softly, setting down the screen and letting her focus rest on Widowmaker for a moment, “I’m sorry, I could not have saved it - certainly not with this time constraint. I could only construct a new one, but it should-”

“It is wrong,” Widowmaker whispered, a thin and strained sound before she took a cautious breath. Another beat like a blow in her chest, and with it came a rush of what she was now able to clearly see as pain. This heart didn’t seem to be much faster than the old one but she couldn’t exactly tell - however, it seemed to be in some other way stronger. More alive.

It scared her.

Nothing scared her, not truly, but this did - she didn’t feel fear, she didn’t feel, except then her heart thumped again and she gasped a short breath and she felt, for an instant, pain and fear. Pain and fear and Tracer’s hand in hers.

“Too strong,” she whispered as Mercy leaned in close, fretting at IV cords and sensors. As Tracer sat up, taking the hand from her head and holding it close to her chest instead. “It is too strong, I- ah, ” a bit of breath left her suddenly when her heart beat once more, “slow it, weaken it, doctor. Please. Something, you must.”

“I can’t,” Mercy responded quickly, bluntly but not sharply, not angrily. “Not short of opening you up again, not permanently - I could slow it for a time through medications but-”

“Then do so,” Widowmaker pleaded softly as tiny muscles throughout her strained, the body still immobile but protesting its too-swift return to too much life like a cold limb plunged into hot water and beginning to prickle and sting and swell. She could feel that sensation and deeper than that, more worrying than that, she could feel in her heart; she could see the name etched into the tombstone, shots lined up, dozens of graves in line.

Sometimes, she had almost longed for feeling. Almost longed to be able to have the guilt which some of her victims deserved - some of. Almost. She could, though, and she always knew she could, and she knew the only price was everything. To lose herself to pain and grief as she did every now and again by the graveside, sating Gérard’s headstone with her blood when she tore her hands against the rock in horror, when she shrieked and wailed in grief. Until it became too much, until she let it all slip away again as her heart would slow and her blood’s warmth would fade.

Now, though, it failed to do so; her heart was not corrected connectly to her head, it was not the
same heart she was used to and it had a mind of its own - beating firmly and strongly. Slow, still, yes, for a human, but far too fast for her.

Accelerating, too. Faster and faster with every beat - fifty percent above baseline. Fifty-five.

Pain filled her limbs, starting not at her chest which was healed but rather at places which bore nonphysical wounds. The tattooed sleeve of her forearm covering up the faint light scars and the thick ones alike, moments of weakness from a lifetime ago etched into her skin eternally but overwritten with her new self - the spider of the night, the nightmare, overriding the failures she’d once had - but now the self-inflicted scars seemed to glow red-hot again and sear her.

Thoughts filled her, not just her mind but her heart and every time it beat, every time it pushed fresh and too-warm blood to the rest of her, the images became more real. Every time, their sharp eyes cut into her core a little more; every time, their blood was her blood, and every time her heart beat, a little more of it seemed to spill.

A weak cry flew from barely-parted lips as she was unable to properly cringe, her body failing to move as the doctor rushed away to fetch something and Tracer caught up her hand. That single point of contact was an anchor in the maelstrom, an island in the flood, and she was unable to grasp onto it.

She didn’t need to, though. Tracer held plenty tightly enough. There was never any risk of the hold failing.

“It’s alright love,” her mouse murmured softly, caressing at her cheek. “It’ll be alright, we’ll get it sorted. You’ll be okay.”

Widowmaker turned to meet her eyes, so warm and bright, so deep and filled with care and sad concern. She tried to speak but failed, a dry mouth robbing her of the power before she swallowed and was able to try a second time. “It- hurts.”

“We’ll stop that, we’ll fix it,” Tracer replied, and she did it with such conviction that Widowmaker could hardly protest. Then again, she could hardly do anything at the moment, and all of her effort was devoted to hanging onto the tattered remnants of her composure.

“I- I cannot-” the sniper gasped a sharp inhalation, “it is too much, I cannot- I do not know how you are able- aah - how-”

“Shh, shh, you don’t-” Tracer swallowed, unsure of what to do - unsure of what exactly was happening or how to help, but she thought she recognized the terror in Widdy’s eyes, the helplessness in her face, the fear and pain in her voice, and all she could think to do was something that had helped her a long time ago on a night she’d almost broken on the rocky shores of her own trauma. Something Emily had said in a moment when everything had just been too much.

“It’s okay for things to be bad, it’s okay to hurt,” she whispered, leaning down to kiss Widdy’s forehead, her cheek, her nose. “And I’ll be here for you when you do, and I’ll be here for you when it’s done. Even if things aren’t good right now, they will be.”

Beside the grave, it had always been such a struggle to keep it in. Impossible, in fact; it exploded out of her in screams and fists that slammed against stone, and there was no stopping it. It was the truth, her grief.

It would be foolish to try to deny it.

Yet, she tried.
It would be foolish to try to stop it.

Yet, she tried.

It would be foolish to try to avoid it.

Yet, she tried.

Even as she romanticized the idea like some gothic poet of old, she tried; yes, grief was what she wanted, but only that soft and morose grief of Mary Shelley holding her lover’s skull and weeping softly over it as she penned some dark literature by candlelight, only that dramatic grief of a widow gripping white-knuckled at the rails of her walk as the storm flashed behind her, only that cold grief of a created monster hell-bent on revenge with teeth glinting in a grim grin in the moonlight as it lunged on its creator, its prey.

She didn’t want that messy grief. That thing that tore her throat and her skin in the graveyard, that thing which overtook her and dragged her down; she didn’t want to submit to it.

It would be foolish to try to control it. Yet, she tried. Foolish to think she could avoid submission, because with all her actions regardless, the truth was the truth. The truth simply was and it did not care for her concerns.

She didn’t think it was okay to hurt. How could she?

It was weakness. It was a weakness that had driven her in the early days to drag ragged fragments of metal or sharp shards of glass across her own wrists in some stupid attempt to join him, weakness - it was weakness that overtook her lungs and left her breathless like a drowning woman, that paralyzed her muscles and left her powerless like a sleeping one, weakness.

It was weakness that thumped from her heart with every now-too-powerful and swift beat.

It was weakness. It was grief. It was not okay.

It was the tree which grew from the soil which had been her life and her love for Gérard. For all of his flaws and shortcomings, and for all of hers, she had loved him, and what had it brought? Weakness. Grief. Pain. Loss.

Now, there she was again. Poised to lose, not because there was any cliff in sight over which to fall - not because there was any immediate threat which might take from her, but simply because she had, and therefore she could lose. Poised to lose, poised to fall, sowing seeds around her to grow into trees of weakness and grief and despair, and she could not possibly think of that as an acceptable thing.

Yet, Tracer did.

The warmth of her was less than it usually was, and yet her touch felt like so much more; every soft press of lips against skin and every stroke of a fingertip was a breath granted in the tumultuous rapids. A brief relief from the horror.

A light in the darkness.

Widowmaker let out a single weak laugh amongst pained noises at the thought, as she recalled Emily’s words from seemingly so long ago, on the night that her mouse had needed an angel herself - the unextinguishable light, and she realized then that she’d misinterpreted the redhead’s words the whole time.
It wasn’t about carrying the light within yourself. She had thought that Emily was saying that Tracer’s mere existence somehow inspired her, inspired Emily, to be able to withstand the darkness and the horror. Fortified her to be able to resist the pain.

No, though, that couldn’t be the case. Yet, as Tracer squeezed softly at her hand, Widowmaker realized what it could have been - what it must have been: Tracer was the one with the light, and she shared it freely.

Widowmaker could feel it in her heart, rising with each beat alongside the horrors - could feel it flowing from their clasped hands as an entirely different sort of warmth, one which sank into her gut and left it feeling light where it would otherwise be trying to roil. Largely, it did, her gut: it clenched in fear and it convulsed in horror, but there were places that instead fluttered lightly from the hand held in hers, and that…

It didn’t eliminate the pain. It didn’t even lessen it, not really, but it was something. It was something, and it was for her - she thought back again, to moments ago and months as well, offering whatever her heart had and explaining how she wasn’t really apologizing, and each time Tracer’s response had been the same.

*Whatever it is, it is for me.*

Apology or not, guilt or not, love or not: Tracer didn’t seem to care, she looked past that to some rose-tinted version of life, or at least that was what Widowmaker had thought.

Now, though, she thought she saw just the same. This wasn’t relief from the pain, not really. This wasn’t protection. Not really. It still hurt - just outside of the hand on hers, just outside of the thoughts or the gentle smiles, it still hurt - but this was something, at least, and it was for her.

Somehow that was enough.

Still, she struggled to breathe, but it was a little easier; still she struggled to keep from crying out, but it was easier, and a smile now fought with a twisted grimace for a place on her lips as she met Tracer’s wide and hopeful brown eyes.

There never had been good words for her mouse. Good enough ones for teasing, yes, of course, but not anything more serious - it seemed that they weren’t needed, though, as Tracer smiled slightly and squeezed at her hand and nodded. Widowmaker couldn’t help but feel that she’d been understood.

The pain wasn’t gone, but maybe that somehow was okay. At the very least, it was manageable now. Manageable enough that she didn’t need to lose herself to it.

She took shaky breaths as her heart continued to gallop away on her, trying to force it back down the way she always had before, but her combat protocols were already active. The problem was not the situation, it was her heart: her brake lines had been cut, and she could pump the pedal all she wanted, the car would never stop.

All she could do was hold on, gripping weakly at Tracer’s hand - all she could do was wait and hope that someone else could stop this runaway vehicle or at least curb its travel, but somehow, that was enough.

As long as she had her mouse, it was enough.

Tracer sat on a stool beside the operating table, held her hand tightly and stroked at her cheek, smiled and kissed her and murmured softly things which didn’t even have words but still held comfort, and Widowmaker just held on.
Held on and murmured softly, for whatever painful time she was granted in which she knew the words could be true, “Je t’aime, ma cherie, je t’aime…”

---

“So! What was that for?”

Symmetra’s eyes shot in irritation to the tall, thin, ramshackle and haphazard man who she had the misfortune of calling ‘cohort’ at the moment. The man who had been setting explosives in the streets. The man who she had just briefly - briefly - hit with the beam of her photon projector, sapping his energy and numbing his arm, and causing him to drop the mine in question.

“No deaths,” she offered as an explanation.

“Well of course no deaths,” he grumbled as he rolled his eyes and knelt to pick up the mine, his true height hidden by slumped posture. “What do I look like, him?” He jabbed a mechanical thumb over his shoulder to his companion, huge and imposing.

Perhaps that was the only similarity between the two of them, that mechanical hand, but even there the differences were evident. Of course some might have said it was only happenstance that his was the opposite arm, his right to her left. Some would have said it, but they would have been fools to do so: there was no happenstance. The universe happened according to its own order, even if it was not easily discernible from the ground level of this plane of reality.

Even if Symmetra found herself struggling to find any order in this. In the actions of the men, and even in the larger situation - even if she did find herself struggling to find it (and she certainly did), she knew it was there, and that was some reassurance at least.

Some.

It seemed like it might not be enough as he flung another mine out into the street.

The hospital doors of the main entrance were within a small alcove. Tall pillars rose on either side of it, thick and sturdy stone which provided good opportunities for hiding, should such a thing become necessary. The street was filled with flashing lights and uniformed officers of this organization or that: firefighters and supposed crime fighters, but the latter only ever filled Symmetra with distaste.

Where were they, the police - the supposed fighters of crime and injustice - when children starved in the street? Where were they when addictions ran rampant and caused families to be ripped apart, where were they for all of the children whose parents had been torn away? Where were the crimefighters then?

They cared not for true crimes, that could be the only explanation - they worried only over the laws of Man, the human laws, and those were laughable constructs at best. Symmetra cared not for them. Only the laws of the divine, the higher Laws of the Universe, could bind her.

The laws of men said that it was acceptable to leave another destitute and starving in the streets, but that it was unacceptable to take a loaf of bread from one who would never notice its absence in order to save the life of that starving man. The laws of men said that it was acceptable to amass wealths which would save whole countries and to hoard them away like dragons in caves behind walls of fire, to cause the whole country surrounding to whither and die.
The laws of men were idiotic.

...as were some of those who rebelled against them. For instance, this filthy mongrel pulling another explosive from his belt with a giggle.

Symmetra caught Junkrat’s harness with her hand - her metal hand, the Vishkar model - and pulled him in behind one of those huge pillars to face her. He radiated poor planning and impulsiveness, and with none of the careful temperance which some others like Sombra or even her chaotic teammate Reaper managed.

He also radiated scents, for which she didn’t care at all. The sharp tang of nitrites and cordite, the long and slow lingering aftertaste of charcoal and smoke, and her nose wrinkled as he batted at her hand. She held tightly, though, and repeated, “No deaths.”

“Well of course no death!” Junkrat protested with a scowl. “You’re not even listening to me! I already said that! Didn’t I?” He glanced over his shoulder to Roadhog who grunted and nodded, letting off a shot far over the heads of the officers below but still causing them to flinch for cover. Junkrat looked back to Symmetra with a smug smirk. “See? Toldja!”

“You are flinging explosives at random into the street,” she hissed, “and that is hardly a non-lethal method of engagement, now sit over there in silence and let us handle this.”

As little as she liked the other man, the massive one, Roadhog, he was at least more placid. In a way. He brought to mind images of crocodilians, lazing but not to be trifled with - capable of much, but hardly chaotic in their moment-to-moment actions.

Junkrat, on the other hand, was much more reminiscent of a blender full of cutlery and firecrackers and even the thought of that, of him, had Symmetra’s nerves tingling unpleasantly underneath her skin.

“They’re only concussion mines,” he protested with a whine, “and I don’t wanna go sit in the corner, that’s boring. These won’t kill anybody, sheila, just launch some cars up into the air!” He cackled, seemingly forgetting that his harness was still held as he tried and failed to walk away before she tugged him back to face her.

“My name is not Sheela,” she corrected, mistaking his epithet for a common (and incorrect but not disagreeable) name from her homeland, “and what happens when the vehicles which you have so thoughtlessly disturbed come falling back down? Hmm?”

“Well I- ohhhhhh,” his eyes widened in realization, “well that might kill some people, so you really should avoid that.”

“I should avoid-” she caught her words in her teeth and looked out as a voice came over a loudspeaker, a voice which demanded they stand down.

“We will not!” Junkrat called back. “Not ‘til this bloody hospital’s BLOWN UP!”

Roadhog chuckled, shaking his head.

“That is not our goal,” Symmetra strained, “that is in fact the precise opposite of our goal, we must maintain the security and safety of those within, we-”

“Well you won’t let me blow up the cars,” Junkrat grumbled, “and I don’t like doing things by halves, so-”
“I think an explosion has knocked loose something in your head,” Symmetra hissed before taking a deep breath in an attempt to calm herself, but that was destined to failure because of the sharp scents that surrounded him. She pushed him away and tried for another breath, a fresher one, and that was better.

What truly helped, though, was focus. Focusing on creating something - a loudspeaker, designing the circuits and the form of it, and it was beautiful. All of her creations were.

She followed up with a few others - as Junkrat and Roadhog drew the attentions of the men with gunfire and explosives which thankfully were directed into the air or at empty sections of the street, she stood and worked and set devices in place.

A few small emitters, looking not unlike her turrets but functioning in a fashion that was entirely dissimilar, dotted the back of one of the pillars a moment later - then she crossed behind the other two, swiftly, the tail of her outfit flowing behind her. An identical arrangement of emitters took their places on the opposite pillar, and then a barrier snapped into existence between them.

The large one, Roadhog, had hauled a chunk of a vehicle up to hide behind, and he and Junkrat were crouched behind it. Symmetra, though, strode out unafraid from behind her pillar - shots lashed out at her, meant to incapacitate or to render unconscious or maybe to kill, she neither knew nor cared. They all splashed ineffectually against the glowing blue barrier.

She stood for a moment in front of them, looking down the approach toward the street: it was a slight slope that gave her the high ground, and her sharp eyes fixed on the hordes of uniformed persons standing there, crouching behind cars or dealing with the fires which had been lit by the crazy man’s explosions.

The other two behind the shield with her stood, slowly, confused and awed. Junkrat took a clunky step forward on his pegleg and reached out a hand, almost touching the barrier but holding just short. “Some kinda bloody sight that is,” he murmured, the blue glow lighting his face.

It was a moment of calm, and more than she needed. This work was chaotic, it always was, but she dealt with it.

She hardly had any other option.

As her eyes studied the scene, as the officers became aware that their rounds and their sedatives would not pierce the shield, she began to smile just slightly and raised the loudspeaker to her mouth.

“This facility is under our control,” she stated clearly. “You will gain no entrance. Hold your positions, and you shall come to no harm.”

Their shots had ceased, as had the explosives and cannon-blasts of the two who she had the temporary misfortune of working alongside. Out amongst the assailants, the same voice sounded from earlier - the captain, presumably, the one in charge of the operation.

“Who do you work for? What do you want?”

Symmetra laughed, “We work for no organization nor corporation, we are unaffiliated, we-”

“We work for Hyde Global!” Junkrat announced with a gleeful cackle, leaning over to call through the loudspeaker and Symmetra looked to him sharply as she lowered the device. He shrugged with a grin. “Got a grudge against those bastards.” His grin widened. “Don’t let my haphazard presentation fool you - I’m quite the calculating businessman, milady!”
Roadhog looked over with some slight noise, and Junkrat whirled to face him. “What? Of course I am! Who got us this job, afterall?” Roadhog said nothing, just looked out to the police forces again. “Yeah, that’s right,” Junkrat scoffed, “it was me!”

“We do not work for Hyde Global, I do not even know who that is,” Symmetra called through the loudspeaker with cold and flat exasperation. “Our interests are our own. Do not disturb our business, and you will go unharmed.”

“You will be stopped!” The captain’s voice was heavily accented, and the idea occurred to her that it was likely not the captain at all, but merely the person who spoke English the best. The idea had her smiling slightly, a small irony. “All three of you are criminals of the highest order and your records speak for themselves, your chaos ends here, you will-”

Symmetra stopped paying attention to the words, in order to turn to the other two with a frown. “Did… they just align me with the two of you? Did they just imply that we are, in any way, similar?”

“No,” Junkrat shot back immediately and then giggled, his eyes lighting up in a way which only happened when something was exploding or some body was annoyed. “He said you’re exactly the same as us!”

Symmetra’s eyes rose helplessly in shock to Roadhog’s, hidden behind the murky glass of his gasmask but still there; she hardly knew him, but he seemed to have no interest in niceties or hiding the truth. It was something of a relief.

With a slightly uneasy shrug, Roadhog nodded.

To think that she was being included in the same group as this pair - even by a fool with a megaphone - was absurd. It was horrifying in an abject sense; they were polar opposites. The voice continued to ramble, something about calling their reign of terror to an end.

“Terror?” Symmetra gasped, staring wide-eyed out at them. “They think this is terror? How could they possibly - they know nothing of the sort!”

“Oh, we’ll sort ‘em out on that point, sheila, dontcha worry about that - show ‘em some real terror,” Junkrat grinned, stepping forward and hefting his grenade launcher, but Symmetra batted it down with a grunt.

“No.” She frowned and shook her head. “In what way, possibly, could contributing to or permitting the dealing out of destruction and chaos lead in the slightest to a view that I am less so an agent of the same? Can you provide any even half-sensible explanation for that?”

Junkrat looked back in confusion, then slowly turned to look back at Roadhog. “D’you even know what she’s saying, mate?” Roadhog sighed and Junkrat exclaimed, “What? First you try to tell me you can speak French, and now you’re trying to convince me you can speak whatever language she’s spouting?”

“It is English you utter fool,” Symmetra groaned, shaking her head. “This would be so much simpler were you not here.”

“Can’t say I disagree on that point, sheila,” Junkrat grumbled. “If you were gone, I’d’ve had this whole place blown up ten minutes ago!”

Roadhog smacked Junkrat not-too-gently in the back of the head, causing the thinner man to turn and glare at him with narrowed eyes and a scowl.
A slight noise sounded in her ear, and Symmetra grunted softly - another thing going wrong, another deviation from the plan, another thing happening and sometimes she wished they would all just stop.

“Hey, amiga, how you doin’ down there?”

Symmetra let out a gradual sigh, shaking her head as the beam of her photon projector lashed out and eliminated some small drone which they’d sent to inspect the shield, no doubt. As bothersome as it was that her equipment was being interfered with, and as annoying as it was that she was being interrupted during a mission - it was precisely why she did not carry her phone while operating - it was still a relief to hear Sombra’s voice. Two steps backward and one to the fore.

“I would hesitate to call the situation under control,” she groaned under a sigh as Junkrat, cackling gleefully, threw out an explosive and destroyed the trunk of one of the trees which lined the approach to the hospital’s entrance. To his credit, the tree did in fact fall toward the path and block the police and military who tried to walk that way, but she couldn’t in good faith ascribe that to planning or intent on his part.

Sombra chuckled softly over the communicator, though, and that brought a slight smile to Symmetra’s lips. “How is the situation inside, my friend? Is everything well?”

“Mmm,” Sombra replied, “not exactly great either. We got sleepy awake again but she’s uh—” the hacker glanced uneasily over her shoulder to where Tracer and Widowmaker clustered close together. “Something went a little wrong, but the angel’s on it, so… no big deal there, I guess. I’m mostly focusing on helping you out and keeping those pendejos distracted, knock their feet out from under them whenever I can. You know, doing my thing.”

“I am aware,” Symmetra smirked wryly as she yanked Junkrat back behind the shield. “Sowing your particular brand of chaos, are you?”

“You know it, chica! Looks like you’ve got things under wraps down there. Nice shield, by the way, haven’t seen one quite like that before.”

“Improvisation is important.” Symmetra took a moment to duck behind a pillar and glance around, looking for cameras - she spotted one, at the corner of the entryway.

“Hey, she found me,” Sombra murmured softly, grinning a little as she saw Symmetra wave in the corner of her eye. Distracting everyone away with incidents elsewhere around the city was going pretty well, and she kept it up idly as something to keep her mind off of the rest of it. This conversation was for exactly the same thing, in fact. As well as to make sure Symmetra was doing well. “Kinda wish I was down there with you, you know?”

Symmetra sighed, nodding as she looked out over the gathered forces again. They’d decided not to press up toward the entrance after the tree fell - at least for a moment. “I do know, yes, and I agree. It would be far better than working with these two. You are much less disagreeable.”

Sombra snickered at the moderate compliment. “Aww, that’s sweet, amiga - won’t be long, though. We’ve got to be gone in about twelve minutes anyway. Lemme know if you need anything else down there, eh?”

“Of course. Thank you for the update.”

“No problem.” Sombra hesitated for a second. “Hey, you got this, chica. You can do it.”

Symmetra let out a single laugh and nodded. “I know I can. As can you.” After a moment’s pause, she inquired, “What defines our timeline?”
“Helix,” Sombra grunted back.

Symmetra hummed as her eyes flicked to the skies, not seeing any flying suits but not doubting they were out there. If the security corporation was here, that did not bode well for their ability to hold the front doors - Helix could circumvent them as easily as she could have, or perhaps even moreso - but if they knew Helix’s timeline, then that suggested something else.

“She will be here, then - the Egyptian.”

With a laugh, Sombra nodded. Technically, nobody had told her that the two, the doctor and the soldier, were together - but she always checked out people she was going to be working with, and this had counted as working with Ziegler. Give or take. On top of that, she’d just been curious.

To their credit, the pair had hidden things pretty well, but nothing was that hidden from Sombra. Or, it seemed, maybe from Symmetra as well. Perhaps the doc was closer with her than Sombra had thought.

“Yeah,” the hacker chuckled, leaning forward against the window with her arm stretched above her head. “Looks that way. Angel-dust told you about her, then?” It would be quite an extension of trust if she had.

“Not as such,” Symmetra shrugged, kicking at the ankles of a soldier or officer who had crept around the sides of the front lawn and tried to breach the shield. She knocked him backward with a strike and he turned to flee as Roadhog brandished his weapon threateningly. “I extrapolated.”

“Hey, good job, amiga,” Sombra murmured appreciatively, grinning at the smile she saw take over Symmetra’s lips on the camera feed. “It means you should be safe from the skies, though. Silver linings, right?”

Symmetra laughed abruptly, shaking her head with a grin. “I am safe from every direction. I ensure it.”

Smirking, Sombra nodded. It was easier to pay attention to the security feeds of her down below, than to the commotion in the room behind her. Widowmaker being in pain like that - being unable to help her, too - was difficult to watch.

The assassin was always so capable, and of course nobody could be all the time. Nobody was perfect, but Widowmaker…

...she at least deserved the opportunity to appear perfect. To look like it. To not have the pain acknowledged, and Sombra knew it. She’d been glad, herself, that Widowmaker had extended the same on that night everything had changed. Not mentioning her tears, not mentioning how obviously she’d been losing her shit and what an idiot she’d made out of herself.

It was like she’d said to Tracer earlier. Her and Widowmaker weren’t really like that, they weren’t in the ‘shared vulnerability’ place, and Sombra didn’t mind that in one bit. It meant she got to stay over here instead of crossing the floor to stand next to the sniper as she cringed and gasped and whimpered - even though the noises were quickly dying down as Tracer murmured softly.

Still, it was better to be an audience to Symmetra being in her element.

The hacker chuckled appreciatively as the Architech whirled, kicking a soldier right in the chest and send them flying back into the bushes - the forces pulled back to regroup a little, and Sombra had no doubt that those doors were staying tightly shut.
“Yeah, you get ‘em amiga,” she muttered just to herself, not letting the words go through into
Symmetra’s communicator. She sent a driverless cargo truck off the side of a bridge, just to cause a
little more distraction for everyone downstairs.

Everything was going pretty well, all things considered. For where it had started, at least. She was
even beginning to have a bit of fun.

---

Pharah sighed as her feet touched the rooftop. T’chou was right behind her. Grumbling.

“Can’t believe our cameras got knocked out. Can you believe it? Ridiculous.”

“Given that it is what’s happening, T’chou, I’d say I can believe it, yeah.” Pharah’s response was
dry and just slightly sarcastic, as per usual, at odds with all the feelings inside her. “Here, Turner. I
don’t even want to know why you carry these on missions.”

Turner chuckled as he took his binoculars back. “What, a guy can’t be a little nostalgic?”

“Those aren’t nostalgic, they’re historic, at best,” Pharah corrected with a smirk. “They’re
practically medieval.”

Turner spluttered in protest as the others chuckled, but Pharah couldn’t deny that they’d been
effective. When they’d first realized that their drones were down and their long-range cams and
scanners in their suits wouldn’t work, there had been a moment of concern. She didn’t want to jump
in blind again, but they couldn’t just stand there and watch as somebody did who-knows-what with
the hospital. The binoculars had solved that problem, but presented a whole new host of them.

It had been a long day, and it didn’t look like it would be ending any time soon.

They’d actually been in the middle of a testing scenario; Helix had called them in to be debriefed on
the situation near the Jordan River, and that had gone about as well as could have been expected. As
long as they were in the city, though, Helix had decided to put the team and the suits through their
paces - something about evaluating the effects of different types of missions, something like that.

Then someone had called in about a hospital under attack, and Helix had been hired to deal with the
situation by numerous parties involved. It was a cutting-edge facility and had a lot of powerful,
wealthy people within its walls at any given moment.

Now, Pharah was not feeling good about the situation at all, because of what the binoculars had
shown her. The front doors were held by known parties - Junkrat, Roadhog, the Hard-light Bandit -
but that wasn’t really a concern of hers.

Her concern was that Angela was inside.

Unmistakable in her Valkyrie suit, with her Caduceus staff - Pharah hadn’t been able to recognize
the other people in the room through the low-powered and old analog binoculars, nor what Angela
had been doing, but she’d recognized her.

Now she needed to give at least twenty minutes of time for her to get out.
Pharah took a deep breath as the eyes of her team fell upon her, and she shrugged. “Well, they’re a nice museum piece, Turner-”

“Hey!”

“-but they’re not exactly powerful. Couldn’t get a good view of the situation - there’s activity on the seventh floor, the operating room, but we don’t know what’s happening elsewhere. Staff who evacuated told us they didn’t have anything happening in that OR, so that situation’s unknown.”

She turned on heel and gestured to the building. “Jet up top, breach the doors and make our way down. Slow, careful, check every corner and every room, I don’t want anyone hiding and getting behind us. Ensure it’s clear, ensure it’s secure, and then make our way down. Two stairwells, north and south, we go back and forth between them. Floor by floor.”

The team’s eyes trailed slowly down the substantial height of the building. “Floor by floor?” Zao’s voice inquired softly from the back.

With a chuckle, Pharah shrugged and turned to flash a smirk as an explosion thumped behind her. “Or you could try busting down the front doors, if you’d prefer.”

“Floor by floor sounds great, boss!”

“Yeah, I thought so too,” she grinned. “I want everyone in constant contact. For all the times I tell you to cut the chatter, this isn’t one of them - don’t want anyone getting hit by surprise, understood?” A chorus of chuckles and nods and affirmative noises. “Keep tuned in to the other frequencies, too. Anything changes out front, we want to know. Remember, indoors isn’t exactly our best situation - if you need out, hit a window and jump.”

“You’ll cover the repair bill, right boss?” T’chou nudged her elbow with a chuckle.

“For everyone else, yes,” Pharah shot back, causing the others to laugh briefly. “Hopefully it won’t be too bad, but everyone we’ve identified in this situation has a tendency to end up with destroyed buildings in their wake and we don’t want that. Move carefully, don’t tip anyone off - you can’t run faster than a blast wave, so don’t try.”

“A stealth mission,” Bjornsson murmured, hefting his rocket launcher so it clunked heavily against his metal gauntlet. “Well, there’s nothing we’re better outfitted for, right?”

Pharah grinned to him. “Aww, almost like you can’t just count on the suit to carry you through this one. We’ll be fine - stay on your toes, mention anything that seems out of the ordinary, and stay on your guard. When we get back, I’ll buy the ice-cream.”

“Good,” T’chou grumbled, “I’m sweating my ass off in this thing.”

The team chuckled as they studied the building, placing the stairwells and mentally mapping their routes.

“Five minutes to lift-off,” Pharah instructed, taking a studious look at the building.

“Five, boss?”

She turned to grin from underneath her helmet. “Alright, three, since we’re feeling so restless!”

A brief chorus of murmurs gave way to the mechanical sounds of Raptora suits and rocket launchers being checked, double-checked, and readied. They could have done it in one and she knew it, but
five was standard. Three was a nice middle-ground. Little bit more time for Angela, but at the same time, a little bit less time of sitting around waiting.

Pharah sighed slowly as she looked down the the window, everything behind it invisible from this angle and distance. She could only hope that Angela was alright in there, but there were only two real possibilities: either she was a willing aide, or she was a captive.

Captive was worse. Willing aide was bad, of course, but Pharah had less of a strict eye for rules and protocol than she once had, and it had never seemed to be a bad thing.

...yet.

She always worried for when the other shoe might drop, of course.

When Pharah told the team to sound off a little less than three minutes later, they responded one by one with calls of ‘ready’, and then they all lifted off at once, leaping through the skies to the rooftop of the hospital to begin their breach.

*Hold out a little longer now, just a little longer...*

Chapter End Notes

Whew! Okay, so, I had a lot of fun with this one. I admit it moved the plot a little less than intended, but I'm really happy with how it caught up on little loose-ish ends from ways back when, earlier in the story. Basically, once more, I've accidentally turned a single chapter into two - but that's okay because last chapter was two-into-one, which means we're still on track for this little climactic arc!

Uh, I had songs for this. Hmm, one of them ("alt.end" by The Cure) is actually for the next segment though, so, ummm... oh right!

"Home" - Barenaked Ladies

Lyrics: "How could you think that I could turn my back on you?
How did you think this would be turning out? And turning 'round?
What could I do but call you?
What could I do to call this home?
That's when I knew where I was,
That's when I knew that I was home."

Sorry it's late, I slipped behind on a bit of stuff. It's been several weeks since I had a day off and I just misplanned a little yesterday, that was my bad - but, to make it up to you a little, I've got something to mention. I first kinda teased at it two chapters ago, but here goes...

This has been a really project for me and the response has been stunning and wonderful. All you wonderful readers have brought me so many grins and smiles, and we're coming to a close on this section of the story - Act One, as it is, is nearing its end. I've got a nice little intermission planned which hopefully you should love, not plotty really but just some nice relaxation, but I've also got another plan.

Remember when I asked you to start thinking about memorable and noteworthy scenes or images from the story? I want to commission a few pieces of artwork, from various
artists, and I'd love your feedback on what I get! So whatever stood out to you the most - Widowmaker disinterestedly shooting soldiers, lying upside-down on the floor; her holding Sombra pinned against the wall in the moonlight, Tracer staring down the hallway at wide-eyed Emily with glowing red eyes in the shadow behind, Emily and Widdy and Tracer all holding hands as they walk toward the cafe, Tracer holding Efi close while the inventory cries and the pilot softly panics - whatever you liked, whatever you loved, whatever you think of and go "wow I'd love to see that", I want to hear it. I'll keep asking for feedback on this for the next few chapters (or until people are telling me to cut it out, heh) and then see about getting some commissions done!

(This is also a note to interested artists! If you want to draw one of these pieces, I'd love to pay you to do so :D)

So, there's that; I hope you liked it, I hope you get some good ideas going for what sort of art pieces you might like to see, and I hope you have a great day!

C'mon back next week - on Tuesday, all things willing - when Widowmaker takes an opportunity to do a little bit of explaining for Tracer. With the emotional tension dissipated, Sombra feels less awkward making an approach of her own to welcome the sniper back to the world. The siege continues, though, of course, and the clock is ticking ever downward...
Serious Summary: Widowmaker has a confession for Tracer which even she doesn't realize the truth of until she goes to say it. She, Tracer, and Sombra have a bit of bonding time - of a sort - which is entirely interrupted by the arrival of something unexpected. A tense moment gets worse, and then worse again, and then... perhaps a bit better. A new plan is developed and it can only be hoped that it will follow correctly.

JFL Summary: Widdy and Sombra don't want to admit they like each other, but Tracer keeps trying to shove them together. Widowmaker compares Tracer to her ex (kinda). Mercy stabs a guy! Symmetra has some fun with Junkrat.

Chapter Notes


See the end of the chapter for more notes

With her mouse there, the pain was bearable - if only just. If she could bring herself to focus on Tracer’s hand, on her soft words and her smile, then the pain and her body’s rebellions mattered less. She supposed that this was her penance in many ways, for so many things, but couldn’t find much comfort in that at the moment. However, she was sure it would come in time.

She was sure that, in time, she would come to lament the lack of this. The lack of feeling. She would come to miss the guilt and the pain, to want their return - she would permit herself this one foolishness and forget how horrible they were, until she found herself again in the graveyard, ready to bleed on the stone.

It was always what happened.

A slow numbness filtered into Widowmaker’s arm after the doctor returned, spreading deep through her tissues and bones. In a few moments her heart had withdrawn to a manageable level, permitting her to let out a slow breath through her nose and relax her head into the small pillow beneath it. At some point she’d regained the strength to lift it, just slightly.

“Thank you,” Widowmaker murmured softly, squeezing barely at Tracer’s hand as her eyes slid closed for a moment and she focused on the sensation of the pain ebbing away like the tide leaving a beach. Whether the thanks were primarily for the doctor for ending the pain, or for her mouse who had helped her weather it, she wasn’t certain.

She suspected that it was mostly the latter, though, and held onto Tracer’s hand as tightly as she was able.

“It’s not a permanent solution,” Mercy frowned, double-checking readouts and data: most of the Talon notes had been propositions or surgical notes, not really thorough data. Widowmaker’s exact
heartbeat or range of heartbeats wasn’t noted in the information present - either lost in the shuffle, or never written in the first place, or perhaps simply somewhere she hadn’t thought to look - so all she’d had were guesses and rough calculations.

She’d intended this heart to be stronger than the last, to be *more* than the last. A return of sensation after so long being numb would be painful, of course, like having circulation restored in the morning after a night of sleeping on your arm wrong - except this hadn’t been a short time of restriction, this had been *years* of lessening followed by an hour or so of total lack in death. She had thought that painkillers would help, that the upsides of a somewhat stronger heart would outweigh the downsides.

She *had* thought that the added strength and speed of the heart would be needed to increase the chance of viability, the chance of success - indeed, she’d first been trying to start the heart with an impulse that was much slower than the one that had ended up working.

Of course, as well, she hadn’t thought there would be quite such a *drastic* reaction, not nearly.

Still, perhaps she’d overreached.

“I’m sorry,” the doctor sighed as she swept a small cloth over Widowmaker’s brow, but it came away clean and dry - no sweat.

Widowmaker laughed lightly, her head tipping over to the side like a single shake of it as her eyes opened again. “Ah, but why? There is no lasting harm - indeed, I am restored. *Alors,*” she shifted her head and one shoulder moved just barely in some tiny indication of a shrug, “there were some pains in readjustment and the process is not yet complete. You could not have expected yourself to be perfect, certainly not in a situation like this.”

Despite their history, Widowmaker was no fool and would not let herself seem ungracious for a gift such as this. The future was incredibly uncertain, but with Tracer’s hand in hers, she couldn’t seem to bring herself to worry about that.

Mercy thought that ‘no lasting harm’ was almost a laughable concept. It couldn’t be determined in the moment and she knew it, and even though Widowmaker had a point that this was better than *death*, she still felt like she should have been able to manage better. To predict better. Admittedly, again, this was still less traumatic than the process had been for Genji - and even he was recovering well, these days, but still…

Still, she felt a lot of guilt over it. All of it, not just today but *all* of the days and how they piled together into each other. Every misstep and every failure. She told herself she shouldn’t, and when someone was on the table and she had a scalpel in hand she *didn’t*, but now? Standing by the bedside - or later, alone in her room?

There, there was plenty of room for guilt.

As Widowmaker nodded, though, just barely dropping her chin with her eyes still locked on, Mercy suspected that she knew that. The sniper apparently remembered their talks over the years: glasses of wine and stories exchanged, and soft confessions to each other about their lives, about the stresses they endured. As she held Widowmaker’s eyes, those familiar golden eyes, she was in fact quite certain of it - as certain as she was that Amélie was dead, because while those eyes might have been familiar, all the rest was so alien.

Maybe this was some remnant of Amélie, though. Some ghost hanging around to make sure an old friend didn’t feel too bad.
“Of course,” she nodded with a soft smile, squeezing gently at one of Widowmaker’s shoulders before looking away - a brief fragment of comfort in a moment of eye contact, but a lot of painful reminders as well, so she looked away to the screens instead where the heart rate was dropping swiftly. She inspected every readout, every item, everything she could do to avoid another problem.

Another problem in what, some days, felt like a never-ending line of them.

“I am sorry, ma cherie,” Widowmaker spoke softly - softer than she needed to, by far, entreating Tracer to lean in close in order to hear. That soft tingle of contact was fading as her heart dropped back down, as the pain and the sensations subsided, but she knew that in its place would come the familiar warmth.

It was something.

“What for?” Tracer settled gently into her stool by the side of the operating table, stroking at Widdy’s cheek, squeezing at her hand - taking quick advantage of all the opportunities she’d been denied for so long, trying in moments to make up for the lost ground of months and knowing she’d fail horribly, but still trying.

Widdy was clearly recovering her strength, albeit slowly. Consciousness had come first, and had clarified quickly. Her body still seemed weak, but she could move her head, she could squeeze at Tracer’s hand - even if it was weak, it was there, and Tracer smiled slightly at it as the sniper tipped her head over and fixed her with those sharp eyes.

For a moment, Widowmaker didn’t respond, because the first response felt so very inadequate. The first response which was ‘everything’ - and that made no sense because how could everything not be enough, but perhaps this wasn’t a problem to be solved be grandeur. Perhaps this was one that laid in the details and the small things.

“For… making you go through that,” she murmured softly, thinking back on those moments, seemingly so perfect at the time. The crystal-clear shot, so familiar in its sound, and that instantaneous soft shock of an expected heartbeat never to come; it had been a beautiful moment.

A death always was.

To her.

Even the one which sometimes made her lost, even Gérard’s death - it had been the most exquisite thing in existence, his gorgeous eyes shining wide in the moonlight; how could she have not thought it was beautiful?

At the same time, she knew the pain that a death could bring. One so close, literally and metaphorically - and even beautiful things could cause harm.

She thought of how Tracer’s face had looked so wrong, how her expression should have been one of hope and freedom but it wasn’t, it was pain, and fear, and incomprehension as Widowmaker let her eyes slide closed and replayed the moments in the silence of her mind.

“Hey,” Tracer frowned slightly as Widdy closed her eyes, as she tipped her head away - she caught the sniper’s chin, more purpleish-pink than she’d ever seen it before but rapidly falling back toward a more blue tone, and tugged it back over in her direction. “It- it was… bad, yeah. Got you back now, though, and I’d rather focus on that if I’m honest.”

If she was honest; Widowmaker laughed lightly, grinning as her eyes slid open again - the idea that Tracer would or could ever be anything other than honest, with her, was so ridiculous that she had
no option but to laugh.

Softly, only - the only laugh she could manage, but it was something as the world continued to seem to lose its fullness and return to those sharp edges she knew so well by now, but Tracer’s eyes didn’t seem to change. They stayed that same soft and warm brown that they’d always been.

“The pain of loss,” Widowmaker murmured as she shook her head loosely against the pillow. “It is such a great thing - such a large thing, and deep, and I think I could say this with more certainty than any other. That - that, ma souris - that pain is what I was trying to spare…”

Her words lost their conviction, and then lost their path - lost their strength and faltered and failed as she found that the next one she was going to say, ‘you,’ was seemingly a lie.

She hadn’t been trying to spare Tracer anything at all. As that smile shifted slightly under those brown eyes, Widowmaker knew it with an intense certainty - she’d thought of protecting Tracer, yes, but only ever from the harm that she posed. She’d only ever sought to keep her blade turned away.

Or, in those last moments, shattered entirely.

Even that, though - even that was, if not a lie, not the whole truth. With the lingering figments of that deeper well of emotion and certainty which warm blood had offered her, Widowmaker knew it.

She had done this for herself.

It would have been better had it been for Gérard and for sorrow, some effort to join him, but it had been years since she’d attacked her own wrists and suspected that it was impossible now anyway. In the early days before the conditioning had taken hold, perhaps, but now? Laughable, she could not.

It would have been better if it had been for Tracer. To spare her from harm, to ensure that the Kiss would never be pointed her way, but as the pair of them - all three of them, Emily and Tracer, and Sombra as well - had pointed out, it made no difference. There were other snipers, there were other threats, there were other things lurking in the darkness. Removing herself from the picture couldn’t save Tracer from anything except for her.

It would have been better, had it been for anybody else. Had it been for any reason other than the truth - that she had seen loss as a certainty of the future, an unavoidable truth which she was destined to collide with, that she had seen only futures where she was denied, where she was destitute, and she had not been willing to lose again.

It would have been better if she could have called her reasoning anything other than selfish.

Widowmaker let out a single soft laugh, and sighed. She was longing for a tear. For guilt. For sorrow.

Something to make those thoughts seem real, like they were feelings and emotions with substance, with effects, rather than figments of whatever cold thing she had in her heart’s place. It had been only moments, and already she was back at her foolishness. It had evolved so slowly, that desire for feeling, for urge, for impulse, for so many things which were so terrible, but she knew some more of the truth now.

They were terrible, but wonderful as well.

“I wish I could say I was trying to spare you from that pain,” Widowmaker murmured before laughing, grinning, shaking her head. “I suppose I could, could say it at least, mais, it is not the truth. The simple truth of the matter…”
Tracer’s eyes were gorgeous. Every bit as much as Gérard’s had been, even if in an entirely different way - even if they didn’t look at her quite the same way, there were similarities in there.

Lacking those visceral emotional reflexes left her feeling empty, sometimes, but it also granted her every capability she had. It ensured her survival, it permitted her operation, she needed it. She might as well take advantage of it, as well, because while she could recognize that her motives had been negative, she didn’t really feel bad about it.

She couldn’t. Not really.

Still, Tracer deserved to know.

“The simple truth of the matter is that I was being selfish, ma souris,” Widowmaker murmured, looking up into those eyes - those eyes which she’d counted as lost, if not today then tomorrow, and every passing day would only worsen it. “I… wish I could say that I was trying to save you from the pain of loss, mais, non.” She shook her head against the surgical pillow again, softly, smiling just the same. “It was myself that I was trying to save from torment.”

Tracer stared down blankly, not knowing how to react to that except for her instinctive shock. It wasn’t even that a bunch of reactions were warring within her, each struggling to make it to the surface first - there was just nothing that followed in the wake of a startled stare.

Not at first, at least. She thought over what it meant, what Widowmaker was saying - that she’d intended to be killed in that situation, that she’d done it to spare herself from losing.

From losing her.

Her, and probably Emily too, and maybe other things - maybe Sombra or her cacti or her rifle or whatever else - and it was a beautiful thought, and a horrifying thought, and she didn’t know what to do about it except for one obvious thing.

Squeezing at Widdy’s hand, Tracer leaned down and pressed a gentle kiss to her lips. “I love you too.”

Widowmaker quirked an eyebrow over a familiarly flat but amused smirk. “That is not what I was saying, cherie.”

“Sounded like it to me,” Tracer shot back with a little chuckle before sighing and glancing back over her shoulder toward the window. They’d been working on things for a while, but their time wasn’t limitless. “How long d’we have left?”

“Eight minutes,” the hacker shrugged by the window, a nonchalant facade hiding her inner unease. “Give or take. Got some time to finish up whatever you need there.”

“Maybe enough time for ‘er to get moving again, eh?” Tracer chuckled, rubbing at her hair with one hand as the other still held Widdy’s tight.

Widowmaker’s lips split into a grin at the sound of the unseen voice, though, and she let out a laugh - not an overly loud or strong one, but as much as she was able at the moment. “Ahh, so you have not, then, been alone? I suppose I should not be surprised,” she smirked up to Tracer. “She is quite impossible to keep out of anywhere.”

The Brit laughed briefly as she glanced up and caught Sombra’s seemingly somewhat hesitant eyes. “Bah,” she shrugged, “I dunno. Don’t think I’ve got such a problem with that, y’know? Not anymore, at least.”
At least, not right now. Not while so much hung in the balance and Sombra had been the only other one there, the only other one hurting, the only other place to turn. Tracer wasn’t sure whether that would change in the future, but she didn’t even bother trying to guess.

It was hard enough to just stay in the present sometimes. She didn’t need to go mucking about in the future and the past as well.

“Wait until she begins to use your shower,” Widowmaker grumbled. “Purple hair clogs are intensely unpleasant. Mais, you have surely been well-acquainted on your own with her annoyances over the time of my absence.” The sniper grinned slightly, narrowing her eyes. “My poor little mouse.”

“Ugh, with the cutesy nicknames again,” Sombra muttered to herself with a roll of her eyes, still leaning back against the window. “Also, I can hear you, you know?”

The situation outside had become much more stable, much more manageable, and it didn’t require her attention anymore. Still, it was a little easier over there by the window. Further away from all the emotional shit, because as much as she joked about being disgusted by it, it really was a dangerous thing to get mired in.

Better kept at a bit of a distance.

“Oi, lay off ‘er,” Tracer insisted to Widdy softly with a chuckle, nudging at her shoulder. “She’s been right helpful about this whole thing, and even gave me a shoulder to cry on when I needed it.”

“Oh, and what did that cost you?” Widowmaker’s grin widened slightly, and even more when Sombra called back a response.

“Still making my mind up on that. Got my jacket all soggy, so, y’know. Whatever it is, it’ll be big. You know I love this jacket.”

“Yes, the hideous thing,” Widowmaker answered back, “for some reason.”

“Go on, lay off,” Tracer nudged Widdy again and then looked over to the window, and Sombra holding her position at it. “She’s been a real help getting you back. I do-” her voice cut off but she cleared it and soldiered on, “don’t think I coulda done it without her.”

Sombra’s eyes met Tracer’s as she said that and backed up the statement with a solid nod, a nod which Sombra returned softly a moment later before pushing herself off of the glass and walking over.

“Guess I’ll come say hi or whatever,” she shrugged. It wasn’t until Tracer smiled a little, though, that she was sure it was the right move - at least, the right move in the Brit’s opinion.

She still wasn’t sure about her own.

Getting hurt generally led to people putting up walls, and Sombra was no stranger to that. She didn’t think about it too often, not in such obvious terms, but she wasn’t an idiot and was actually a fair bit more self-aware than the blustering facade she sometimes put on. She knew how crammed-down her own emotions were and she knew the risks of letting them start to escape.

Damned if life didn’t seem determined to make it happen, though. Between that fucked-up incident with Athena’s omnic body and the Black Tide, Widowmaker’s little terrifying stunt trying to shove her away that one night, and then the total shitshow of today - Sombra knew the cracks that were showing up in her walls.
She’d always had a bit of a soft spot for Widowmaker. Something in her eyes, maybe. It didn’t really matter, but the important part was that there was a danger to soft spots. They hurt if they got prodded, and today had been one hell of a prod already.

There was a large urge deep inside of her like a spring wound tight, all of those emotions struggling to escape and fly out, and it only got stronger as Widowmaker looked over and met her eyes.

Emotions, though, were really hard. Jokes were easier.

“Couldn’t let you go and die,” Sombra shrugged with a smirk. “You still owe me an ice cream - and with interest, and paying me back for all of today’s shit? Pretty sure it’s gonna take one of those cement trucks full.”

“Ever the shrewd businesswoman,” Widowmaker sighed with a roll of her eyes, looking to her mouse again. “She thinks she can hide anything from me, ridiculous.”

“She can still hear you,” Sombra muttered wryly, standing at a bit of an aloof distance - close, but not too close, because maybe if she stood like that physically, she could convince herself it was happening emotionally as well.

“Oh don’t try and act like you’re not glad to see ‘er,” Tracer protested, tugging at Widowmaker’s arm. “C’mon, I saw you on the couch and all, bein’ all snug, don’t try and pretend!”

“Pretend? Pretend what?” Widowmaker laughed slightly with a shrug. Weaker than her normal, both gestures, but stronger than they had been moments ago. “I will not deny her warmth, certainly, but -”

Tracer rolled her eyes heavily. “You like her, come on, admit it!”

“I will be admitting to no such thing.”

“Yeah, geeze _chica,_” Sombra added in with a grin, leaning back against the table so that she just pressed up against Widowmaker’s hip and trying not to think about how good that tiny reminder felt. It was so much easier, and so much better, to focus on teasing Tracer instead. “You keep trying to set us up, fine, but I told you before: purely sexual.”

“That’s not even what you _said,_” Tracer protested with a frown and an accusing finger. “You said friendly too!”

“Ehh, I say lots of stuff.”

“Oh _come_ on!” Tracer groaned a laugh and grabbed Sombra, pulling her in suddenly and then leaning forward, wrapping her and Widdy both up in a hug that was made entirely awkward - awkward at every level, from their positioning with Widowmaker lying back on the operating table, to the fact that Sombra squirmed and tried to escape.

“Gack! _Chica,_ ugh, you and your touchy-feely shit again,” Sombra protested, surprised and not actually bothered, but unwilling to let go of the bit so easily.

Widowmaker cut her off with a dismissive laugh. “Oh, and now _you_ are complaining about contact? Surely that is-”

Tracer let out a loud groan, silencing the other two. “Just shut up and cuddle for like ten seconds, wouldja!”
They did.

For a fair bit more than ten seconds, actually. Sombra’s bodily tension wore off quickly and she relaxed: it hadn’t been hard to see that Tracer didn’t exactly trust her. Whether suspicion or jealousy was the more accurate term, she hadn’t known, but that seemed to be gone for the time being at least - and while Sombra wasn’t planning on ever admitting to it, it had felt really good to hold the Brit while she cried. Almost too good, and not in a superior way. Not because Tracer was crying and she wasn’t, but because she felt like she was able to provide a little shred of comfort at least to someone in pain, and because she felt a little more vindicated in a tear or two of her own.

One of those slippery fuckers ran down her cheek as she relaxed into the embrace, in fact, twisting a bit to wrap an arm around Tracer and running the other alongside Widowmaker. “I… guess it’s good to have you back. Or whatever.”

Widowmaker laughed slightly, smiling widely at the warmth and the arms, and the pressure on her chest. The idea that they had risked so much, and continued to risk so much, for her. The idea that they hadn’t abandoned her, even when they should have. It sent a twitch of something into her chemically-slowed heart, and she mustered all the strength she could to drag an arm up to lay over their backs. “I suppose it is good to be back.” She chuckled. “Or whatever.”

“Ugh, you’re both terrible,” Tracer groaned, squeezing them as tight as she dared now that the hellish ordeal was over - or at least, now that it was out of the worst part. One cheek pressed against Sombra’s shoulder, the other against Widowmaker’s chest, just in time to hear a single heartbeat and to think that maybe it was for her. Maybe for both of them, but she didn’t care right then because she was part of both of them anyway.

“…what a… touching… moment.”

They all recognized the voice in an instant, harsh and gravelly and dark, always sounding like a sneer, a hiss from hell’s own halls: the voice of the Reaper. Tracer’s head shot up in shock to stare at him, but it was Sombra who moved first.

“Boss! Fuck, I-” She leapt to her feet, pushing herself away from the table and forward - toward Reaper - but he gestured sharply with an outstretched shotgun.

“Shut up.”

Sombra held out a hand. “Look, it’s not- just,” she sighed sharply as, on a hunch, she checked something. It looked like he’d made several attempts at contacting her, but she’d blocked them out along with everything else in her focus on the task at hand. “Shit, I didn’t get your messages, I was-”

“Shut up.”

His arm trembled but the shotgun didn’t waver in the slightest. Screeching filled his mind, his soul, he felt like a Banshee’s wail as every particle of him rubbed up against the others all wrong. Dark wisps lifted from every seam of his outfit, leaking through wherever the fabric didn’t hold them in - they seeped out of bullet-holes that he’d acquired on the way here, gashes and stabs and shrapnel damage, they poured in small rivulets down from the eyeholes of his mask like incorporeal black tears as he stared from beneath.

She wasn’t dead.

Widowmaker wasn’t dead, and she was laying there on a table looking flatly back at him - didn’t even have the decency to look frightened, just mildly surprised - along with Sombra and Oxton, and
in the corner, a very scared-looking Angela Ziegler.

Fate had brought them all here, it seemed.

Reaper absolutely hated fate.

Sombra’s placating (patronizing) outstretched hand felt like a physical jab (knife) in his gut (back), looking at it; the look in her eyes, the way she cautiously (fearlessly) took half a step forward, it made his soul shriek in anger - violent, vile and vitriolic anger, the product of years of steeping, the bitterest brew in existence.

He wasn’t sure if he felt most like he was going to scream, vomit, collapse, or murder them (team) all. Maybe all (teammates) four of those except he couldn’t (traitor) seem to think straight. It was all he could do to hold still. He really didn’t know what would happen if he tried to move. If he let himself.

Still, the idiot didn’t take the hint - Sombra didn’t take the hint, she never took the fucking hint, she always kept coming closer and closer to him like she thought she was special, like she thought she was invincible, like she thought he wouldn’t tear her skin off with his claws as she screamed. Like she thought she was safe, but she wasn’t.

Sombra put on a grin, the same grin she always did, and tried to stuff down deep the fear that gnawed at her mind - she knew he was on the edge, she could see it and she’d be lying if she said it didn’t worry her. It did. He did, just by being nearby sometimes, but she still trusted him. He’d proved it earlier with calling Widowmaker off, or at least trying to, and she knew it must’ve been hard. It was his own personal crusade against Overwatch, it had to be, and he’d let it go because she asked him to.

She trusted him, she grinned, she let out a laugh even though her gut crawled in fear a little bit. That just happened around him sometimes. That was just what he was like: terrifying. Didn’t mean she couldn’t trust him anyway. “C’mon, you’re killing me with this shit. Just… we can talk this out, okay? Just put down the gun and-”

“Shut up.”

She took another half-step, another stupidly certain half-step like he wouldn’t kill her, like he wouldn’t rip her to pieces and laugh as he did it and drain every scrap of vitality from her crumbling corpse - she took another half step forward as if she was safe and this time the shotgun did shake in his hand.

How could she be standing there? (Teammate.) How could she not have said something, not let him know? (Betrayed.) Why was that accursed doctor here? (Traitor.)

His mind felt torn, ragged, sections of it screaming at each other words or just feelings if the capacity for words was beyond them - teammate, trust, betrayal, anger, murder, hatred, hunger, pain - and it was all he could do to hold those fractured piece of his mind from fraying entirely as he took a shaky breath.

Black liquid dripped from the joints of his armoured gauntlet. He’d eaten so many on the way here, drained so many lives but he still hungered; every feeding renewed him, healed him, but then he would be shot or attacked, or simply tear through another wall and rend his flesh in the process, because sometimes the sharp pain was the only thing that could keep that crawling, nagging, incessant ever present itch away from his spine.
That itch.

His neck cracked as it pulled sharply to the side, his shoulders shifting uncomfortably as a grating sensation ran up his spine like a length of electric fence being powered up within his skin, like an acid-soaked line of rough twine run through a vein and being dragged on, like a cavalcade of worms burrowing their way up through his spine with their tiny chewing mouths.

Tracer could feel her fist clenching up as the rushing noise in her ears grew louder, the sound of blood as her heart rate increased in the tense standoff - from the first sight of him, it had started. The first thought of everything he’d done: that interrogation session in the Talon base, chasing Em and her out of their home, and now this. Killing Widdy, or getting her killed, because if it hadn’t been for his orders, if it hadn’t been for his suspicions, none of this would have happened. He was the only reason they’d been apart in the first place. He was the only reason they were here. He was the only reason.

He was the only reason.

Her mind went past the capacity for any thought more complex than that - that he was the reason, the one to blame - as her rage continued to boil in the harsh silence, her grip on Widdy’s hand growing tighter and tighter. She didn’t want to let go.

As her teeth ground against each other, though, there was nothing more she could do. The Accelerator whirred up to power as she screamed and leapt forward, blurring overtop of the table and Widowmaker as well in a flash of blue light.

“Cherie!” Widowmaker called out, stretching out a hand to try to stop the foolish mouse but there was no way, she could barely summon the strength to raise her shoulder and throw out an arm. She certainly couldn’t lift herself from the bed and give chase, though she tried. Tried and failed. “Stop, you foolish girl!”

Tracer realigned with her pulse pistols in hand, blaring as she saw red - red and black as pulse rounds tore into Reaper’s flesh and released dark blood and smoke, and then she saw white as he roared and unloaded a shotgun at her but she was already gone into that non-space outside of time, twisting through the thick air as his blast spread through the air like dye dripped into water.

“Chica don’t!” Sombra sprung forward the instant she noticed anything happening, as soon as she saw the blue flash - by the time she got there shots had already been fired but it still wasn’t too late. “Fuck’s sake neither of them will forgive me if I let you get yourself killed!”

Tracer reappeared behind him, unable to let off a shot before his arm swung around and he fired the other shotgun, hitting one of her pistols and shredding it to useless pieces. With a ragged shriek, she twisted time just the tiniest bit, spinning in the treacly air and letting herself fall back into the normal timestream in such a way as to send her foot lashing sharply across his mask.

“BASTARD!” She shrieked as she unloaded a clip from her one remaining pistol at him, but he caught one of her legs in a clawed gauntlet and flung her at the wall - it cracked behind her and she saw stars, felt bones break, but her first instinct was always to rewind, and she did.

He was expecting it. He knew she would. She always did.

Ogundimu had figured it out on the fly, tracked her movements and been able to predict them, and he’d never seen her in the practice range. He’d never looked up her dossier. He’d never been considering drafting the fledgeling hero of Overwatch into his team, hoping that maybe one more reliable person could save them all from the impending doom - hoping that maybe with one more
good one on his team, Blackwatch would finally be able to figure out just who was behind it all.

Gabriel Reyes, on the other hand, had done all of those things, back in a former life. Now, he got to reap the benefits of that knowledge.

His claws caught her harness in the instant she reappeared, lifting her up into the air as she cried out, but then there were arms wrapped around his neck and a weight on his back. He flung Tracer thoughtlessly off to the side, reached over his shoulder, grabbed whoever it was and flung them off forward, and let off a shot into their body as they flew.

Tracer tumbled a few feet along the ground before hitting something which stopped her. She flipped over and took a position braced like a sprinter at the blocks, but as she was about to set off, a hand landed on her shoulder - she looked back to see Widowmaker leaned sharply over the edge of her table, half-dangling and half supporting herself, gripping tightly at Tracer’s jacket lapel.

There was something about being physically anchored which stopped the Accelerator from working its particular brand of technological magic - Winston had said it was something to do with the observer effect, probably. The ‘probably’ hadn’t inspired confidence in her, but the physics of it didn’t matter anyway, because it wasn’t Widowmaker’s hand which stayed her.

It was those pleading golden eyes.

With a weak noise, Tracer slapped at the ground with a palm and turned to look away, but as she did it was immediately apparent that the fight was probably over anyway.

One way or another.

Sombra hit the wall with a weak cry, blinded by the pain of the gunshot and the impact at once, and falling limply to the floor.

A bright red streak followed her down along the wall, making clear what he’d done; a bright red slash, a vibrant highlight that he couldn’t deny as he dropped the shotgun to the ground, but his feet were frozen in place. He couldn’t move.

Not as she pushed herself half-upright with a shaky arm and a weak cough of a laugh, looking down to her other hand which was soaked in her own red blood. “W-when I said you were killing me, I didn’t mean it, amigo .”

A tense tremor ran through his locked muscles at the expression on her face, in her eyes, as she looked up at him. He couldn’t move.

He had no warning as something struck him in the back, nearly knocking him off-balance as there was a searing sharp pain in his neck which gave way to a spreading iciness; he shouted and spun and grabbed, acting instinctively and leaping forward, slamming the person against the glass - it was a triple-treated specialty carbonate, bulletproof, rocketproof, almost unbreakable, but sharp cracks still spiderwebbed out from the impact point.

He let go of the front of Ziegler’s armour and caught her by the throat instead, pushing her higher up the glass with the sun streaming through the cracks which spread out from her back like wings.

Reaper’s other hand raised to his neck where the cold continued to spread with worrying speed, rushing through his arteries. He yanked loose the needle there but it was already too late, already emptied of its payload and he whipped it away with a hiss as he pulled another shotgun out and pressed it to the side of the doctor’s head.
“You bitch, you have five seconds,” he seethed, “to tell me exactly what you just dosed me with or I’ll- stay the fuck down, Oxton,” he growled back over his shoulder as he heard the telltale noises of a person regaining their footing - he had no doubt who it was because she never did stay down, but he didn’t hear her Accelerator whirring.

Tracer stood tensely at the bedside but one of Widowmaker’s hands was holding her wrist and the other was on her gun, and she didn’t know what to do about it. She might have been able to yank the gun and her arm free because Widowmaker was still quite weak, but it wasn’t the actual grasp that held her in place, anyway.

On top of all of that, she was quite sure that if she tried to do anything, Reaper would just kill her. He’d snatched her out of the air like a fly and it brought the encounter with Doomfist back to her mind, fear helping to paralyze her in place as her free hand clutched desperately at Widdy’s, trying to hold onto the world out of sheer determination as she could only watch in terror.

She could only ever watch, she couldn’t reach out and touch them. Whatever it was she saw when she flickered away from the world, she could never touch it. Never. She could only watch as people died.

“G-Gabriel,” Angela choked out, hands gripping tightly onto Reaper’s armoured wrist and trying to hold herself up enough to restore more airflow, but as she did, he tightened his grip - just a little, not enough to cut off her ability to speak but enough to restrict it and her breathing, and she thought that he probably knew that. Thought that he probably intended it. “Gabriel please just-”

“Stop calling me that,” he growled, “and you’re down to four.”

“Please, please you don’t-”

“Three. Seconds.” The cold continued to spread, through his shoulders and slowly filtering into his chest, approaching that writhing hateful itch in his spine and the yowling hunger in his gut.

“-need to do this, you can-”

“Two.”

“-just tell me if it’s working, please, just-”

“One.”

“P-please, please, you don’t need to do this, if it’s working, it should help balance the mood swings, if- ”

She begged, and he had to admit that he liked hearing her beg. Hearing anyone beg for their life was good, and it was only better when he knew he’d take it anyway. Only better when they met his eyes - just like she did - and tried to convince him through their gaze. Only better when it was one of the Overwatch members. Only better when it was somebody who had personally betrayed him, and Ziegler ranked quite high on that list.

It was the perfect storm. His hand didn’t shake on the grip of the shotgun.

“Zero.”

His hand didn’t shake on the shotgun, not in the slightest, not as his finger tensed up and she continued to babble and ask if it was working, whatever it even was that she’d refused to divulge. The cold had spread nearly throughout him now, through his core and his arms - it didn’t seem to be
paralytic in nature, whatever she’d dosed him with, or he would have shot already. His neck had remained feeling normal though, his face seemingly unaffected, his shoulders still strong, his arms still quite capable.

It wasn’t a sedative. Curiosity burned in his mind, and paranoia as well, driving him as they always did but it was too late.

He couldn’t have stopped now even if he’d wanted to, and he knew it.

The cold reached the hand clenched tightly on the grip, through to his trigger finger, and he saw in her eyes that she knew - knew that she was going to die, knew that he was going to kill her, because in that moment he couldn’t avoid it any longer. That horrid hole inside him demanded it, needed to be fed, needed life and hers was the one it would take.

His hand didn’t shake on the grip as he took a deeper breath and the cold sank through his gut, and on further - Ziegler was still making noises and saying words and he tensed up his talons just a little, just enough to cut off her words in a choked squawk as he pressed the barrel of the shotgun more firmly against her head.

There was no option in it, not to him. Taking a life wasn’t a choice, it was a necessity, like breathing - oh, he could hold his breath. For a while. Maybe even for a very long time if it was needed, but sooner or later he’d need a bit of air - and the longer he’d held it in for, the harder he had to gasp when he did.

The shotgun didn’t shake, no tremors in his muscles as he stood perfectly still and stared into her eyes, and she stared back - blue eyes which everyone always said they saw as comforting, but he couldn’t see it. He couldn’t see anything good in her, not anymore, and despite what Talon or anyone else said he knew the world would be better off without her.

...but she was a damn good doctor.

Reaper didn’t look over, didn’t blink, didn’t anything as he stood with his breath held both metaphorically and literally, every muscle tense but steady as the cold sank through his calves. Sombra was bleeding, Sombra was hurt, and as much as he hated Mercy - and it was much, indeed - he knew she could save the hacker’s life.

It had been quite a long time since he’d really wanted to not kill somebody. Only one other instance really rose to mind, and she was currently bleeding out twenty feet away, anyway. A red-highlighted monument to his own inability to exercise control.

Control hadn’t been a problem in the past. Long ago when he’d lived like anyone else. Even shortly after the Fall, he’d had so much more of it, more control, but it gained him nothing and held him back from his path of vengeance and justice. He couldn’t devote himself fully to that while he was still distracting himself with self-control, and it hadn’t been an issue up until recently.

Hadn’t been an issue up until Sombra.

Now she was bleeding out, and he was about to kill the doctor who could save her life, but he knew it was too late to stop. He knew he wasn’t capable of it, and he hated that, but...

...but it didn’t feel the same as it normally did. Hating himself didn’t feel the same as it normally did. Needing to kill her didn’t feel the same as it normally did.

Reaper’s breath left slowly, not sighed but just exhaled through his nose as he pressed the barrel against Ziegler’s temple a little harder - her cheeks were turning a little pink. How long had he been
holding her like this, with her air cut off?

How long had it been since he’d said zero?

His head tipped to the side and she seemed to notice that, her eyes widening with some sort of sickness hope, but it didn’t leave him with the same overwhelming sense of revulsion that he thought it should have. As a matter of fact, he felt downright reasonable.

She wasn’t even bleeding.

Reaper lifted the shotgun away, and actually laughed when he did - just once, because up until he tried to move his hand, he was quite certain it wouldn’t work. Was sure in his mind that any attempt to move would mean a trigger being pulled, but it didn’t.

He didn’t need to kill her.

He still wanted to. He still very much wanted to, but that deep and desperate need was gone, suppressed by the cold that had spread from the injection - that chill that was now blanketing the roiling hatred in his gut, smothering the wriggling itch in his spine.

For the first time he could remember, he felt almost good. It was just a shame that it was at her hands.

Mercy gasped as metal talons withdrew from her throat, entirely, letting her fall right to the ground and collapse as she coughed.

“You’re going to explain that one, doc,” Reaper murmured almost thoughtfully without even looking down to her as she rubbed at her throat, but he had bigger concerns. Even though that surprised him.

Even though he didn’t think that should be possible. Bigger concerns than his vengeance? Ridiculous, but that didn’t stop it from happening. “But first, you’ve got something else to do. Another life to save.” He chuckled with a warmth that surprised himself when he heard it. Sarcasm, too, though. “I know how much you just love doing that.”

Mercy’s eyes flicked up to him, pained, but he didn’t look back. He just walked away without a thought, dropped his gun, and stalked right over to Sombra. There was something different about his pacing, though. His stride. It was just as deliberate, but less aggressive now, less sharp. He’d dropped her, too, rather than killing her - her heart sped up at the thought, the hope that her drug had worked. It had only been a loosely-educated shot in the dark, but she’d needed to do something to help the situation, and it seemed to be working.

Reaper crouched in front of Sombra and she coughed. “Sombra-”

She cut him off with a weak wave of her bloody hand. “Boss, I know I shoulda got your messages, I just-”

“I’m sorry.”

He smirked a little behind his mask at the look of surprise on her face, and considered it a personal accomplishment to have rendered her speechless. On a much more surprising and deep level, he was shocked at his own ability to think it or say it without breaking, without becoming frantic and angry and having his mind filled with screams.

It was good that he could, though. Whatever the reason, he was glad for it, and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. “I fucked up. Now just shut up for a minute and let me take care of this, okay?”
The gloves slipped off easily, clattering to the ground and followed by his mask. It felt a little bit stifling at the moment, like he couldn’t quite breathe right, and more than that he wanted her to be able to see his eyes, his face. Maybe it was a stupid thing, but it mattered to him. “Let me see the-

She was leaning over before he could even finish the sentence, obvious pain on her face as she curled her arm over her head to let him lean in and inspect the wound. He tugged at the fabric of her jacket, tattered by shot, and practiced eyes studied the blood and damage underneath.

It wasn’t too bad, not immediately life-threatening but definitely requiring some prompt attention: the shot had peppered the lower part of her ribs, her abdomen, down over her hip and the upper section of her thigh. It went about as far in as her belly-button, a thousand tiny holes that conglomerated into larger wounds toward the centre of the shot. It bled a lot, because every tiny part of it bled, but there were no exit wounds from the distance he’d shot her at. The damage didn’t go all the way through.

“Ah, you’ll be fine,” he muttered, smirking, “what’re you complaining about?” His eyes raised to meet hers. “You’d think you’ve never been shot before.”

His easy, teasing tone helped to set Sombra’s nerves at ease. Didn’t do anything to lessen the pain, but she was confident that if it actually was bad he wouldn’t have said that. Or maybe he was just trying to make her feel better.

“Just another Wednesday to me, chico,” she groaned in response. “Just- give it to me straight, Boss.” She held his eyes intently. “Are you gonna be able to save… the jacket?”

“Oh no.”

Sombra gasped. “I might not be able to live without it! Don’t know if it’s worth carrying on - just get me the M&Ms out of my pocket, like in the war. Let me die.”

Reaper rolled his eyes. “First off, that’s about ten wars back. Secondly, it’s an ugly jacket.”

“I know, right? Isn’t it great?” She laughed. Weakly, but still, it was a laugh.

“Thirdly,” he stressed, “you’re not dying today. One’s enough. Too many, even - so, no, no M&Ms for you.”

“Damn.”

Really, though, the jacket wasn’t that badly damaged. He was sure he could repair it, at least, and he planned to - but there was no need to say that right now. With his inspection finished, he nodded and slipped an arm behind her back and the other under her knees, lifting her easily.

“Heh,” she chuckled, wrapping an arm around his neck. “Aren’t we uh, missing a couple steps here chico? Not that I’m complaining, but a ring would be nice. Y’know, to show off to my friends.”

“Ha ha ha, dumbass,” he muttered through a smirk. She wasn’t very heavy, and he didn’t care in the slightest about the blood that dripped from her onto his cloak and armour - it only joined a much larger reservoir there anyway. “Doc. You’re going to save my friend here, and then you’re going to explain why I haven’t killed you all in a rage yet.”

Despite the harsh and worrying words, his tone actually sounded only amused - he sounded like he was on the verge of laughter as Mercy stood. Her armour had protected her from any real damage from the exchange, and what there was had already healed. “I- it was an experimental-”

“Wow, you really don’t like listening, do you?” He quirked an eyebrow. “Here, I’ll make it easy for
you. *First*, you are going to heal Sombra. Everything else comes *afterward*. If you speak to anyone except Sombra, or do anything *other* than heal her until I tell you to, I will kill you. If she dies, I’ll kill you.” Again, his tone was a mismatch to his words - he didn’t *sound* threatening. He definitely sounded truthful, however. “Don’t worry about that, though - for the first time in a *very* long time, Doc,” he grinned, “I’m confident in your abilities.”

Her eyes flashed with anger as she looked over to him, but that wasn’t a downside to him at all. He quite liked it, in fact.

“Guess it’s your lucky day, Doc, because I’m giving you a pass on this one today. Much as the idea surprises me.” He sighed wistfully as she looked curious but hopeful, and it should’ve killed him to not ruin that hope, but somehow it didn’t. “Yeah, if you fix Sombra up, I’ll let you walk away. I give you my word.” He smiled coldly and met her eyes with a sharp glare. “It’s worth a lot more than *yours*, if I remember correctly.”

She dropped her eyes at his pointed words and refused to meet his gaze, and it felt like some small victory at least. There was a smile on his lips and a spring in his step at the thought.

Reaper carried Sombra quickly over to a table and laid her down carefully on it. “Now, you start working, and I…” he glanced over toward Widowmaker and Oxton. The sniper was sitting up on the edge of the table now, but still clearly being supported by the pilot who glared back at him with obvious fire in her soul, and he could only grin at that too. “I’ve got some other people to talk to.”

His hand patted at Sombra’s shoulder as he turned and stepped away, and hers rose to meet it for a second - just a second, before he was gone and she was left with a very distraught-looking Mercy.

“Relax, Angel-dust,” Sombra sighed, letting her eyes fall closed. “Gonna be easier than anything else you’ve done today, let’s be honest.”

“Mm, of course your health is my only concern,” the doctor muttered darkly in response.

It drew a weak laugh from Sombra. “Wow, I never thought you could be a snarky bitch! Not gonna lie, that’s actually pretty great.” Still, the doc had a point - there were other concerns. Helix, for one. Couldn’t have them dropping in to crash the party for about a hundred reasons. “I’ll make sure the doors stay closed and uh, our *friends* upstairs have a little distraction for a couple minutes longer here, alright?”

She raised a hand and brought up a screen, but the doctor's hand caught her wrist. Sombra’s eyes snapped over to meet blue ones, looking back in fear and concern, but Sombra just scoffed and rolled her eyes. “Relax, nothing harmful. I’ll get Symmetra to take care of it.”

A moment later, Mercy relaxed her hold and let Sombra carry on. She bit her lips together to keep from saying anything, quite certain that Gabriel - or Reaper, or whatever he wanted to call himself - would certainly do something horrible if she spoke. Maybe not kill her, not immediately, but something.

All she could do was work, and hope that he would hold true to his word. Hope that Tracer would remain safe. Hope that Fari would stay away enough to not exacerbate the situation with yet another layer of hostility.

She administered a local anaesthetic so Sombra could remain conscious, then had a moment’s pause while the medication took effect. She used the opportunity to rub her tired eyes before pulling another pair of gloves on.

“I *should* wash up before we start,” she sighed, “but I don’t think infection risk is our primary
concern here.”

Sombra chuckled weakly, laying her head back against the little pillow. “I think you could say that again, doc…”

---

Symmetra had taken to manufacturing replacements for Junkrat’s mines and explosives whenever he wasn’t looking, and doing her best to plant them on his person whenever the opportunity presented itself. Amongst other various modifications to decrease his likelihood of lethality.

“Never had so many bloody duds in one day,” he grumbled to Roadhog as he thumbed at the button on the detonator again, shook it, pressed another five times, and then threw it at the wall. The mine which he’d thrown did not go off, however, because it was in fact not a mine.

It only looked like one.

Sombra’s voice, when it came over her communicator, didn’t sound right. It was wet and weak and raspy, and brought a slight frown to Symmetra’s lips as the hacker spoke. “Hey, chica, got a favour to ask. I need you to do something big enough to pull Helix out of the building for a couple minutes - we hit a road bump here so we need just a little longer. You need a hand with anything?”

As Junkrat pulled the cord on his Rip-tire and had it fail to turn over (because of a few changes she’d made, namely cutting the ignition lines to the spark-plugs of its engine), Symmetra smiled slightly. As he kicked at it with a shout of “Come on!” she grinned outright, and a slight but pleased sigh slipped from her nose.

“I believe I have the situation well in hand. Be as quick as you are able, and let me know when you are clear of the area. Keep me apprised.”

Sombra chuckled, but it turned into a weak cough before she croaked, “Thanks amiga. I’m gonna get you something real nice for all this.”

“Sombra, are you well? You sound…” Symmetra swallowed uncomfortably, unsure of what exactly she sounded like. The only image which rose to mind was one of a frog in a thick swamp attempting to speak, but that seemed hardly befitting the situation so she did not provide it.

“Bah, I’m fine,” Sombra replied. “Well, will be. Whatever. But hey, it’s cute that you’re getting all worried over me, thanks.”

At that, Symmetra laughed briefly. Not for a moment did she think to wonder whether Sombra was really okay. Friends wouldn’t lie, not about something that important, and it never occurred to her to question it. “I suppose it would be rude not to say you are welcome, then. Be swift and safe, my friend.”

“You too, amiga. I’m lookin’ forward to seeing what you come up with for this one.”

A slow smile spread across the Architech’s lips as she thought quickly, measuring up the situation and her resources and doing the math between the two. A likely catalyst, in the form of Junkrat, provided several possibilities which she rapidly narrowed down. Her smile grew as she did so, as she figured it out. She always had loved puzzles - and just as much as she loved them, she loved solving
them.

She crouched in behind one of the thick pillars that flanked the entrance, coming up with new designs on the fly as the planet turned beneath her and the world carried on in its chaos - near and far. Junkrat and Roadhog shouted and fired and threw chunks of rubble or stone that had been blasted free of the building’s facade by either themselves or the encroaching forces, and the forces in question had their blaring sirens and their loudspeakers, guns and tranquilizers and so many others, and it was simply so much to tune out.

However, she was practiced, and not without aid in that matter. Her headset had sound dampeners which she turned up then, and in the silence, soft music started to play. At first, she thought it was only in her mind, but that was soon proved incorrect - the music came from her communicator, one of the songs she liked to listen to in private and dance to.

Symmetra’s eyes widened slightly, and a line of text flowed across her visor. “Thought it would help you concentrate. Figured you might want it. You got this, amiga.”

She looked up and over to the camera which she’d discovered earlier, offering it a smile - not the sharp one which she deployed as she did any of her other measures, the constructed smile which was part of her persona under Vishkar’s employ. No, this smile was the private one which almost never came out, the one which only a select few had ever seen, the vulnerable one which was only for the very small number whom she could count truly as friends.

Then, with the music soft in her ears and helping block the world out entirely, she stood and began to work. Her shoulders and hips swayed softly as she did, every joint moving and reacting fluidly. The beauty of dance, the beauty of creation - it always had entranced and captivated her.

Her colleagues at Vishkar - her so-called peers - thought she was an oddity for it, amongst a hundred other things. They, too, took their careful and cautious measurements and had their periods of studious design, but then when they carried out their work, it was always so stiff to her. So unnatural, so disconnected.

She supposed that it was perhaps the way of things. A connection in one arena denied it in another, naturally; they made their easy ways with other persons and in society, and that was something she never had been able to accomplish. This, then, was balance. They connected to each other but could not truly connect to their work, but she, she held a distance from people and connected, deeply and truly, with creation.

The machine coalesced within her hands, defined and sculpted by her smooth movements and subtle motions, the tiny curve of a finger bringing the side-plates in a half-centimetre, the slightest angling of her wrist causing the barrel to be lifted by two degrees for greater loft of the payload.

When it was finished, she plucked it from the air in the moment before it reached full reality, before it became entirely corporeal and ceased to hover there. Then she stepped swiftly over to Junkrat and, shuddering slightly at the way his dirty and greasy hands would no doubt despoil its flawless and perfect finish, she held the launcher out to him.

“Here,” she sighed. “A new weapon for a new course of action.”

Junkrat, who hadn’t immediately noticed her approach because he was focused on building a new mine out of his walkie-talkie, was jogged from his concentration by Roadhog’s fist thumping him in the shoulder.

“Oi! What’re you thinking, mate? Liable to make me-” he cut off when he noticed Symmetra there, a
huge curved grin overtaking his lips, but then he noticed what she was holding and whatever he’d been about to say died on his tongue. “What’s that?”

“...a new weapon for a new course of action,” she reiterated with an irritated glance toward Roadhog. “Unfortunately, it is for you.”

“Well what’s unfortunate about that? *I love* presents and new toys!” He giggled, dropping his half-disassembled walkie-talkie to the ground and clapping his hands as he danced in place. “What does it do what does it do - oh, does it explode? Make other people explode? MAKE ME EXPLODE?”

Roadhog smacked him in the back of the head and he frowned, rubbing at the impact and looking over with an offended expression.

“None of those,” Symmetra explained. “It is a launcher not dissimilar in function to yours, but I *daresay* entirely dissimilar in form and appeal.” She smirked slightly, finding some joy in hiding things from him amidst the language, but Roadhog’s soft growl suggested that she should exercise caution in the matter.

“This device, rather than flinging explosives haphazardly,” she continued, although Junkrat provided counterpoints even *as* she spoke, which was quite irritating.

“Not hap hazard at all I think you’ll find it flings ‘em very hazardly in fact,” he muttered.

“propels a payload of an entirely different sort, a stunning explosive. Similar to a flashbang, but with a few… personal enhancements on my part.” She could *certainly* do better than some century-old barbaric creation of overstimulation, but the *function* was similar and she suspected that would be Junkrat’s focus.

His eyes widened, his face overtaken with sheer glee - even moreso than usual - and it actually stilled him a bit. He went beyond the point of dancing around with joy, circling all the way back around to a moment of stunned, shocked stillness.

Junkrat reached out and stroked at the machine’s barrel - it was gorgeous in white composites and brightly-shining metal, the prettiest present he’d gotten for a long time if he was being honest. Not that he’d tell Roadhog that, given the fight that would likely ensue.

“It’s beautiful,” he gushed, his thumb leaving a smear of grease on the side of it at which he frowned. Immediately he snatched a cloth from a pocket and wiped it clean, then returned to grinning. Then, giggling, and finally cackling as he lifted the machine from Symmetra’s hands and spun on his pegleg to face the officers who were hiding behind their vehicles out past the shield barrier.

“Come on, you Hyde Global bastards! I’ve got a new present for me, and it’s for you too!” His gleeful, shouted announcement was all the warning before he began to unload the launcher - perfect spheres sailed through the air on flat arcs, detonating with a *snap* and a small flash and leaving everyone within twenty feet of them stunned and unable to react for a few seconds afterward.

Symmetra sighed slightly, shaking her head. She almost fell over when Roadhog patted her on the shoulder, between a combination of his force and her own surprise - recoiling away and looking to him in shock, but it seemed that he’d intended a comforting gesture.

With another sigh, she returned to standing upright and nodded as he patted at her shoulder twice - much more gently - as Junkrat danced out down the approach to the entrance, firing stun-grenades as he did.
The forces shouted and scattered, breaking their lines and abandoning their positions for a moment at least, and Symmetra’s eyes turned skyward to look for signs of Helix’s approach. She could only hope that, within the building, things were going smoothly and well, and with any luck they were in a modicum more control than they were out here.

“I believe your distraction is forthcoming,” she sent over the communicator. “Now we can only hope that Helix reacts as we desire.”

A flash in the sky drew her eyes sharper upward, though, and put a smile on her lips - there were Raptora suits, descending.

All things according to design.

Chapter End Notes

Okay I think I'm done with threatening people's lives now? I think this is the last incident where a life really seems to be hanging in the balance, at least for quite a long time! There's a brief moment or two coming up, but they're not nearly as focused and intense as this one (or the last one, heh) so I think I can say that, yeah.

This one! Whew, eh? Tracer finding a little more common ground with Sombra, kinda, or at least some agreement and I liked that. The little reassurances all around, and that nice hug, that was good.

Originally, the Reaper arrival was going to be the end of last chapter - a big ol' cliffhanger, but that didn't work as well. It made the previous chapter waaaay long and a little too full, and trying to pull out chunks from Helix or the bouncers out front of the hospital in order to make the length fit made the chronology wrong, so I shifted it around a little and put Reapskis in the middle of this chapter, and you know what? I like it better this way. It's better being integral like this rather than a cliffhanger, at least I think. How about you?

I like being able to cash in on things. I spent all this time drumming up Reaper's lack of control, his hatred and anger, and now I get to use that, and I love it. I think it creates a kind of tension that can't exist otherwise, but that also means that it can create a palpable sense of relief. You can't relieve tensions which aren't there, eh?

Trust is a big complex thing, and it's kinda weird sometimes. I like how Sombra thinks about Reaper in this one - that she is uncomfortable around him sometimes because that's just who he is, but that doesn't mean she needs to freak out about it and let it cause problems. I like that. Generally I like their dynamic and I look forward to exploring it more!

Angela and Reaper/Gabe's backstory's gonna come out really soon here so you'll get to see why exactly they are the way they are with each other, so that's cool. I've been promising for a while now a nice solid resolution to the Reaper vs. Sombra/Widdy/Tracer/Emily storyline, and I think you can now see how it comes about: here he is, here they are, and they're gonna have a nice open chat about it.

A very elaborate locked-door trope, if I do say so myself XD
Also, I now have a Ko-Fi thing if you want to toss me some money? Alternately I also have a Paypal.me thing which can be nice if you don't want to be held to $3 minimum or increments of Ko-Fi? I dunno if there are other downsides, but I just signed up for these things today, heh, so we'll see I guess!

I want to thank you all again, as always, for reading and giving your feedback! You're helping me make this a better version of itself; the story will be what it will be, but your feedback really helps me make it the best I can, so thank you! Keep on thinking about and saying what images you really like from this story - I've got a bunch of milestones to celebrate, so I've got several commissions I'll want to take out; fire away!

Come on back next week when Reaper starts to talk it out. Will it be easy? No. Will Tracer punch him? Yeah, maybe. Once things are in the open, though, they can be a little more easily sorted out - that's not to say that everything can be fixed, and a lot of it can't, but at least that can be known. At least it can be dealt with.
Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Reaper, Widowmaker, and Tracer have a talk - a few explanations offered and a perhaps-surprising apology, but it doesn't all go perfectly smoothly. Trust is such a finicky thing sometimes, but it can't really be faked. It's either there, or it isn't. Meanwhile, Pharah does her best to keep the situation from worsening even further, and Pharah's best is very good indeed.

JFL Summary: Reaper totally wants to get punched in the face. Widowmaker has clearly learned her lesson and won't try to sacrifice herself to save Tracer anymore - oh no wait, no she hasn't. Junkrat wants to keep his present but Pharah tries to steal it away.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: uh, bit of pain, but honestly after the last chapters I don't think a warning's really needed. Things are calming down! Really!

Previous Chapter Summary: Tracer and Widowmaker's reunion was joined somewhat by Sombra, to the annoyance of Tracer - not because Sombra interrupted, but because she and Widdy tried to play off the whole thing as no big deal. She wrapped them both up in a big hug, providing a lot of comfort that nobody mentioned, but the whole thing was interrupted by Reaper's arrival.

He was clearly angry, but held his position, struggling internally as Sombra tried to explain and defuse the situation. Before her success or failure could be made clear, though, Tracer's emotions got the better of her and she leapt into a fight. Sombra followed to try to stop Tracer, and in the melee, she took a shot that Reaper had intended for somebody else. He froze as he looked at her bleeding on the floor. Mercy took advantage of the opportunity to inject him with something, and he slammed her against the wall and threatened her life. As the drugs spread through his system, though, they seemed to suppress the symptoms which drove him crazy: the hunger in his gut, the void in his core, the itch in his spine which was only ever sated by death.

He realized that, while he still wanted to, he no longer needed to kill her, and spared her life before they returned to mutual jokes and teasing. Sombra arranged to buy some more time from Helix, by getting Symmetra to cause a larger distraction - the Architech did so by providing Junkrat with a new grenade launcher, one which fires something similar to flashbangs, stunning its victims. He had a lot of fun with it. The Shrike has yet to play her hand or make her appearance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Throughout the conflict, Widowmaker watched sharply - it was all she could do, the only piece of her which acted as it should, her eyes. She could not leap up and catch her mouse, holding her back from conflict with a madman. She could not do the same for Sombra.
As the hacker was flung and shot, she could do nothing but watch - watch and grab at Tracer’s shoulder wildly when she came near enough, and then there was a moment of stillness as her mouse seemed to relent.

A few moments too late, perhaps, but then it had all been over the moment Reaper had arrived. It was only a matter of time now, and all she could do was observe.

Widowmaker watched as Angela - a woman who she’d more than once called friend and more than once cursed in the tear-struck darkness - approached Reaper, and to her surprise, was able to get quite close. The doctor could be quiet when it was required, it seemed.

She had no guesses for what was in the syringe clutched in one fist, but she was not surprised when it was buried in Reaper’s neck. The doctor came off and was pressed against the window with all the frightening strength that Reaper could muster, and Widowmaker was quite sure that only Mercy’s armour had saved her from broken ribs and worse.

Tracer pushed herself up, trying to go and help her friend, but Widowmaker’s hands stayed tight on her, holding not just the Brit but her weapon as well.

She could have said that it hurt to hold back her mouse from helping one of her friends, but that simply wasn’t true. She was once again beyond pain, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t think.

This didn’t seem like a good situation. Whatever the doctor had injected him with had clearly failed - he still stood, where Widowmaker had expected him to go slumping to the ground from some anaesthetic. Now, he was free to do as he pleased.

Many possibilities existed, almost all of them entailing a large toll of death. As Reaper counted down and the doctor refused his request for information, at least one death - hers - seemed a guarantee. Widowmaker’s eyes shifted to Sombra, bleeding on the ground: without Mercy, she would likely die before long as well. When Mercy died, Widowmaker was sure she could not hold back Tracer any longer, and then her mouse would be dead.

...and then there would be only she, and he, and that could only end two ways.

She wondered whether he would be kind enough to grant her death instead of reconditioning. She wondered if she would even be capable of asking for it.

Then, though, he delayed. He held his shot, stayed his hand, and didn’t kill Ziegler. Not for a second, and not for the next, and not for the next. Her words shed no real light on the matter, but then Reaper lifted away his shotgun and laughed, and dropped her, and went to tend to Sombra instead.

“Ange, are you alright?” Tracer’s voice was intent and strained, and the doctor flashed her a weak smile and shook her head swiftly. She was, however, alive and seemingly unharmed. If Reaper could be trusted - and Widowmaker was quite certain he couldn’t - then she would stay that way.

Widowmaker tried to develop every ounce of strength she could, concentrating effort out into her muscles as Reaper charged Mercy with Sombra’s aid, and the sniper managed to get herself upright. Tracer noticing her attempts and assisting was largely the reason she was able, however, her mouse helping lift her from the table.

Then Reaper was approaching. She wasn’t in fighting shape, not nearly - she could barely stand as her feet touched the ground. In fact, she couldn’t. Her ankles wavered and shook and it was only through her shoulder wrapped around Tracer’s shoulders, and her mouse’s arm at her back in turn,
that she was able to remain upright.

She could not fight, she could not stand, but she still refused to kneel. To submit. If she was going to
die, she would do it on her feet and do everything she could to buy a moment for Tracer’s escape.
The foolish girl’s device would have recharged fully by now - Widowmaker couldn’t let her keep
depleting it with an extended fight, not when she would need it to gain her freedom from Reaper.

As it had been an hour ago, so it was now. If she was to die, she would at least have her death mean
something.

He wasn’t wearing his mask, though, and wasn’t bearing his guns; he didn’t look at her angrily, and
in his damaged face and his twisted eyes, she thought she saw more of the man she’d once known.
The Reaper near the beginning, or maybe even echoes of her once-husband’s cohort Gabriel from
before that.

As best as she was able, she shifted to be in front of Tracer - to hold the two of them back from each
other, in some hope that maybe her body would at least stay a shot which might otherwise take an
important life. He was not holding a weapon, but he could produce them quickly.

A shield, that was what she was: weaponless and helpless, she could only be a shield.

Yet, if she was, she was a curious one. That look in his eyes as he simply stood with his arms
crossed and watched, and studied her, for a long twenty seconds or so of silence.

He looked so much more like he had years ago.

“You didn’t say anything about this.”

Her eyes flicked to the side just briefly - she couldn’t see Tracer but knew she was there, and could
tell from looking at him that that was his focus. What was there to say, though? What explanation
could there be? Of course she had not said anything about it.

“I… did not think you would understand,” she replied softly with a frown.

need two more minutes to get into position? You tell me, it happens. You need to sit out from an op,
for whatever reason - you tell me, it happens. You say we need to abort the mission, you tell me, it
happens. Doesn’t matter if I understand, you can always explain later. That’s how a team works.”

He shrugged. “Can’t say I’ll always be this bright and cheery about it.” He laughed briefly, the
sound trailing into his words, “In fact, I can guarantee that I won’t.” The humour dropped away
again as he met her eyes intensely once more. “I’ll rage, I’ll shout, I’ll tear up the goddamned walls,
but I will never betray you.”

She eyed him flatly. The foolish thing about trust was how cyclical it was. One could trust what one
could trust, but the untrustworthy things? Well, they were untrustworthy. There was no possibility
for transition there.

She couldn’t trust him. She couldn’t trust anyone, could she?

Tracer wasn’t so readily willing to accept what he said, and she spoke out sharply as she angled
forward around Widowmaker, “And what do you call all this, then, if not a betrayal, eh?”

“This…” he looked around slowly - the blood on the wall, cracked glass, the lump of flesh sitting in
a dish beside the operating table, and back to Oxton’s face, “was a misunderstanding. I played my
part in it and I know it was a big one, and I’m sorry for that. I can’t take it back, but I can apologize: I made this worse than it had to be.” Slowly, he sighed. “So did the rest of you. I could’ve been informed beforehand.”

Reaper’s eyes returned to Widowmaker’s, quickly, forestalling retorts. “I don’t hold it against you - not telling me,” he continued with a sigh. “I shut everything out. Can’t expect that anyone would have trusted me when I haven’t been trusting them, and it’s been years now since that. I’ve been…”

he chuckled with a nod, “a real asshole, and not in the way I want - don’t know what the doc shot me up with but I can tell you things seem a lot clearer and more stable than they usually do. Can’t say I dislike it,” he grumbled, shaking his head. “I’ll probably slip back sometimes, but if you stay open with me I’ll stay open with you. Trust me, and I’ll trust you.”

Widowmaker watched him through narrowed and speculative eyes. He certainly seemed to be acting differently. Some huge exaggeration of the slight manner he’d changed after Sombra’s foolish display. Openness, trust, all those silly notions in his words and in his eyes, but there was something entirely different about which she was curious. Trust, she could not trust - but a question, she could find an answer to.

“Why… did you come here?” Widowmaker’s eyes narrowed slightly, studying his for any hint of a lie, any hint of what truth she might find there.

Reaper paused for a moment, taking a small breath and sighing it out of his nose as he shook his head, just barely. Not enough to break eye contact. “Nobody gets left behind.”

She laughed at the answer provided. She laughed because it was the funniest, stupidest, most foolish thing in the world to say or think - she laughed because in comparison to ‘nobody gets left behind’, a cream pie in the face was an intellectual triumph without equal. He’d said it before, when Tracer was captured, and it had been just as laughable then but she’d been more concerned with upholding a facade.

Now, she could let out the laughter.

For his part, Reaper chuckled as well. “Yeah,” he spoke as if he could read her thoughts, “I don’t blame you for that either. I get it. Hell, up until about now, I was in the same place myself.”

“I was dead,” she raised an eyebrow, “and more importantly than that, you-”

“No body,” he interrupted her, “gets left behind. Not ever. Not you, not Sombra, not anyone on my team. Alive, dead, I don’t give a damn, nobody.” His voice growled more and more as he spoke, deep and harsh. “We’ve all been through it too many times already. Never again.”

She knew what he was referencing. She could see in his eyes the building coming down over him and nobody coming to lend a hand - or at least, that was what she saw at first. Then, though, something seemed to shift and there was a tiny dark shard of sympathy in his gaze.

A little fragment of sadness, as looked at her the way everyone had looked at Amélie when she was returned - except that, for them, that shard had floated in a sea of pity. They were all so terribly sorry over how they had failed her, and it had done nothing at all - it had not lessened her pain and it had not saved Gérard’s life, nor hers.

She hated that pity as much as she was able.

For him, though, there was no pity. That little shard of sadness instead glittered in swaths of anger in his eyes. She could see in that moment how hateful he was over it all, as well. Over abandonment.
Her laughter died. Her laughter and her humour, as surely as she had earlier that day - slain not by a bullet through the heart, but by the truth in his eyes.

He meant it. Somehow, he meant it, that she would never be left behind, and she couldn’t find it in herself to deny it.

A tiny nod was the only response from him, the only response to her silence, and she had nothing to do but return it and question her own mind for believing him. For something so foolish as trusting. The truth, though, was what it was. It never bent for any will in the world, and when it was known, it was inescapable.

She squeezed her arm around Tracer’s shoulders, drawing support in more than just a physical way. The foolish girl had been the first thing she’d trusted, perhaps, and that had not betrayed her. Even when things had seemed so sure to end poorly, they hadn’t - perhaps, then, that meant that the same could occur once again.

“I should be thanking you, Oxton,” Reaper shrugged slightly. “You did what I couldn’t, you saved her. Quick thinking, determination, yeah…”

He trailed off into a sighed chuckle as he met her eyes. Those qualities were exactly what had drawn him to her in the first place - along with maybe a little bit of hope that she’d be reliable in a way that others might not, that she’d be able and willing to see through some of Overwatch’s self-righteous veneer after her accident. That maybe a little bit of pain on her part would mean suspicion that could help him get to the bottom of everything that was going wrong.

It hadn’t come to pass, though. She’d been too far taken-in by them, the wool pulled thoroughly over her eyes, and things had been too far along, so he’d abandoned his thoughts of recruitment.

For a time.

Then the idea had come back with a vengeance, because everything came back with a vengeance after he’d donned the mask, after he’d left Gabriel Reyes behind. He’d still seen it in her eyes though, when she was trapped in that chair - that fire.

It was still there now, too, burning back at him, and he grinned at the sight of it. She’d be a hell of a teammate.

“You’ve always been capable, you’ve always deserved more than you got,” he mused, watching the anger flicker and shift in her eyes, reacting to his words. “This was a hell of an undertaking for you to leap at all on your own. You never did learn how to approach things cautiously, did you? Works out well though, because you don’t half-ass it. Always two feet first, and it saved a life today. Thank you.”

He held out a hand.

Tracer’s eyes flickered to it in shock before returning to his hatefully. “After all this,” she scoffed, her words almost shaking with anger as she instinctively tried to step out from behind Widdy but then stopped herself, stayed half-behind her shoulder. “You expect me to shake your bloody hand? After-after getting her killed, after interrogating me, after tracking me down to my sodding apartment and chasing me out, you-”

Reaper laughed briefly, nodding. “Oh, so you found out about that, huh? Well, fair enough - but I wasn’t tracking you to kill you. I wanted to recruit you.”

She looked back at him in as much offense as she could muster. He was mad, insane, he had to be,
there were no two ways about it. “You think I’d join you?” She hissed the words, shaking her head, but again he only laughed in response.

Not derisively, not a laugh of mockery or defiance, just… a laugh.

“No,” he waved a hand. “Hell no, not anymore. I can see it in your eyes, that determination, that fire - I always have. I respect your decision, but more than that…” he trailed off for a moment, studying her thoughtfully as he nodded. “More than that, I respect your conviction. Your loyalty. Hell, I respect you, Oxton.”

One of his hands rose to run over his head, overtop of the hood as if he was running fingers through his hair. “Even if I think some of your loyalty’s misplaced,” he admitted with a short sigh, “or even most of it, I respect that you have it. Don’t ever let that fire get extinguished, Oxton - not by me, not by Jack,” that name still came out slightly sneered, but he felt calmer about it than he normally would’ve, “not by anyone. Keep that flame going, because you can change the world with it, I know. You’ve got your own compass. Follow it.”

Reaper wasn’t sure quite what he’d expected to follow the admission that he’d only half-understood himself until his mind had become clearer. It had been so difficult to sort out between the anger and the hatred, everything twisting his mind and snarling up his thoughts, but he understood it now.

Tracer stared back at him in a kind of incredulous horror, hearing the words very differently despite the voice. The voice was still that dark and gravelly tone of Reaper, even if it was maybe a little less harsh than normal, but the words sounded more like ones she’d heard years ago after the Null Sector incident in King’s Row. Sounded a lot more like Gabriel Reyes.

Not that that changed any of what had happened, not in the slightest.

“Right now my compass is telling me to punch you right in the mouth,” she muttered darkly, and Widowmaker turned her head to make some small, slight noise, an indicator not to push things too far.

Reaper, though, chuckled and held out his arms to the sides. “Well, I’ll point out that I’ve got a few new holes in my outfit thanks to you already,” he quipped, “but, yeah, I’d say you’ve earned a shot or two. Go ahead.”

At first, she didn’t know whether it was a real offer or some kind of trap. Whether he wanted to be hit (in which case she almost wanted to avoid it just to spite him), or whether he just wanted her to swing so he could block or return a strike - she didn’t know what he wanted.

Pretty quickly, though, Tracer realized that she didn’t care. She didn’t give a damn what he wanted, because she knew what she wanted. She squeezed at Widowmaker’s hand held in hers - Widowmaker at first squeezed back, tightly, and then relaxed her hold with a slow sigh, and let go.

The Accelerator thrummed softly, as it always did, keeping her held to the moment. It didn’t take much to send it leaping into action, whirring up to speed, and she swung a fist at his face through the thick and treacly air. When she let her hold on time snap, she came blurring back into reality with her knuckles only a scant few inches away from his head which rocked back as her punch struck him at a speed that far exceeded what would normally be possible.

Reaper started to chuckle as the strike knocked his head back, breaking his nose and letting out a smattering of dark blood, but he would heal and the hunger was less than it had been in years, and there was something in offering her a little bit of catharsis. He’d always liked Oxton - it seemed like everybody did.
There was something, as well, in feeling like he was paying a bit of penance. He’d heard the pain in her voice after that gunshot - he’d felt some of it in his own gut, but nothing compared to her. The idea that Overwatch deserved to suffer for what they’d done to him, it was a two-way street. He deserved to pay for the pain he wrought as well.

Then she swung again, catching him across the jaw and twisting his head to the side, and he let out a laugh, held out an arm to block, but there wasn’t a third punch. She just stood there, taking a heavy breath and glaring, and stepping back to stand by Widowmaker’s elbow.

“Thanks for letting me have that, love,” she muttered softly, her hand seeking out Widowmaker’s as the rage started to drain from her - the sniper caught it, held it, but her gold eyes were fixed on him.

“What now?” Widowmaker barely moved otherwise, hardly breathing, her lips almost still despite her words.

It was probably the biggest question, and Reaper’s lips pursed up as he thought about it. “Now? All that’s moot anyway because, no offense meant, Oxton, but the position’s not available to you anymore. Only a limited number of slots on my team,” he murmured thoughtfully, his eyes fixed on Widowmaker’s, “and I’ve already got an offer to extend for this one.”

She was a weapon. For a time, that was all she had been, and although it had caused its issues, it was just a fact. Now, though - he saw the way her fingers intertwined with Oxton’s, he saw the way they looked at each other. The way Widowmaker looked back at him, too, unafraid and certain.

They’d taken a woman and hollowed her out and turned her into a puppet, but it would seem that Talon hadn’t done their job quite right. There was still a little something left, a little spark, a little glimmer.

…and she always had been capable.

Frighteningly so - that had been his biggest fear and concern in the whole venture, not just that somebody might have been tasked with killing him, but that it was her.

For some time now, he’d been torn up over the idea that he couldn’t trust her. She’d been perhaps the only trustworthy person in his life, and realizing just how much she could be turned against him while others still held her leash, still held the keys - it had nearly killed him. Or, to be more accurate, it had nearly killed Sombra.

Twice.

Still, the idea had been lingering and festering for a while now, ever since Sombra had started to worm her own way in, and now with some clarity he was able to see things more for what they were.

Reaper stretched out his hand, open, toward Widowmaker - holding her eyes as he did. “No more lies, no more hiding. I help you, you help me. Teammates. That’s my offer.”

Her gaze dropped to his proffered hand for an instant. “Talon-”

“Talon doesn’t need to know about all this,” he chuckled, “and those who find out? Well, we can deal with them one way or another. I’ll cover the Council’s concerns. Sombra can fix the data from your biometrics so that none of this little escapade shows up. One or two other small things and nobody will know.”

Widowmaker took a slow breath. Neither of them had blinked yet, and she could scarcely believe it
all. What he was offering, and the fact that it was him offering it. She felt compelled to accept, but it wasn’t an order, it was an offer.

Something which she was so scarcely given.

Still, she thought that she might be compelled, because it seemed like such a compelling offer. There certainly weren’t any other alternatives - she could try to strike out on her own, but she of all people knew of Talon’s ability to capture or destroy whatever they desired. She could try to plead aid from Tracer’s friends, but she had no desire at all to rest her fate on their failures once again. Nor to tolerate their pity.

Whether it was the truth, though, or her mind bending the truth because Talon had designed it that way, she could not say. Whether she was only perceiving this as the best option because it was Reaper, a high-ranking member within Talon, offering it. Whether she actually thought it was a good idea.

“My mind is hardly my own,” she murmured, still not blinking, still not breathing, Tracer’s hand held tight in hers. Could she deny it? Even though it was only an offer.

“This isn’t an order,” Reaper stressed. “As for the rest of it, moving forward?” He took a deep breath and exhaled heavily, tipping his head to the side. “Been a while since I’ve de-conditioned somebody, but it can be done and I have done it before. Probably at least some of what they did to you was out of Blackwatch’s book, anyway, they were getting fed things for a long time.”

He hesitated, withdrawing his hand slightly - not retracting it entirely, but pulling it back just a little. “It won’t be pleasant.”

“So little is,” she retorted with a chuckle, “mais…”

...but, it wasn’t her choice alone. As little as Widowmaker wished to deprive herself of any of what little free will she was offered, she realized that her fate was now intrinsically tied to Tracer’s, and to Emily’s as well, for better or for worse. She suspected that it was her better, and perhaps their worse, but the two had made their choices and they would continue to.

Now, though, was the time for hers. Her choice. She turned, supporting herself still with one hand against the operating table but growing stronger with every passing moment. “Cherie,” she murmured, squeezing Tracer’s hand to draw her attention.

Tracer looked confused, when she looked over - confused and a little bit hurt, and Widowmaker smiled softly as she leaned her hip on the table, freeing up her hand to stroke a thumb down Tracer’s cheek.

“You can’t-” Tracer swallowed, her other hand rising to meet Widdy’s, to hold it against the side of her face. That familiar touch of chill felt so good, so right after so long absent. “You can’t seriously be considering this, can you?”

Widowmaker let out a slow breath, then nodded slightly. She opened her mouth to cut off any immediate protests, shaking her head. “Cherie, you must understand, it…” she chuckled, “ah, that conversation we have not yet had, hmm? They… abandoned me, cherie. I needed them and they were not there.”

Tracer frowned slightly, but Widowmaker continued with a flat look on her face. “Not Overwatch, not the police, not the military, nobody. No one came. They all abandoned me, and…” she let the sentence trail off, because the only end was ‘I hate them for it’, but one who didn’t feel could hardly
hate, could they?

“You, did not.” She squeezed at Tracer’s hand, leaning in to kiss her softly, warm lips pressing against hers as she took a breath and then retreated, seeking out Tracer’s eyes, not exactly pleading with her gaze but something, trying to insinuate all of the genuine intensity she could. “You did not abandon me, and… and neither did he. There is much going on here, I know, and I know that you do not know it all. I will attempt to explain, but-”

Throughout, Tracer’s head shook softly, a constant expression of disbelief on her face. Of horror, as well, at the idea coming to mind again of all Widowmaker had gone through. Tracer didn’t know exactly what her capture had entailed, but it couldn’t have been pretty - and in the absence of facts, her mind filled in the worst things it could.

As it turned out, her mind’s worst imaginings were pretty horrendous indeed.

She wanted to say that they had been trying, Overwatch and all - had been doing everything they could in order to get her back - but she didn’t think it would make much of a difference. You couldn’t tell somebody they weren’t in pain; if they hurt, they hurt.

“I-” she cut Widowmaker off mid-word, half-lost in those beautiful eyes and hardly listening anymore, because she thought a whole lot about the situation. She thought that Talon was generally pretty bad, she thought that Reaper was one of the worst people she’d met regardless of whether he was experiencing some moment of clarity right now, she thought that this plan of going back with him sounded like a huge risk that might not be worth taking.

She thought that, if Talon wanted Widdy killed, it probably wouldn’t make a difference whether she was in a Talon base, or an Overwatch one, or in an apartment in the country somewhere. She thought that Reaper could have done a lot more than he had - could have killed Angela, and probably her, and Widowmaker and Sombra as well, but for whatever reason he hadn’t.

She thought a lot about the situation, but there was only one thing she knew. As she stretched up on her toes to capture Widdy’s mouth with hers, pulling her down a little into a firm kiss, there was only one thing she knew that sort of trumped all the rest.

“I never,” she whispered against Widowmaker’s lips, searching those wide golden eyes, “ever want to force you into something. I… I think you need to do what you need to do here, love, and whatever it is?” She squeezed at the sniper’s hand with a soft smile, “I’ll be here for you.”

She had a lot of thoughts about the situation. She had a lot of hopes. At the same time, she knew that this wasn’t her thing, because she didn’t know everything Widowmaker had been through. Didn’t know all that her time with Talon or with Reaper had entailed, didn’t know what made them tick or drove their hands.

Widowmaker returned Tracer’s smile, stroked at her cheek; she took a breath and turned away, looking to Reaper with a firm nod. She was glad not to be forced.

“I refuse.”

He looked surprised. Just a little bit, just deep in his eyes as she watched, as he still held out his hand.

Then, he nodded. “Alright. That’s fair. I…” he sighed, shaking his head and dropping his hand, “I can find someone else for what I need. I don’t know where you’ll turn now, but I wish you luck in it. Tell me if you need help, if there’s anything I can do, but I won’t hold it against you if you’d rather just contact Sombra.”
She’d saved his life, repeatedly, and he knew it, but it wasn’t just about repaying a debt. Even if it was, that wasn’t the debt he would hold himself to - it would have been a far older promise of sorts to a man named Gérard and a woman named Amélie. It wasn’t about repayment, though, him offering to help however he could - and it couldn’t be, because in time that would end. Eventually, the debt would be paid off, and then the blades would turn again.

It was about trust, about team, about support, and even if he’d been doubting it lately and even if she was going off in another direction now, Widowmaker had been part of his team. She deserved her best shot at whatever she wanted.

He wasn’t sure what her chances were, but it was difficult to think of something she wouldn’t be able to attain. Realistically, he was more worried about his own plans moving forward, but Jesse had shown some hint of promise and there were perhaps one or two others. The team could still be filled. Widowmaker was off the list, and Oxton as well, but there were more names below them.

Eventually, he might even find what he was looking for.

With a small smile, Widowmaker nodded, watching him intently as he stood with a studious look. With a few words, in just a moment, he could turn it all on its head. Make her do anything he chose - follow him, or murder Tracer or even herself, she was quite sure. He held total power, and for him to have ever pretended otherwise was foolish. It was almost an insult, in fact - to pretend to be granting her free will.

A dog was never free while the owner held a hand on the leash, even if the leash was not being pulled on. A slave was always a slave, even if their owner invited them in for dinner and dressed them up nicely.

When it could end in an instant, it was not true freedom. If she only had her own will as long as he permitted her will, that was the same as nothing at all, because the instant he wished something it would be the case. Free will when permitted was not free will at all.

That had been the whole problem to begin with.

Yet, he didn’t force her hand. Didn’t speak, didn’t issue her codes, didn’t get angry or pull on her leash, her noose. He only offered her another nod, and then turned to leave.

She fell into step at his elbow, tugging Tracer gently along with her. She still couldn’t walk easily on her own - her mouse quickly slipped an arm around her back and took one in turn over her shoulders, but let Widowmaker set the pace.

Reaper made it two steps before he stopped, but still said nothing and didn’t look over. Widowmaker halted when he did, silent - he took another pace, and so did she, halted and she followed suit, and then he turned to face her with a chuckle as he put two and two together.

“So that was your idea of a test, huh? See whether I’d force you into it?”

She raised an eyebrow with a slight smirk, declining to explicitly confirm his quite correct guess, and then shrugged. “Alors, all of my belongings are at Talon facilities anyway. Well,” she let out a laugh, “most, perhaps, but still...” a brief sigh interrupted her words and she shook her head. It was good that he gave her the choice, but the world didn’t. “I have lost my old life. I have fought hard to carve out this new one. I will not lose again.”

Nodding, Reaper held out his hand with a grin which only widened when she took it and shook it. “Welcome to the team.”
When he stepped away, though, she didn’t follow immediately - she hung back, turning and leaning down to press lips briefly to Tracer’s. “Ma souris, I know this is not what you want for me, but-”

“All I want for you,” Tracer interrupted softly with a slight frown on her lips and worrying her brow as she shook her head, “is for you to be as safe and as free and as happy as possible. I…” she sighed as she looked over, her eyes fixing on Reaper’s back as his hole-ridden cloak swirled behind him with the measured motion of his march.

He seemed different. Sounded and looked different, but more than that, he felt different. He still got under her skin, still made her spine crawl a little, but it wasn’t in the same foreboding way. It was, in some ineffable way, less dark than it had been.

She still couldn’t push from her mind all that he had done, but some part of her distantly realized that this was hardly the first time - Mondatta had been a huge issue at the start of her talking with Widdy, and now she hadn’t thought about it in months.

Reaper did at least seem to be legitimately apologetic, and self-aware. He seemed to be concerned about Sombra, and he’d seemed quite ready to accept Widdy’s refusal - even though he clearly hadn’t been happy about it. Even though he’d clearly expected her to say yes the way she always did.

Tracer didn’t know if that was enough, though, or if any of it was even really real. He seemed different, and she did want Widdy to have whatever was best for her. “I dunno if this is really that,” she confessed softly, a smile finding her lips at Widdy’s soft chuckle.

“Nor do I,” Widowmaker admitted, “mais, this… is what I know. Working with him, with Sombra, is what I know. That life, such as it is, and… perhaps, I think,” she murmured thoughtfully, “this is for me, as being with me was for you and notre cerise. Were I to mean you harm, you could hardly fight it, so… why not grasp at every benefit you can? Alors, I will do the same in this situation.”

Tracer nodded a little, the crown of her head nuzzling up against Widdy’s jaw as they held each other close, partly to keep the sniper standing upright but mostly just because they wanted to be close, wanted to hold each other.

The whole thing still felt only half-real, but somehow solidly familiar. Much like a dream or a moment of deja vu, that bizarre and ethereal sense of knowledge without knowing where the knowledge came from.

“He has always been fiercely protective of that which he chooses to protect,” Widowmaker sighed into Tracer’s hair, stroking at it with one hand which was still weak but regaining strength.

“Formidable, too. The only concern in his suspicions was what measures he would be capable of, so if I can gain him as some form of ally…”

Tracer took a deep breath and sighed it out, sinking into the embrace as much as she dared whilst still providing support. She wanted to relax entirely, to sag and let Widdy hold her close, or even carry her, but she couldn’t. Not yet, at least; the sniper was still lacking much of her normal strength.

Maybe that was part of it, or even most of it - some protective urge or sympathetic reflex prompting her to give Widowmaker whatever she asked for, whatever she wanted. Maybe she was just tired as the day’s outbursts grew higher and higher in number, and shorter and shorter in duration. Even she only had so much energy and it had come out in spurts today, and that always made it all the harder to deal with.

Whatever the motivation, though, and whatever the reason, the forefront emotion in her heart was a
weary sort of happiness, the first thought in her mind a wary kind of hopefulness, and her only real desire was to curl up in bed with Widdy and Em and a bucket of sorbet for a week.

“S’long as I get you, I don’t think I give a monkey’s about anything else much,” she sighed, squeezing her arms a little tighter around Widdy. Just to have her back felt incredible, and while she didn’t trust Reaper as far as she could throw him, at least he wasn’t being openly hostile at the moment.

“Nothing will separate us again, ma souris.” Widowmaker kissed at the top of her head, leaning back and encouraging Tracer’s softly-smiling face to tilt up to hers. “This, I promise you. I will not be taken away, and neither will you - not by him, nor anyone else.”

It had always been so hard to deny those sharp golden eyes, and Tracer’s heart sped up at their intense gaze as it seemingly always had. “It’s bloody good to have you back, love,” she sighed in a mixture of awe and relief.

Widowmaker nodded with a smile, stroking at her mouse’s cheek. “It is good to be back, as well - mais, let us go see how the annoying one is doing, hmm?”

Tracer laughed briefly as they walked over in Reaper’s path, toward Sombra and Mercy. “You know, you used to call me that. Careful now or I’ll start getting jealous.”

With a chuckle, Widowmaker squeezed lightly at one of her shoulders. “Oh, do not worry, ma souris. You are still quite annoying when you put your mind to it…”

---

Pharah grunted when the radio chatter grew more heated, something about movement and what they thought might be a weapon. Another one, at least.

She was trying to keep the team slow, for two reasons. Firstly, Angela, and secondly because she legitimately was concerned about their safety. The three holding the front doors hadn’t caused any fatalities - yet - but that wasn’t to say anything about the inside of the building, and she didn’t know who else was involved here.

Angela was likely a captive, she’d decided by this point - taken from her camp by some terrorist cell in order to carry out some probably-nefarious operation for them. Although, she discarded that idea the instant it occurred to her. Angela wouldn’t do that, not something nefarious.

More likely, the terrorists just had a few dying members and had recruited Angela to help. At gunpoint.

Pharah’s teeth ground against each other as she wished for the fiftieth time that Angela would take her own security and safety a little more seriously, but that had always been a point of contention between them. Pharah thought Mercy took unnecessary risks. Mercy thought Pharah applied unnecessary force.

It was one thing to disagree over dinner though, or cuddled up watching a movie, and entirely different to know that somewhere on the seventh floor Angela was doing something and Pharah had to keep her team away for fear that Angie would get caught in the crossfire, while worrying the whole time that being away would mean Angie’s harm at the hands of her captors.
Needless to say, she was on edge. “Clear,” she called out, sending it over the radio. “South side?”

“South side’s clear,” T’chou returned over the comm.

“Head down to the fifteenth.”

Her and Zao were at the Northern stairwell, with the other three at the Southern. They took their time, clearing the rooms - encountering mostly the few worried employees and patients who remained in the building which had been mostly cleared. They were directed to the rooftop for evacuation where possible.

A line of text scrolled across the bottom of her visor’s HUD. “Chica, you don’t know me, but I’m helping keep the angel’s halo nice and pristine here, free of dirt and damage - so maybe you and your little amigos take advantage of the distraction out front and slow down for a minute. Thanks, chica.”

The radio calls grew suddenly frantic, sharp calls for assistance and shouts that would cut off halfway through - Pharrah spun to a window and tilted her head sharply to see out and down. A bright and instantaneous flash seemed to fell a pair of soldiers, but they still moved on the ground - slowly, sluggishly, as if stunned.

“Shit,” Pharrah muttered, her jaw working as she chewed on the word like a general on a cigar.

The radio-chatter rose higher. Several units from out front had been called away to deal with issues elsewhere across the city, fires or accidents or other problems, and the lessened presence meant a heightened concern for all the people left there, and then there was their name as the radio started to call for “those damn Helix flyboys.”

“Well that’s rude,” T’chou responded over their comm channel - not where the various security and emergency forces could hear them, but just the five members of the team.

“Who wants to prove them wrong?” Pharrah raised an eyebrow, a smirk tugging at her lips as every member of the team immediately sounded off in the affirmative. “Good, that makes five of us. Zao and Turner, hold positions in the stairwells. Nobody goes past you, up or down - I don’t want this to lose our progress on the floors we’ve passed. This is all pointless if we let it go slack now, but- oh god,” she cut off with a sigh as a police officer tried to scramble over his own cruiser and was stunned by a grenade as he did, tripping over the lights and tumbling off of the car comically.

“Yeah, they really need our help out there,” Pharrah muttered. “Bjornsson and T’chou, to the roof, jet up the stairwell. I’ll meet you there and we’ll see if we can’t show them what a few damn Helix flyboys can accomplish, shall we?”

Brief cheers were the response as she pushed off of the window, jogging the short distance to the stairwell - Zao was already there on the other side of the door, easily blocking anyone’s passage as Pharrah set a boot up onto the railing and jumped into the empty column at the stairwell’s centre. She hit her jets and started to ascend.

Having the two set up was important, because she really was concerned for her team’s safety. She didn’t know who else was involved in this - who had sent her that message, for instance - but she didn’t trust them as far as she could spit. As long as her team kept the situation locked down, though, nothing would get the drop in them.

“Helix is responding,” she stated over the standard radio channels so the forces outside would hear. “Stay clear of hostiles. Arriving as quickly as we can.”
It didn’t take long to reach the top floor, and she kept her jet wash from peeling too much paint on the way up, but a little was unavoidable. The exhaust whipped one man’s long hair around his head and Pharah had scarcely enough time to recognize him and snap off an apologetic salute as she continued to rise. “Sorry, Ambassador,” she called to him as she rocketed upward.

What he was in the hospital for, she couldn’t guess, and she didn’t care. He was one of the reasons Helix was even here, and while she wasn’t a diplomat or a politician, it had been stressed to her that the image she presented was the public image of Helix.

Repeatedly, it had been stressed, and emphatically too.

At the top floor, she nudged the roof access door open with her hip as she readied her rifle. “Sound off.”

Turner’s voice was first. “South stairwell’s good.”

“North stairwell is solid, boss,” Zao responded.

“Sparrows one and two are ready to fly,” T’chou called out loud from across the rooftop with a laugh.

“Wait, am I number one or number two?” Bjornsson’s question came over the radio, but they weren’t too far off and Pharah could easily see T’chou punch him in the shoulder.

“Alright team, in the air and let’s see what we’re dealing with.” Pharah spoke on the jog, heading directly toward the edge of the rooftop and not slowing for a second - she sped up, in fact, to a sprint, and then flung herself headlong over the precipice.

That first moment of a fall, first instant of a flight, was always a glorious one. When the pit dropped out of her stomach and got replaced with that high, keening sensation of excitement and adrenaline. Her heart leapt up higher in her chest, a wide grin fixed on her lips under her visor as she fell headfirst toward the ground.

Not just fell, in fact. She lit her jets and propelled herself, plummeting toward the ground far faster than mere gravity could have managed; T’chou and Bjornsson followed suit, and they all studied the situation below.

Down on the ground, Junkrat was holding a launcher of some sort which seemed to be dispensing those stunning explosives, whatever they were. He was far out down the front walkway, a long way away from the sheltered area around the front door.

“Stay clear of the doors - that hook’s vicious,” Pharah reminds the other two as Junkrat launched off another explosive. “Sparrows, knock him around. Try to jostle the weapon loose and I’ll grab it.”

They sent back affirmations over the radio, lessening their speed to let her pull ahead as she slung her rocket launcher over her back. She wouldn’t be needing it for the QC to come.

As she shot down toward the ground, she counted the floors and tried to look over at number seven, but everything was moving too quickly for her to see anything of use. Her eyes snapped back to the front as the ground approached. Five, four, three - she flipped around and hit her jets again to slow herself before she touched down.

Her feet still struck the pavement quite heavily as she sank into a kneeling position, and maybe she’d let things go a little longer than they needed to. For dramatic effect. There was a tactical reason as well, though: distraction. As she slammed down with a crack and a clank, the servo-driven joints of
the Raptora suit absorbing the impact without damage, Junkrat whirled to face her.

“Oh, a birdy!” He cackled, hefting the weapon - it didn’t look like one of his. It was clean, for starters, and looked very deliberate in gleaming white and silver. “Say cheese!”

She suspected that he was just saying the first thing that popped into his head, but it didn’t matter anyway as a concussive rocket - Bjornsson’s - landed just behind Junkrat and sent him flying through the air.

Pharah’s jets flung her forward and up, her armoured hands clutching at the odd weapon. Junkrat’s grip was surprisingly tight, though, for his chaotic manner - her momentum carried the pair of them off of the path to flip over a low hedge and tumble out on the grass.

“Leggo!” Junkrat shouted. “It’s my present!” He pulled on the launcher but failed to gain any ground, then let go with one hand and swung a punch at Pharah’s head.

Unfortunately, he’d chosen the wrong hand. His skin-and-bones fist slammed ineffectually against Pharah’s helmet - at least, ineffectually for her.

He noticed some effects, though, definitely. A yowl ripped from his throat as he recoiled and Pharah moved to kick him off. She succeeded, but he leapt back onto her with a vengeance before she was able to get to her feet, swinging this time with his metal prosthetic.

“I said it’s mine!” He snarled and wrapped his legs around her torso, trying to wrest the weapon from her grip.

“Get off of me, you lunatic.” Pharah hissed as she rolled, knocking him against the ground, but he barely even seemed to notice. He wasn’t having any real effects against her armour but he was doing a decent job of infringing on her motion, and he even managed to activate the weapon and send off another stunning explosive wildly.

Her eyes stung from the flash and she grunted, activating her jets on instinct. They weren’t certified for use against the ground, but it was grass and dirt anyway and she didn’t care - they tore up huge rooster-tails of earth as the two of them slid rapidly across the hospital’s front lawn.

Junkrat, wrapped around her like some absurd marsupial, let out a gleeful shout and a whoop, while still trying to pull the launcher free of her grip. Pharah cut her jets and pushed back with her legs, sending them into a tumble.

They separated, the weapon flying free as well - Pharah regained her footing almost instantly but was astonished to see that somehow Junkrat was already upright, but she supposed that he must have had some good balance to carry on like he did.

He leapt at the launcher and she decided to forego that, leaping for him instead and letting her jets roar at her back. “Bjornsson, T’chou, secure the objective!”

Pharah caught Junkrat around the middle, propelling them both in a low arc over the hedges to the lawn on the other side. Doubtlessly, the hospital would be filing a minor grievance with Helix over the damages, but Pharah didn’t care about that.

Although she suspected that she might have trouble suppressing her rolled eyes during the inevitable chewing-out in the debrief.

Junkrat’s pegleg caught on the ground, either intentionally or by accident, and sent them twirling. Jet-propelled cartwheels threw them across the yard and set Pharah’s head whirling. She shook it to try
to clear it, getting to her feet a little more unsteadily this time.

Again, though, somehow, Junkrat was already upright and stable. He jabbed at the dirt with his pegleg like an impatient horse, but Pharah just grinned. If he wanted to go, she wouldn’t stop them.

For a moment, though, they stood like duellists in an old movie, tensely waiting for the other to make the first move.

Junkrat was expectedly first. He swung a hand by his belt and pulled a grenade from it, and Pharah crouched and leapt forward underneath the arc of the thrown projectile. This time, though, she didn’t collide with his middle - he jumped, planting a foot in the small of her back to leap up with a giggle and left her to spin around and catch herself upright.

A pegleg caught the side of her helmet and she spun away from it, lashing out with a foot of her own and hitting his ankle - with a yelp, Junkrat fell, but caught on her armour and swung around to pull her to the ground as well.

They fell on each other with fists and shouts. A strike caught her jaw underneath the visor of her helmet and she rolled, planting an elbow deep in his gut; he smeared a handful of dirt over her golden visor in an attempt to blind her and she hopped briefly into the air, jet-propelled ten feet or so before falling back down knee-first.

Junkrat rolled out of the way, though, leaving her to land in the dirt, but she didn’t overly care. Not overly. Her main role was as a distraction right now, anyway, letting Bjornsson and T’chou (who she could see in glimpses as blue flashes in the background) recover the weapon.

They seemed to be encountering problems of their own given that they hadn’t finished yet, but they also hadn’t called for help yet and she couldn’t spare the concentration to assess the situation any more accurately because Junkrat was sprinting at her with blazing eyes again.

He hissed as he grabbed at her armour and managed to find a wire that he yanked loose, disabling her wrist-launcher, but Pharah didn’t really care. It could easily be fixed and she wasn’t going to use it in these close quarters, anyway - he was really only being an annoyance.

One hell of an annoyance, though, she had to give him that. He spat strings of words that were entirely nonsensical, but certainly didn’t sound like compliments, and all the while he kept kicking and punching and never seeming much to care about the hits she landed.

Actually, Pharah was starting to wonder if he even felt pain anymore, and suspected that he maybe didn’t. Probably nerve damage from all of the explosions and fire and such.

Still, she could tolerate an annoyance, and even started to enjoy herself a little more - as she ducked underneath Junkrat’s swing and threw a jab of her own that he also managed to dodge, she let out a chuckle. As he spun and speared with his pegleg, she deflected it with a forearm and a laugh. As he threw a handful of dirt like sand at her face, she smirked and let it just bounce off before diving back in again.

The fight settled into almost an easy rhythm. It wasn’t predictable by any stretch of the imagination, and she needed to stay on her toes because he kept trying to produce more explosives. She was starting to wonder where he kept them all, given that he had no shirt and no backpack, when her radio crackled.

“Pharah! Secured - disengaging!”

It was all she needed to hear, and she let out a triumphant laugh and punched at the air. “Yes! Hey,”
she caught Junkrat’s fist and twisted, wrenching his arm around and sending him to one knee. A trick her mother had taught her over a decade ago, but a useful one.

“Thanks for the dance, but,” she smirked, “I’ve really gotta jet.”

He spun the rest of the way around, relieving the tension she’d instilled in his arm and trying to come back with a kick but she caught that too, and then set her jets roaring again. They both shot forward and up, and she let go just as they approached the entrance of the hospital.

“Special delivery!” She laughed as she flung Junkrat away toward his huge compatriot, who then had a choice - catch his boss, or fling his hook.

Pharah hadn’t expected Roadhog to be quite as agile as he was. He caught Junkrat with one hand and flung out the hook with the other as Pharah twisted, boosting with her afterburners to escape the area.

The hook caught her around the waist, tightly, her jets straining for a second before he started to reel her quickly back in - then, though, a blue flash knocked both Roadhog and Junkrat back toward the doors and Pharah felt a tug on each of her shoulder pauldrons.

T’chou and Bjornsson had dropped down to her level, each one grabbing one of the large loops over her shoulders and adding their jets’ force to hers - she slipped free of the hook and they streaked skyward, all laughing and cheering.

“Well-placed shot there, with the knock-rocket,” Bjornsson commented.

T’chou laughed and nodded. “Well, it was either that or jump in the way, and I figured Pharah’d yell at me if I did the latter!”

“I would,” Pharah confirmed as they reached the roof again. “As it is, I’ll get you a lollipop. Bjornsson, let me see that weapon - you and T’chou can head back down and continue with the sweep, I’ll join you in a few minutes.”

He handed over the launcher and turned away, walking alongside T’chou toward the stairwells. She nudged him with her elbow. “I get a lollipop! You hear that?”

Pharah chuckled as they split off, each heading to one of the stairwells to return to their previous duty. They’d bought some time, at least - even if she still didn’t know who had hacked into Helix’s systems and her visor to send her that message.

She couldn’t exactly bring herself to feel grateful about it, either, but if it meant Angie would get out of this one safe…

...well, that would be worth it. That was her only real concern here right now - her friends and their safety. Bjornsson, Turner, T’chou, Zao, and probably mostly Angela.

Her eyes studied the peculiar machine, clearly a high accomplishment for whoever had made it. It looked strangely familiar in ways she couldn’t quite place at first - the smooth, flowing panels and the wires all bundled together tightly in conduit sheaths.

It wasn’t something she’d ever seen before, and that immediately meant it might be of value. Maybe Helix wouldn’t be chewing her out for tearing up the lawn and ruffling the Ambassador’s hair, after all - because if she could provide them this and they could make something of it, that would be a whole different story.
A little grin found her lips as she hefted the weapon and carried it with her toward the stairwell.

She didn’t have any way of messaging the person back that the sweep was continuing, but she didn’t really want to talk to them anyway. She wanted to talk to Angie - but, she had to settle for a text message.

“Heading down again - fifteenth and counting. You might as well tag a dessert onto that dinner.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay! Alrighty, well, we get now to something that I've been honestly a little worried about for a long time. See, when I started this all, I had the story in mind - an outline, of course, and this was where it led. I hadn't read other fics, I didn't know the community's established ideas on things.

One thing that seems to me to be so commonplace as to be almost ubiquitous? The concept of freeing Widowmaker from Talon - distancing her from all of that, and perhaps bringing one or two other characters, Sombra or Reaper, with her. When it comes down to it, though, people seem to almost always get her away from Talon. I don’t know that I've seen one, like this, where she stays in despite the changes happening.

I think it's backed up, though. She's got a bit of a history of bemoaning things but not necessarily actually doing much to change it - I think she's had things so out-of-control for so long that what she wants as much as anything else is some stasis and some stability. I think she'd rather be steady in a subpar situation than tenuous in a more enjoyable one, at least in my interpretation of things here, and I think that's come out before: her fear over things changing with Tracer and with Emily, over losing Sombra, her own feelings regarding her feelings, heh. She gives herself a moment by the graveside, but she doesn't actually really do too much to change it - that's been commented on by a few folks, actually, heh, and uh... I guess all I can say is that, even though it might've been (and might still be) frustrating, it was leading here.

Now - this isn't to say that Widowmaker will be unchanged here, at all. Not in the tiniest bit! She's changed hugely and that'll be clear, but she will be ostensibly staying within Talon. Now, at the same time, she'll be less and less working for them, and more and more working with Sombra and Reaper instead. The three of them (and perhaps a few others) are going to be diverging in some ways from what could be seen as Talon's established vision.

Okay, so - on to Reaper, then. I've mentioned before that this isn't a redemption story for him, and it really isn't, and I think if there's any doubt over that it'll evaporate next chapter (when he is a big huge dick to Mercy). What this is, though, I think, is an exploration. I want him to have a reason, something greater than just "nah I wanna be a dick to Overwatch" because that's not very compelling to me. Betrayal, though? I think that's more compelling. I think it lets me raise some interesting questions about justice and righteousness, too, and payback.

I was so glad in this chapter to finally again get to write some softer moments between Tracer and Widowmaker. I think Widdy asking her, and talking to her before making her decision - I think that's huge, because it's never happened before, and it's arguably
been a crux of many of the problems that have been faced. E.g., Widdy's recent (if temporary) death! So, I think that's progress.

I think there are enough characters on-screen that it's a little tough to have them all active all the time. Hopefully I've done a decent enough job of establishing them otherwise - what everyone's doing while they're not actively talking or on screen - and I'm also, as you've noticed I'm sure, jumping around in time a lot more. Some chapters are days or weeks, and I've spent the last several chapters on only ten or twenty minutes.

Whew. Okay, I've been waiting a long time to be writing this all - I knew this semi-endpoint stuff would be really important, and I've been thinking about it so much over the past year as I was writing the rest of it. I think it's coming out pretty well, overall! I always worry, though, of course. I hope I don't lose any readers over these plot developments, heh, but if I do? I understand that - I want you all to read the stories you like, the things that give you what you want, whether that's smiles or tears or that electric shiver down your spine; whatever you want, I want you to have it, and I hope I can provide it somewhere, even if it's not in this story, but either way I understand. I hope you're liking this, but more than that, I hope you're liking something - anything. I hope you're having a great day!

(Running up on the character limit so I need to stop here, but I'll happily talk about more in the comments! Ask any question you have, as always, and yell at me for what you didn't like XD)

Come back next week when Reaper is a tremendous ass to Mercy, but he does explain some of why - or gets her to explain. More of the backstory of his betrayal and Overwatch's fall is revealed, and a tantalizing proposition for the future leads him to a realization he'd never expected: the knowledge that somebody actually feels bad over what happened to him. Will it be enough to change anything? Yes. Will it change things for the better? Well, that depends a lot on your definition.
Once More, for the People in the Back(story)

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Reaper finally opens up about what happened in Overwatch, at least to an extent - he has Angela reveal her part in it, and then, he decides on her punishment. However, the situation isn’t as he thought it was. Things have changed, and the truth is so far from what he expected.

JFL Summary: Reaper and Mercy are going to live, forever, together! Kinda. Widowmaker's back to stealing hearts - again - and Sombra's just cracking jokes and eating candy. Tracer kinda just wants to get out.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: emotional pain! Mostly on Mercy's part, some on Reaper's. No deaths! No dismemberments! No injuries of any kind! Yay!

Previous Chapter Summary: Widowmaker, despite having decided that self-sacrifice was perhaps a cruel kind of aid to offer, did just the same again. Or, at least, she tried; Reaper didn't react in hostility, though, he didn't try to shoot Tracer or anyone else. He explained, in fact, that he'd never wanted to - death had never been his goal for Lena Oxton, but rather, recruitment. Now, though, that's all changed, and while he's willing to overlook everything that's happened and give her a get-out-of-jail-free card, Reaper no longer thinks she's a good fit for the team. Instead, he offers the slot to Widowmaker. He said that they can cover these issues within Talon, ensure nobody finds out to report it - and he promised that he can break the conditioning that controls her mind. Even though it won't be pleasant. Widowmaker talked with Tracer for a few moments and then, refused his offer. She knew that he still could say his override codes and give her no choice in the matter, but he didn't - he accepted, offered his help, and walked away. With her test complete (and passed) she followed him. Elsewhere, Sombra sent Pharah a message, instructing her to take advantage of a distraction to slow her team. A fight with Junkrat ensued, during which Pharah managed to wrest control of Symmetra's weapon. She resolved to turn it over to Helix in hopes of placating her superiors over the incident, but as long as fatalities stay at zero, she didn't think there would be much of an issue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Reaper felt, if not light and happy, per se, at least closer to those than he had in years. There had been little moments in the past - on the rooftop with Reinhardt kneeling, or pulling the trigger and seeing the muzzle-flash light up Jack’s expression of pain. Those aside, though, he’d been going through years and years of grimness and bleakness. He still wasn’t happy, but he was glad that Widowmaker was going to be on his side in this one. He
was glad that Sombra was, too. He appreciated the opportunity to think and *breathe* without that
grating itch in his spine.

It wasn’t even spoiled when he looked at Ziegler’s studious face of doctorly concern - he could
openly think about her and all she’d done over the years, and sure, he wasn’t *happy* about it. He was
pissed off about it, in fact, but it didn’t ruin him.

He thought that he might - *might* - even be able to bring himself to thank her for this.

Eventually.

She still needed to suffer, though. As surely as he’d deserved Tracer breaking his now-re-healed
nose, Angela deserved to suffer. She was high up the list, indeed. In fact, she was third.

Technically, fourth, but that was a thought for a different time. Something that was more of a quirk
than a real plan. Probably impossible, anyway. Regardless, it didn’t matter.

“Laying down on the job again, huh?” Reaper nudged at Sombra’s shoulder, with her stretched out
on the operating table.

She laughed, more fully than she’d been able to a few minutes ago before Mercy had got to work.
The wounds healed quickly, and all but the worst was gone now. “Ahh, you know me boss. Lazy,
lazy bitch.”

One of her slightly-bloody hands slipped into a jacket pocket and produced a little plastic tube full of
brightly coloured candies, flipping the lid with her thumbnail and tipping the tube back into her
mouth.

Reaper scoffed as she crunched down on the candies, and Sombra quirked an eyebrow. “Oh, oh
sorry,” she grinned, holding out the snack. “Did you *want* some?”

“There’s something wrong with you,” he muttered back as he shook his head, but she just laughed
and nodded, and he was glad he hadn’t ruined this all in a moment of thoughtlessness and stupidity.
As hesitant as he’d been at the start, and as annoying as she often was, he had to admit that he’d
grown to sort of like the annoyances.

Widowmaker approached, drawing up to his elbow and still supported on Tracer. She sighed down
to Sombra. “Ah, so it seems you will survive, then.” Another breath, another sigh, a soft smile.
“What a pity.”

“Yeah, pity ‘cause you didn’t get to do it, maybe,” Sombra quipped, then frowned slightly at herself.
“Wait, I dunno if that works. Ah, who gives a shit,” she shrugged against the table. “I hear you’re on
the team now, eh? Welcome to the Gabe-won’t-tell-us-shit club!”

Sombra held out a hand for Widowmaker to shake, which she did with a roll of her eyes even as
Reaper groaned.

“Yeah, ha ha dumbass, I just couldn’t tell you earlier. Wasn’t safe. Hell, I can’t tell you some of it
even now but- oh, how convenient…”

A wide but twisted grin crossed his lips as he looked up and away from Sombra, locking his gaze on
Mercy instead - she looked practically the same as she had back then, not aged a day since it had all
gone wrong.

“Seems to me like she’s pretty stable, doc, which means - congratulations! You’re allowed to talk
again!” He chuckled with almost a sneer, shaking his head. “Let’s see how much you can remember, shall we? Or did you ever even look at the files?”

Angela’s gaze diverted away from a screen for a moment, fixing on his - Sombra was stable, and didn’t require any real work on her part anymore. The shrapnel had been minimal and easily removed, and the wound was now rapidly healing; her work was done and it was only a matter of time, now.

Still, she didn’t want to meet his eyes for long. She was both saddened and scared by what she saw there.

Tracer’s fist clenched up weakly at the way he was taunting her friend, but she swallowed it down - as long as he kept it from being openly hostile, at least. Insults seemed to just be a way of life for all the Talon operatives, so she could let that slide. Barely. For now.

Mercy shook her head slightly, and Reaper tipped his off to the side. “Oh, no? No what - no, you didn’t look? Or no, you don’t remember? Or no, you don’t want to say, hmm? Don’t want to admit to what you did?”

“Please stop,” Mercy whispered, still focusing on her screen rather than him, trying to ignore and avoid the pointed words and sharp tone.

“No,” he sneered in mockery. “What the hell makes you think I’d do that?” Reaper laughed, crossing his arms. “Oh, I might be having the best damn day of the past decade because of whatever the hell you did, doc - and don’t think I’m letting that go, either - but that doesn’t mean I’m going to drop all the shit you put me through. I’m never forgiving what you or any of them did to me, not until you’ve paid the price.”

She spoke, too softly to be heard, and he leaned in and cupped a hand to his ear. “Hmm? What- what was that? Really, after it all, you’re choosing this moment to shut up?” He recoiled, face twisting in disgust that dripped from his voice as well. “That’s all you had to do in the fucking first place.”

“Lay off of ‘er,” Tracer grunted, shaking her head, unwilling to let it go on further. “She’s done enough today and she deserves-”

“She deserves,” Reaper cut her off firmly but not sharply, “a whole hell of a lot, Oxton, and don’t push it just because I’m in a good mood - but, fine, fair. I’ll let you be the judge. Go ahead and ask her.”

Tracer’s eyes flicked over to Angela’s, pained and sad, and she didn’t consider it for even a moment. “No. Forget that bollocks - I’m not your messenger or your lackey! I don’t even know why I bothered asking Morrison in the first place, but I’m sure as hell not throwing more shit on Ange’s shoulders, today of all days!”

As she took a deep breath and Widowmaker made a slight, slow noise, Tracer gritted her teeth. She couldn’t remember the last time she’d eaten, and spinning through time always took its toll - she’d been taxing the Accelerator nearly to its limits for most of the past hour or so and everything about her was complaining.

Muscles, bones, joints, her mind and her heart and then ineffable parts which didn’t even have names, her soul or whatever you wanted to call it, everything was stressed. Her body had experienced so much time that didn’t match up with reality, it might take her a few days at this rate to
get back on a half-believable sleep and eating schedule.

Still, she knew she had to try to hold back more than that if they wanted to make it through this. As much as she hated it, he was probably right that she shouldn’t push the point. It was too late to go back on her words now though, so she just glared and awaited what his reaction was going to be.

If it took letting him get a punch or two in on her in turn, she was happy to give that up in trade. In fact, if that could work, there was a whole lot worse she wanted to say to him and would gladly pay him back in bruises.

He didn’t hit her, though. Didn’t turn and snap or yell - he did turn to face her, but fairly slowly, and with a slight grin. A slight grin and narrow, intense eyes. “You actually asked him about it? Swiss Headquarters?”

After a moment’s pause and a dry-mouthed swallow, Tracer couldn’t think of any reason to not confirm it, so she nodded slightly.

Widowmaker shifted on her feet, testing her strength which continued to return. She no longer needed to support herself so fully, so she shifted from Tracer’s side to almost behind her, wrapping arms around her shoulders. She’d been denied the contact of her mouse for so long, she refused to withhold now if there was no point - and perhaps it could provide some caution, as well. Although whether it was meant as more of a reminder to Tracer, or to Reaper, she didn’t know.

Oddly, though, she found herself trusting the pair not to come to blows again. She had no doubt that there would be anger between them, but there was some far-down flicker of feeling remaining from her heart’s quickened beats.

It had always been Reaper who was more of the concern. Her mouse might be foolish, but she was not that irrational; Reaper, however, could lose himself to anger and Widowmaker had seen it happen. It had always made her feel a little superior.

A little superior and a little concerned, because she never could really manage fear, but concern was always present in those situations. Now, though, there was no real worry of that - even in his bitter spitting of a moment ago, there had been nothing of that voice-fraying hatred that seemed to consume him.

Her mouse was safe, and that was her first concern at the moment as she squeezed Tracer’s shoulders tighter.

Reaper laughed, rubbing at his chin thoughtfully. “Son of a bitch,” he murmured, a grin shifting his cheeks and his skin and it didn’t feel right, but it was there regardless. “And,” he looked back to her with a raised eyebrow, “just for my own edification, what did he say?”

Tracer didn’t respond immediately, she took a few breaths to mull it over, because it had led to a bit more of a discussion that she didn’t feel right divulging. Wasn’t even sure it was alright to tell him anything at all, and was tempted to just tell him to go to hell, but she really didn’t want to make this worse than it had to be.

Widowmaker’s embrace helped, though. Made her feel like she wasn’t alone, that she had some support, and Tracer wished she could sag back into it but she knew she had to hold her own for a little while longer here.

“He said… that he shot you.” Tracer swallowed heavily. “That he’d thought the bomb was yours, but now he thought it wasn’t.”
It was more than he’d expected to come out - not that he could trust Jack anymore. Not his word and not his actions. No, he’d made that mistake too many times already.

Reaper raised an eyebrow and tipped his head off to the side, halfway between curious and just sarcastic. “Did he tell you that he tripped the wires and set it off?”

“He didn’t mean to, he was trying to disarm.” Tracer started to retort, but Reaper cut her off with a laugh.

“And you believed him? After that?”

She stared openly, shaking her head softly. “What- why wouldn’t I? What, you think he wanted to blow the shop up? Well why the hell would he bother putting the bomb in the atrium, then, eh? Thousand other ways he could’ve done it.”

Reaper withdrew a little and then chuckled. “Alright, so maybe it wasn’t his bomb either. Maybe. Still set it off - and either way, he shot me, in the back, without even telling me to stand down, Oxton. Never gave me a chance to explain anything. Never gave me a chance to defend myself. Never gave me anything. He betrayed me, don’t you get it?”

His eyes were hollow pits that looked like pure black struck through with the faintest milky streaks, giving them an appearance of shifting smoke. Deep down below that, though, Tracer swore she saw something flash - a bit of fire, an actual glow.

Did she get it? She understood getting pissed off over being shot, particularly by a friend. Even if their relationship had already been strained by the time she’d started to get to know them, it had clearly once been a close one, and that had to make it hurt all the worse.

Did she get it? She understood anger, she felt it at times, she knew what it was like to lose yourself to your emotions. It had happened to her in more ways than one, more than once, and she thought it would be pretty damn hypocritical for her to think that nobody else was ever allowed the same.

Did she get it? She understood a little more clearly the grey that laid between the black and white, these days - she always had, and had never necessarily considered following the law to always be right. She wouldn’t have answered the Recall if she had; vigilantes don’t tend to be wholly law-abiding. Now, though, she knew a little more deeply just how much it all could rely on things unseen, because a year or two ago she never would have thought she’d be holding Widowmaker’s hand. A year or two ago, she never would have thought she’d mourn Widowmaker’s death. In fact, she was quite certain - as a sickening twinge settled into the pit of her belly - that she would have been celebrating it, a year or two ago.

Did she get it? She knew that things were so different now than they had been. She still didn’t like that Widdy killed people, and she didn’t think she understood it fully even now, but she didn’t think Widdy was a bad person despite some bad actions. There was more to it than that, a larger and more complex issue, and she knew that now. You couldn’t judge a book by one chapter, you had to read the whole thing, and most of Reaper’s own story was still shrouded in smoke and mystery so she could hardly pass judgement on it.

Did she get it?

She didn’t.

Tracer shook her head, brow furrowed and a frown on her lips as they held each other’s gazes. “Where does it end? Your vengeance, all this, huh? Answer me that.”
A wide grin spread across his lips. His skin looked almost unreal, less like skin and more like clay dipped in something viscous and unreal - it slipped and shifted in ways that skin never would, and it gave his grin an intensely unsettling quality as he chuckled. “Oh,” he hummed thoughtfully, warmly, almost delightedly as he shook his head, “I’m absolutely certain you don’t want to see my list.”

He strode around the bottom of the operating table, gesturing broadly as he did. “Where does it end? I know the answer - and, vengeance, you called it?” He turned his head just enough for his eyes to flash back over his shoulder, his grin glinting in the light. His teeth looked impossibly white and straight amongst his otherwise twisted visage.

“I wouldn’t disagree with that one. However,” he tipped his head to the side, turning on heel to lean on the edge of the table. He dropped down, setting his elbows on the metal and letting his forearms flop down in a loose shrug. “I don’t know that I’d say it’s the only applicable term. How much better do you feel after hitting me, huh?”

Tracer narrowed her eyes and shook her head, but his grin only widened and he waved a hand. “Relax. I’m not trying to goad you into anything here - you can drop the suspicion. Simple fact of the matter is that vengeance is one word. Retribution is another. Justice would be a third. There are others, too, but the point is that they feel fulfilling, and what do I want?”

Reaper let the word hang, his eyes dropping from Oxton’s to his own hand, held up off of the table and moving slightly. He wiggled his fingers and watched as the tendons and skin shifted, as all of it shifted in ways that no human’s would, with wisps of smoke lifting from his hand, and he wondered how long it had been since he’d really been human.

It had been such a long journey, step by step and at every point of the way he felt like he’d had no other option. Such a helpless feeling, that was; he hated fate, and that was why. Fate and destiny made a man helpless. If he’d been destined to become this, then it was all pointless.

If he chose it, though? That was a different matter.

Still, the path was so meandering, all that had led him here, and he could never have guessed at its endpoint halfway along. That was just the way of things, though. Sometimes you ended up somewhere and simply had to figure out how to deal with it.

Definitely couldn’t go back.

“They destroyed me,” he muttered thoughtfully, his eyes still on his own hands. “My friends, my colleagues, my superiors - every person I trusted, everyone I loved, every one I looked to in times of trouble - abandoned me or betrayed me. One by one I watched them all slip away or turn to me with weapons in hand, Oxton, and yes, I want vengeance. I want retribution. I want… justice,” he sighed the word as his eyes slipped closed. “I want them, I need them, and then, it will be over.”

Tracer swallowed and squeezed at Widdy’s hand, stroking her other one up and along Widdy’s forearm held across her chest, and didn’t say that he sounded like Jack did sometimes. Less so recently, but still, she knew it’d be a mistake to say it to either of the two of them.

“I’d say you payed off your debt today, for what that’s worth,” Reaper shrugged as he stood more upright and cracked his neck. “You all chose your own paths and now it’s time to pay the piper, but not every bill is equal, and… you’re done.” His gaze flicked from her to Widowmaker, with a slight little nod.

The sniper only looked back to him with a sort of hopeful wariness.
They’d all cast their lots. Angela had given him up. Jack had turned on him. Jesse had run. Reinhardt had blocked him. Ana had tossed him aside. Oxton’s only real crime had been standing with them. It was a grand offence, certainly, but other than that her slate was clean, and today? He’d heard the pain in her voice. He’d seen it in her eyes.

“You’ve suffered enough,” he nodded again, his eyes returning to her. “So where does it end? For you, it’s already over. Back in the black - just watch your hand and don’t slip into the red again. Everyone’s got their own prices to pay, though, and the doc here?” Reaper chuckled and patted Mercy on the shoulder, gently.

She still cringed away from it, but only halfway - her shoulder dipped under his hand but didn’t shirk it entirely.

“You want to tell her, or should I, hmm? Angela… Ziegler,” he punctuated her name with another pat on the shoulder as he slid behind her, “wunderkind, that was you. The best and the brightest all came to Overwatch, and that was you. The best, the brightest, the kindest in all the world!”

Throughout it, he left one hand on her shoulder and waved with the other like a showman selling his product, like a barker drumming up interest in the sideshow; he called out the words and swept an arm through the air, and then he dropped it all with a growled sneer as he stepped away from her.

“I even thought I saw it at first. That’s why I trusted you, doc.”

“Please, I’m sorry, Gabr-”

“Sorry?” He cut her off with an exclamation and a laugh, clapping a hand to his gut. “Wow! Oh, oh she’s sorry, I guess I’d best just call off my whole plan, then, huh? Ha!”

Sombra rolled her eyes and pushed herself upright on the table, supporting herself on her elbows. “Okay, well I’m tired of knowing jack shit so would somebody please say something here that’s not a riddle wrapped up in a rhyme?”

Reaper, still chuckling, clapped Sombra on the shoulders and nodded. “Oh, that sounds good, yeah - you should really think of what I’m offering you here, doc. Most people don’t get to know when it’s their last chance, but this is yours. Final offer to let you come clean on your own terms rather than letting me spill the beans - more than you ever gave me, huh?”

Angela wiped at her face blankly with her forearm - there were no tears to chase away, but she sort of wished that there were as she pushed the screens to the side and peeled her gloves off. Her work was all done, Sombra was healed and Widowmaker was clearly recovering as well, but now it was her own safety she worried over.

She was more tired than anything else, but there was still more than enough room in her wearied conscience for worry, and for quite a lot of guilt as well. Hoping for some comfort, sought out Lena’s eyes. The Brit was looking back with a soft and sorry smile, and that was something, at least. A little bit of support.

“When… I was working with Overwatch,” she began, her voice soft. She didn’t know where to look, so she looked nowhere in particular - let her eyes unfocus and fixate on nothing, and let it all replay in her mind’s eye.

“One day, one of the officers came to me. A man who had a long history with the organization, and with me. A- a friend, even, maybe.” Her eyes flicked to Reaper’s which were fixed on hers, and her dry tongue scraped against the roof of her mouth as she swallowed. “Gabriel Reyes.”
He nodded. Not exactly encouragingly, but at least it wasn’t hostile - her serum was clearly working, holding his worse impulses at bay, but she knew that didn’t guarantee any safety. Even before he’d encountered problems, Gabriel would quite happily kill people he thought deserved it.

She might have undermined the worst spasms of anger, but that didn’t mean she was safe.

“He told me… that he needed help with something. He had a package, files that he said indicated deep problems within the organization - evidence of security leaks, he said, and…” her words trailed away, unable to take her gaze away from his as he glared back.

“…and you took that information, given in confidence, and you just gave it away, didn’t you?” Reaper’s voice grated through gritted teeth, his lips peeling back in sneers as he spoke with his arms still crossed. “You took what I’d trusted you with, and gave it away to the people who were behind the leaks in the fucking first place. You,” he held out a hand, extended a finger in accusation, “you were the first one I trusted, doc. I thought of all the people there, you would understand enough to not say anything about it.”

She had. Things looked different to her in the aftermath, when the smoke cleared and the Swiss headquarters had been in rubble - a part of her had never believed that it had been Gabriel behind it, some little voice that whispered in her mind late at night and kept her awake, reminding her of what she’d done.

A tear slid down her cheek as she shook her head, her face shifting uneasily as she tried to start a sentence but then discarded it, then again and again as nothing could really suffice. There weren’t any words she could offer to change it - it was all in the past, and she couldn’t change it. She could only hope to fix it.

“I was wrong.” The words were strained whispers as she wiped at a cheek with the back of her hand, “I was wrong, Gabriel, I-”

“You know, you really sound less genuine when you keep using that name after I told you not to,” he chuckled, shaking his head. “You clearly still care more about your own well-being than mine, your own comfort, your own protocol, whatever.”

“That’s-” she half-gasped a breath, shaking her head still, “that’s not why I did it, Ga-” she cut herself off even before he snapped another harsh look her way, dropping her eyes to her hands.

“I- you-” she sighed, running a hand over her tied-back hair. “There was a documented history of paranoid tendencies.” Angela looked up, over to Lena again, trying to explain because somebody deserved to know. After all these years, she couldn’t bear the knowledge alone anymore. “Gabriel had just been on an extended mission, away from medical care - the things he was saying, they were so… they sounded so much like symptoms of that condition being untreated, extrapolations and coincidences and…”

She didn’t want to look back over to him, but something tugged her gaze that way anyway. The same thing that had prevented her from ducking entirely away from his hand earlier, the same thing that had spurred her to speak about it at all - the little voice that whispered in her mind late at night, her guilt.

Reaper shook his head slightly. “None of it was solid, that’s true, but that’s because you were the first, doc. If you hadn’t given that info away? They never would have started coming after me, after my teams - you know that’s the whole reason Blackwatch and Overwatch ended at each other’s throats?”
He turned away from her, grinning to Oxton instead with a chuckle. “The whole thing fell, all because she knocked over the wrong domino.”

“I didn’t know,” she protested, but he wasn’t willing to accept that.

“I told you not to say anything.”

Ziegler hung her head, nodding weakly. “I know. I- I know you did, and I’m sorry, and I know that doesn’t make it any better, but-”

“It doesn’t.”

She flinched slightly, and his smile stayed steady at that. It didn’t have the same effect that it normally would have, because he wasn’t in the same situation as he normally was, but he had to admit that it felt nice to have it out. Felt nice to sit in the shocked silence of the other three who were finding out for the first time.

“I know it doesn’t make it any better,” she repeated and then continued, “but I- I know that I made a mistake. I didn’t know it at the time, but afterward, as things started getting worse and worse, I started to worry about it more and more but you wouldn’t talk to me and-”

“He! Wouldn’t talk to you?” He grinned, nodding. “Of course I wouldn’t. Would you have? After that?”

Her head rose and her eyes burned back at him, and that felt good too, only widening his grin.

Mercy didn’t answer. “I- I wanted to help, but-” she turned to Lena again, shaking her head. “Gabriel refused any medical aid from me, any medications, at first - and later, anything at all that had come out of Overwatch.”

(Of course I did,” he nodded, “would you trust meds from the person who had turned you over to your enemies, Oxton? She was working with them, clearly, and-”

“I wasn’t!” Angela spun toward him with a cry. “I was never working with them, I- I didn’t even think there was a them! Then- then everything went to hell and I-”

She stared back at him desperately, looking for some kind of understanding or compassion, or anything at all other than hatred and distaste, but it wasn’t there.

Slowly, he looked away from her, and faced Lena instead.

“So, there you have it, Oxton. There’s her bill to repay. They’ve all got one just like that, Jack and Ana and Reinhardt, I trusted them all and they either let me down or wrapped the noose around my neck, so you want to know when it ends?” He laughed. “It ends when it’s all over. When the bills are all paid and the debts are settled, and they’re all dead. When we all are.”

He had them all listed. For most of the names, the specifics didn’t matter - a whole bulk of fairly random Overwatch members and ancillaries who could be dispatched however he chose - but the ones near the top were a different story. Reinhardt, Jack, Angela, Ana, Petras, ten or twenty of them who deserved so much worse than just death.

Death would still come for them, though. They just deserved a hell of a lot of torture, first.

It was always so satisfying to think about. It still was even now, but it didn’t provide any of that relief that it normally did, because there was nothing to relieve. No itch in his spine, no acidic burning
beneath his skin, no shrieking void in the core of him calling out for life, for death, and that was so very strange to him now.

After so long with them, it was odd to be without.

“What did you dose me with, doc?”

Mercy let out a wet laugh at first, shaking her head. “It- it’s an experimental mixture of medications and nanobiotic components, it-”

With a smirk, he interjected. “Never thought you’d be the type to experiment without consent.” The flash of anger and pain across her face when he said it, the way she physically recoiled, his heart sang at it a little bit and he laughed. “Wow, that really hurt you, didn’t it? Good.”

“You’re a cruel bastard,” Oxton muttered, but he just flashed her a grin and nodded.

“I am what the world made me. Now, carry on, doc.”

Mercy kept shaking her head, almost constantly, the pain on her face shifting. “I nev- I never forgot what I did to you. I never forgave myself for all that happened - I gathered every piece of data I could, everything about this wraithlike mercenary, I’ve been researching a solution this whole time. Hearing from the members of Overwatch, seeing surveillance footage, piecing together symptoms and fragments of information, and-” she let out a hesitant half-laugh, taking a step closer and holding out a hand toward him, “and it’s working, isn’t it?”

Reaper looked back at her warily, not liking one bit the hope in her eyes. “What are you talking about?”

She shook her head, tears glistening on her cheeks but they didn’t look like tears of pain or anger anymore to him. “I wanted to help - I still want to, I, I made mistakes. I was wrong. I can’t change that but I can do something to repay it now. This was only temporary, but with your help I can refine the therapy - we can develop a permanent solution, or at least a longer-lasting one, something to relieve the symptoms that plague you and-”

That look in her eyes. He couldn’t get over it, couldn’t pull his focus away as she continued to approach until she was standing right there, until she had reached out and cupped his cheek in her hand and he just kept staring back into her eyes.

“We can fix this. Please. Let me help.”

Fix it? The thought had him wanting to laugh, at first, but the look in her eyes stayed him for a moment. He couldn’t deny that she was a good doctor - maybe the best there was. The idea of a condition she couldn’t fix, a wound she couldn’t heal, was even more laughable than the idea of himself getting fixed.

The only problem was that this wasn’t just some wound. This ran so much deeper than just the symptoms, because the cause was still kicking around.

His hand raised, slowly, as if of its own mind - rose up and laid overtop of hers on his cheek. As she stared back at him so hopefully, a grin started to spread across his face because it wasn’t a problem at all.

There was no problem. No conflict. He knew exactly what to do.

“No.”
The way the hope in her eyes died was perhaps the greatest thing he’d seen in his life - Reinhardt on his knees had been in first place, for a while. Jack, helpless and bleeding on the floor, that was a good one. Both of them paled in comparison, though, to Angela’s eyes as he denied her - and that told him something very surprising.

“You… you actually didn’t forget, did you?” He frowned, leaning toward her just slightly. As she dropped her hand and shook her head, he chuckled. “Well, I’ll be damned - and I am. I thought you all forgot, I thought you all just put it out of your minds and got on with your little lives, but… you really didn’t, did you?”

She shook her head again, sharply, another tear streaking down her face - she opened her mouth and tried to say something but her throat was too choked-off for her to succeed. He liked that too.

“Wow.” Reaper tipped his head off to the side with a nod. “Colour me impressed, doc. Thanks, too, because you’ve given me the perfect solution.”

Her eyes brightened in an instant. “Then you will let me help?”

Reaper’s head rocked back and he laughed, broadly and mockingly, for a fair while. “No!” He shook his head, grinning wide and meeting her eyes, “no, of course I won’t! How would that solve anything, huh? No, no doc, you see-”

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders, holding out his other hand as he explained. “You see, finding the right price for all of you is really hard. You all think I just want to murder you, but where’s the fun in that? No, you need to suffer - and Oxton today, see, she suffered enough to pay it off. You weren’t there to see how much Widowmaker’s death hurt her, but it was a lot, and that paid her debt off, but you? You, doc, oh damn did you ever run up a higher bill.”

As he talked, he walked along, bringing her beside him - wandered away from the table and over toward the window where he’d pinned her earlier. Angela met Lena’s eyes briefly in a soft sort of panic and found them looking back just the same, and she really didn’t know what could be done. Lena had her Accelerator, though, she could move faster - if things came to that, if they came to a fight, there was still some hope.

“I couldn’t decide, for you, what would be best. What would be fair,” he sneered the word lightly, then chuckled and squeezed his arm a little tighter around her shoulders. “Now, though, you’ve provided me the perfect solution, doc.”

Reaper dropped his arm, stepping away and turning to look at her with a wide smile. “I always hated you so much for your failures, but do you know what I think now?” Another chuckle. “I don’t think I hate you for that even half as much as you do, doc. Legitimately impressive, in fact, but not enough to get you out of your debt.”

That pain returned to her eyes, that anger, but he could see that it wasn’t directed outward at him - no, it reflected off of the inside of her gaze and shot right back into herself, and he’d never in his life thought that any of them would have the decency to actually hate themselves over what they’d done to him.

“I’m sorry,” she tried again weakly, and he laughed and clapped her on the shoulder.

“I know you are! Ahh, that’s- don’t be sad, doc, you should be happy, because I’m not going to kill you. Not today - that was already assured, I gave you my word on that - but do you know what this means?”
Reaper leaned in closer, one hand still on her shoulder as he grinned. “I’m never going to kill you. After all I’ve been through, I can say with confidence that death’s beyond me, and I’d suspect,” he mused as he squeezed at the shoulder of her Valkyrie suit, “I’d suspect that you’ll never die, will you? You could be killed, I think, but age and illness are never going to pull you away, are they?”

There was no response from her at first, but a moment later she shook her head, raising a hand to stroke a stray bit of hair behind her ear.

“Good. It’s what I’d been hoping for, but now?” His grin widened even further as he held her gaze. “Now, I’m not going to kill you. In fact, I’ll shred to pieces,” he growled, “anybody else who even tries to take you away.”

Mercy frowned slightly as the sentence ended not even vaguely how she’d expected - not with her torn to bits, but somebody else, and she stared back in incomprehension.

“You’ll never be killed, doc, and neither will I - I’ll carry along right beside you, right behind you, a dark shadow and ever-living testament to all of your failures. Any time you ever try to forget what you did to me, I’ll be there to remind you. Any time anyone tries to grant you the sweet release of death, I will rip them to shreds. For a hundred years, for a thousand, for eternity, doc, you will never get to escape your failures.”

Something deep, deep inside of him stirred at the horror that played across her expression, the intense anguish in her eyes - the perfect solution, finally, and only because for once in her life she’d actually held up to her image. The only one to feel guilty for him, the only one to empathize instead of pitying, it was such a beautiful situation.

It was such a beautiful situation, as she visibly struggled to hold herself back from sobbing, but then Sombra coughed in the background and he didn’t much like how that stuck in his ears. In his gut. His eyes flicked over to the wall, that red streak of blood, all a result of what he’d done. That ever-damned itch in his spine.

It was gone, now, but it would come back. Apparently. When the meds wore off, it would be back, and what would that mean for his team? For himself? He couldn’t just let Mercy get what she wanted, though, but…

…but he also couldn’t betray his team like that. Couldn’t stomach the idea of putting them through that risk, not if he could avoid it.

Another plan could be developed. Another payment. He’d find some way to pull it out of her, even if it wouldn’t be quite as beautiful as this, even if it wouldn’t be quite as perfect.

Although, he did realize that he could always change his mind.

“…or maybe seven.”

Mercy swallowed heavily, not understanding what the words might mean. “Seven? What is seven?”

“A hundred years, or a thousand,” he murmured, “or maybe seven. Not for you - don’t for a damned second think that this offer is for you,” he hissed, pulling his eyes away from hers and looking up and past her to his team. Widowmaker’s gaze, and Sombra’s as well, fixed on him as he nodded and they returned it.

“No, this is for my team. Seven years, doc, and then-” Reaper sighed through clenched teeth. “And then, we can see about your little cure.”
“Please, you don’t have to-”

“I’ve made my decision, doc, and you really need to start respecting that.”

“I do, but you don’t need to live like this, please, you can-”

“What? You wanted a way to help. This helps.”

“Please-”

“The only way you can help me is by suffering, doc.”

“-just let me fix this, please, let-”

Reaper let out a laugh, cutting her off. “You know, I like hearing you beg, but this is getting annoying now. I think for every time you ask, I’m going to add a year.”

Mercy shook her head. “What? What are you talking about? You can be healed, please, let me help you.”

“No, doc, hell no. You’re up to twelve years now, by the way - but, no, I won’t be letting you cure me just yet, and you know why? Because it’s what you want. Because you’d feel better, and I am unwilling to grant you that. You don’t deserve relief from your guilt, doc. I hate you, don’t you understand?”

He grinned, meeting her eyes, and his expression looked astonishingly soft to her. His eyes didn’t burn, his lips weren’t twisted into a snarl, he didn’t look cold and sharp or angry or hateful, but then he opened his mouth and repeated it through his wide grin, his voice smoother than she’d heard it in a decade. “I hate you. So much, Angela - I hate you.”

Words failed her as she opened her mouth to respond, but then she tried again and they came. “What- you would make yourself suffer just to spite me? Just because of this absurd crusade?”

Reaper laughed, full and deep. He nodded and pointed at her with a grin. “That’s exactly it, doc - finally, you get it. Took a while for such a supposed genius, but I guess everybody has their shortcomings and you certainly seem to have plenty.”

Sprinkling in the little insults felt nice, slightly warm and fuzzy down in his gut and he liked that. “Bang on the money though, doc. I’m gonna make myself suffer just to spite you, because I’ve suffered for years. Now it’ll finally be gaining me something.”

“Don’t think she’ll be feeling so bad after this, mate,” Oxton shot from behind him. “You’re making your own choice here, so why should she feel guilty? Isn’t that right, Ange?”

Reaper chuckled deeply as the doctor winced. “Oh, no,” he murmured through his grin in a warm voice, “she’ll be hurting just as much. Probably even more, in fact - I can see it in her eyes.” Those blue eyes that met his so desperately once more; yes, this was far better.

“You think it’s just empty vengeance, but it’s not.” He turned away from her, leaving her like she’d left him, and returning to the side of the operating table. “You can call it an absurd crusade for me, but that’s just further proof, because when Jackie-boy does it, it’s justice. When Reinhardt does it, it’s honour. When I do it, you call it absurd vengeance instead.”

“As a matter of fact, I disagree with both of them on the matter as well,” Angela muttered darkly.
Again, Reaper laughed. It felt almost like he’d been laughing constantly since he’d been drugged. “Oh, come now doc, we’ve got a perfectly good hateful relationship going on here.” He turned his head to flash her a grin as he helped Sombra to her feet. “Don’t ruin it by going and saying reasonable things that I agree with.”

He sighed a little, supporting Sombra around her shoulders but she really didn’t need it - however, she also didn’t pull away from it or shake him off. Ziegler still didn’t understand that, he could see in her eyes, but he could also see once again that she was actually telling the truth. She didn’t consider them to be different, justice or vengeance, she stupidly hated them both.

It was something, at least. Not enough to buy her any relief, but something.

Reaper shook his head. “The fact stands that the world is still out there, turning, and they have a very different opinion. You’ve been forced into your mould just as I have, and I’m sure it’s hard to be the angel all the time…” his words came out sarcastic and dark, soft sneers as he narrowed his eyes, “but what I wouldn’t give to trade in my horns and brimstone for a pair of wings and a halo, just for one goddamned minute.”

With a chuckle, he shook his head. “That’s not for me, though - the world’s made it clear what they want me to be, and monsters have their purpose. Sometimes people need a demon to scare them into straightening up, because they sure as hell won’t do it on their own. Have you looked at the world, recently?”

Still supporting Sombra, he wandered over toward the window. The sun streamed in over the buildings, glinting in the light - from here, if you didn’t look down, it almost looked beautiful.

He looked down.

Fires and smoke, the front lawn torn to muddy shreds as enforcement personnel rushed to and fro. Anger and hatred and pain, that was the world. “Have you ever looked into the alleyways and the dark places, the shadows - we hate each other, doc, all of us. The whole world around, and they’re getting less afraid of it. Baseball bats and slurs, gangs and monsters and politicians. They need a demon to scare them back into line? Well, someone’s got to do it. Might as well be me.”

Angela frowned as she looked at him, but it was Lena who gave word to her own thoughts.

“You’re bloody deluded,” Tracer called to him, staring back defiantly as he turned back to her.

“Wow, you really do want to push the envelope, don’t you, Oxton?”

“Just following my own compass,” she retorted sarcastically.

Reaper chuckled and shook his head, but didn’t respond otherwise. “For now, though, we need to get out of here. Oxton, you can find your own way home, I’m sure - we’ll be taking your dropship, and taking the doctor back to her camp because there’s one more thing she needs to do for us. You’ll be implanting a device in Widowmaker’s heart, doc, and-”

“Absolutely not,” Mercy interrupted, and Reaper pressed a palm against his forehead as ire flashed in him.

“I wonder if you’ll ever let me finish a sentence before jumping to conclusions? You’re putting in a dud, you moron - if there’s nothing, then that will be detected immediately, so we’re going to manufacture a replacement that is identical, with one exception.”

He looked over to the sniper who was the topic of their discussion, meeting her golden eyes. They’d
done a lot to keep her under control, Talon had, and the measures had only increased until they’d reached a breaking point - her noose was thick and sturdy and wrapped around so many times, but Talon always had been a little stupid when it came to some things.

“No codes,” he finished, “none. The explosive will never go off and I don’t want anyone, myself included, being able to affect her heart. Nobody but her. You understand?”

Angela studied his face, his eyes, but he wasn’t looking at her. His gaze stayed fixed on the topic of conversation, on Widowmaker, as he continued to speak.

“We need the monitoring capabilities and the physical object implanted, because they’ll check *those*. They’ll notice the absence. In all these years, though, they’ve never actually checked the software that would let them end her life or force her into a catatonic state. They haven’t run those codes, and if they decide to do so now,” he chuckled and shrugged, “I’ll kill them.”

He’d decided to work with Talon. He’d never pledged his allegiance to them - and sure, over the years the lines had become a little blurred, but he had a team now.

His priorities were clear.

Widowmaker cleared her throat softly, drawing all eyes to her - all save for Reaper’s, which were already directed that way. “This would mean my heart would be as it was. Suppressed and slowed, the combat protocols…”

Tracer’s hand squeezed at hers and she saw the concern in Sombra’s eyes as her mouth opened to protest, no doubt to call for something *better*, but the foolish girl didn’t understand. How could she? They hadn’t really discussed it.

She looked over to the side, though, to meet Tracer’s gaze, and *she* understood. That was the important part.

“Good,” Widowmaker murmured, nodding slightly to Tracer before looking to Reaper again.

It was what she wanted, things returned to normal - she would always have the foolish option of lifting her combat protocols as she did by the graveside. Perhaps this new heart would be somewhat freer, perhaps…

“Could I be given *more* control over it?”

Her soft query was met by a squeeze of her hand, and Angela looked back in thought and soft pain as well. The doctor clearly wanted the heart to run freely, unimpeded - she, as they almost all did, clearly wanted to turn Widowmaker into something she wasn’t. The sniper didn’t like that. However, to her credit, the doctor nodded to the query.

“Of course,” Angela assured softly. “It looks as if the previous system took cues from various sectors of your brain, and-”

“As long as you know what’s happening, doc, we’re good.” Reaper cut her off. “Don’t have long until Helix gets here, do we? Let’s move out.”

Tracer scowled at him, taking a step forward. She wasn’t going to just let it go all this easily, wasn’t willing to just leave Angela alone to deal with it, but before she could say anything, the doctor cut her off.

“Alright,” she sighed with a nod, rubbing at her forehead with the heel of her palm. “Alright, I’ll do
it, but I want Symmetra to manufacture the module. She’s the only one I trust with it.”

There was a moment of silence before Sombra chimed in. “She can definitely do it, boss. I’ve got the specs and designs, she can make it indistinguishable from the original.”

Reaper grunted. “Fine. Call her in for it. She was doing a good job out front, anyway.”

“Not good enough if you ask me,” Tracer muttered, because she’d let him in, but he only laughed to that.

Mercy took an unsteady step toward the doorway, the long hours of work and stress and strain catching up to her. “I’ll need to sleep for a moment on the return trip to the camp.”

Reaper laughed mockingly. “Oh, sure, if you think you can manage to get to sleep with all of what you’ve done weighing on your mind, traitor, you-”

Widowmaker didn’t mind the cruelty with which he’d been treating the doctor. She knew that Tracer did, and knew that perhaps she should echo that and mirror it - and there was much she owed to Angela for saving her life, but at the same time, she felt no true remorse over how she was being treated.

However, she’d learned that she didn’t need to feel something to act on it.

“Arrêt, stop.” Widowmaker shook her head, once, catching Reaper’s gaze which flickered with irritation when she cut him off, but she held up a hand to assuage any counterpoints for a moment at least. “She has not paid enough for it all, perhaps, but for the day, she has suffered enough. Alors, as well,” she smirked softly as she rested a hand on her chest, “it will be my heart she is operating on. I would rather she had rest.”

For a moment, Reaper stared back at her with a scowl, but she only held his eyes as Tracer gripped her hand tightly. It only took a few seconds, though, for him to take a breath and sigh it out.

“Fine.” Widowmaker had a point, and he knew it. He couldn’t take it all out of Angela today - as much as he wanted to, and as little as he wanted to ever offer her any relief. After all, he’d never had any.

Not until today, at least.

His shoulder blades shifted uncomfortably as he took a step forward, toward the doctor, hissing softly under his breath. Son of a bitch, it’s coming back.

With a heavy sigh, he ran a hand over his hood and then held it out to be shaken.

“You saved two teammates today, and despite everything else-” his lips twisted into half a sneer, something wriggling deep in the base of his spine - slight, faint, but definitely there, and as much as he hated her, this was important. “You deserve thanks for both of them. And for- ah, for this. First opportunity to breathe freely in a long time, and-”

A laugh leapt out of him, but it sounded more pained than the others had. “And, as much as I hate that it’s been from you, that still deserves thanks. So take them, quick, doc, while we’ve still got the opportunity. You’re far from done, but… she’s right. You’re done for the day.”

Mercy studied his face and his eyes in a moment of shock, and shook his hand as much as a reflex as anything else. For years and years she’d shaken hands with people who had no clue about her research, who had no real respect for her, who offered empty thanks for her attendance at their functions - it wasn’t her they ever had any interest in, it was her name in their magazine or on their
attendance list, her face on their periodical, it was what she could gain them and she knew it.

This didn’t feel like that. This felt more genuine, even if she could feel his hand clenching up tight as if he wanted to crush her in his grip.

He held true to his word, though, and didn’t even say anything. Didn’t insult her or make a snide comment, just held her eyes firmly for a second and nodded before breaking off and heading toward the wall.

“DZ will be four blocks East and two blocks North, top of the Koyu building,” Reaper called over his shoulder as he stalked swiftly over toward where he’d discarded his gear earlier near that bright red splash. Looking at it now, it didn’t feel good… but it also did.

He could feel it all returning, if slowly. That horrid wrenching sensation in his gut that told him to take, and take, and take.

He hated it. He loved it.

“Figured you’d want a few minutes to say goodbye,” he grunted back to Widowmaker. “Take what you need. Just don’t drag your ass or we might swing by and pick you up ourselves.”

“Nah, I can keep the ship grounded, take as long as you like. I know you two get all mushy,” Sombra quipped from the side, leaning back against a wall with her arms crossed and a smirk on her lips. Except for the ragged and blood-soaked section of her jacket, it was as if nothing had happened today - not a stress, not a worry, not an injury.

At least, that was what it was like from the outside. What it looked like.

Reaper barked a single laugh at the comment, but didn’t deny it as he crouched down and picked up his things.

Tracer squeezed at Widdy’s hand again, glad to be given that opportunity at least, although she wasn’t looking forward to saying goodbye. Not even for a moment, not even for just a while, but for the first time in a while it actually seemed like it would be alright.

She’d even got Reaper to stop mocking Angela. It was a promising sign.

The thought brought Tracer’s eyes that way, to see the doctor looking through her phone with a tired expression. “Ange,” she murmured, dropping Widdy’s hand and stepping toward Angela. “Are you gonna be alright?”

For a moment, Angela didn’t look away from the screen, because it was a complicated question. Today hadn’t revealed much new for her - she had already known what had happened all those years ago between herself and Gabriel, but she also knew that nobody else had known. Now, that was no longer the case.

There was a relief in releasing a secret, but it was also a reminder of why she’d kept it to herself to begin with. That guilt was unlikely to ever go away. What if she hadn’t handed the files over to somebody else? She’d thought it was the best thing to do at the time, a relatively new member of the organization feeling out of her depth, but now she couldn’t help but wonder.

Or what if she’d said something else, lending her voice to Gabriel’s when things began to be divided? She hadn’t been privy to most of that, only becoming aware after it was later, and worse, and quite possibly too late. It had been hard enough to convince Jack of things he agreed with sometimes, to convince him of ones he disliked might well have been too tall an order.
She still wished she’d tried and failed. It would at least relieve the guilt of having never even tried. She could still remember it all swirling around her mind as she sat at the UN hearing, weary and worn, sleepless nights of tossing and turning behind her and so many more to come.

Was she going to be alright?

With a heavy sigh, Angela wrapped Lena up in her arms, nodding her chin against Lena’s head. “I will be as alright as I ever was. As I ever am - I’m... I’m tired, and stressed, and strained. I feel awful and I can’t help but dread what might come in the future, but,” she let out a soft laugh as she dropped her head forward until it rested in the crook of Lena’s shoulder, “what else is new?”

“Angela-”

“I really will be alright, Lena,” she sighed as she patted at Lena’s back. “Believe it or not, this is far from the worst operation I’ve had to carry out!” She sounded a little more energetic as she withdrew from the embrace - smiling, if softly, and nodding her head.

Nobody had died this time. That actually beat most of her field ops, easily - and she hadn’t been shot at all, which was uncommon as well. All in all, not the worst thing she’d been through.

“Okay,” Lena nodded with a smile, hoping that it was the truth and not just being said for her benefit. She still felt a little bit like the whole situation was a dream, and a little bit like it was a runaway train, but she had Widowmaker’s hand in hers and nobody was holding a gun anymore. Things were a lot better.

“Don’t worry, amiga,” Sombra added from off to the side. “I’ll make sure nothing goes wrong. Go on,” she met Widowmaker’s eyes for a moment, “get your little chica out of here - we’re taking the horse we rode in on, so take her to her new ride. Mono and Roja are waiting three blocks due south of here.”

“Ma cerise as well?” Widowmaker raised an eyebrow, glancing to her mouse to see if this news was surprising, but it seemed not to be. It was certainly fortuitous, though. She’d been wanting to see the redhead again as much as her counterpart, and being separated from them had been...

...well, it had been killing her. She chuckled slightly at the beautiful irony of the thought, gripping Tracer’s hand tighter in hers and striding forward with renewed strength. “Come, souris, let us say our hello and our au revoir, and let us take our time in it.”

Tracer took a last look around the operating room, items strewn from the brief fight, blood dripped and splattered on the floors and walls, glass cracked - she didn’t notice that the remains of Widowmaker’s former heart were absent.

There was little of her former life which Widowmaker had any hope of holding on to, and in the face of such a thing it was only natural that her desires to do the same had died as well. In a hopeless situation, one lost hope - but even though it had been ravaged for years and then destroyed, it had still been her heart.

She’d screwed the cap onto its jar tightly during a moment of distraction, and hadn’t thought through what exactly she would do with it later, but it seemed only fitting to preserve it. If only for its destruction, even - it was a thing of beauty. A metaphor made literal, a very pure expression, and she knew that she would spend much time pondering over it.

For now, though, Widowmaker’s thoughts didn’t even touch on the subject as she waited for Tracer to begin to move, to let them take their leave. She was tiring of the others, of keeping up so many
acts; she wanted that soft stillness once more where she could simply be.

She marveled at the fact that things could be so very different. Things which were so very the same, could still be so drastically dissimilar - being alone, she could be herself, yet she was never the same self she was around Tracer and Emily, and she was different again around Sombra. None of them felt false, but she was unsure of how exactly that could be.

Perhaps she was simply that good of an actress.

The thought brought another chuckle from her lips as Tracer started to move, and Widowmaker promptly led the way off. They’d spent far, far too long in all of this - this separation and strain, this stress, this division.

It was, sadly, nearly time for them to say goodbye again, but it would not be any return to the same. 

Au revoir. Not adieu.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! I feel like this is the chapter where things actually feel like they're wrapping up, even though I'd say they have been pretty much since Reaper got injected. I think this one actually feels like some closure to me, though - and it's the establishment of a new norm, a new way of doing things, for them all, sort of. At the least, it's sort of aired out and in the open now, which is good!

I like several things about this one. I know the Angela/betrayal backstory's maybe a little risky, but I've been weaving it in since the start - you can go back and there are mentions of Gabe refusing treatments from her, of an altercation that led to distrust, and, well, this is it! I wanted to paint it as something which was very much understandable from her point of view, and probably from his too, so that the question isn't "is it okay to be mad over this?" but rather "is it okay to be this mad over this?" So that it becomes, rather than a question simply of validity, a question specifically about the validity of scope: how big can Reaper's vengeance become before it outstrips the things which inspired it?

Vengeance stories seem to be a fascination of us, and I'd say that Reaper's arc is going to be one, but hopefully one not quite like what's been seen before. I certainly don't think I've read or watched its like - but I suppose we'll see, eh?

Update on those art pieces I'm commissioning: I've got some feelers out, and even have one person working already! I know they're gonna be really wonderful, and I hope you folks like them too. After all this, I think we deserve a little treat, eh? :D

Other treat mention/question: I'm writing an interlude which essentially consists of Widowmaker, Tracer, and Emily going away for a little vacation. It's gonna be nice and fluffy and funny, set after the events of BSN here, and I suppose my question is this - do you have preferences on the topic of smut/NSFW content? There's been a little sprinkled throughout this story and I honestly expected at the start that there would be more, but I dunno what happened there exactly, heh. Anyway, something to think about and let me know!
Getting real close to the end of this section here, folks; couple more chapters! Hope you're still enjoying it - I know I am overall :D Thank you all so much for your reading and your comments, your kudos and your support!

C'mon back next week when Reaper comes down off of his high and we see some of what readjustment's like, but he's not alone. Sombra's there - for better, or worse. Or both. Widowmaker and Tracer zip off to say their goodbyes, and there's a surprise or two in the wings.
Roundup

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: The deeds are done and the sand is running low in the hourglass - it's time for them all to leave. Widowmaker and Tracer are heading off to say their goodbyes, while Reaper and Sombra need to gather up the rest of them and get out before Helix shows up. There is a reason, though, that Reaper hates Fate, and that is because Fate seems to have it out for him personally. It's not a good time to have his meds wear off and his Hunger return, but on the upside, he's not alone anymore. Sombra's got his back, the same way she always did. The Shrike makes her appearance.

JFL Summary: Can't a girl get just one kiss in peace? Seriously, these interruptions need to stop. Gabe wants a snack, Sombra suggests ice cream, and Gabe gets pissy about it. Junkrat mourns the loss of his gift. Comforting people isn't exactly Satya's strong suit, but she tries it anyway, and gets a hug or two for her troubles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The mask fit so well. The gloves fit so well.

Reaper groaned a sigh as he stood up from where he'd stooped to gather his things. With his peripheral vision limited by the mask, he could only focus all the more on that red splash of blood that seemed to glow in front of him. It was his own doing.

He wanted more.

He always wanted more, the same way even a sated wolf wanted more food; there could be no true end to it. That didn’t mean, however, that he needed to eat anyone who happened to be nearby.

...even if he wanted to.

The sounds of footsteps - Widowmaker leaving the room with Oxton in tow - leaving only himself, Sombra, and the doctor. The latter was waiting by the door, while the former came over to join him.

Sombra saw the difference in his stance when he stood. She’d seen his footsteps get a little sharper as he walked over, and now his shoulders were just a little hunched and his hands held out a distance from his waist rather than hanging easily at his sides.

She could see the tension. She wanted to say something about it, something to maybe ease his nerves, but there didn’t seem to be a lot that would work. Still, he at least deserved the effort.

Only problem was, she wasn’t quite sure what to do or say, because things were a little different now than they had been. Genuine sentiment always had been a rough spot, anyway.

What she settled on was, “...comin’ back, huh?”

Reaper’s jaw tensed up for a second before he forced a breath slowly out of his nose - it was, it was
all coming back, and fast, and it felt so much worse than it had before. So much worse for the relief he’d briefly been given. So much worse for the injuries he’d sustained and healed.

The shadows were always so much darker after walking through the daylight.

“Yeah.” His voice grated as one of his hands tried to flex into a fist but he stopped it, shifting his shoulder blades to try to relieve the growing itch in between them. In vain. It was always in vain.

He tried anyway.

It didn’t work. Still, there was more to do and he couldn’t afford to spend too long focusing on being comfortable. “You can call them off of the front doors. We’ll provide exfil if needed.”

Sombra chuckled. “Ai, all six of us in one dropship? What, you starting a new sitcom or something?”

“Seven,” he reminded her with a brief glance over toward Mercy, standing by the exit where Widowmaker and Oxton had gone - the sight of her was enough to send a hot spike into his gut in an entirely unpleasant way, but he’d given his word that she wouldn’t be harmed.

Instead, he comforted himself with the memories if the pain in her eyes, the way she’d begged - for her life, or for his. For a moment, it even brought a smile to his lips.

“Helix is on their way, we should go,” Sombra murmured as she swiped at some screens. “Dropship’s engines are humming and ready for us, Symmetra’s got a way to get our bouncers out easy, everything’s set, boss.”

Everything was set. It certainly sounded that way, and he wasn’t surprised; Sombra was plenty capable.

Capable enough to pull this whole thing together without his oversight, and part of him was trying to get angry at that. At the fact that it had happened without him. He knew what that was, though. Knew that it wasn’t really her he was angry at, it was the world. She was just a convenient focus.

Sometimes, anger needed a focus. Sometimes hate needed an outlet. Sometimes you just needed to vent.

Reaper chuckled darkly as the hole inside him yowled to be filled. “Helix. Tell me…” his voice had sunk back to its normal low, grating tone, “Sombra, tell me that I don’t need to kill them all.”

For just a moment, Sombra hesitated, not exactly hugely surprised - but a little bit so, at least. She was no stranger to strong urges or even undeniable ones: her pockets were filled with things that she never needed, her safehouses all strewn with them. She saw something she wanted and she just took it, as simple as that. Gabe saw something and killed it. It wasn’t that different, but she still wasn’t expecting to suddenly become a little reminder voice for him. A conscience to whisper in his ear.

It was kind of nice. Unsettling, but nice, to be trusted that much. She nudged at his elbow. “Hey, chico, c’mon. You don’t need to kill ‘em all.”

He started to chuckle, though, and then it grew into a laugh as he pulled out a shotgun. “Oh, okay,” he replied in a voice full of sarcasm, dark and thick like molasses. “I’ll leave one of them alive, then.”

Sombra let out a laugh immediately, rolling her eyes and grinning, because this was better anyway. She didn’t want to be some Jiminy Cricket do-gooder, but he really did need someone there sometimes. Someone to keep him back from the edge.
If nothing else, today had shown her that.

They really did need to go - an incident with Helix, particularly a fatal one, would lead to so much more investigation. It would be a delay, it would cause problems, and that wasn’t even to mention the horrific tidal-wave of a chain of events that would surely unfold given the involvement of one Fareeha Amari in the whole thing.

“Ah, c’mon boss,” she waved a hand dismissively. “Not worth the time or the bullets - let’s go get some ice cream instead.” She smirked. “Your treat.”

“My-” Reaper glanced over to her. “What are you talking about?”

Arms crossed, smirking, the perfect picture of teasing and nonchalance - Sombra looked back and quirked an eyebrow. “Uh, ice cream? You forget what that is? Gotta be kidding me, boss.”

That tone in her voice, the expression on her face - she had to know what she was doing, and that just drove the needle a little deeper because it was a reminder that he couldn’t fight it the way he’d been able to ten minutes ago. She’d done this before, she’d always done this, try to crawl under his skin and annoy him. Right from day one.

Like she was safe. She wasn’t. “Sombra…” It came out as a growled warning as his fingers clenched tighter on the shotgun’s grip, and he never told them to do that, but they didn’t care.

Neither, it seemed, did she. She didn’t heed his warning, didn’t stop. “What, you don’t like ice cream? Is that it?” She leaned in, looking sharply up at him through narrow eyes over a smirk. “I bet I can guess your favourite flavour. Gimme three guesses.”

“Sombra.”

“First guess has gotta be plain, boring vanilla.”

“Stop it.”

“No? Alright - oh yeah, that was stupid,” she slapped a palm to her forehead with a laugh, “obviously you’d go for something kiddy like blue bubblegum.”

“Sombra, shut up.”

He was still standing there, though, with his shotgun drawn, so she knew she couldn’t. No, instead, she just smirked all the harder and rolled her eyes as she leaned back. “Ohh, oh okay, no I know it now - black licorice. Because I mean, black,” she waved a hand over his outfit, “plus it’s like the worst flavour objectively, so-”

He whirled in an instant with a growl, raising a clenched gauntlet - tight as if on an invisible necktie Sombra was wearing, his fist just a few inches in front of her sternum, not actually gripping onto her jacket the way he wanted to. No, he forced himself to hold back from that despite the swirling hatred inside himself as wisps of smoke peeled away from him and bled through the bullet holes in his coat.

When he spun to face her, though, her eyes had lost that teasing gleam. They were surprisingly wide and solemn, and it gave him a moment’s pause as she patted a hand on his forearm, carefully amidst the spikes emerging there.

None of it served to decrease his anger, but it did remind him that it wasn’t for her. That hatred was for the world.
Not for his team.

“Sunny Coast Creameries, Butter Pecan Ripple,” she murmured, eyes locked with his. Her voice had lost all sense of teasing or humour, just as her eyes had. “I’ve got two tubs in my freezer, come on, Gabe, let’s just… let’s just get the fuck out of here and leave this whole shitty day behind us. Alright?” She paused for a second. “Please.”

His fist clenched tighter in front of her chest, everything in him shrieking out about how very wrong all of it was, and how much more he wanted to see those purple eyes in pain again, and he hated it. He hated it completely.

He wondered if she knew it was his favourite flavour of ice cream, from his favourite brand - it couldn’t even be purchased outside of the US, and it didn’t surprise him in the slightest. He couldn’t figure out whether he wanted more to scream or just to collapse and cry.

Of course she knew his favourite flavour. Of course she had it waiting at home. Of course she had to reveal it in the most annoying possible manner.

She always did.

With a grunt, Reaper thumped Sombra’s sternum gently with his gauntleted fist. “Why do you do that?” He flung his shotgun off to the side as he growled the question, heading toward the room’s exit, and she laughed and spun on her toes to follow alongside him.

“Ahh, somebody’s gotta keep you in line,” she quipped, giggling at the growl he shot back. She didn’t care, though - or, rather, she’d kind of been counting on it. Maybe even hoping for it. “And maybe you’re not the only one who likes pulling pigtails?”

He stopped and turned to her, fixing her with a warning glance but she just met it levelly with a grin before shrugging. “Ahh, or maybe I just like when you pull mine, huh? Anyway, whatever, c’mon,” she held out an arm. “I’m all fucked up from getting hurt, you gotta help me walk.”

“Oh really?” He shook his head with a heavy sigh, linking his arm through Sombra’s. She wasn’t injured anymore and he knew it, she was just leveraging the situation. He knew that, yet still found that he didn’t care. If anything he actually liked it. “Should’ve known I couldn’t expect you to bounce back that quickly.”

Sombra laughed. “Yeah, I know, I’m so weak - hey, maybe you should just give me a piggy-back ride, huh?”

“Don’t push it.”

“Aww, c’mon,” she whined pitifully, “my leg’s really hurt here! Really, really bad!”

“Yeah, well, suck it up,” he grunted back to her.

“I can’t,” Sombra gasped, pulling harder on his arm and dragging one foot along the ground in an exaggerated limp that would get her booed off of any stage in the world. “I- I can’t go on, chico, either you carry me or just- or just leave me here. Go on without me, I-”

Reaper grumbled as she went about an exaggerated display of swoons and moans and pained noises, all without letting go of his arm for even a minute. “Fucking hell you’re annoying,” he groaned, half-crouching so Sombra could jump on his back.

She did, with a delighted giggle, wrapping her arms tight around his shoulders. “Aw, thanks boss,
you’re the best.”

He just grunted back to her, though, holding her legs tight to his sides and heading for the exit. He tipped his head toward Mercy. “You take the lead, doc.” He wanted her where he could see her. Just in case.

Angela listened and followed his instructions, mostly just desperate to leave. She’d been promised sleep on the dropship, and hoped that the promise would be kept.

Reaper waited a second or two for her to start walking, but not long enough that she’d have any chance in hell of escaping if she tried to run. She obeyed, and readily, and she was definitely afraid. That was good. They were both good, they helped a little bit. The tiniest little bit.

“This is definitely worse for your legs than walking is,” Reaper griped as he carried Sombra down the stairs.

Sombra just chuckled and nodded, and couldn’t help but think that there was more to life than legs. This would’ve been worse for an injured leg - if she’d had an injured leg, which she didn’t - but it was definitely better overall.

---

Everything felt better as soon as they were out of the room, or at least it did for Tracer. Fear and concern, anxiety and panic - they hung in the air in there like a fog, and it was hard to move past them while she was surrounded by it all.

Even better still was when they exited the hospital entirely. Hand in hand with Widowmaker for the first time in what felt like forever - it was often so easy to become detached from it all, to forget how long things had been or how long she had until the next appointment, the next mission, the next day. Her life was a long string of alarms and reminders on her phone, calendar appointments, calls in advance of appointments and double and triple checks - just to maintain something halfway close to a normal timeline. Just to keep from forgetting everything and missing every appointment she ever made. Just to keep from falling out of life in even a mundane way.

It was so very easy to get lost, but the hand in hers anchored her.

Gripping strongly now, fingers interlaced, holding tight - a little cooler than it might’ve been if it hadn’t been Widdy’s, the same temperature as the room, just the way it was supposed to be.

Just perfect.

It was easier to breathe in the air outside, but she didn’t have long - the hand in hers pulled itself free and wrapped around to the other side of her waist as there was the telltale noise of the grappling hook firing off, and then Tracer was being pulled swiftly up and through the air.

She sighed contently, encircling Widdy in a tight embrace; this was so much better, so very much better, and the way the inertia tugged at the pit of her stomach and the way the wind ruffled in her hair - coupled with the strong arm wrapped around her and the slight smirk she saw on those dark blue lips - drove away the last lingering fragments of anything other than joy. Anything other than love.
The future might have some problems in it. It always did, in fact, and so did the past, but with it being so hard to simply live in the present, Tracer was glad she could do it every now and then - and this present was perfect.

If she disregarded the past that had led here or the futures it might lead to, the things that she could worry about eternally and still fail to change, this was beautiful.

They would discuss what had happened. They would plan for what would happen. Both of them, past and future, would be dealt with, but right now she just wanted to enjoy the present.

When they crested the top of the building, Tracer didn’t bother putting any strength into her legs. She let herself sink down to the floor and Widowmaker knelt to join her, wrapping her up in a tight embrace. She murmured softly, brushed at Tracer’s hair, looked into her eyes and held her.

Finally, Tracer could relax. She felt like she’d been carrying so much for so long and now she could finally let it go. An opportunity, there in the present, to just stare deep into Widowmaker’s gorgeous golden eyes and to stroke a thumb at her cheek, and back along her jaw to tuck behind her ear - to spread out her hand and pull Widdy’s head in gently, and let their mouths meet properly and deeply for the first time in far, far too long.

Tracer sighed into the kiss, through a nose that was pressed tightly against Widowmaker’s face and making the sound come out hissed, but she didn’t mind that in the slightest - it gave the gesture of relief and joy a desperate edge that felt entirely fitting as Widowmaker tipped her head back slightly to deepen the kiss, their tongues swirling for the first time in eons. Eternities.

Or maybe seconds.

It was so impossible to tell.

Keeping track of the seconds or the hours was difficult at the best of times and it always had been harder when she was in Emily’s arms, and it always had been harder when she was in Widowmaker’s sights, and she couldn’t tell whether it had been five minutes or five years since all this started but she didn’t care.

She let go of the seconds, the minutes and the hours - all the time that had come before and since and all that would after - and just surrendered to that moment. Let herself be in the present, in Widdy’s arms, in love.

When they parted, however long later it was, Tracer smiled and pressed her forehead to Widdy’s, giggling below her slightly-rushed breath. “I love you so bloody much. Thank you.” She took a deep breath and sighed it out, sinking to lay her head on Widowmaker’s shoulder instead. “Alright,” she croaked softly, eyes closed. “I think I can stand to keep going now. I really don’t wanna keep Em waiting.”

Widowmaker didn’t respond immediately. Her hand stilled on Tracer’s spine, she was holding her breath - it spurred the Brit to raise her head and look to see what was wrong. Widowmaker was staring over her shoulder, fixedly, at something.

Turning around, Tracer saw what - or rather, who - it was, in an instant. Ana Amari, with her rifle slung under her elbow, and Widdy’s rifle in hand.

“Ana!” Tracer leapt up, blurring time to be standing upright, hands outstretched flat toward the older sniper. “Please, don’t-”

“Cherie, get behind me,” Widowmaker urged, quietly but intently, but Tracer shook her head and
held up a hand over her shoulder.

“No. No, I saw what you did in there with him, and now it’s my turn, so you just hide behind me
love and let me sort it out.” Tracer didn’t blink, her eyes still fixed on Ana’s - but Ana wasn’t
looking at her, she was looking over the Brit’s shoulder to a different set of eyes.

“No. Don’t do this. Please - I know it looks bad, but I can explain, I- I know you don’t understand,
but-”

“Saghir.” Her words came out sharply because she felt sharp, she felt jagged on the inside.
Widowmaker hadn’t blinked and neither had she - neither could she, because even though the two
had just been…

Ana swallowed heavily, forcing her eye away to meet Tracer’s, and she shook her head.

“Understand? No. I do not.”

Tracer was so young, so quick to jump in; she reminded Ana of her own younger self in some ways.
Much, much younger, before the military and the Crisis and Overwatch. Back before the world had
beaten her down and she’d been forced to take up arms against it.

The rifle was at the ready, automatically - she’d thought nothing of it. She’d heard of the hospital
under attack, the last point on the trail she’d been following ever since Tracer had disappeared. Ever
since that gunshot.

Again, Ana shook her head, softly. “I have never understood love, but-” her eyes flickered to
Widowmaker’s again, so painfully familiar and she couldn’t deny the anger that she felt at the sight
of them.

That didn’t change anything, though.

“...but I can recognize it when I see it,” Ana finished, looking back to Tracer’s face again. She
smiled gently at the soft surprise she saw there, the clear effect of her words. “Saghir, I- did not
know, but when I saw you…” her eye tried to well up but she swallowed it back. “I- am so sorr-”

“Arrêt. Stop.” Widowmaker spat the commands swiftly, cutting Ana off mid-word - she hadn’t
thought before saying it, the imperative just leapt from her mouth, but she immediately knew why it
had. She shook her head as Ana’s eye fixed on hers again.

She had loved those eyes once, when there had been two of them. They’d been the mother’s eyes
she had never felt at home, and she could still remember them - how Ana had looked at her during
tea or over the rim of a glass of wine, that gentle concern or occasional admonishment. Back when
her name had been Amélie, she thought that Ana had been the mother she’d never quite had.

That had been the name she’d called out second-most in her cell, after Gérard’s, begging and
pleading for Ana to come save her.

She hadn’t.

Then, to see her again so long later - that look of horror on her face, Widowmaker remembered that
clearly as well. The way Ana had looked at her, disgusted and afraid, like she was a monster.

Just as she looked now, in fact. It was the closest Widowmaker had come to being infuriated, for a
very long time, and that fragment of a feeling put an edge on her voice as she leaned forward and
wrapped an arm around Tracer’s shoulders, shaking her head.
“You saved her.” Widowmaker half-spoke and half-hissed the words as she met Ana’s gaze aggressively, even angrily. “Do not sully that with an apology. You were the only thing I could trust in that moment. After all the rest, do not take that away from me too.” She saw pain in Ana’s eye at the words, and anger as well, as the old sniper stood there with her rifle in hand.

Ana took a pace forward, dropping the rifle’s barrel to point toward the ground. “After all the rest? After what - losing my team to you? Losing my life to you?”

“You threw that away for yourself,” Widowmaker responded flatly, turning her nose up and looking away. “You think I could not have killed you? Ha!”

Ana laughed as well, just briefly - sharply, humorlessly, a noise of pain. “Of course you could have! I know it - I have always known it, and I wished that you had. Lying in the hospital bed with nothing but grief and pain, I wished that you had.”

Widowmaker dropped her upturned nose, looked at Ana with a scowl and a huff, and wished that she could gain the same fulfilment as Reaper did. Ana’s words should have felt like a surrender, like her victory, but they didn’t.

They just sounded like words.

“Ana… Widowmaker…” Tracer’s voice was soft, as a matter of intent. She was quite literally between two of the most powerful women she knew, and while they weren’t exactly yelling at each other, it was clear that there was a lot of pain and a lot of anger in the mix. With that in mind, she felt like being cautious was the best policy. Down at her side, one hand held tight onto Widdy’s, and her other she held out in some effort to forestall a fight.

Before she could figure out the next thing to say, though, the path that would lead them away from an altercation, Widdy spoke up again over her shoulder.

“I remember… all of it.” She took a breath and sighed it out through her nose tightly, jaw tensed and nostrils narrowed. This felt almost like an apology, and particularly given the circumstances, that was irritating.

Irritating, but important.

Ana’s brow furrowed in confusion, and Widowmaker let out a soft laugh. “Every moment of the life I had, every piece of advice you gave or joke you told; I recall them all. And, then…” she sighed, but this time it was a weary sound, “to see you looking back at me like that through the scope. Disgusted with me, horrified.”

The old sniper swallowed heavily, her mouth as dry as the deserts of her homeland as she searched those golden eyes for some hint of a cruel lie, but it was not there. All she saw was the even crueler truth.

“You remember.” Ana shook her head. She’d never thought - had never feared in the worst moments that Amélie was still in there somewhere, because of course she was not. How could she be?

And how unfathomably horrific would it be if she was?

“Amélie…”

Tracer shook her head, took a breath to speak up - to correct Ana, to point out that she shouldn’t use that name, but Widdy’s arm squeezed tighter on her shoulder and her chin dragged lightly left and
right across the top of Tracer’s shoulder as Widowmaker shook her head.

“Let her, cherie,” Widowmaker whispered softly into her mouse’s ear, letting a gentle smile to her lips at the tiny nod she received in return. She looked up and met that one familiar eye again - one, because she’d taken the other, because she could not stand the look in it any longer. “Yes? Ma mère?”

Ana didn’t know what to say. She lived her life in stoicism or witticisms, generally, and sentiment had never been a strong point. It had strained every relationship she had, with Fareeha, with Jack, with friends and superiors and subordinates - sarcasm was so much easier.

It wouldn’t suffice, though, and even if it would have, Ana found herself incapable of speech as Widowmaker looked back at her with Amélie’s eyes. That gaze that she’d once seen across the dinner table or on the other side of the couch, and then filled with hate through the scope of a rifle.

How could she say it? Any of it? That Amélie’s face was one of the more common ones to appear in her dreams and send her back to the land of the waking, in a cold sweat. That she had hesitated out of some feeling for the woman she once was, and regretted it bitterly ever since for not ending the woman she had become. For hating the poisoned monument which Widowmaker was, to a woman she’d once called friend; wearing her face, possessing her grace, but only as a twisted mockery.

That was what it had felt like.

No longer.

She couldn’t find that hatred anymore, with one of Widowmaker’s arms wrapped around Tracer’s slim shoulders - not holding her hostage, not binding her, but a gesture of protectiveness and care. The way their hands were clasped down at Tracer’s side.

The gut-wrenching way Tracer’s voice had torn when she screamed.

Words had never been her strong suit, not in this way. She could twist them and turn them as weapons, she could deflect them easily and weave them with joy, but not like this. Perhaps Reinhardt or even Jack - or Fareeha - could have found some way of saying it. Ana, though, was more a woman of action.

Her face shifted subtly, taking on a slightly more stern countenance - she straightened up, taking a pace forward and holding out the rifle. Widowmaker’s rifle, the weapon that had taken her eye and sent her to the precipice where she’d thrown her life over the edge, to regain it only years later.

She offered it now in lieu of the words she couldn’t find.

Widowmaker stared openly, surprise written clearly across her features. Her eyes dropped instantly to the rifle, her rifle. She knew every piece of it. How the firing pin would have snapped forward to detonate the primer in the bullet which had ended her life, how the receiver had done its dance to bring a new shot into the chamber, how the trigger and the scope and how everything about it worked.

She knew it better than she knew herself, and she reached out from Tracer’s shoulder with reverence. Her mouse stepped to the side, still holding her hand, but she barely noticed that as her other hand clasped at the stock of the Kiss.

“I believe this is yours.” Ana nodded slightly, as they each had a hand on it for a moment. She couldn’t deny that it was the finest weapon she had ever had the opportunity to handle, and to fire. At the same time, she never wanted to touch it again.
With a tiny motion, a slight tug and a twist, the Kiss pulled back toward Widowmaker and spun around her shoulder. She slipped that arm through the sling and dodged her head to the side, and the rifle fell into place slung across her back. Always those same seemingly effortless displays of grace and skill.

Then, Widowmaker surprised even herself by leaning forward and kissing at one of Ana’s cheeks, and then the other - the way she used to a decade ago, when her skin had been pink and her heart had worked and her name had been Amélie.

“You saved her,” she repeated in a whisper, her lips near Ana’s ear. “Never regret this. Please.”

Ana swallowed and nodded, once, then cleared her throat. “Come. We can make our way back to the dropship - it may be night by the time we reach it.” She unslung the Biotic Rifle and glanced down to it with a sigh and a smirk. “It would be better to have a scope.”

Stepping forward, hand-in-hand with Tracer, Widowmaker laughed brightly. “Ahh, perhaps I shall just shoot you in the head the next time, hmm?”

“I suppose a scope is hardly necessary,” Ana muttered wryly in response. A slight grunt was forced out when Tracer leapt on her, squeezing her in a tight hug.

“Thank you, Ana, I-” Tracer didn’t even know how to say it, but she knew there’d been no fight and they were going home now, and right now, that was the most important thing. “It’s- you’re wonderful, just-”

Ana squirmed slightly, trying to escape her grip. “Yes, well, if that is the case, why must you do this to me?”

“Cause I love you!”

Widowmaker sighed and rolled her eyes with a smirk. “She loves everyone.”

“Oi!” Tracer withdrew and slapped at Widdy’s shoulder lightly with a grin. “Don’t go spoiling it now! Anyway, uh, actually Ana, we’ve got a dropship coming in closer. Winston and Emily aboard.”

With a heavy sigh and a shake of her head, Ana started to head toward the edge of the building and the fire escape she’d climbed to get a better view of the hospital. “Emily? I suppose I should prepare myself for more hugs, then…”

---

Reaper didn’t put Sombra down until they reached the stolen dropship. The doors were open, but nobody was inside - Mercy was the first to set foot there.

“Sombra-”

“Already on it, boss,” she muttered as she hopped off of his back. About ten seconds later, there was a crackling noise, and Junkrat, Roadhog, and Symmetra all appeared from a portal which had been set up off to the side.
Symmetra snapped her fingers as she stepped away, the teleporter dissolving into particles of light which were swept away in an instant - Sombra grinned at the sight of it, nodding as the Architech came over. “Damn, love the theatrics, *chica*!”

“I knew you would,” Symmetra responded briskly, “now *please* sequester me from those two.”

Junkrat was sobbing as Roadhog carried him, looking as irate as a man in a gasmask could ever look. “Took- took my present!” Junkrat’s words were broken up by gasps and shuddering cries as if he was mourning the death of a close family member. “Can’t believe they- those- A**AUGH!”

Reaper made a fist and pressed it to his forehead at the antics of those too, hissing a breath as the dropship door started to close behind them. He was already almost sure that having them all together in here was a mistake, but he’d deal with those two in a moment. First, there was the matter of the explosive module.

“Symmetra,” he turned to get her attention, but she just held up a hand and kept walking. Growling under his breath, Reaper clenched his fists and looked to Sombra who only shrugged as she waved a hand and set the dropship on its course to the destination he’d given Widowmaker earlier.

---

Angela felt almost impossibly tired, in every sense she could think of. Physically, mentally, emotionally - she’d been working and thinking and *feeling* harder than she could recall in years, and it was definitely taking its toll.

She stopped even caring if anything was going to go wrong after about the third step of the staircase down, and by the time they made it to the dropship, her only thought was quite simple.

*Oh good. There’s a free seat.*

There were, in fact, only free seats, but her eyes saw a single one and her mind fixated on it, and that was all that it had the space to process. She stepped over to the third seat away from the left wall on that side and slumped into it, dropping her head back with a groan and letting her eyes slide shut.

Her feet hurt, her hands hurt, her brain hurt, she still felt steeped in worry and anxiety and guilt, but more than anything else she was simply *tired* and all the rest paled in comparison.

She let out a single chuckle as she thought that it was still probably better than grad school.

“Angela.”

Instantly, she recognized the voice, and opened her eyes - the ship was in the air now, but there were still buildings outside sinking down as the craft rose so it couldn’t have been long. She must have dozed off for a few seconds, though, but she still offered a weak smile to the woman standing in front of her.

“Satya, hello,” she gestured at the seat next to her. “You can sit, if you’d like? This seat looks to be free.”

Satya’s eyes flicked that way briefly, but she shook her head in almost the same instant. “No. Thank you. I would rather stand.” She hesitated, unsure of where exactly to go from there. Angela looked…
not good, but in ways she could not put her finger on. Tired, perhaps, or irritated, or scared - they all looked so similar sometimes, from the outside. “Are you… well?”

A weary laugh escaped Angela’s throat, and she rubbed at her face with her hands. “Oh, of course, I’m quite well.”

“You don’t seem it.”

She hummed a chuckle as she stretched back against the chair. “Mm… well… I suppose I’m not, quite. I will be, though, that was what I meant to say.” Angela yawned, but felt a little bit more awake afterward as happened sometimes. She looked up to Satya with a soft smile. “Thank you, Satya - for your concern, and for all of your work here today.”

Nodding slightly because she didn’t know quite what else to do, Satya looked around the cabin. Reaper was over there, talking with Sombra it seemed - Sombra’s jacket was tattered in an entirely worrying way that widened Satya’s eyes at the sight, but she didn’t appear to be bleeding currently. Still, it needed to be investigated. It indicated much, in combination with the look on Angela’s face.

“…I do not feel as if I performed particularly well,” the Architech murmured thoughtfully. Recognition of successes might feel better, but it was in fact recognition of failure that provided the greater opportunity. A success might have relied on that ever-fickle circumstance which Satya so despised, but failure could be tracked. Often, at least.

Angela’s eyelids slid slowly open and she looked blearily up at Satya’s face of mild concern. Her lips pursed like that when she was thinking, when she was doubting - Angela had seen it before. With a bit of a sigh, she sat up straighter. “Would it be alright if I held your hand?”

It only took a moment’s thought. The primary concern was positioning, but the solution was simple. With a nod, Satya took a seat next to Angela and held out her hand - the one of skin and bone - with a slight smile. Angela took it with a gesture much the same.

“Thank you,” Angela sighed, squeezing lightly at the hand in hers. It felt nice to have someone here she knew could be relied upon. “You did a very good job, Satya, this - this could have ended so very much worse than it did. Circumstances were very nearly out of control, but it would seem that you and Sombra did a fairly good job of herding these cats.”

Satya frowned slightly, but didn’t even have time to state that there weren’t any cats, before Angela was giggling softly. “It’s an expression,” the doctor explained, “which means… trying to control things which are very difficult to control.”

At that, Satya nodded softly. “Not an expression with which I’m familiar,” she murmured, a slightly awkward sensation settling in underneath her skin as it almost always did in these situations. Feeling like she’d missed something so obvious.

It did feel a little bit better when Angela laughed, though, because she didn’t have a cruel laugh in the slightest.

“That’s quite alright,” Angela assured her, “there are so many, it’s easy to miss some. The important part is that… I went into this by choice.” Her eyes flicked briefly to Gabriel, Reaper. “Perhaps,” she muttered, “I did not know all that it would entail - but,” she raised her voice to a normal tone again, “I knew some and I chose to expose myself to it. Nobody was injured, nobody killed; I think you did a wonderful job, Satya.”

For a moment, Satya just sat there, nodding softly and trying to convince herself of the truth of the
words. Angela wouldn’t lie to her, she knew - but there were things that might not be known or understood, and that could sway the results.

Of course, Angela could tell she wasn’t all that reassured, still. It wasn’t written on her face but in her posture, in that tense way she carried her uncertainty in her shoulders and woven throughout her body. She sighed and squeezed at the hand in hers, lightly. “Would you like a hug?”

Satya didn’t need to think for very long at all. Not even a full second. “Very much so.”

Angela’s arms were quite strong, they wrapped around her and squeezed tight and Satya felt a little better as she let the air bleed out from her lungs through her nose. She held her friend in turn, trying to press aside all of the uncertainties and self-doubts with a tight embrace.

With other people they mattered so little, these days - those doubts, those questions, those cares about not knowing quite what to do or how to act. There had been a time when she had been wholly anxious about it, but she’d largely written off people as beyond the effort, now. A few exceptions remained, though, and both of the ones which sprang to mind were in this dropship.

She always felt better when she talked to Angela, and she hoped that it worked both ways. “Are you **certain** you are alright, my friend?” Her soft murmurs had a solemn tint as her eyebrows pulled inward.

Angela let out a slight sigh, squeezing Satya a little tighter. “Of course I am - I promise. Everything isn’t perfect, but I am definitely **okay**, at the least. Is that acceptable?”

A promise meant a lot, and she knew Angela knew it - knew that her own thoughts on the matter were understood. Or at least, that they’d been heard. She relaxed even a little more into the embrace, and was quite pleased when it felt like Angela did the same. “If there is anything I can do,” she started to offer, a small smile finding her lips when Angela’s soft giggle told her that the doctor already knew what she was offering. She offered it every time they spoke, in fact, and Angela always returned it.

“I promise I will let you know,” Angela nodded as she withdrew, one hand lingering on Satya’s shoulder for a moment as she met her eyes. “And you do the same, yes?”

“Of course, my friend.”

Angela’s smile widened a little further. “Good - now, I must confess I’m quite tired, and I believe your substantial skills are needed elsewhere. Sombra should be able to fill you in.”

“Convenient,” Satya murmured - and it was, because Sombra was the next person she was planning on seeing anyway. She stood, letting her hand trail along Angela’s arm until it met hers, squeezing it briefly. Her hand of flesh and bone, of course.

It felt somehow wrong to touch Angela with this prosthetic, Vishkar’s prosthetic - it felt like denying a gift, and Satya wasn’t comfortable with that in the slightest.

“Sleep well, Angela.”

With a sigh, the tired doctor settled back into her seat with her eyes already closed. “Mm, thank you, Satya, I plan to.”

She must have been half-asleep already, because Satya heard a soft snore as she started to walk away, but that was good. Sleep was good.
The Architech strode across the dropship’s floor to Sombra, stepping in close and reaching out to tug at the tattered and blood-soaked shreds of her jacket on the one side. Of course, she knew better than to just grab at a stranger that way, but Sombra was no stranger. “What is this? You must be more careful.”

Sombra blinked, mouth freezing halfway through a sentence as she was talking to Gabe. He sighed heavily and turned away, though, leaving her with Symmetra - she turned toward the Architech with a chuckle and a grin. “Uh, it’s bullet holes? And you’re right, it was totally my fault. I’ll duck next time, good point.”

Symmetra let go of the jacket and straightened up abruptly, a frown setting on her face in an instant. “That’s not what I meant,” she protested sharply, almost desperately - she didn’t want Sombra to think she was being blamed for her injuries, it was just that she was concerned, and that led to everything coming out wrong.

Already, though, Sombra was chuckling and draping an arm loosely over her shoulder. “I- I know, it’s cool, I was just joking.” Her other hand took Symmetra’s - or rather, Satya’s now, she was quite confident - and set it over the healed wound. “It’s all better now, though. Just a little temporary thing, it’s alright. Angel-dust took care of it.”

She could see the relief in Satya’s eyes, feel it in her posture, the tension relaxing from the Architech’s shoulders. Sombra was quite certain, then, that the mantle of Symmetra had been hung up for a moment - there was more to it than the uniform, it was a persona, and she understood that maybe a little too well.

“Speaking of,” Sombra murmured curiously with a glance over Satya’s shoulder, “I figured you’d stay over there with her.”

“You required attention,” Satya responded with a soft smirk. If Sombra wasn’t injured - and she wasn’t, Satya could feel for herself the wholeness and health of the skin as her fingers slipped through the holes in Sombra’s jacket - then everything was well, and they could joke. Sometimes Sombra had a greater definition of ‘things going well’ than she did, and joked in situations where Satya would rather they carried on without, but they seemed to agree on the usefulness of the tactic. Just slight differences on the scope.

Now, though, things were well. Satya knew that she herself was alright, Angela had assured her of her own wellness, and Sombra was uninjured and happy as well. That meant that the jokes could return. “You are quite needy that way,” Satya added with a grin.

Sombra barked a laugh, her skin and muscles twitching a little underneath Satya’s metal fingertips at her side. “Ha, yeah, sure - or maybe it’s because the doc’s out like a light, huh? Hey, I like this, by the way,” she patted at Satya’s hand stroking lightly at her skin through the holes in her jacket. “Maybe I should get shot more often, huh?”

The Architech rolled her eyes with a soft scoff. “Of course that would be the conclusion you would draw.” There was no real malice to the words, though, and no real superiority either. She knew that Sombra was capable - the hacker’s injury only underlined how much worse the situation must have been than its appearance.

The pair had been involved on numerous operations, both with and without other members of Sombra’s team, and Symmetra hadn’t seen her injured this badly before. Little nicks or grazes, yes, a few laser burns, and once an actual bullet in a quite non-vital section of her abdomen, but this wound looked entirely different.
For a moment - though she knew Sombra preferred not to, it was what she always said - Satya let the joking facade slide away and leaned forward, resting her forehead against Sombra’s shoulder as she wrapped her arms around the hacker and squeezed tight. “I am glad you are not hurt, my friend.”

Slight shock stilled Sombra for a second, her eyes widening instinctively, but her free hand slid on its own to Satya’s back and stroked softly there. “Yeah,” she murmured, “me too. Thanks.”

Her eyes flicked around the dropship, from Ziegler to Gabe, as she wrapped Satya up in a hug. For her part, she was glad that nobody had got hurt - at least not in a way that stuck. A wound that healed up didn’t really count, did it?

Not until you started poking at it again, at least.

She saw the way Gabe glared over in Ziegler’s direction, and after hearing the story, she couldn’t blame him. There was a reason Sombra held all of her sensitive intel in a tight fist, anyway - and with her own attempts against Lumerico recently, Gabe’s story had left a bitter taste in her mouth. She knew exactly what it was like to stretch out there and put out the story, only to have it stomped away and have nothing change.

Portero was still in command, all of the charges against him dropped, and for the most part even public inquiry had dried up. Sombra couldn’t even imagine how much worse it would have been if, instead of releasing the information to media outlets directly, she’d given it to a person who had then gone and handed it over to Portero right away. Or how much worse it would have been if she’d been deep inside Lumerico when that happened.

It didn’t mean she didn’t understand the other point of view. Sometimes you didn’t know what to do with something, so you just handed it off to the person nearest to you or the next person along the line.

Still, Sombra knew she wouldn’t be entrusting anything sensitive to Ziegler for some fair time. She wasn’t sure how this would all work out, where it all would go - but that was always the case. She was out there dancing on a tightrope, dancing on spiderwebs, and tugging on all the strings she wanted to along the way.

Her lips curled into a grin as Satya sighed against her shoulder. They’d all made it out alright, and she had a whole lot more to play with now. New intel, new contacts - a whole load of new favours owed.

So she’d been a little shot. So she’d messed some stuff up. So some people had got their lives a little threatened. At the end of the day, the pros definitely outweighed the cons.

“Hey,” Sombra patted at Satya’s back, “I gotta make some calls, alright? But we’re still on for Thursday, right?”

“Was that…” Satya rubbed heavily at her forehead with a frown, “...tacos, or movies? I cannot recall.”

Sombra snickered, clapping a hand lightly on her shoulder with a grin. “Ah, no big deal - besides, isn’t both always better? No reason we’ve gotta choose just one! I mean, you know me, amiga,” she dropped her hand down to hold Satya’s. “I’m a greedy, greedy bitch…”

Chapter End Notes
Okay, okay okay, I hope nobody was too startled or scared by Ana's appearance - I didn't want it to seem as threatening as the other things had! I think I succeeded in that, too.

RE: the Ana and Widowmaker/Amélie backstory? Well, it's actually probably sadder than it first appears. This is just touching on what I had in mind, and I want to write more about it, but this right here wasn't really the place or time. I didn't want to get lost in big long flashbacks, but I did want to give enough of a glimpse into what they'd been through in order to highlight some of it.

The anger on Widowmaker's face in Ana's Legacy comic, and the horror on Ana's - that's what inspired this idea of their previous relationship like this. It's kinda painful, but I like the... I dunno, the balance that's starting to be struck between Amélie and Widowmaker. She's remembered this whole time, but now she's starting to actually act off of it. To accept those memories as a bit of a part of who she is now, rather than just who she used to be.

It'll be a slow process, of course, but I'm really looking forward to how Widowmaker's story is going to unfold through the second part. More backstory, more openness on her part - and a few setbacks, of course, because nothing goes perfectly flawlessly - it should be good.

I feel pretty good about this one. It's still a little hesitant in terms of tone, overall, but I think that's realistic - given what's happened, I don't think it would make sense for everyone to just go "oh okay everything's good now, everything's fine". There's still some concern, some tiredness, some pain, but people are overall looking forward now I think. That's the tone I was going for, at least: weary hopefulness, at the end there.

Also! Satya and Angela getting some more interaction, I love them, and also some more glimpses into Satya and Sombra as well, eh? I liked that too! I still feel like they're too background/teased in terms of relationships for me to tag them or anything, but I'm learning that I really like them all.

Sidenote: I've been accepted into a Zine! I'm really, really, really excited about it, I'll be writing a couple of pieces, and I'm so crazy psyched for it. I've applied to a couple of others but this is my first acceptance, so, fingers crossed! More info upcoming, but I'm doing a Symmetra/Mercy piece and a Tracer/Emily/Pharah piece at least!

Art Update: I've got some commissions going! :D

As always I want to thank you all, and welcome any feedback you've got. Things you want more of, things you want less of - even if I don't necessarily follow through with your recommendations, I want to hear them! I hope you're all having a great day, and I hope you continue to have a great week! :D

C'mon back next week when the spider and the cherry finally get to say hello again, and everybody gets to go home. It's been a long day and they deserve a rest.
Return

Chapter Summary

Serious Summary: Tracer, Widowmaker, and Ana return to the dropship where Winston and Emily await. There's a brief goodbye as Ana distracts Winston, but it doesn't feel as hopeless as many goodbyes do. Widowmaker leaves and returns to Reaper, Sombra, and the others - both groups head back to their home bases, and deal with the immediate aftermaths of their actions. A new plan is put forth.

JFL Summary: Ana and Tracer went out for hot dogs. Geeze, Winston, why you gotta be so suspicious? Widowmaker has a heart! That visit to the Wizard had to be good for something, right? Reaper throws a guy (what else is new?). Ana mixes a mean drink.

Chapter Notes

Previous Chapter Summary: Things wrapped up at the hospital, Tracer and Widdy leaving - but bumping into Ana. At first it was tense, but Widowmaker's revelation of her own memories and Ana's recognition of Tracer's feelings let them move past it without too much concern.

Reaper wasn't a fan of Mercy, of course, and momentarily considered taking out his anger on Helix until Sombra convinced him otherwise. Convinced him by teasing him until he snapped at her instead - a tried and true tactic of hers, sort of. They left, along with the others - Mercy, Symmetra, Roadhog, Junkrat.

Satya spoke with Angela, seeking to lend comfort but really requiring some herself, as well, and finding it in her friend. Then she went to Sombra as well, concerned over the hacker's well-being, but all was resolved.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Winston paced uneasily, back and forth along the edge of the dropship’s open door. He didn’t know what Tracer was doing here, what had led her here - what had happened. Athena was back online now, and he trusted her, but that had been a big enough scare of its own.

He didn’t know almost anything, and that had always caused problems.

“Winston, love,” Emily murmured and draped a hand on his shoulder. “It’ll be alright, they’ll be alright.”

He eyed the city warily. The sirens weren’t inaudible, and he knew there must be a reason they were so close - but at the same time, not there. There must be a reason Athena had brought the dropship here instead of to wherever Tracer was.

...and he already knew what the reason must be - the reason he didn’t know, and he knew that if he asked, Athena would tell him. He trusted her with that. As long as she had the situation under control, though - as long as they did - he didn’t actually need to know.
The problem was that he was always worried, not knowing. Although knowing rarely helped much, either.

“I know they will,” he sighed, taking a seat on the floor and raising a hand to Emily’s arm that swept across his shoulders in a hug. “I know they will. It’s just… anxiety-inducing, to be waiting with no idea of what’s happening.”

Emily barked a laugh, nodding into Winston’s shoulder. “Yeah, you could say that again. Join the club on that one, eh?”

For a moment, he chuckled at that despite his concern. If anyone had a right to be worried because of that, it was her - she’d been so far outside of things for so long, he was just getting a taste of it and it was almost unbearable. He couldn’t even imagine what it was like for her.

“Winston, Emily,” Athena’s voice came from the speakers above. She sounded happy, though - positively delighted. “Tracer is returning, in the company of two others. Ana, and Widowmaker.”

Emily’s heart leapt a beat as she stood up straighter, Winston getting to his feet in front of her as they both studied the city intently for any sign of their approaching friends.

“All three of them?” She glanced up to the ceiling.

Athena hummed in response, still fairly busy with clearing out her databanks and system of the clutter that had been thrown at her. “Indeed. The situation in King’s Row is resolved as well, Operatives McCree and 76 are making their return.”

There was a little lurch in Emily’s gut, and a little warmth as well. The Row was sorted, at least for a minute, but some damage had definitely been done. Widowmaker was safe, and Lena as well, and they were together which was delightful, but she couldn’t help wondering what had happened.

Whatever it had been, it hadn’t been good.

“Small victories, yeah?” Emily patted Winston on the shoulder, smiling at his relieved-but-still-nervous chuckle in response.

“I don’t even want to think about this debriefing,” he sighed.

It was Winston who spotted them first, coming through an alleyway - Ana was in the lead, on point. Tracer was next, and Widowmaker brought up the rear, stepping backward with her rifle at the ready.

Emily stepped forward in front of Winston to get a better look, and immediately noticed the scorches, the blood, the dirt on Lena’s outfit and her skin. She was used to looking for those, trained into it - the next thing she set her eyes on was Widdy, performing that same check that she always carried out after a return home.

No visor, a small amount of blood and a hole in the back of her jumpsuit - but with her, only a little blood could still mean quite a lot. She was there, though. Right there, in person, just the way she should’ve been.

It had been a long time.

Clearly, there was a story behind it all - how Widdy could be there, be here, without causing undue risks. How Ana fit into the whole thing. Why their comms and vitals had gone dead so suddenly. Why Lena’s voice had been so strained in that phone call earlier, and why Widdy hadn’t spoken
during the same.

Right now, though, none of that mattered to Emily. They were safe.

Lena leapt at her, flashing through time to get there in an instant with a wordless shout, and Emily let herself fall back into Winston’s arms where he wrapped the pair of them up. The words they said didn’t even matter, the sentiment was obvious in every direction.

*I’m so glad to see you again.*

Tracer thought she might burst, but for once today it was in a good way. They were all safe, they were home free, it was perfect. Or at least, *almost* perfect, because there were two people missing from the hug.

“C’mon,” she called out, glancing back over her shoulder with a grin to the two snipers who stood at a distance, watching warily.

After a moment of looking at each other and gesturing the other forward with no progress being made, Widowmaker rolled her eyes and went to join the group at the dropship’s doorway.

It wasn’t that she didn’t *want* to go and join them, Tracer and Emily both. To hold them and tell them that they could finally return to the way things were. She *did*, she wanted that greatly; to feel their warm hands and lips on her again, their embraces, their sheets.

Her hesitation was born out of the others. What her place was with Winston, what her place was with Ana, but it didn’t take more than a step for her to realize that she didn’t care.

She’d never had any concerns about dancing to their tune, of course, but she had thought that there were appearances to upkeep. That she would need to be conscious of how she came across, as The Widowmaker.

Those thoughts dissolved as Emily reached out and caught her hand, and her skin was so warm as it always was - her pull was, as always, firm but not unyielding. A clear statement that her cherry wanted her closer, but never so strong a grasp as to prevent her from leaving if she tried to pull away.

She didn’t try, not even for an instant - she let herself collapse forward, Tracer’s head coming in against her shoulder and spiky hair brushing at Widowmaker’s face and leaving a smile on her lips. Emily pressed a kiss to her cheek and Widowmaker shifted, following her retreat so that they stayed in contact, stayed touching, for the first time in so long.

The only problems had been the other people, but when had she ever cared about *people*, anyway? Not for years now, certainly.

With a very few exceptions.

The big mess of a group hug lasted for only another few seconds before breaking up, Winston pushing himself upright and away somewhat and clearing his throat. “I- I was… so worried about you both, what…” he shook his head, frowning deeply, “I mean, what *happened*? You went off comms, we lost vitals, lost everything, this-” he let out a single laugh, “this is going to be a hellacious debriefing.”

Ana stepped closer, rolling one shoulder in an idle shrug. “What is there to debrief, Winston? The communicators encountered some problem which forced us to remove them. That caused the loss of vital signs. We accomplished the mission, destroyed the stash of chemical weaponry, but the problems forced us to pursue alternate methods of evacuation.”
Winston fixed her with a firm frown. “Ana… we are three countries over from where you were deployed.”

She smirked and raised an eyebrow, just a hint. “Quite alternate methods, then.”

He gestured a hand toward her. “Your rifle’s missing its scope.”

“Oh, is it?” Ana glanced down to her Biotic Rifle and shrugged. “I hadn’t noticed. It must have fallen off along the way.”

Winston groaned, wiping a hand over his face in exasperation. “Ana!”

Tracer’s hand found Widdy’s, clasping tightly - her other was caught up in Emily’s, their fingers intertwined, and she cleared her throat. “Widowmaker, um- she was on a different deployment. Nothing to do with us or our mission, but we kind of… crossed paths, and erm, well, she got hurt. And I- I couldn’t just-”

Emily wrapped her up in a hug again, cutting off her strained words and murmuring soft words of comfort as Winston met the sniper’s eyes. She looked back at him sharply, piercingly, and for a moment he was even a little bit afraid.

“…whatever I can offer,” she stated softly with a small nod. “As promised.”

Winston wasn’t sure what it had to do with everything the three of them obviously weren’t saying - there was a lot of it, he knew that much. Explanations behind the damage to their outfits and their equipment, from Ana’s rifle to Widowmaker’s visor; the reasons behind the blood and the dirt, and the pain in Tracer’s voice.

How any of it tied into Widowmaker’s promise to protect Tracer, he didn’t know, but it made him swallow as a thick lumped formed in his throat and it didn’t want to go down. Their hands were still clasped tightly together, almost desperately. His eyes flicked to Ana, who nodded, slightly but gravely as she held his gaze. For her to be there, for her to be willingly and freely escorting Widowmaker…

Whatever had happened, it had been big. It had meant Tracer in danger, or at least Widowmaker thinking she needed to protect her - the sniper had been hurt in turn. There were a lot of possibilities for the specifics, but if he wasn’t being told them, there was probably a reason.

Athena had traded something for Tracer’s release from Talon, and he knew it. They’d openly been working with Sombra, but he hadn’t told everyone about that right away. Sometimes things weren’t revealed in the moment, because it wasn’t safe.

Winston took a breath and slipped off his glasses, rubbing at his eyes with a thumb and a forefinger as he stretched his neck back to face the sky. “I do want to know what happened,” he sighed, then shook his head. “Eventually. It doesn’t need to be a debriefing, though. Officially… technical issues with comms, Widowmaker was injured, and we owed her for helping Tracer in a similar situation previously. Ana and Tracer escorted.”

Widowmaker nodded, but Ana scoffed and stepped forward toward the dropship. “What are you talking about? Nothing happened, nothing at all.” She laid a hand on Winston’s shoulder, steering him up into the dropship as he groaned.

“Ana, a lot obviously happened. There is blood all over-”

“It is only ketchup. Do you always need to jump to the worst possible conclusion?”
“You were dropped off in an active warzone! And here there are so many sirens it might as well be a warzone too!”

“We got hungry. We went for hot dogs.”

“Ana!”

“It was a long mission! You don’t think you would be getting hungry?”

Their bickering trailed off as they wandered into the dropship until it was swallowed by the sounds of the city reacting to the chaos which had broken out shortly ago on its streets, and in one hospital in particular.

Widowmaker listened to them go off, Ana staunchly refusing to admit to anything, anything at all, and she quite suspected that it was primarily to defend Tracer. She also thought that Ana just might have had some lingering protective urges toward a girl named Amélie.

Within a few moments, though, the three of them were alone, just the way it should be.

“Do I... even want to ask what happened?” Emily raised an eyebrow, glancing back between the two of them.

Tracer laughed, and then shook her head as Em stroked at her cheek, wiping a bit of dirt away. “Maybe later,” she suggested softly, “or, well...” her eyes flicked over toward Widowmaker’s for a moment, a silent mention to tell the tale for herself if she wanted.

There was only one problem, though: where to begin. Where to begin, and how much to say, and how it was to be presented - the words, the truth, the lies.

Everything, then.

Widowmaker sighed, shaking her head softly as she stepped forward and wrapped the two of them up in a gentle embrace and relishing in their warmth.

“Alors, it is a long story. Suffice to say... I may have lost sight of something important.” A light chuckle flew from her lips as she shook her head again. “How you two are so adept at making me do this, I suspect I will never understand.”

Her heart, though, had some small reaction. It was still greatly slowed by the doctor’s medications, it was still not her heart, but therein was the source of its response. It wasn’t her heart, that old and tired piece of machinery that had been redesigned and redesigned and been through so torturously much. It was new, it was fresh.

It was much more alive.

“...or, perhaps I already know it.” Widowmaker’s words all but dissolved into the air, barely making the distance to the ears of her audience, but they both heard. Barely.

Emily pulled her head back with a slight, curious look - she didn’t want to upset Widowmaker by implying feelings, but she suspected that was quite the reason. “Whatcha mean, love?”

“Oh, I-” Tracer interjected with a half-frustrated sigh, a roll of her eyes, and a blush. “I told ‘er about uh, all that. I bloody did it and in the worst possible situation, I mean- just, wow.”

Emily’s eyes widened slightly, and then she giggled and squeezed the other two a little tighter.
“Worse than with me? Really?”

“A thousand times worse,” Tracer groaned, leaning her head in heavily against Widdy’s shoulder and stroking at the small of her back.

Emily laughed, cackled even, and kissed Lena on the cheek. Widowmaker smirked slightly, raising an eyebrow. “What are you speaking of?”

The blush that filled her mouse’s cheeks was wonderful, and served to so perfectly demonstrate what she’d been missing. The sight of it, of life and emotion so clearly displayed, and that warmth that would go with it, too. She didn’t need to observe only with her eyes, anymore; she leaned her head over and brushed her lips across Tracer’s heated cheeks, smiling as she did.

Tracer made a soft noise, her blush increasing as she tipped her head over and sighed. “I- we’re talking about the first time I told Em I loved her.”

“She was trying to break up with me,” Emily chirped, kissing at Lena’s other cheek.

“I-I was trying,” Tracer protested, but not too firmly because there were noses and lips nuzzling at her skin and she didn’t want to chase that off. “I was trying to just spare you all the worry and hassle of having me in your life, love!”

Emily giggled, pecking a kiss on the tip of her ear. “I know. It was stupid and sweet. Very you, love.” She giggled again as Tracer groaned, rolling her eyes.

Widowmaker smiled at this new knowledge, a feeling of vindication settling in to her. “Ahh, so you were doing, then, as I did today, hmm? Foolish little mouse.”

Tracer scoffed and pulled her head back, fixing Widdy with a flatly unimpressed look. “Yeah, but I didn’t use bullets, love. I mean, I love you, but you really can overreact to things sometimes.”

“I haven’t the faintest clue what you are talking about,” Widowmaker murmured, running her hands up to thread through hair - copper and brown alike, warm and soft, and she kissed at the top of Tracer’s head and breathed in deeply.

It would be soon enough that she would be denied this again, even if only for a day or for a few. She wanted to take full advantage while she could.

The words and interactions felt light, the way they should - that mixture of teasing and joy, that dance. She had harboured some worries that they would be heavy, and solemn, but those concerns had been in vain, it seemed.

“You did threaten me at gunpoint when we first met,” Emily pointed out with a smirk. “Along with threatening… well, just about everyone else I can think of. Lena, Angela, Sombra… is there anyone you haven’t threatened?”

Widowmaker paused for a moment in thought.

“...well, there is- oh, no. Never mind.” She frowned slightly, discarding the name which had first sprung to mind. She shrugged. “Perhaps no person I have met, but of course there are billions whose paths I have never crossed. They remain unthreatened.”

Emily giggled, shaking her head as she stretched forward to kiss at Widdy’s neck, stroking at her ribs. “Mm, yeah - I love you too, chérie, but I think Lena’s got a point on this one.”
“Ah, now we are tracking her points as well,” Widowmaker laughed lightly. “No matter, it is easy enough to mark a single tally on a pa- what did you say?” She withdrew swiftly, not quite an arm’s distance but close to it as she looked into Emily’s eyes. Eyes which danced with mirth and delight.

“I said I love you!” She giggled again, squeezing at Widdy’s hip. “I mean, now that the secret’s out on her end anyway,” she nudged her head toward Lena who rolled her eyes and blushed a little more heavily.

Widowmaker stared openly, lips slightly parted as she shook her head - love, again, Emily as well, and she wasn’t even much surprised to find it out. They were so alike in some ways, and Widowmaker could only grin as she shook her head. “You two… so foolish, both of you.”

“Fools in love,” Emily grinned, “and you’re stuck with us!”

Rolling her eyes, Widowmaker pulled them both in closer again, a position that was far worse for conversation but far better for everything else. “Oui, so it would seem, and… perhaps…” she lowered her head, burying her nose in Emily’s hair and taking a deep breath. She could just barely detect the scent, so numbed were some of her senses, but that was the price for some other upsides.

Not the only price, though.

“Perhaps,” she continued in a soft murmur, “I… am foolish as well, around you. Both of you.”

She smiled softly at Emily’s brief laugh, the way her arms tightened up - she knew that her cherry would see the hidden meaning behind the words, the thing she could no longer bring herself to say openly because she could not believe it was true. When her heart had run out of control in the hospital, she had been able to truthfully say it for Tracer, to speak of love, but now…

...it felt a little hollow. It still felt somewhat false, because she didn’t really feel the love. She thought it. She knew it, in her mind, but she did not feel it in her heart and that seemed important somehow. A vital piece still missing.

However, she knew that Emily would be able to piece it together from what she had said.

The slight surprise was that Tracer did as well. A high, almost-squealed coo came from near her chest, followed by Tracer’s voice. “Awwwwww! That means she loves us!”

Widowmaker scoffed reflexively as Emily laughed, but she couldn’t bring herself to really deny it, even though she didn’t quite think it was true. As she worked on finding the right thing to say, though - the correct balance of teasing and truth - she felt a finger brush up against her skin through the bullet hole in her uniform.

Emily sagged slightly as she sighed, shaking her head which was pressed right up against Widowmaker’s shoulder. “I… still want to know about this,” she whispered, fidgeting with the hole a little bit more as a bit of worry crept through her gut at the thought of it. “Doesn’t need to be now, though. Or even soon. I- I just-”

She was always worried about it all. The missions, the fights, the knowledge that there might come a day when she never got to see a certain pair of eyes again or feel a certain set of lips; it had always scared her, not just with Lena but even before. Rough upbringings can mean rough friends, and even in the best situations things go wrong. Car accidents, medical issues. Leukemia.

Of course, it was worse with two girlfriends who were off with guns half of the time, and she always worried about that. It was still worthwhile, it was so worthwhile, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t afraid.
“I’m just so glad you’re safe, and so glad you’re back,” Emily gushed, pulling in closer to Widdy - she felt Lena’s head nodding against her shoulder, felt her doing the exact same.

At first, Widowmaker didn’t know exactly how to respond. She knew how one was meant to respond, of course - but if her heart didn’t react, how could she fake that? She could say the words, of course, but she would be lying and it would be worthless.

There had been a time that she hadn’t minded lying to them, and in some ways she suspected she still would not, but to lie about this - to lie about love - that felt wholly wrong.

On its next beak, though, her heart convulsed oddly. Not painfully, but almost - a noticeably different rhythm to its beat, and her eyebrows drew sharply inward as she clutched two heads to her shoulders. Her eyes didn’t fill with tears, but they stung, they wanted to tear up, and she knew what it meant.

“Je vous aime, mes chéries,” she whispered almost desperately, while she could still feel that twinge of the heart clearly in her memory. While she could anchor it, in that moment, to the feeling she needed. “I… I love you. Both.”

They held each other tightly, as if they could hold the world and the passage of time at bay, but it was never the way of things. Now, of all times, particularly so - the dropship’s engines whined and the city’s sirens blared distantly as the three clutched at each other and breathed deeply, and traded chill for warmth and warmth for chill, and took their first opportunity in so very long to simply just be, together.

It was Tracer who eventually broke their silence, with a sigh. “Gotta be on our ways, I suppose. I just- ugh, that sucks. Don’t wanna say goodbye, you know?”

Widowmaker withdrew, smiling softly and stroking a thumb down her cheek. “Ah, ma souris - I know, and I agree, but this is not adieu.”

Tracer rolled her eyes and then stuck out her tongue briefly. “I know, it’s au revoir instead,” her accent was still far off from perfect - in fact, it was atrocious, but Widowmaker grinned a little wider because she was quite certain that it was a show for her benefit.

“Still, it’s…” Tracer sighed, running a hand briefly through her hair, her eyes studying Widdy’s. “It’s always gonna be like this, innit? With the- the wars and the alarms and all, getting called away, I mean… it’s never gonna just be us , is it?”

Emily’s hand squeezed at hers as Widowmaker laughed - briefly, brightly, slightly derisively - her trademark laugh, accompanied with a toss of the head and a soft roll of the eyes and a sharp smirk, and it made her heart soar.

It made both of their hearts soar.

“Ah you foolish girl,” Widowmaker grinned, leaning in to lift Tracer’s chin with a fingertip and raising an eyebrow. “I am not quite the white picket fence type, now, am I? Ha, non, I think.”

Her hand dropped away, slipping into Tracer’s while her other one went to Emily’s and held it as well, squeezing them each lightly. “We are together, we are whatever we are to each other, and that…” Widowmaker let out a brief sigh with a small nod. She had agonized over the words, the terms, the labels.

There weren’t any. It didn’t matter, though.
“That is the important thing, that we are together. We can be whatever we wish, and for now,” she smirked, “we shall simply need to take advantage of every opportunity that is presented.”

Her eyes flicked from one of them to the other as she wished that she could hold two gazes at once, but alas, even she needed to shift between them. Even the Widowmaker could not hold to hold them both in her sight. She shook her head, just slightly. “I would not have it any other way.”

Tracer sighed through her nose, smiling as she stared back into those gorgeous golden eyes - a thousand times she’d found herself in their sights, and it had maybe meant a thousand different things. She knew, too, somewhere deep down, that Widdy had a point. She’d left Overwatch, after all - or Overwatch had left her, either way, but the point still stood that for years she’d been out there in a leather jacket punching robbers in the gut and knocking muggers back into the alleyway despite being gone from the organization, and she knew she wouldn’t stop any more than Widdy would. She needed to be out there, doing something, making a change for the better. She was never going to settle down behind a fence, not while the world was still out there needing her.

“Neither would I,” Tracer admitted softly with a wide grin, squeezing at each of their hands. Emily giggled softly, shaking her head. She had a real habit of picking just about the craziest partners, the wildest and the most out-there, and she wouldn’t change it for the world. She was scared every time Lena went on a mission, and now she’d added Widdy to that list, but what she got in return was so much greater. So much more.

She’d made her choice a long time ago, and she continued to make it, each and every single day. There was never a doubt in her mind, not in the slightest, as she smiled back to her girlfriends. “Agreed.”

In wordless unison, they pulled in toward each other, three points of a triangle converging. Their arms wrapped around and squeezed tight, a perfect mess of love as they kissed indiscriminately, pressing lips to cheeks or jaws or other lips.

Widowmaker soaked in the warmth, and wanted it to go on forever.

It would, too.

Not for every second of every day, but for every day hereonward - she would never be taken away again, not by herself and not by anyone or anything else.

“Au revoir, mes cheries, and we will see each other again soon. Very soon.”

Widowmaker took a moment to devote to each of them, fingers twisting in Tracer’s hair as she drew every scrap of warmth she could from her mouse’s mouth, feeling the foolish girl’s knees buckle and holding her in tight with an arm across her back. Then, to Emily, who raised a leg to hook it around her and hold her close as their lips worked at each other and Emily’s breaths shortened.

“Alors, that should make for an interesting dropship ride home.” Widowmaker murmured in soft assessment, grinning as she surveyed the slight blushes and heated looks that her amours were favouring her with. “Much better.”

Her arm snapped out almost without thought. She knew where the buildings were behind her - she knew where everything was, nothing escaped her sight, and the grapple bit firmly a second later. She waved as it began to retract, whisking her off of her feet and upward as Emily and Tracer, hand in hand, leaned against each other and waved as well.
It was so much more satisfying a goodbye than any they’d shared for months now. The screens had their uses and she had no doubt they would continue to be used, but to know that she was free to be with them properly again…

Already, her mind was racing, as she spun on her line and detached it to easily vault onto the rooftop. She landed in a sprint, grinning in the warm sunlight as she pulled together parts of plans, possibilities which she intended to make into realities - ways to score points on Emily, ways to make Tracer whimper or growl, ways to make either of them blush or smile.

Locations, actions, light deceptions: the sorts of things she was meant to be thinking about, as she leapt off of the rooftop and somersaulted. Her long hair trailed out behind her and she loved the feeling of it, the way it shifted her momentum, the slight strain that carried through her neck.

Every grapple point found itself true, rooftops and railings providing easy footing for her as she whirled and danced through the city back toward her exfiltration point.

Just the way it was meant to be.

---

Tracer leaned heavily against Emily, the redhead slumping over in return - they held each other upright and continued to wave, for several seconds after Widdy was gone from sight. Then, with a sigh, they turned to each other.

Emily stroked a finger behind Lena’s ear, leaning down to kiss her deeply, taking a deep breath and holding it only to sigh it out through her nose after they parted and she stroked at Lena’s cheek. “So it’s… sorted out, then?”

With a snort of a laugh and a roll of her eyes, Tracer shook her head and ran a hand through her hair. The other was busy holding Em’s hand as they stepped into the dropship and slumped into a pair of seats side-by-side.

“Honestly?” She took another deep breath, held it for a second, and then released it slowly as she looked off into the distance and thought back on everything that had happened today. Angela and Sombra and Reaper, every dodge and weave and how it had all wrapped up.

“Honestly, I dunno,” Tracer muttered softly as Emily’s head came in to rest on her shoulder and one hand rose automatically - but not thoughtlessly - to run through red hair. “I think… this definitely is. Us three. Reaper was there today, and uh…”

Another slow, thoughtful, and slightly sad sigh as Tracer let go of everything and slumped entirely. “He was really weird and he was hostile, but oddly almost supportive of this. Of… her, generally, actually,” she murmured, recalling the fire in his eyes and the force in his voice at a few key points.

He seemed more vehement about revenge, still, but Widowmaker was clearly more than just a tool to him.

“That’s good,” Emily sighed softly with a smile. “She deserves a few people on her side.”

Tracer nodded slightly. “Yeah. Dunno what this all means for the rest of it - Talon and Overwatch, and- god, the Row, I forgot-”
She shifted, trying to stand from her seat to go and check on the situation as she recalled what had happened hours before, before Widdy was injured and all the rest - King’s Row, openly under assault from the Black Tide.

Emily held her back, though, gently keeping her in her seat. “S’alright, love,” she stroked at Lena’s arms, her shoulders, her hair. “Athena said it’s tied up there anyway. Jack and Jesse are heading back to base.”

For a moment, Tracer stayed tense, not exactly trying to stand but not exactly willing to just sit either. Then, though, with a nod, she slumped back into her seat. “Oh, well… alright, then. I hope things worked out alright.”

“Me too.”

“I’ve got him to thank for you being out here in a warzone, eh?”

Emily looked over swiftly, but giggled at Lena’s teasing smirk. “Warzone? Hardly! C’mon, love, I didn’t even see a gun.” Her eyes narrowed in a squint as she realized the falseness of her words, Lena grinning triumphantly. “Okay, that’s… a lie, yeah, but-” she raised a finger to cut off any counterpoints, “in my defence, it’s hard to spend any time around you or your friends without seeing a couple of guns, so that’s hardly my fault!”

She grinned as Lena laughed, brightly and openly - it felt so good to know that she wasn’t just nearby, but she was full and complete the way she was supposed to be. Little things ate at Lena sometimes and Emily knew it, and this one had been nibbling for a while now.

“I’m glad we told her,” Emily murmured, nuzzling deeper into her shoulder.

Lena let out a single chuckle, stroking at the side of Emily’s head. “Yeah. Me too.”

The dropship had closed up and lifted off by this point, and a noise from the cockpit - voices - drew their eyes as Winston and Ana started to approach from that direction.

“-find that I do in fact know the difference between reconnaissance and traveling through two hostile countries and into what was apparently an active hostage situation, and going out for hot dogs, Ana.” Winston’s voice was low and grumbling, but his lips twisted into a suppressed smirk and his shoulders weren’t sagging low the way they did when he was legitimately upset.

“There is no law of the universe which bars hot dogs from being in proximity to hostages, Winston,” Ana nodded curtly. “Sometimes these things just happen.”

“Ana, I know something else happened, and it-”

She cut him off with a raised hand. “Well, you are quite simply wrong. Hot dogs. Nothing more. Saghir, how are you feeling?”

“Oh I’m sure she’s stuffed,” Winston snarked softly from the side, grinning at Emily’s giggle.

Tracer laughed briefly and shook her head. “Oh,” she rolled one shoulder in a shrug, “y’know.”

She didn’t elaborate any further, but she didn’t need to. Ana looked back at her levelly with a small smile and a slow nod. “Mm, I suspect I do,” she murmured, and reached out a hand to lay on Tracer’s shoulder for a moment.

“I’m giving you an out on account of these deeply-needed snuggles,” Emily threatened teasingly
with an outstretched finger, her other limbs intertwined thoroughly with a slumping Tracer’s, “but believe you me, you'll be getting an awful lot of hugs when we make it back to base, missy!”

Ana’s smirk widened, just barely. “Oh no,” she muttered, almost inaudibly as she stepped off to the side with a soft and low chuckle. “How terrible …”

The three of them laughed and chuckled as Ana took a seat and started to strip down her rifle, and Winston took a breath that hung for a second - it felt like an apology about to come, the way that you could sometimes feel the approaching rains, but Winston never got a chance.

He frowned, patted at a pocket, and pulled out his phone. The screen blossomed up, hovering above the device in his palm, with a familiar face on it.

“Sombra?”

“Hola, amigos!” She waved with a grin, some blood still visible on her hand. She busied herself cleaning it out from underneath her fingernails as she reclined, looking entirely disinterested. “So, yeah, I figured I’d check to see your chica made it back alright and everything.”

Winston sighed heavily. “So I’m guessing you had something to do with whatever happened here, too?”

Sombra blew a raspberry. “Pfft, something to do with it.” She hiked a thumb, looking to Tracer and Emily with a smirk. “You hear this guy, amigas? Something to do with it, he says.”

“Sombra, just-” Winston was cut off as the hacker waved a hand.

“Oh, hey, actually there is something else I wanted to let you know. I’ve been working on some things, you know, and every now and then I see a little bit of something I figure I can use later, and…” as she talked, she looked off airily, gesturing freely with one hand as if she had no cares in the world.

“I figure - I mean, I know you guys have been having some problems,” she chuckled, grinning sharply as her eyes fixed on the screen in front of her again. “And you know Sombra never hesitates to help out a friend.”

“Alright, alright,” Winston groaned, “just tell me what you did and what I owe you.”

The silence before she chuckled was minuscule, but still clear. She shook her head. “Nah. This one’s already paid off, mono.” Her eyes stayed fixed on Tracer for that, and then she waved her hand and a flotilla of screens came into existence all around her head.

Sombra shifted and dragged them as she spoke, highlighting them for the camera or just playing idly, something to keep her hands occupied. “You’ve been having some problems with - how can I say this delicately? The fact that you’re a bunch of illegal hoes.” Winston growled a warning and she laughed. “Hell, you’re hardly better than Talon!”

“Sombra, I’ve had a very bad day, so-”

“Yeah, tell me about it, chico,” she muttered, cutting him off with a roll of her eyes. “So, I figured,” she rolled a shoulder in an easy shrug, “I’d do you a favour and help you out. For old times’ sake.”

“What old times?” Winston pressed a hand to his forehead in frustration.

Sombra just snickered and shrugged again. It was fun to mess around with people. “Okay, fine, for
new times’ sake, then! Geeze, mono, you’re not great at accepting gifts. Anybody ever tell you that?”

Winston bared his teeth at the screen, but it was more a reflex than anything else. He didn’t actually feel angry, just a little frustrated and a lot tired. “Yeah, and you’re terrible at giving them. Has anyone told you that?”

“Aside from you?” She raised an eyebrow and tipped her head, declining to answer, but grinning all the while. “So, yeah, I got you some official paperwork.”

When Sombra snapped her fingers, two new screens flashed into existence coming out from Winston’s phone. He and Tracer and Emily all leaned forward, squinting and frowning, reading curiously as Sombra continued to talk.

“Should make it easy to operate openly. It’s all one hundred percent legitimate - official documents from all the required agencies. You have an international permit to operate, kinda like Helix.”

“We’re… mercenaries?” Winston flicked his finger at a screen, scrolling through. That’s what these documents and permits looked like, at least - they read as if the group would be bounty hunters, mercenaries, hired bodyguards.

“Something like that, yeah, technically,” Sombra shrugged. “Like I said, like Helix. But hey, it means you can actually, you know, do shit, huh? Don’t have to run around in the shadows anymore - trust me, you guys suck at it so I’m doing you a real favour here.”

Winston sighed, shaking his head. “Yeah, thanks, I’m sure. It’s-” he cut himself off with a breath, running a hand over his brow and then down his face. “It’s not ideal,” he muttered, “but it’s… it’s something. Thanks, Sombra, this- this actually means a lot.”

He’d known, when he issued the recall, that he was signing his name to a lot. Treason, international breach of codes and laws, as well as breaking Overwatch oaths as well, just to name a few. He knew that he would be making himself and everyone who answered the call - probably all of his friends by association - into fugitives from the law.

Admittedly, a few of them had already done that for themselves, and all of them made their own choices in the matter - but, still, he hadn’t hit the button without a fair bit of trepidation. He hadn’t called them back without an unhealthy dose of anxiety and concern.

It had hung with him ever since, that knowledge that it was all illegal, all clandestine, all against every rule he knew except for what was right. He didn’t care as much about breaking the rules - although he did care some - but the idea that the rules could prevent what was so clearly right had irked him for a long time.

Now, he felt that lifting. Sure, it said they were mercenaries. Hired goons and bodyguards - but so what? So was Fareeha, and she had been for a while, and it wasn’t far off from the real truth anyway. Bodyguards protected people, and that was what he wanted to do.

“Thanks,” Winston grinned, widely and genuinely, looking away from the contracts and toward Sombra’s projected face again. She was still grinning deviously, a sparkle of something in her eyes, and it just hung there as she looked back at him.

Slowly, Winston got a little more apprehensive. After a short while, he couldn’t stand it anymore.

“…what?” He raised an eyebrow to Sombra. “What’s going on?”
“Have you uh,” she cleared her throat softly, leaning forward and seeming to rest her elbows against the bottom of the screen. A carefully crafted illusion, of course. “Have you looked at the name, yet?”

The name. He hadn’t looked at the name, yet, in fact - and was now feeling quite nervous about doing so, as Sombra chuckled wickedly. Winston scrolled up to the tops of the contracts and peered at the name, with Emily and Tracer leaning in and doing the same.

Sombra’s chuckle shifted into a snicker, then a barely-contained giggle as the three faces on her screen started to shift. Emily’s eyes went wide and she clapped a hand over her mouth, and Sombra started to snort as the laughter wanted to escape. Tracer’s mouth dropped open, her eyes like dinner plates, and Sombra could barely keep herself contained - she felt like her ribs were about to crack right open.

The clincher, though, was the deadpan flat expression on Winston’s face as he slowly looked away from that screen and back toward her. “I hate you.”

Sombra burst into laughter. She doubled over, cackling and slapping at her knees and thighs as she gasped and heaved to get enough air to fuel her joy. “I- I couldn’t resist! I ha- oh, mono, your face, I got-” she broke up again, falling into laughter once more.

Emily tried to stifle her giggles, grabbing at Lena’s shoulder and pulling her backward. Lena grinned and chuckled and held her as she shook with laughter.

Underwatch.

Sombra had jumped through all of those hoops to set everything up, surely doing a lot of dangerous things in order to get the group permits to openly operate, and the name she’d chosen to give to the new organization was Underwatch.

Emily only lasted about five seconds before the laughter broke free of her hand, and at that point it was too late for Lena too. The pair of them collapsed into a laughing, cackling mess as Winston started to chuckle as well.

Before long, he joined the other three on the floor, guffawing and rolling from side to side to try to control it.

---

Widowmaker stalked surely along the rooftop toward the dropship, a sway in her hips, rifle tipped back against her shoulder; it felt familiar and in the best possible way.

Reaper stood at the doorway. “Took you long enough,” he grumbled.

She just tossed her head back and laughed as she walked past him. “Were you getting cold waiting? I am sure Sombra would not hesitate to warm you up.”

“Ha ha ha.” She could practically feel his eyes narrowing at the sarcastic laugh.

It was good to have things returned. Things she had thought lost forever.

Over in the corner, Sombra rolled on the floor, and somehow Widowmaker was not surprised to see
that. In a seat near the middle, the doctor was asleep with her head tipped back and mouth yawning wide - the Junkers were off to the other side, huddled together and seemingly plotting something as Junkrat sketched on the floor with charcoal. Nearer by, Symmetra had a phone pressed to her ear.

“No, Sanjay-” she began, biting her lips together as she was cut off, but then evidently the voice on the opposite side said something with which she decidedly disagreed because her eyes flashed with ire.

“No, you listen,” she hissed. “You yourself said that Vishkar was being excessively associated with the persona of the Hard-light Bandit, did you not?” She gave no pause for the question to be answered. “You did. You yourself said that the Corporation must distance itself from these claims, did you not? You did. The Corporation cannot move, so to create distance, the other point must be shifted - what better way to distance the Hard-light Bandit from the Vishkar Corporation than to be associated with acts which have no involvement, no knowledge, no possible gain whatsoever for the company?”

Widowmaker smirked slightly as she heard a voice on the other end of the phone spluttering, trying to protest, but Symmetra was clearly having none of it. “I will not hear these accusations! Unacceptable. I will be returned within two hours, and you may thank me then. Good day, Sanjay.”

Then, with a sharp huff through her nostrils, Symmetra hung up the phone - hung it up by dissolving it back into hardlight in a flash that rent it into motes of light which swiftly dissipated, and then promptly tugged her uniform straighter.

She’d never stood up to him like that before, but this was an exceptional circumstance.

Reaper chuckled, a dark and delighted sound, and clapped his hands a few times. “Bravo. Good. He seemed like a real prick, every time I talked to him.”

Symmetra looked over in that direction sharply, ire still running hot through her veins and simmering uncomfortably underneath her skin. She suspected that she would regret her actions and her sharp words, and quite soon, but right now it was all she could do to hold back from more. Instead of speech, she simply nodded, unsure of whether he was being genuine or sarcastic, but hardly caring. She would be returned soon, and it would be of no difference.

Reaper walked off, and the sniper - Widowmaker, that was her name - kept her eyes locked on as she stalked past. She had a grin on her lips, and leaned in with quirk of her eyebrow. “You have teeth. Interesting.”

Then, she wandered away as well, and Symmetra was left with confusion and slowly-fading anger as she forced herself to take deep breaths, the thumb of her left hand running along her index finger, and back, and back again.

Of course she had teeth. The thought of lacking them was entirely unpleasant. She wasn’t sure what to make of the remark, but the confusion distracted her away from her anger as she walked over to take a seat at the side.

Widowmaker stepped swiftly over to Sombra, raising an eyebrow as she nudged the hacker with the toe of her boot. “You. What are you doing?” Sombra, wordless, still laughing, pointed at the floating screen off to the side. There were Tracer and Emily, and the gorilla as well.

“Ahh, mes cheries,” Widowmaker purred, “we are relegated to screens again so soon. Something Sombra said has done this to you? Doubtful, I think, mais…”
“S-something she did,” Tracer gasped, clutching at her sides.

“Underwatch!” Emily half-squealed before breaking off into high laughter again. “I- I can’t believe!”

“I ha- hate it,” Winston forced between blurted laughs, “so much and it’s perfect.”

Widowmaker stood and shook her head at all of them, smiling softly as her gaze flicked from Sombra at her feet to the other two on the screen, and even to Winston as well. For people who had no idea of how life worked, running around trusting and feeling and all the other things that would bring only ruin - for people who didn’t understand life, they certainly seemed to be very alive.

In a few moments they had calmed down enough to explain, and she even chuckled at Sombra’s joke - chuckled and wished she could be there to see the reactions of some of the members. Sombra promised she’d be videotaping them wherever possible.

Reaper could feel it in his back when he stepped over, anger and pain, like crackling electricity surrounding every vertebra, sizzling underneath his skin, and he hated it, but there were important things to be said.

“You. Monkey.”

Winston narrowed his eyes at the dark and cloaked figure on the screen, growling and baring his teeth. Sombra and Widowmaker, he didn’t mind dealing with, but Reaper was a different question entirely.

“Yeah, just try to bite me through the screen,” Reaper sneered. “Hell, let’s meet up. You name the time and place and I’ll gladly give you a chance to try to take a piece out of me.” He paused, staring at the screen as Winston just narrowed his eyes and scowled.

“Hmm, no? No takers?” Reaper chuckled, shaking his head. “Fine.”

He took a breath and sighed it out, clenching a fist. There were important things to be said. “Your team gave mine an assist today, and that’s appreciated… but that’s all. What they do is their own choice,” he grunted, gesturing to Widowmaker and Sombra before jabbing a sharply-taloned thumb at himself, “but you’d all better watch your sorry asses when it comes to me. This is not a ceasefire, do you understand?”

Tracer froze up at it, staring back at the screen. He couldn’t let it go, not for ten minutes - she shouldn’t have been surprised, but she still sort of was. He hadn’t let it go with Angela, of course he wouldn’t with the others either.

Reaper nodded, just barely, in Tracer’s direction. “She’s safe. The rest of you… I’ll be dealing with you. One by one.”

“You expect us to just take this lying down?” Winston growled dangerously, remembering every time he’d run into the Reaper, every story he’d heard - from Reinhardt, from Jack and Ana, from Tracer, from all of them, and it made his blood boil.

Reaper, however, laughed. “No! Hell no.” He leaned in toward the screen, his voice almost fraying with fervor. “I want you fighting. I want you struggling.” He smirked behind his mask with a single chuckle. “It wouldn’t be any fun, otherwise.”

The gorilla glared back at him and Reaper grinned a little wider. It still felt good to taunt them, and now, he had a plan. He had a plan and he had support.
“That’s all I have to say on the matter. Maybe elements of our teams can work together, but none of you can consider yourselves safe from me until I’ve dealt with you. Now you know.” His lips twisted in a devious and hidden grin. “No more worrying.”

Chuckling, he leaned in toward the screen as he placed a hand on Sombra’s shoulder, and when he next spoke it was almost in a singsong tone. Singsong full of jagged glass, but, still, it counted. “Goodbye!”

When he squeezed at Sombra’s shoulder, she got the message and cut the video link, immediately turning to Widowmaker. “Hey, Gabe said he’d buy us ice cream.”

Reaper frowned behind his mask. “No, you said you already had ice cream.”

Sombra grinned wider, still facing an unimpressed-looking Widowmaker. “Gabe said we’re all having an ice cream party at my place.”

“Sombra,” Reaper grumbled in warning as Widowmaker smirked.

“Shirtless ice cream party!”

“Sombra! Shut up!”

Widowmaker laughed lightly, shaking her head. It was good to have things returned.

---

McCree pulled his hat off and threw it at a hook as he stepped through the door into the mess hall. It caught, spun around three times, and then fell onto the floor.

*Perfect,* he thought as he glared down at it. *Just fucking perfect. Of course.*

Jack walked past him, briskly - they hadn’t spoken on the whole flight back, but now that they were back at base, Jesse felt the anger at the whole situation bubbling just a little too hotly to ignore.

He could’ve kept it in, could’ve washed it away with time or whiskey or sweat, but historically it hadn’t gone well in the long run. It was better to let things out.

“Fucking disgrace is what that was,” he muttered under his breath.

Immediately, Soldier: 76 sighed when he heard the words. “I don’t disagree,” he grunted, “but there’s nothing more we could’ve done.” He slung his rifle over his back and pulled his mask off, clipping it to his belt with a frown.

“Nothing more we could’ve done?” Jesse laughed, humorlessly.

Jack spun around to face him. “No, there wasn’t. We don’t have any jurisdiction, we don’t have any purview, we don’t have anything.”

Jesse glared back at him flatly. “We had words and guns, Jack. We could’ve used at least one of ‘em.”

With a scoff, Jack shook his head. “You think we would’ve survived? I’ll tell you they definitely
wouldn’t have if we’d started. ”

Their eye contact didn’t break, each of their gazes burning with anger - but not anger at each other. Still, it had been a stressful few hours.

Soldier: 76 stood tensely, grinding his teeth a little bit, because he didn’t disagree. If it had just been him, he would have done more - would have starting shouting or swinging punches and maybe even firing off shots.

Something that had been made abundantly clear to him, though, was that it wasn’t just him. He had a team with him now, and they deserved to be taken into account.

Jesse was pissed off, at himself, for not having done more - but what else was new? He let out his held breath in a ragged sigh, dragging his fingers through his long hair and dropping his eyes to the ground.

“I know we ain’t got any political power,” the cowboy grumbled, “but I just… I hate standing on the sidelines.”

From behind him came a giggle. “Well that’s a change! Seems to me you were all sorts of happy to do it for a couple years there.”

He spun around in an instant, recognizing the voice and grinning when he saw her. “Trace! You’re- you’re safe, you’re back, you’re-”

All thoughts of King’s Row, of unnecessary violence and an inability to stop it, fled his mind as he wrapped his arms around his friend and squeezed her tight for a moment before letting go and ruffling her hair with a grin. “You had me worried there, kiddo.”

Glancing up, he saw Winston and Ana entering through the doorway. None of the three of them - four, as Emily came in too looked injured, but they all looked like they’d been through a bit. Some of them more than others.

“What happened?” Jack was at his elbow in a moment, Tracer stepping forward to hug the old soldier as Emily came over and gave McCree a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

Winston sighed as he slid into one of the mess table benches. “Technical problem killed the comms and biometrics, and then there were complications.”

“Talon?”

Tracer saw Jack stiffen up as he said the word, and she answered it promptly. “Yeah, but not the way you’re thinking. Widowmaker got hurt, and uh… well, I owed her a favour from that mansion. To say the least.”

His eyes seemed to study her for a long time, but she met them unafraid. One of these days they’d know everything, but for now, piece by piece seemed to be best. Even that seemed to be hard enough for them to swallow, but after a few seconds, Morrison nodded with a smile and patted her on the shoulder. “Glad you’re back, and safe. Scared us all, I think.”

McCree left a hand on Emily’s shoulder as they parted from their embrace, his eyes searching hers for any bad portents. “You alright, Miss Emily? I know you were all kinds of shook up over this.”

She laughed lightly, waving a hand; it was true, but it was also past. “I- yeah,” she sighed a chuckle,
“yeah, I was, but I’m over that now. It’s all sorted now.” Her other hand snuck over to take Lena’s and give it a squeeze which was swiftly returned.

It felt a little bit like she remembered some of the storms being like, when she was a little girl - everyone calling everyone once the power came back on, hurriedly checking to see whether friends and relatives were alright and unharmed. There was that same hushed tension to it, and the same palpable relief when familiar voices responded that they were okay.

Something occurred to her and she let out a laugh, shaking her head. “Oh, I- I forgot your gun on the dropship, I think. Probably lying on the floor.” Emily shrugged with a slight smile. “Guess I won’t be special operative material after all, eh?”

McCree chuckled to that, shaking his head. “Hell, I’m just glad you’re back safe, Miss Emily. I was worried sick over you, too.”

“I’m also fine, by the way,” Winston muttered from the side with a smirk. “Thanks for asking.”

Everyone laughed or chuckled, Morrison elbowing Jesse with a hint of a grin. “Wasn’t even your gun anyways, it was mine,” he pointed out. His voice was characteristically gravelly, but sounded amused regardless.

“What happened on King’s Row?” Ana’s voice sounded from the back and everyone turned to face her, having lost track of her whereabouts (with the exception of McCree). She stood off to the side, pouring out a glass of something for herself and taking a drink as she eyed Jack and Jesse.

They looked at each other wearily, the cowboy shrugging and the soldier following suit and slipping into a bench. Jesse remained standing, instead choosing to step off to the side and lean back against the wall.

“Well,” Jack tipped his head to the side, “by the time we left, the situation was under control.”

“Yeah, the infection and the riots,” McCree shot darkly.

Morrison dropped his head into his hands at that, feeling the weight jar through right into his elbows on the table. “Yeah,” he sighed, “those. Final count: forty-six injured or damaged, eighteen dead.” Another sigh, heavier than the last. “Sixteen of them omnics. Seven of those, infected, near as we can tell.”

Winston frowned thoughtfully, trying to integrate this data into a pattern - he’d been trying to for a while, they all had, and to no avail. With every new datum, though, came the chance of a pattern emerging. “The infected turned on omnics again? Like the Greenland Sea event?” There hadn’t been many repetitions. If this was one, though, that could be highly meaningful.

Jesse shook his head bitterly, glowering, but it was Morrison who actually gave voice to the answer.

“No.”

What attention had been diverted elsewhere was suddenly on them each, flitting back and forth between the glaring cowboy and the glum soldier as Jack sagged more. Ana slid into the seat beside him and set a glass down on the table.

It caught the edge of his vision, and he didn’t even know what was in it - he grabbed it up and took a desperate swallow, almost immediately coughing. “Damn, Ana, how much whiskey’s in this?”

With a shrug and a smirk, she didn’t answer, but drained about a third of her glass in a single long
pull. It looked like orange juice, roughly, but evidently wasn’t.

Jack wiped his mouth, still spluttering a little and taking a smaller sip of his drink as he shook his head. “The rioters turned on omnis. All seven infected were killed, along with nine others.”

“Nine innocents,” Jesse hissed from the side.

“Nine innocents,” Soldier: 76 grunted in agreement, “but we couldn’t do anything about it. The rioters would’ve ripped us to pieces just as easily - unless,” he looked over to McCree darkly, “you think we should’ve just killed them all.”

The cowboy slumped, breath leaving him as he shook his head - it was the straw which held up his whole argument, and most of his anger as well. “No,” he muttered below his breath, “obviously I don’t. Lots of ‘em probably ain’t bad people nine days out of ten, but get ‘em in a mob and whip ‘em into a frenzy, and…”

His eyes pulled over to a projected screen at the side, showing the King’s Row area. It looked fairly different from when they left - marks had moved and proliferated, green slashes and circles indicating the movements and presence of emergency personnel.

There was less red than there had been. What was up there was in small splotches which moved swiftly, jumping around - or blinking out of existence altogether. Fires that had been started were put out, broken windows were cordoned off, and a series of tickers on the side kept track of the numbers. They hadn’t moved in twenty minutes, no more injured persons or damaged omnis being reported.

Only time could tell the real damage, though, and Jesse knew for a fact that the actual harm went far deeper than scorched bricks and shattered glass. It went further than broken bones or spilled blood or oil - this was a wound that would fester deep in a whole city, and for a long time.

He’d been around, he’d kept his ear to the ground, and he’d heard the harsh hissed whispers of hatred in the alleyways. It was out there, all around, and that was what had him angry. Not that they couldn’t do anything to stop the riots, but that they’d happened at all.

They could work on it, though. They could get ahead of it, patch up the old wounds and keep an eye out for new ones - somebody had to.

McCree knew that he was done standing on the sidelines. It had started out as something else, maybe, something just for his friends, but it had shifted now.

Like it or not, he was back in the world.

Wearily, he walked over toward the table and took a seat across from Jack - next to Emily, who leaned against his side comfortingly. He patted her on the far shoulder and let his arm rest there, draped across her back.

“I know we did all we could,” he sighed, reaching across the table to take a heavy swig of Jack’s drink. “I know we did a damn good job, too. No telling how much worse it would have been if we weren’t there.”

“Exactly,” Tracer added from the seat on Emily’s other side. “I mean, the Row…”

She trailed off for a second, glancing over and meeting Emily’s eyes softly for a second. “It’s… been through a lot. Not exactly the smoothest area,” she chuckled, looking out to meet the others’ gazes instead, “but it’ll get through it. It’s been through bad before and came out on top - you all remember Null Sector.”
A series of nods went around the table, somewhat solemn but not in a sad way, not depressed nods of the head. Tracer grinned resolutely. “We beat it then, and we’ll beat it now - we always have, haven’t we? Overwatch.”

“Underwatch,” Winston muttered in correction.

Jesse choked briefly on his drink, or rather, on Jack’s drink. “Under what?”

“What are you talking about?” Jack looked over with a frown.

Chuckling and shaking his head, Winston waved to the ceiling “Athena, uh… why don’t you handle this one?”

She hummed a soft chuckle. Winston looked tired - she turned up the temperature in his room just slightly, in an effort to make it a little bit more comfortable for what she suspected would be a promptly-incoming nap.

“Of course, Winston.” Athena brought up a series of screens with the data and permits Sombra had sent. “Great effort has been spent on procuring these, the permits for a new organization. An organization with wide purview and agency, comprised of unique individuals with a common goal: protection…”

Tracer couldn’t wipe the smile from her face as Athena carried on, and it sounded inspirational the way she said it. A bit of a rebalanced version of the more standard Overwatch speech she was used to hearing. Then Athena got to the reveal of the name, and Tracer got to relive the joy of that all over again, laughing with delight at the shocked look on Jack’s face and the distressed one on Jesse’s.

She took a deep breath and let it out, resting to the side on Emily’s shoulder and letting her head tip over - she felt a pair of lips brush against her ear, leaving a soft kiss in their wake, and she grinned as she squeezed at Em’s hand.

They were going to be just fine, all of them.

---

Junkrat and Roadhog were released elsewhere in the city, having decided on some new plan. Symmetra followed them as far as Mercy’s aid camp, where both of them departed - after Mercy had implanted the new module in Widowmaker’s heart.

The effects had been swift, a drop in heart rate and all of the functions she was so used to being restored. She let out a sigh of relief as her irritatingly high heartbeat came down to ten percent above resting, then eight, four, two, and then held steady right at the baseline.

It was still stronger. It changed pace more readily, it seemed to her, and she felt slightly invigorated even with it at its normal sedate rate - though, whether that was the heart or simply the day and its promise for the future, Widowmaker couldn’t say.

There had been a moment of worry when she had asked Reaper to test her detonation codes. Sombra had refused immediately, but Widowmaker had only laughed at that and reminded her that it was not her decision to make.
She refused to return to Talon if they could say a sentence and end her life. She would take her minuscule chances elsewhere instead.

Reaper said the codes, though, and nothing happened - no explosion, no death, nothing of the sort, and Widowmaker had laughed triumphantly. Reaper, for his part, had chuckled and clapped her on the shoulder.

“It’s not over,” he muttered, hand still resting on her shoulder as they returned to the dropship without Symmetra or Ziegler. “Your conditioning’s still largely in place. They can render you unconscious, force your hand. Anyone who has the codes.”

“I know,” she nodded, eyes fixated in front of her. “You will fix this. Yes?”

His hand tightened on her shoulder as he took a deep breath and let it out. He knew that she knew what she was asking. She had to know that getting it all out would be at least as torturous as getting it all in had been in the first place.

“Yes.”

Widowmaker nodded with a small smile. “Good.”

“It’ll take a while, but we’ll start working on it soon,” he grumbled as the ship started to close up. “Sombra, I want you to send me-”

“Yeah yeah, everything I have on Project Widowmaker,” she rolled her eyes. “If I had a dollar for every time I heard that today, seriously - and c’mon, it’s like you don’t even know me, amigo, it’s already on your drive.”

Reaper snorted a laugh. “Yeah, along with a few movies and candid snapshots, I’m sure.”

A slow grin spread across Sombra’s lips as she snickered. “Hey, maybe you do know me!”

With a sigh, Reaper rolled his eyes as they all took their seats.

The quips and banter continued as the ship sped along through the skies, and Widowmaker had a consistent small smile on her lips. Sombra was leaning back almost across her and warmth seeped through her outfit from the hacker’s body. One hand stroked at purple-dyed hair, soft against her fingers as Sombra put her feet up in Reaper’s lap, and though he grumbled and growled about it, he didn’t displace them.

Outside, through the window, there was no sun. It was cloudy, dark grey streaks scudding across the sky and blocking all the blue and all the light from view.

Yet, still, Widowmaker knew it was there. Even if it was not visible, even if she could not feel its warmth on her skin, it was there and more than simply knowing it in her mind, she knew it now deep in her core.

The sun was out there. Even through the clouds and the storm.

When the dropship came in to land at the base, there were two men and a woman waiting. Talon troops in their standard garb - not their armour, worn on deployments, but simpler fatigues and sidearms.

They stood more sharply to attention when Reaper stepped off of the ship. Widowmaker followed in line to his right, and Sombra to the right of her.
The troopers watched Reaper as he approached in that attentive way that people do when they want to broach a conversation, and he stopped, tipping his head to the side as he fixed them with a glare. Then he glanced over his shoulder at the dropship.

“‘It’s a decade old design,’” he pointed out, “‘hardly worth tearing down anymore, but worth keeping for other purposes. The Claw outperforms it, but for misdirection?’” He chuckled in lieu of an explanation.

One of the gathered troopers nodded, but another spoke up. “Sir. I’ll notify the hangar to make space. That’s not why we’re here, though, sir.”

A moment of silence, with none of the six moving.

When it became apparent, several seconds later, that Reaper wouldn’t be requesting more information, the trooper in charge cleared their throat and volunteered it. “There’s been some confusion over the biometric readings, Sir. Readouts are good now, and the archives as well, but one of the technicians thought-” They cut off, clearing their throat. “Some concern has been raised.”

“There is no issue.” Reaper’s statement left no room for questioning, no room for leeway.

Yet, still, as he stepped forward - followed immediately by Sombra and Widowmaker as well - the trooper questioned anyway. “I’ve been ordered to take the asset in to Medical for examination, Sir.”

“Countermanded. She won’t be going anywhere. We’ll be following standard debriefing protocols.”

He didn’t slow, forcing the troopers to almost jog to follow along - Reaper stepped smoothly, long paces that ate up the ground beneath him as his boots dug in sharply.

“Sir, this order will stand. I am taking the asset to Medical. You-”

Reaper growled, not looking over as he grabbed the front of the man’s fatigues and flung him backward. The trooper flew about fifteen feet in an instant before hitting the concrete wall on his side with a yelp, and then falling limply to the floor.

“You’d be better served by getting your own injuries inspected,” Reaper snarled. “Hands off of my team.”

Then, he stopped - sharply, suddenly, turning around to face the two other troopers who stood there silent, still, and stunned. “That is,” he chuckled, “presuming that you want to keep them.”

They took a half-step back, each, and didn’t follow when the three turned away and continued to walk. A few seconds later, the two troopers rushed to escort their injured companion to the Medical bay.

As they stepped through the doors and into the base, Widowmaker had the faintest hint of a smile on her lips. Her gold eyes darted, left and right - black and purple, flanking her - and the smile sharpened just a bit as her eyes narrowed.

The troopers in the halls evidently heard of their entry, quickly, as word spread. Any one of the three of them would have been given a wide berth on any day - troopers would move to the opposite side of the hallway to give them space, to stay out of arms’ reach.

Now, with all three of them walking side-to-side, the troopers didn’t stick to the walls. They were, in fact, entirely absent. After one or two frightened stragglers near the doors, they didn’t see a single other person in the halls. As knowledge of their path spread, everyone vacated those corridors and left them empty.
Widowmaker’s slight smile split into a wider grin.

It was good to be back.

---

Lena collapsed back onto the bed with a groaned sigh, her towel stretched behind her like a cape. “I’m bloody knackered. It’s still Tuesday, right?”

“No even close, love,” Emily called from the bathroom with a laugh, hanging her towel from a hook before heading out into the main room.

She delayed for a moment at the doorway, leaning up against it and just looking - the way Lena was stretched out on the bed, the weariness clear throughout her in the way she slumped. The little scars and freckles that dotted her skin, the way she flapped her cape of a towel a little bit back against the bedspread. “You’re gorgeous.”

Lena perked her head up with a grin, giggling as she saw Emily just leaning against the doorframe and looking at her. Hair, freckles, skin, grin, eyes, wit, charm, patience - she’d always thought Em was one of the most beautiful people, inside and out, in the world. “You too,” she responded, her grin shifting into a smirk, “pervert!”

Emily’s jaw dropped into a faked aghast expression as she scoffed in mock offence. “You what? I’m the pervert? Well, we’ll just see about that when I start tickling you!”

Lena jumped up onto the bed, her knees tucked underneath herself and her hands held out like a wrestler. “Oh no, no no - see love, that’s what a-” she repositioned as Emily circled the bed like a shark “-pervert would do, tickling - really, it is, and it- aah!”

As Emily leaped, Lena pushed herself backward and grabbed a pillow, flinging it into Emily’s face but the redhead had foreseen this possibility. Holding up one freckled forearm to deflect the impromptu projectile, Emily barrelled right through the feather-filled onslaught with her other hand outstretched and ready.

Her aim struck true, too, her fingers digging into Lena’s ribs and wiggling - all but instantly, Lena was a convulsing and giggling wreck, freeing Emily up to use her other hand as well, as Lena batted weakly at her and shouted between her laughter. “N-no don- ack! Gah no love, no y- eep! Help! Someone! Aaha!”

They collapsed together into laughter, tickles shortly becoming soft strokes and caressing touches as they stared into each other’s eyes and grinned like the fools they were. Emily brushed a thumb along Lena’s cheek, trailed fingertips down along her arm, and twitched slightly when Lena stroked at her ribs and down over a hip.

A noise from the side table drew her attention and she looked over, the phone ringing - she immediately reached out and snatched it up, flopping over next to Lena with a grin and hitting ‘answer’ as soon as she saw whose number it was.

“Widdy!”

On the projected screen, that familiar blue face smirked, raising an eyebrow as her golden eyes...
flicked. “Ah, mes cheries, I see that you are having fun without me.”

“Be more fun with you,” Lena insisted with a giggle, and Widowmaker laughed lightly to that. She smiled as she looked at the two of them, heads nestled against each other on the bed, still damp freshly out of the shower.

“I thought I should tell you that all is well,” she nodded. “The doctor’s little addition went without a problem, and we have returned to base. On the topic of which, I have a surprise of sorts…”

Emily sat up, intrigue piqued, and Lena followed suit - they shuffled around to be leaning back against the headboard, taking no measures to cover themselves as they rested against each other. “Surprise?” Emily asked. “What’s that?”

“Upon our return, Reaper went and had a… conversation, with Medical.” The word came out softly purred and delightedly dark, Widowmaker’s eyes narrowing as she said it, and her grin widened for a moment.

Then, though, her unaffected mask returned as she shrugged. “I have been instructed to take a week of leave. It sounded terribly boring, so I decided you would both accompany me. Sombra tells me that Athena has already approved this plan, ma petite souris.”

Tracer let out a laugh, catching it at the end with an open grin and an expression of slight confusion. “Hold on, you went over my head to get me a vacation?”

Widowmaker grinned slowly. “Non. Of course not, no, Sombra went over your head to get you a vacation.”

Tracer rolled her eyes and scoffed, but Emily laughed brightly and shoved at her shoulder. “Oh, go on - you two have fun, you deserve it.”

“Two?” Widowmaker raised a disbelieving eyebrow. “Ma cerise, you must shower again - you clearly have done a poor job of cleaning your ears.”

“I can’t just go running off and swanning about,” the redhead sighed with a smirk and an eyeroll, “much as I’d like to. Scheduling’s gotta be done three months in advance at the hospital and-”

“-and you applied for this week of vacation leave three months ago,” Widowmaker nodded certainly.

“W- no, I didn’t,” Emily protested with a laugh and a shake of her head, “I don’t even have any days left, I’ve used ’em all. It’d be lovely to go on holiday with you both, but-”

From the screen, a different voice sounded; Sombra’s voice. “Oh, come on, Roja - of course you’ve got vacation days! You’re friends with Sombra now, you always have vacation days. Weird that the people at the hospital didn’t notice your schedule until today, but if they check the computers they’ll see it’s been that way for months now. Not your fault they didn’t check, right?”

Emily groaned, grabbing at her hair as Lena laughed next to her - laughed and clapped. “N- I, I can’t just leave suddenly! I need to be there, for my patients, for the team - we don’t have enough people in the psychiatric ward as it is, and we-”

Another screen flickered into place, this one with Sombra’s face on it - she was laid back on a bed as well, empty bags of potato chips and candy wrappers all around her head. Widowmaker’s nose wrinkled at the sight of it, and Tracer giggled softly.

“Yeah, speaking of that,” Sombra interjected, painting her fingernails with a smirk, “it’s funny, you
just got three people transferred in from London - Lord Nelson Psych Hospital.”

For a moment, Emily actually reacted with confusion, frowning softly and shaking her head. They’d been sending requests and quite literally begging the administration at LNP to send over more staff, but they’d been met with denial after denial. Despite LNP having far more psychiatric nurses and doctors than they needed, they still refused to part with any.

There was just an instant where Emily forgot who she was talking to, and wondered how in the world Sombra had managed to accomplish in an afternoon what she and her coworkers had been unable to do in a year and a half.

Then it clicked into place and she laughed. “Sombra, you- you can’t just hack everything!”

“Of course I can, Roja,” Sombra murmured back, smirking and still focusing on her nails, but she didn’t need to look at the screen in order to see it. It was fed directly into her eyes, along with so much else.

“So, y’know,” Sombra set down her nail polish and stretched her arms above her head, “don’t worry about that shit. Your shifts are covered, and it’s all good.”

Widowmaker reclined in her chair, legs crossed at the knee as a broad grin slowly split her lips. She always did appreciate this: the knowledge of a plan coming to fruition, a trap springing, a surprise succeeding - she saw it in Tracer’s eyes, hopeful and wide and shimmering, she saw it in Emily’s, shocked and delighted and beginning to spill over with tears.

“So you see,” she purred, leaning forward toward the camera, “your fates are secure in my hands.” The pair of them laughed, exactly as she’d intended them to, exactly as she’d wanted.

For years, she had been without desire. Then had come that tumultuous time of its return, those small impulses which she was forced to either deny or to fulfil - those things which could often be so confusing, leaving her thinking that she wished for one thing only to find out later that it was another.

She had tracked her mouse to the apartment thinking that her desire was to kill Emily, to eliminate her competition - or perhaps to use her as leverage to make Tracer squirm, or any one of a hundred things.

She’d followed the pair of them, thinking that she wanted to track their motives and their routes, to map out their lives so she could more easily strike. She’d followed Emily with the thought that she could somehow ensure things went according to plan.

She’d slung Sombra up against the wall, thinking that she wanted to be rid of her. That she was angry at her.

Never had it occurred to her that it would end up being something so simple, yet so vast, as what it was in the end. Desire. A single word that managed to encapsulate all of the world.

Or, at least, all of it that mattered.

“Alors,” Widowmaker sighed softly with a smile, “we will meet at the airport where we took the motorcycles. Tomorrow?”

Lena slumped over, slipping an arm behind Emily’s back and squeezing her tight - she wanted this, definitely, but she wanted Em to be there too. She sought out those eyes which she’d known and loved for so long, gorgeous hazel that looked so green now as they often did after a shower. Emily met her gaze, held it for a moment, and she felt like her heart might leap from her chest. She always
“Yeah,” they agreed almost in unison, giggling and nodding as they looked back to the screen. Tracer thought her cheeks were probably about to fall off with how much they hurt from all the smiling. “Sounds absolutely brilliant!”

Widowmaker let out a breath through her nose, smiling as well as she took in all of the emotion she could from each of them - the way their arms wrapped around each other, Emily’s hair draping down onto Tracer’s shoulder, still wet and trickling; the hope and joy and love in their eyes.

It was still so worrying to think that one day might be the last. That all of this might end. However, she’d made a decision: she wouldn’t let the worry stop her from enjoying it.

Take every opportunity they could find. The world wouldn’t stop, not for any of them - not for an instant, and they all knew it.

That just made it all the more important that they carve out time wherever they could. If they had to fight for their time, so be it.

“In that case,” she grinned once more, “it is au revoir again, mes cheries. Bonne nuit, et je vous aime.”

The pair of them grinned, nodded, and replied almost in unison - Emily in French, Tracer in English, which only broadened her smile. “Love you,” and “je t’aime,” and they sounded good together.

It would be an entirely deserved vacation, and she immediately went to work planning it - the instant the call was hung up.

There was much to be done.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaaaaaand... *drumroll* that's it! Kinda.

Basically, this is the story of Both Sides Now. Act I, such as it was - there's an Act II and an Act III to follow, with different focuses and main plotlines, but this was the main plot of Act I: Widowmaker, Tracer, and Emily sorting out their things, the situation with Reaper and Sombra and Widowmaker, broaching that trust and getting it in the open - and setting up the Black Tide, as well as the operations of Underwatch and the world generally.

...Underwatch, yeah - honestly for a time I was gonna take it one step further and have it be "Underlisten" but that just felt a little too blatant, heh, and didn't sound as good. So uh, yeah!

I'm not sure how to post the Interludes - one consisting of Emily, Tracer, and Widowmaker's vacation; the other consisting of a Talon Trio get-together of sorts (ice cream and movie night, of course!). Not sure whether I should make them their own self-contained things, or post them on the end of this as chapters. Tempted to do the latter at least for the vacation because it's pretty heavily tied-in (plus it might bump me over half a million words for the fic! :D)
So, uh, yeah, feedback would be appreciated there! I'm not super-certain what the update schedule will look like for these Interludes, or for that matter when Act II will start being published. I'm also curious, though, as to what you folks would like to see from me next? I ran a few other chaptered things alongside Act I here, and I'd like to get back to that I think - I have a few in the works: Pharah/Tracer/Emily thing that's fairly NSFW and features a devious Emily (because she's so much fun), a Widow/Tracer/Emily re-telling of Top Gun because *holy crap yes please* which would be funny and actiony and also have some NSFW to it, a Sombra/Symmetra/eventually Tracer too time-travel arc which would be sweet and kinda painful and maybe a little scary, a downright totally fucking angsty WidowTracer thing (which will make me hate myself slightly but it'll be worth it), a fun thing where Junkrat and Roadhog get a baby (literally find one, not a biological thing). Any preferences there?

There's also of course the option of anything else. I love, love, love providing for rarepairs and things that people want, so if there's something you want to see? Please let me know!

I'd love to hear back from you folks about everything - this chapter, the whole story, all of it. Your thoughts, your feelings, positive or negative, I feast upon them in the darkness of my hovel love them a lot, so please don't hold back! :D

As always, thank you so much for reading, for commenting, for sticking with me. This has been one hell of a ride and I don't know if any of us - myself included - really suspected or knew how much it would be. You're all great, and I hope you have great days!

Come on back for Widdy's vacation with Tracer and Emily! Maybe - or maybe I'll be uploading it as its own thing, I don't know yet. Gimme your opinions! Thanks!
Chapter Summary

Art!

Okay, folks! So, this is not an actual chapter as you may've guessed already. This is where I'm going to put the art I've had commissioned, along with any fanart I end up receiving, and other bonus materials as I come up with them.

Firstly, lemme point you over here: "A Well-Earned Rest" is the next thing! It's the followup, the vacation for Tracer and Emily and Widowmaker. It's going to be a bunch of chapters, I'm going to upload them approximately whenever the hell I feel like it/get one finished, I'm not going to bother trying to hit certain word counts for a chapter, etc. It's about fun and freedom for the trio and for me and you folks as well, so I'm gonna try to embrace that.

Also, you may notice this story is now part of a collection! I've written several other things that are tied in alongside this story, and that's how I'm going to keep them together - so, let's say you're reading through BSN and you think "wow, I kinda like Ana and Reinhardt's dynamic in this, I could go for more of that", well, have I got news for you! I wrote a whole story about that, it's sixteen thousand words, it's set back during the origin days during the First Omnic Crisis, and you can find it right here! You want to read more of Angela and Fareeha? Well I've written that too! More Emily and Lena? Yup, I gotcha! And there'll be more and more as time goes on, too. I have so many plans.

Now, with that out of the way and without further ado, let's get on to this art and such, shall we?

Also I'd like to start with a huge shoutout to Nox, who gave me some HTML/CSS tips on getting this image data properly formatted. Turned a couple hours of headscratching and frustration on my part into a nice smooth couple of minutes, so that was fucking excellent and thank you Nox!

This one is a piece by the excellent and hilarious lesbeanlatte, who is generally excellent. You might've seen her comics floating around Tumblr, they're great, and she made one of the morning scene in Chapter 19! Tracer awakening the morning after her close call with the Black Tide, with Widowmaker and Emily both there. It's a sweet and silly scene which I thought would pair absolutely perfectly with lesbean's style, and I think it turned out really really well! I love little things about their facial expressions and stuff like that. Also I should mention that I did a couple of little things like compiling the images into a comic strip, and redoing some of the wording and speech.
bubbles a little with some other tiny edits and stuff - so uh, if there are any problems they're almost definitely things I did XD

She did a really great job and captured so much of the scene's ambiance and mixture of sweetness, concern, and playfulness - send her a little bit of love or some reblogs on Tumblr or something, because she deserves it!
What, um... what
happened last night, Em? Widowmaker?

I, uh, can't remember anything of the mansion...
She took you to Mercy! And then I was a mess, but I didn't want to wake you, so she let me use her like a pillow which
was sweet.

Widdy, how d'you like your toast?

Just do it like yours – it'll be grand, love! I'll join you in a minute, yeah?

No you will not! The kitchen is strictly...
The kitchen is strictly for people who didn't get exploded last night!
So this next one is a piece from IceImagines (or icewuerfelchen on Tumblr)! This was fanart that they just up and did of Widowmaker and Sombra's soft moment from Chapter 44 and it's really great! I love the colour on the hair, the way the poses and facial expression captures some of the emotion of the moment, the lighting and shadowing - it's really awesome and was so unexpected, and I'd love it if you'd pop over and leave a thank-you in their Tumblr askbox or something like that :D
More to come as time goes on! I have more feelers out, so you can check back here every now and
then maybe? Or perhaps I should do them as new chapters so people get the notifications? I dunno -
what do you think? Don't really know what I'm doing here, so let's find out together, shall we? Heh.

End Notes

So...that's that for now - thank you so much for reading! What do you think? Comments are
always appreciated :D (I'm pretty talkative and I'd love to chat!)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!